

Cover feature

Nolte Organ Building, Milwaukee, Wisconsin Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish, Kenosha, Wisconsin

What can you do with a late 1920s Kilgen organ that has a host of problems? That is the question the organ committee at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in Kenosha, Wisconsin, asked us when we first met with them. They had already rejected both the idea of replacing the instrument with a new organ, and a lower-quality rebuild that would replace the electro-pneumatic action with an electro-mechanical action. Based on our preliminary look at the organ, we agreed to design a rebuilt instrument that would be visually attractive, mechanically reliable, and tonally more complete. Because of the reasonable but limited budget, we would use as much of the old instrument as possible, and some additions would have to be left as "prepared for."

The worship space is a very modern room with good acoustics for music and the spoken word. The interior decoration is modern, tasteful, and quite plain. Stained glass windows depicting biblical scenes are located in the clerestory on either side of the sanctuary. They feature various shades of blue, purple, and brown. Stations of the cross are painted on the upper walls in shades of brown and gold. The lower walls form an elliptical footprint and feature mosaic art behind the two side altars. The baldachin is a free-form plaster and mosaic arch over the tabernacle, illuminated with an oculus in a sunburst of beams in the chancel ceiling. The reredos consists of simple paintings on the wall and two statues. In sharp contrast, the original organ, located in the balcony, was quite ugly.

The tonal resources of the organ consisted of three stopped 16' ranks, eight 8' ranks, and one 4' rank distributed over three manuals and pedal. The only reed was the Vox Humana. Through the former organist, the church had acquired several more ranks of pipes that were being stored in the balcony: a 32' Subbass, a 16' Open Diapason, a 16' manual Bourdon, and a capped 8' Oboe.

The console shell was in poor condition, and its style was not appropriate for the room. The three keyboards with ivory naturals and ebony sharps were in moderately good condition. The electrical switching system in the console and relay was the source of numerous dead notes in the stops and couplers.

The blower still worked, but would not last indefinitely. For budgetary reasons it would not be replaced. (The blower failed a few months after the organ was playing, and had to be replaced.) Two large regulators needed restoration. The two Swell boxes and their shutters were not serviceable. Because of the extensive unification of the organ, all of the chests were unit chests. The original chest leather, dating from 1928, was still in excellent condition and would provide many more years of reliable service.

The pipework had suffered some minor damage, and some pipes did not speak properly. The Great 8' Diapason was overly large and loud. Tonal improvements in the Principal chorus were the highest priority, especially since congregational singing has become more important than it had been when the organ was originally installed.

For the visual design of the organ, we began with a CAD drawing of a façade that would emphasize the vertical line of the organ, even though it was installed in a low, wide space measuring 12 feet by 29 feet. This drawing was further refined with an artist's rendering, and finally a scale model was used to determine sight lines and other details. The façade includes narrow side towers and an arch to reflect elements in the chancel. To further emphasize the vertical line, the wood 16' Open was put into the façade, and a "V" was cut into the center of the wall in front of the organ to expose more



Nolte organ, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish, Kenosha, Wisconsin



Balcony and organ before renovation



Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish, Kenosha

length of the longest pipes. The toes of the treble pipes follow the line of the "V." As the smaller pipes rise higher and higher, they seem to fade into the background like a perspective drawing. Shading the smaller pipes darker and darker enhances the illusion. The maple and purpleheart grilles that support the pipes also taper to the vanishing points that are located high on either side of the façade. The side towers and the arch are made of walnut and maple. The wall cap is walnut.

Tonal improvements were limited to

the Principal chorus and the substitution of an Oboe for the Vox Humana. The Trumpet, Mixture, mutations and other stops to straighten the specification are dependent on the prosperity of the organ fund. The 30-note Open Wood has been extended with new pipes to play at 16', 8', and 4' in the Pedal. These pipes were painted and placed in the façade. The 8' Open Diapason in the Great was discarded, except for the bottom octave of open wood pipes. These were reconditioned and revoiced with the flues shimmed

Original Kilgen stoplist

GREAT

- 8' Open Diapason
- 8' Doppelflute
- 8' Gamba
- 8' Melodia
- 8' Dulciana
- 4' Octave
- 4' Flute
- Chimes

SWELL

- 16' Bourdon
- 8' Violin Diapason
- 8' Stopped Diapason
- 8' Quintadena
- 8' Salicional
- 8' Vox Celeste
- 4' Flute d'Amour
- 4' Salicet
- 2' Flautino
- 8' Vox Humana
- Tremolo

CHOIR

- 16' Dulciana T.C.
- 8' Violone Cello
- 8' Melodia
- 8' Dolce
- 4' Flute
- 2' Piccolo
- 8' Synthetic Oboe
- Tremolo

PEDAL

- 16' Subbass
- 16' Bourdon
- 16' Lieblich Gedeckt
- 8' Cello
- 8' Flauto Dolce

19 couplers

New Nolte stoplist

GREAT

- 16' Bourdon
- 8' Open Diapason
- 8' Doppelflute (ext Bourdon)
- 8' Gamba
- 4' Octave
- 2½' Quint
- 2' Octave
- IV Mixture (prepared)
- 8' Trumpet (prepared)
- Chimes

SWELL

- 16' Lieblich Gedeckt
- 8' Violin Diapason
- 8' Stopped Diapason (ext)
- 8' Salicional
- 8' Vox Celeste
- 4' Violin Diapason (ext)
- 4' Flute d'Amour (ext)
- 4' Salicet (ext)
- 2' Flautino (ext)
- 8' Oboe
- Tremolo

CHOIR

- 16' Dulciana (ext, 1-12 Lieb Ged)
- 8' Gamba
- 8' Melodia
- 8' Dulciana
- 4' Gamba (ext)
- 4' Flute (ext)
- 4' Dulcet (ext)
- 2½' Nazard (ext)
- 2' Flute (ext)
- 1½' Tierce (ext)
- 8' Clarinet (prepared)

PEDAL

- 16' Open Diapason (façade)
- 16' Subbass
- 16' Lieblich Gedeckt (Sw)
- 8' Open Diapason (ext)
- 8' Bourdon (Sw)
- 4' Choral Bass (ext)
- 16' Trumpet (prepared)
- 8' Trumpet (prepared)
- 4' Oboe (Sw)

10 couplers
32-level combination system
Transposer

outward so beards are no longer necessary for good speech. Ten of these pipes are in the side towers of the façade. The original 4' Octave became the rest of the 8' Diapason, and new ranks were added at 4', 2½', and 2' pitches. Because all of the stops are on unit chests, and the new relay and switching system utilizes a



View from the front of the sanctuary



The front of the sanctuary



Console



Façade detail



Console

multiplex system, several stops are currently being played at additional pitches for greater flexibility in registrations. For example, the Choir Melodia has been wired to play at 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ' and 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ' just by adding a stop action and one wire.

While a new solid state switching system and multi-level combination system were always part of the design, originally we planned to renovate the old console because of the limited budget. We planned to save the keyboards and to repair and refinish the console shell. During the project, the organ fund did quite well, the 32' Subbass pipes were sold, and we gave the church a very good price on replacing the console shell. When the church agreed to add the new console, it exceeded the production budget and schedule, but we think the results are worth it.

The design calls for a very low profile three-manual console so that the organist can also direct the choir. The elliptical footprint of the sanctuary is carried over to the console footprint, and to the elliptical etched glass music rack. The music rack casts an elliptical purpleheart shadow onto the console top, and from the purple ellipse, there is a solid maple elliptical sunburst pattern to the console rim. The outside of the console is made from birdseye maple. The gorgeous grain patterns were book matched around the perimeter by carefully selecting and re-sawing the individual boards. The interior woodwork of the console is purpleheart, a South American tropical wood. The key cheeks, stop boards, knee panel, pedalboard, and sharps are all made of purpleheart. The same material is used in the upper part of the grille behind the façade pipes.

The original ivory and ebony keyboards were saved for the new console. The keyboards in the new console are adjustable so that the lowest manual can be set for any distance from 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ " to 10" of overhang in front of the pedal sharps. This covers the full range in the AGO console specifications, and allows each

organist to adjust the keyboards to the most comfortable position. A pencil tray above the top manual slides in and out with the keys under the music rack so that the key tails remain covered when the keys are moved. Knobs under the keydesk lock the keyboards in place.

The organ committee and parish were a pleasure to work with. Some of the circumstances were a little unusual. The organ project began when there was no organist at the parish. During the project, the interim music director, whose expertise was piano and vocal music, preferred to have no input into decisions on the project. Also, several months after the contract was signed, the pastor, Rev. John Richetta, retired. We were able to have the organ playing for his retirement, although the project was far from complete. Special thanks are due to the parish secretary, Peggy Dixon. Through her efforts, even with significant changes in the parish staff, communication continued seamlessly. The new pastor is Rev. Dominic Thomas, and the new music director is Rita Torcaso.

John M. Nolte established Nolte Organ Building & Supply, Inc. in 1986. The firm currently employs five full-time and several part-time workers in their well-equipped shop. They are known internationally for their expertise in wood pipe making and voicing. They are also known for their innovative and creative designs. Benjamin Nolte assisted with the design of the façade and was responsible for building and installing it. Jeremy Nolte assisted with the design and building of the console.

The firm is currently building a three-manual and pedal mechanical-action practice organ. All of the pipes in this instrument are made of maple and walnut.

For more information and pictures, see <www.nolteorgans.com>.

—John Nolte

Cover photo by Benjamin Nolte; other photos by Benjamin Nolte and John Nolte.