

The New Organ: Questions & Answers

By Rebecca Davy, Music Director & Organist

Most of you probably know about the exciting news that Bruton Parish has ordered a new pipe organ from Dobson Pipe Organ Company, Ltd. in Lake City, Iowa, but I would like to share some answers to questions I am often asked about the new instrument. Some comparisons with our current organ are a good starting point.

The new Dobson instrument will have 45 ranks, totalling 2,577 pipes, while our current organ has 105 ranks and 5,686 pipes. Why so much smaller? Our building simply doesn't need such a large organ, the size of which is usually reserved for cathedral spaces and large concert halls. Many of our current ranks are redundant and buried in the attic and behind other pipes.

If the entire organ were in a case in front of the church, it would be capable of an overwhelming amount of sound. Forty-five ranks (sets of pipes) divided between the pedal division and three manuals (keyboards) will be the perfect size for our space and capable of playing any repertory we choose. One division (the swell, or top manual) will still be in the attic but placed to allow the sound to carry into the church much more readily than is currently the case.

And there will no longer be any pipes in the back tower, where temperature swings keep that division nearly constantly out of tune with the remainder of the organ. Because most of the pipes will be encased directly in front, the sound will be able to provide more presence (not necessarily volume) throughout the sanctuary.

Another frequent question regards how everything will look. The "wings" that protrude into the chancel across the front windows will be removed, giving an appearance more in keeping with the original building. The "wing" on the left/north side was initially added to house the 1756 organ and its match on the south side was added by architects of the restoration in order to provide symmetry. Removal of these wings will allow much more light to shine onto the altar area.

The new case will extend to the edges of the reredos, and the gallery will be shortened, ending at the top of the decorative carvings and the middle arch, providing visually pleasing proportions. The new case will be painted to match the reredos and trim in the church and will have gilded pipes as was the norm for English organs in the 18th century.



The organ console will remain in the same place but will be movable, so that it can be wheeled out into the center for organ recitals and even into the crossing for choral concerts with organ and orchestra accompaniment. It will be able to be placed in its current box either facing the altar (as is currently the case) or facing the choir pews to allow the organist more ability to see what is going on in the service. The console itself will be smaller and only about as tall as the edge of the box.



The design itself is a carefully crafted compromise between how an 18th-century English organ would have looked and our need for a modern instrument of adequate size to accompany our choirs and play a vast variety of solo repertory. The organ case will be built to match seamlessly with the front wall and to appear as if it had always been there. Each part of the organ will be constructed by hand in the Dobson factory, built with the highest standard of craftsmanship. It is a great honor to serve as Music Director at a church that has made such a visionary musical choice and

one that will serve the congregation well long into the future. I extend my gratitude to the many who have already generously given to the campaign for a new organ.

Lynn Dobson, President and Artistic Director (holding drawings), and Abe Batten, Technical Designer, paid a visit to Williamsburg. They spent time at Bruton Parish on May 11-12, gathering information to begin the working drawings for the organ.



Dobson provides this description of the project: "The new organ will stand in the east gallery, above the reredos, in the space currently occupied by the Green organ case. The design of the new organ case takes its cue from the historic reredos, which was restored in 1939. The case will be painted the same putty-gray color as the reredos. The tin façade pipes and the carved pipe shades will be gilded."

We will be following the progress of construction of Bruton's organ and sharing information along the way.