

THE ORGANS OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

St. Petersburg, Florida

There are two organs in the sanctuary of First Presbyterian Church: the Main organ on the east end and the Antiphonal organ on the west end. Both organs, totaling 99 ranks, contain 83 pipe ranks with 4,959 pipes and 16 digital ranks. They are controlled by a 4-manual, solid-state console that governs all nine divisions of the organ: Swell, Great, Positiv, Choir, Solo, Pedal, Antiphonal Swell, Antiphonal Great and Antiphonal Pedal. The 10 ranks of the Antiphonal organ are from the Dewey Layton organ of the old Sanctuary. A separate 2-manual console controlling only the Antiphonal organ stops had been located in the north balcony until October 8, 2014, when it was removed to make room for upgrades to the church's sound and video systems. The Main organ, built by the Reuter Organ Company of Lawrence, Kansas, originally consisted of 42 ranks in 1967 when it was installed in the church's new sanctuary. Over the years, many changes and additions to the organ have occurred. A detailed chronology of these changes and additions is listed below.

- In 1984, the impressive *Trompeta Imperial*, a gift of the late Mary Ohrns, was added to the organ. This commanding stop is a high-pressure reed featuring a chrome-plated rank of copper pipes mounted horizontally below the Burning Bush window, 175 feet from the Main organ.
- In 1988, a special donation to the Organ Fund made possible the addition of two new ranks as well as several extensions to existing ranks. The two new ranks, the *Gemshorn 8'* and *Gemshorn Céleste 8'* with a full-length, 16-foot extension, formed the beginning of a new, expressive Choir division with plans for 16 additional ranks. In the Swell division, the *Voix Céleste*, a stop that usually ends at tenor C, was extended down to bass FF. Twelve new pipes were added to the top end of the *Basson 16'*, and it was made playable at 8' pitch on an unused draw knob that was renamed *Basson 8'*. Also, twelve pipes were added to the bottom octave of the *Flûte à Cheminée 16'*, a stop already prepared for on the console.
- In the summer of 1993, the 44 ranks of the main organ were completely revoiced and regulated by R. Joseph Wiessinger and Dan Abrahamson of the Reuter Organ Company. A new 3-rank mixture of lower pitch was bought to replace the old *Plein Jeu III* in the Swell division, and the 16-foot *Basson* was sent back to the factory for new reeds and tuning collars.
- In the fall of 1994, a new action was purchased to control the beautiful Deagan Chimes of the organ, which were relocated from the Antiphonal Swell division to the relay room of the Main organ.
- In 1997, a brand new 4-manual, solid-state console designed by organist Jack Rain in collaboration with R. Joseph Wiessinger was installed, replacing the old 3-manual console, which had served for 30 years. The new console has 189 drawknobs, 55 tilting tablets and features state-of-the-art technology. Ninety-nine memory banks govern the 16 general combination pistons, thus giving the organist 1,584 pistons! (The old console had only 8.) A transposer allows the organist to play in any key required. Computer technology lets the organist record his playing onto a floppy disk for playback at a later time. Along with the new console, the old *Plein Jeu III* from the Swell (removed in 1993) was added back to the organ as the *Cymbale III* on a new chest. The Pedal *Bombarde 16'* (with 8' and 4' extensions) was made playable in the Great and Solo divisions with the addition of 29 new pipes, also on a new chest. The Great *Quintatön 16'* was made playable at 8' pitch with 12 new pipes, and the Swell *Prestant 4'* was rescaled for a broader sound with 12 new pipes added on a new unit chest, permitting it to play as the *Montre 8'* in the Swell and Pedal divisions.
- In the spring of 1999, two electronic 32' flue stops were added to the Pedal division, and, one year later, two electronic 32' reed stops were added. These additions, which take the listener down to the lowest frequencies of the audible sound spectrum, were built by the late Edward J. Henley, Sr., of Temple Terrace, Florida, who had built the electronic *Bombarde Basse 64'* for the organ at the Washington National Cathedral several years earlier.
- In September of 2002, a beautiful *Flûte Harmonique 4'* was added to the Swell division. The pipes of this stop are from the 1907 Pilcher organ (opus 579) of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Tampa. At the same time, a new chest was ordered from Organ Supply Industries for a rank of old Möller *Vox Humana* pipes which had last been heard at Bayshore Baptist Church in Tampa. The chest and pipes are located inside a wooden box with a lid that can be opened and closed by a tilting tablet on the organ console. The new stop was installed in February of 2003 and was renamed *Voix Humaine 8'* in keeping with the French nomenclature of the Swell division. Nearly six months later, both stops underwent a thorough revoicing and regulation at the hands of R. Joseph Wiessinger and Dan Abrahamson, recently retired from the Reuter Organ Company.
- In September of 2003, a contract was signed with R. Joseph Wiessinger for the addition of two 8-foot ranks to the organ's Choir division to be built by Organ Supply Industries: a *Cor Anglais* (English Horn) and a *Flûte Harmonique*. Installation of these ranks as well as a *Tremulant* for the Choir division took place in June 2004. Shortly after this installation, a contract was signed to add three more ranks to the Choir division to be built by Reuter Organ Company: a *Principal 8'*, a *Tromba 8'* (with 4' extension), and a *Dulcian 16'* (with 8' extension). Delivery and installation of these ranks occurred in December 2004, just in time for Christmas.

- In October of 2004, contact was made with Gilberto Serna of Century Mallet Instrument Service of Chicago to discuss extending the church's 20-note set of Deagan Class A Chimes to a full two octaves. An order was placed in November to add 5 new nickel-plated brass tubes needed to complete the set. The order arrived in December, but 3 of the tubes had been made to the wrong length. Damage during return shipping and lengthy negotiations delayed the remaking of these tubes. It was not until April of 2005 that the order was successfully completed and installed.
- During most of 2004, extensive preparations had been going on for the installation of the bottom 12 pipes of a full-length, 16-foot *Open Wood* stop in the Pedal division. The enormous pipes, a gift to the church, date from an E. and G. Hook organ of the late 1800's. The placement of the pipes is so far from the Main organ that a separate, used blower was purchased from a church in Carrollton, Georgia, to supply the enormous amount of wind necessary to make the pipes play. The nearly two-year project came to fruition on January 25, 2005, when the new stop spoke for the first time.
- In April of 2009, a contract was signed with R. Joseph Wiessinger for the addition of 15 digital voices made by the Walker Technical Company. These additions would complete the stops prepared for in the Solo division. In addition, four 32' stops were added to the Pedal division. Two of these replaced the two 32' flues added by Edward Henley, Sr., in 1999. The 16' *Open Wood* pedal stop, consisting of the lower 12 pipes, was completed digitally. Except for the *Clarinet* and *Tuba* stops, all manual stops were extended in both directions to play 85 notes instead of the usual 61 notes. Thus, 16' and 4' couplers provide complete 12-note extensions in both directions. In like fashion, the Pedal additions were made to play 44 notes instead of the usual 32 notes because of the unusual Pedal to Pedal 4' coupler. Installation of the new equipment began on July 27, and, on August 21, Mr. Walker arrived to voice the new additions.
- In April of 2014, a contract was signed with R. Joseph Wiessinger for the addition of a 5-rank mounted *Cornet*. Drawknobs for the stop were already prepared for in the Great and Solo divisions and are labeled *Kornett V*. Some unused space in the Pedal division provided room for the 220 new pipes and chest. Due to higher wind pressure, the stop was winded from the nearby Choir division instead of the Pedal division; thus, the stop is affected by the Choir *Tremulant*. Installation occurred at the end of July and the final voicing was done on November 3 to give the stop a more assertive character than it originally had.
- In November of 2015, the digital stops installed by Walker Technical Company in 2009 were upgraded to newer technology with two new generator boards. The *Flûte douce* and the *Flûte douce céleste* were combined onto a single drawknob labeled *Flûtes douces célestes II*. The remaining spare drawknob made possible the addition of a 4' *Orchestral Flute*. Mr. Walker himself did the voicing and installation on November 4, 2015.
- On April 13, 2018, a contract was signed with the Reuter Organ Company of Lawrence, Kansas, for the addition of 12 ranks to complete the Choir division. The difficult job of installation began on September 10 and was completed on the 13th. The location of the 12 ranks in very tight quarters on the second floor demanded careful planning. It was necessary to remove most of the pipes already in the Choir division to provide space to work in. Framework to support an upper deck of chests had to be erected first. The chests then had to be hoisted up to the second floor and installed on the new framework. Wiring and winding were then completed before any pipes could be installed. The following new stops were added to the Choir division: *Octave 4'*, *Koppelflöte 4'*, *Octavin 2'*, *Sifflöte 1'*, *Sesquialtera II*, *Fourniture IV*, *Rohrshalmei 8'* and the *Trompeta Real 8'*, a Spanish-styled horizontal reed. In addition, a tremulant was added to the reservoir of the Pedal *Bourdon 16'* which plays in the Swell division at 8' pitch.
- Future plans include the refurbishing and enlarging of the old Antiphonal organ. Since 1976, R. Joseph Wiessinger of Clearwater, former Reuter Organ Company representative, had done all additions and maintenance of the organ until his semi-retirement in 2010 when his protégé, Ron Streicher, took over maintenance of the organ. Wiessinger, however, continued to be involved in the completion of the organ's Choir division, which he had begun in 1988. The 30-year project was officially completed on October 10, 2018.

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