Paul Fritts & Co., Tacoma, Washington
St. Philip Presbyterian Church, Houston, Texas

From the organist

Nearly a decade ago, St. Philip Presbyterian Church began planning a major renovation of its facilities. In addition to a new educational building, plans were made to gut the sanctuary and make it a more vibrant and flexible space. By 2004 a new organ was on the horizon as well, thanks to an old electric-action instrument whose shortcomings had become obvious, an enthusiastic committee, and an expert consultant. In 2005 we bid good-bye to the old sanctuary and organ and signed a letter of intent with Paul Fritts for his Opus 29, a three-manual and pedal mechanical-action instrument of 48 stops, which was delivered and installed in the renovated sanctuary in early 2010.

And we couldn't be happier! The new organ and sanctuary are a perfect match, with the instrument speaking directly into the room from its lofty position in a new gallery. Significant changes had to be made to the former choir loft to support the new organ, with the new gallery extending forward into the sanctuary to accommodate both choir and organ. Fortunately, we were blessed with a building whose basic shape—tall, long, and slender—presented a potentially ideal acoustical environment for organ and choral music. The transformation has been stark: a room that formerly had abundant absorptive and soft surfaces now has several seconds of reverberation. It's also become a much more appealing visual space: the modernist light-filled sanctuary now boasts handsome millwork, beautiful stained glass, a tile mosaic front wall, and in the rear gallery, a stunning new organ.

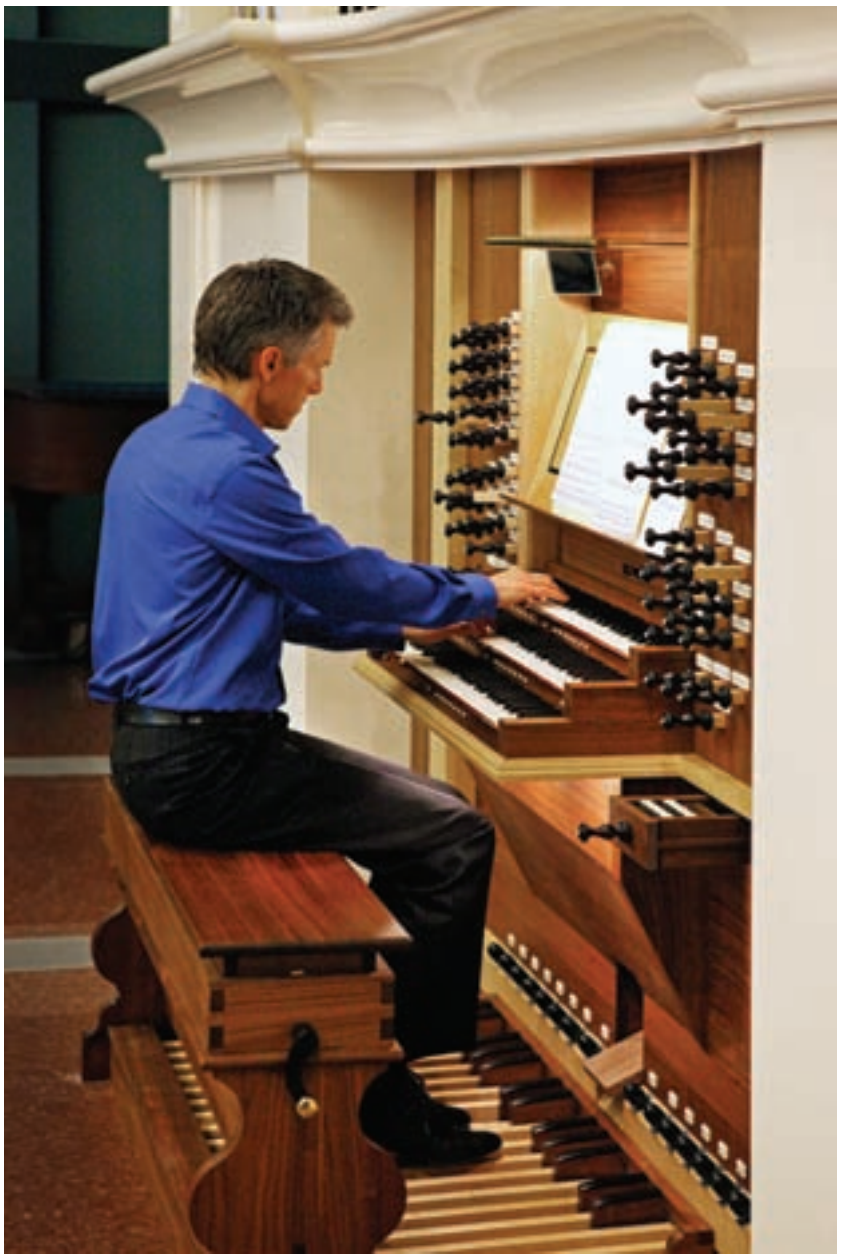
Our selection of Paul Fritts & Co. as builders reflects St. Philip's longstanding commitment to excellence in its music program and the amazing foresight and generosity of its members. Now just a little over a year old, the Fritts organ has generated a great deal of local and even international enthusiasm, and we're delighted to be sharing it with a wide community of music lovers. I'm especially pleased that organ students from the University of Houston are able to use Fritts Opus 29 for weekly practice and degree recitals, since a splendid instrument like this has so much to teach us.

—Matthew Dirst
Organist
St. Philip Presbyterian Church

From the organ consultant

Long before I became the consultant for a new organ at St. Philip Presbyterian Church in 2004, Matthew Dirst set the groundwork for the project. For many years he had developed a solid relationship of trust, goodwill, and mutual respect between himself and the musicians, clergy, and congregants of St. Philip. It is certainly safe to say that without that special relationship, this project would never have happened. Soon before I came on board, an organ committee had been formed and fundraising had begun. I quickly learned that music was very important to the people of St. Philip. The committee made clear that they wanted an instrument that could lead in worship, accompany the choir, and make possible the performance of great organ music—especially music played by their world-famous organist! But something else came through from our initial meetings. The committee wanted an instrument of high quality that would stand the test of time, and of real beauty that would lead people to a fuller spiritual life.

The committee considered several builders. Committee members took their responsibilities seriously, and some of them made trips well outside the state of Texas to hear recent installations. As soon as they heard the Fritts organ at the University of Notre Dame, they knew what builder they wanted for St. Philip. The size of organ was never the driving force, and in fact the church initially contracted for a smaller (and less expensive) two-manual instrument. I know Matthew Dirst would have been content with it. But additional funds became available, and the size and scope of the instrument increased accordingly.



Matthew Dirst, organist at St. Philip Presbyterian, prepares for an evening program.

A view from the front of the church. The remodeled gallery provides an ideal place for choir and instrumentalists. The organ speaks freely into the nave, in close proximity to the ceiling, an important reflective surface.

The upper, center portion of the façade. The Swell division is at the top so the center flat is made up of Positive Principal 8′ bass pipes.

The treble sections curve forward to the bass side towers, adding an interesting three-dimensional quality to the case. Pipes arranged this way are typical of early Dutch cases.

Besides the desire for a quality instrument that could lead in worship and be featured in concerts, the people of St. Philip Church wanted an instrument that could be used for educational purposes. The organ majors of the University of Houston now practice on this instrument almost every day, take weekly lessons at the church, and present degree recitals on it every semester. Last year, the church began an internship program, which lends support to one lucky UH graduate student in organ. In its role as music educator, the instrument will be featured in numerous conferences and workshops in the years to come, including a national conference sponsored by the Westfield Center for Early Keyboard Studies to be held April 12–15, 2012, and the AGO national convention, scheduled for the summer of 2016. We are most grateful!

My congratulations go first to Matthew Dirst, Associate Professor of Musicology at the University of Houston and organist of St. Philip Church, for his many years of strong leadership and impeccable musicianship. He really deserves such an instrument! I also want to thank the St. Philip Organ Committee—espe-

An inside look at the Great pipework, the "C" side of the organ. The tenor and treble sections are in major third arrangements, that is, neighboring pipes are a major third higher or lower, facilitating easier access (the walkboard is to the right, out of frame) and more efficient use of space. Top left is the mounted Cornet V.

cially its remarkable chairperson, Elizabeth Duerr—for years of hard work and unwavering commitment to excellence. And, finally, thanks go to Paul Fritts and his entire team for the construction and installation of an instrument of real quality—one that I know will inspire the congregants of St. Philip and the citizens of Houston for many years to come.

—Robert Bates
Professor of Organ
University of Houston
Organ Consultant
St. Philip Presbyterian Church

From the organbuilder

Many decisions contribute to the building of an organ, and these decisions become more significant when virtually every part is designed and built in the builder's workshop. This distinction, achieved by our firm in 1984 when the pipe shop was established, enables creativity to flourish—we can build anything we want.

Organbuilders have been practicing their art for centuries, often with extravagant support. Today we can visit existing organs from most periods and national styles and still experience them firsthand. These visits become more challenging since we must also account for things outside the original builder's intention. We are experiencing instruments through the veil of rebuilds and restorations over the centuries, some not so sensitive. We must also develop a good understanding of the acoustical environment these organs are speaking in, often a far cry from the typical modern American space. We can both experience how these organs sound and behave today, and also imagine how they once were.

Over the course of many study trips, I have noticed things common to instruments I consider magical. Interestingly, these outstanding instruments are not limited to any national style or time period. When comparing the experiences, I find a substantial convergence in areas of sound. The sounds of the pipes are complex and yet they have an unusual combination of qualities often difficult to achieve but deliberately sought after: their harmonic content is both refined and colorful, and it is balanced with a generous amount of fundamental. The speech is quick and elegant. These qualities are especially challenging, since customary ways of refining speech generally kill the unique harmonic content we hear in the old pipes. Interestingly, we find these sonic qualities in other fine instruments: violins, harpsichords, pianos, and many others. There seems to be a connection to the human voice—richness is present, combined with clarity—and all of this is accomplished, in the case of the organs, without excessive intensity, through the use of relatively low wind pressure. The organs somehow function on a human scale in spite of being grand both in appearance and sound. The pipes have open feet and flueways and relatively high cutups, but are mostly controlled in their sound production by the organ's wind pressure, the main determinant of the organ's overall intensity. These things contribute to what has been aptly called a relaxed intensity—the pipes sing robustly without shouting. Many other aspects fall into place when stops are working this way. The blend between them is enhanced and many more stop combinations work together. The organs carry a space remarkably well without

Stop knobs and preset system drawer

having to be loud. They lead rather than direct a congregation. This rather strict approach surprisingly enables an organ to be more eclectic or universal in its capabilities. And, most importantly, they are supremely musical.

These thoughts were on our minds as we considered the design and construction of the new St. Philip Presbyterian Church organ. Many ideas garnered from the study trips expand the design, construction, and voicing, along with the collective experience of our seven craftsmen. The case appearance, in keeping with the spare nature of the church architecture, is an original design and incorporates ideas found in revered cases to make it more interesting. The treble flats curve inward and alternate direction in ancient Dutch fashion, and the proportions of the bass and tenor flats follow well-established trends. Straightforward moldings properly adorn the case and each vertical stile is framed with decorative insets. The carvings are contemporary creations inspired by Renaissance-era Italian organ pipe shades. All is painted a glossy white with gold leaf highlights. The result in the church is both a striking appearance and a comfortable feeling that it belongs.

Tonally the organ is more strict and at its core Germanic. Arp Schnitger's work forms the basis of our recipe, and for good reason. The level of sophistication in the pipe-making and voicing is a true inspiration. Congregational support is of paramount importance and was at the forefront of our thinking when envisioning the St. Philip tonal design.

There is an abundance of reed stops, and these pipes follow the same principles as the flue pipes. They are made to produce a strong fundamental tone combined with color and refinement. The resonators are cut long to facilitate this, and a welcome consequence is tuning stability.

Eclecticism within this structure can flourish. For the St. Philip instrument we have included many stops and features that broaden the scope. A Swell is present with shades on three sides, along with the required string stops plus the Hautbois (a strict Cavaillé-Coll copy) stop. A string stop is also present on the Great, and there is a wide variety of flutes throughout the organ.

We have also added an electric stop action piggybacked to the mechanical stop action. We do this since there is a vastly different life span between the two systems. Any electric computer system will fail within a relatively short time compared to a well-made mechanical system that can function for centuries. We can avoid this dilemma if the electronic components are included in a non-intrusive way and are easy to replace when it becomes necessary. In the meantime, the organ will not be seriously disabled by failures of these electrical components, since the mechanical system will continue to work. As is usual with modern electrical preset systems, there are the usual features, including hundreds of memory levels and a sequencer.

The wind system is substantial, with four large bellows fitted with all the levers and check valves necessary to foot-pump the organ. When this novelty is utilized and the audience is informed, the performance takes on new meaning. There is a connection to the organ's legacy—the organ is functioning on a human scale.

All of the four divisions speak directly through the façade—that is, no divisions speak through other divisions, contributing to an easy balance among them. The manual divisions are positioned center case, with Positive at the bottom, Great above, and Swell at the top. The Pedal is divided on each side.

The people of St. Philip Presbyterian are to be much admired for their unyielding support throughout the process leading up to the dedication of the organ in the spring of 2010. I am also humbled by my talented staff who work skillfully and with dedication. We strive to build lasting instruments—instruments that are both durable and very much cherished by those who play them and those who listen. Projects like this have the added benefit of the involvement of a wide group of people, a group too numerous to individually name here. I thank the St. Philip family for their support on many levels throughout the process, and I thank my wonderful crew for their continued excellence and support.

—Paul Fritts
Paul Fritts & Co. Organ Builders

St. Philip Presbyterian Church
Paul Fritts & Co. Organ Builders
Opus 29, 2009

GREAT
16′ Principal*
8′ Octave
8′ Rohrflöte
8′ Salicional
4′ Octave
4′ Spitzflöte
2⅔′ Quint
2′ Octave
1⅗′ Terz
IV–VI Mixture
V Cornet (mounted)
16′ Trompet
8′ Trompet
4′ Trompet
8′ Baarpfeife

SWELL
8′ Principal
8′ Bourdon
8′ Violdigamba
8′ Voix celeste
4′ Octave
4′ Koppelflöte
2⅔′ Nasat
2′ Blockflöte
1⅗′ Tierce
IV–V Mixture
16′ Fagott
8′ Trompet
8′ Hautbois

POSITIVE
8′ Principal
8′ Gedackt
8′ Quintadena
4′ Octave
4′ Rohrflöte
2′ Octave
1⅓′ Larigot
II Sesquialtera
IV–V Scharff
8′ Dulcian

PEDAL
16′ Principal
16′ Subbaß
8′ Octave
8′ Bourdon*
4′ Octave
VI–VIII Mixture
32′ Posaune*
16′ Posaune
8′ Trompet
4′ Trompet

*Some pipes transmitted from other stops

Couplers
Swell to Great
Positive to Great
Swell to Positive
Great to Pedal
Swell to Pedal
Positive to Pedal

Compass: Manual, 58 notes; Pedal, 30 notes

Other:
Polished tin front pipes
Solid wood casework with carved pipe shades
Suspended, direct mechanical key action
Mechanical stop action with electric pre-set system
Tremulant
Multiple wedge bellows with foot pumping levers
Wind Stabilizer

70 ranks, 48 stops, 3,488 pipes

Photo credit: Paul Fritts