

Cover feature

**Lewtak Pipe Organ Builders, Inc.,
Camillus, New York, Opus 2
West Baptist Church, Oswego,
New York**

From the music minister

The original organ in the West Baptist Church was built by John G. Marklove in 1867, and was placed in the front right corner of the sanctuary with the console attached. The instrument had two manuals with mechanical key and stop action. Anything beyond this is not known, although the former organist has said that there was a second console in the back of the organ, which allowed the instrument to be played from the adjoining room. Unfortunately, we don't even know the original stoplist.

In 1951 Paul C. Buhl of Utica was contracted to do a full rebuild of the church's organ. Sadly, the work was not up to today's standards. The organ was completely taken apart and the original Marklove slider-and-pallet windchests were chopped into pieces (we found parts of old chests used as catwalks, ladders, etc.). The pipework was mixed and matched with pipes from other instruments of unknown origin. In some cases, we found pipes from the same rank used in four different stops; this was especially apparent in the Pedal division. The configuration of ranks hardly made sense in terms of scale matching or materials used, not to mention any tonal coherence. Two manual keyboards that were built into the façade were disposed of and replaced with a three-manual console with electric action, detached from the organ chamber. Inside the organ chamber the Buhl Company placed new, direct-electric chests and distributed the existing pipework into three divisions. They ended up adding a few "modern strings," changing the configuration of mixtures, duplexing many ranks, borrowing stops from one manual to another—all of it in a way that the person playing the organ couldn't possibly tell whether the sound was coming from this or that division. In addition, the electrical system suffered from poor wiring and faults caused by climatic conditions. For years the church's building has been extremely humid during summer months, which contributed to severe mold growth and this, in turn, caused a complete deterioration of old insulation made of fabric. Shorting wires caused an array of ciphers and dead notes and created a situation of serious unreliability.

In addition, the Pedal had only two independent stops and was unable to sufficiently support the sound of the full organ. The organ committee quickly became aware that another renovation was not a feasible option and decided to employ Lewtak Pipe Organ Builders to build a new instrument that would retain the original façade (at least in the general sense) and restore as much of the old pipework as possible, leaving the judgment of selecting the useful pipes to the organbuilder. All other components of the organ are brand new and were built specifically for this instrument.

—Abel Searor

From the organbuilder

When in 2006 our firm was contracted for the maintenance of the Buhl organ at the West Baptist Church in Oswego, New York, from the first visit to the church we knew that something had to be done with the existing instrument and that the situation was quite serious. As time progressed, we were first asked to do a complete renovation; however, upon further examination of the instrument, we advised the organ committee that funds spent for the renovation would simply become money wasted—the organ was beyond any sensible repair. It was then that a small miracle happened. The members of the West Baptist Church, quite few in numbers and certainly not spoiled with overflow of extra capital, decided to accept our proposal for a new organ that would incorporate the exist-



Lewtak Opus 2, West Baptist Church, Oswego, New York



Current front view of the organ at the West Baptist Church in Oswego, New York

ing pipework (with great modifications, however) and would retain the existing outside appearance (although slightly changed as well).

When the decision was made to build a new organ, there was no question that going the "old way" would most certainly be the best way. We are passionate supporters of tracker organs. It has been proven through centuries of experience that the most reliable and artistically gratifying key action is a mechanical one. We also put our complete trust in the time-proven manner of building windchests with sliders and pallets. We strongly believe that the characteristics and performance of a tracker organ are unquestionably superior to any other kind of action. Coming from this viewpoint, the new organ was designed with fully mechanical key and stop action. We opted to go back to the two-manual setup and designed a stoplist that was not influenced by any particular style or builder. We simply wanted to create an instrument that would be quite universal, full of tonal variety, and suitable for many musical genres. We intended, however, to sustain a bit of an "old-fashioned" flavor, which is clearly manifested in the voicing of pipes.

The new organ was built on a tight budget; therefore, some of the work has been done by the members of the congregation. The Buhl organ from 1951 had been completely removed and disposed of. The organ chamber was emptied out and renovated. New plasterboard was installed, and everything got a fresh coat of paint. The floor was refinished, and sufficient room was made in front of the organ for a new console—built into the organ case with two manuals and a pedal keyboard. All of this work was done by the members of the church.

The largest pipes, from the wooden Principal 16' in the Pedal, were placed on "benches" along the walls and connected via flexible conduits to a separate chest designated exclusively for this rank. The reason for this was twofold. First, these pipes were too big to fit on a "regular" pedal chest and, second, they required a considerable amount of wind, which would almost certainly cause a shortage of wind for the rest of the ranks, if placed on the same chest. The remaining pedal ranks were placed on two identical windchests butting against each other side to side.

All pipework in all divisions is distributed in a major-third configuration, of course split in the middle into two traditional sides, C and C-sharp. The Swell and Great divisions are mounted above the three single-rise wedge bellows. All windchests were provided with small shocker bellows, allowing for steady wind supply even during times of high wind demand. All major wind conduits are made out of wood; small offsets were carried out with flexible conduits.

We kept roughly 70% of the pipework from the Marklove/Buhl organ. It was nearly impossible to determine which pipes were "true originals" from 1867 and which came from some other sources. We opted for keeping only the pipes that offered us a chance to do a decent revoicing. The remaining 30% we acquired from various sources; however, all the pipework was voiced together as one instrument—the process took nearly five months.

The new instrument boasts 27 stops, 33 ranks, for a total of 1,803 pipes. Since it is nearly impossible to describe the sound, we can only say that the goal was to have an organ with a confident, but not bold, tonal character. Therefore, all of our voicing efforts went in the direction of having the pipes speaking in a manner that is naturally free and unobstructed. There is never a problem with using fewer stops, if needed, but one cannot produce a *fortissimo* effect if there is no substance to support it. In no way, however, is the organ "shrieky" or unpleasant, even with all the stops pulled out. Working with the relatively low wind pressure of 69 mm for the



Close-up view of the details around the console area



Decorative rosette was added to the facade design, designed and hand-painted by Pawel Lewtak



Delicate work in gentle hands—Vanessa McCrea setting Baltic amber inlays in drawknobs turned in Norway from hard maple

manuals turned out to be quite rewarding. The pipes develop a sound that is not forced and is very “singing” in nature, yet not lacking in natural strength.

The facade was left in its original general concept. The facade pipes were completely stripped to bare metal and repainted with the addition of some subtle stenciling. In the top portion of the middle arch, we added a painted rosette with elaborate decorative floral elements. The lower portion of the frontal cabinet had to be modified in order to accommodate our new keyboards and the drawknob desks. We used American walnut for all new frontal elements—the same wood species as the old cabinet. Neither time nor money was spared when it came to the console area. The keys are made of tightly grained spruce, naturals with granadilla overlays, sharps with maple and natural bone. Natural keys have their fronts embellished with a half-circle arch. The key cheeks as well as the music stand are made of solid walnut with hard maple inlays. Drawknobs are made from Norwegian maple. In the center of the ball there is a round inlay made of sterling silver and Baltic amber in honey color. The knobs were custom turned for us by Johannes Rieber in Oslo, Norway; the amber pieces were also made especially for this purpose—they came from Poland from one of the most renowned figures in amber art circles, Mariusz Drapikowski (his original creations are on permanent display at the Vatican Museum).

The tracker action is carried out in the simplest of ways, which is a bulletproof formula ensuring reliability for many years to come. Keys are a double-armed lever, with 10 mm movement in the front and 7.5 mm in the back. Trackers are made from red cedar, squares from hornbeam, and rollers from aluminum with wooden arms. Because of extreme humidity problems, we chose to make all pallets out of aluminum. The windchests were made of solid oak and maple, toe boards and pipe racking out of poplar. The stop action is made from white ash, sliders from the laminated phenolic fabric. The air is supplied by a 1-HP, three-phase Ventus blower.

We wish to extend our thanks to all members of the West Baptist Church in Oswego, New York for entrusting us with this project. We hope that this project will indeed help to rejuvenate the church family and that it will serve the community “For the glory of God.”

—Tomasz Lewtak
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Craftsmen who worked on this project:
Vanessa McCrea—woodworking, book-keeping, purchasing and general help (doing all the things that nobody else wanted to do . . .)

Iwona Henschke—pipe restoration, stenciling
Jeff King—electrical work, organ chamber and floor finishing
Gerry DeMoors—carillon restoration and electronics
Johannes Rieber—drawknob turning
Mariusz Drapikowski—Baltic amber and sterling silver setting
Pawel Lewtak—facade design, wood-working, pipe restoration
Tomasz Lewtak—mechanical design, woodworking, voicing and tuning

Photo credit: Tomasz Lewtak

GREAT

- 16' Bourdon
- 8' Montre
- 8' Gedact
- 4' Octave
- 4' Flute Harmonique
- 3' Quinte
- 2' Super Octave
- Mixture IV
- 8' Trumpet
- 4' Clarion
- Chimes

SWELL

- 8' Melodia
- 8' Gamba
- 8' Celeste
- 4' Principal
- 4' Fugara
- 2' Piccolo
- 1 1/2' Larigot
- Mixture III-IV
- 8' Oboe
- 8' Clarinet
- 8' Vox Humana
- Tremolo

PEDAL

- 16' Principal
- 16' Subbass
- 8' Octave
- 8' Violon
- 4' Choralbass
- 16' Fagotto

Couplers: II-I, I-P, II-P
Mechanical key and stop action
Tuning: Vallotti temperament, A=440 Hz at 18° C
Winding: three single-rise wedge bellows, additional shocker bellows in each division
Wind pressure: 69 mm in Great and Swell, 82 mm Pedal



Iwona Henschke working on a facade pipe



Voicing in progress—Tomasz Lewtak at custom-built voicing organ