

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Just one year ago, a few months after the death of my father, Elmer Dobson, I wrote in this column about the help he gave me and the influence he had on me when I started and was developing my organ-building business. Now with the recent death of my mother, Muriel, I am again drawn to reflect on all that I received from both my parents during the many years they helped me with my business, but particularly the contributions of my mother. It seems incredible that they are both gone now, a reality which one can never really adequately prepare for. They were good and caring people, and I owe who I am to the lessons they taught me, and the support they gave me.

Muriel Dobson died on February 3, 2003, after an extended stay in the nursing home. In the formative years of the business my mother served as the company's secretary and bookkeeper. Having developed business management skills while running the family farming operation and later with my father's involvement in political activities, she was very good at bookkeeping, typing and proof-reading. She helped organize my record keeping for setting up a job cost accounting system. During the first ten or twelve years of the business' existence she kept me informed on a day-to-day basis about every project's financial status. As the company grew she learned more about organbuilding than she probably ever wanted to. Typing technical information, transcribing pipe scales and dealing with international banking issues all became a routine part of her work. With Muriel taking care of so much in the office I was able to concentrate on designing and building organs.

In those early days, just as my father helped me in the shop, my mother performed the secretarial and bookkeeping work as a labor of love since I was too poor to pay her for her time. After the business eventually became more established she was on the payroll as part-time help. Muriel helped make the transition to the hiring of our first full-time secretary in the early 1980s. She continued to do all the bookkeeping, however, and fully retired only after helping facilitate the transition to our hiring a full-time business manager several years later.

Elmer and Muriel Dobson in 1991



My mother was as cautious and conservative in business matters as I was idealistic in building organs. She provided a very good balance, probably worrying for me when I was too naïve to be worried for myself. Eventually she told me that it was time to find someone else to take over her work because the business had grown in size and complexity to a point where she felt I needed better advice and more help than she could give. But she always remained intensely interested in the business. Even after several strokes, a broken hip and becoming wheelchair-bound in a nursing home, we still talked every day either in person or by phone so she could catch up on how things were going. To see us working on the important projects we are now involved in gave her great pleasure these past several years.

I will miss my mother for many things, especially her dry sense of humor. I think I was very lucky to have had a mother and father who together supported me in pursuing my dream even though organbuilding seemed to be an unlikely occupation by which to make a living. I am grateful for all their encouragement, advice and the incredible amount of physical effort they put into the business over the years.

Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, Los Angeles
Dobson Op. 75, 2003

EVENING PRAYER AND BLESSING OF THE ORGAN

Cardinal Roger M. Mahony presiding

5:30 p.m., Saturday, May 3, 2003

Dedicatory Recital following Evening Prayer
Samuel Salvadore Soria, Cathedral Organist

PROFILES



When you walk into a certain older part of the shop, you first notice the huge pile of wood chips surrounding a drill press. Nearby you see dozens of thin boards recently pierced with hundreds of holes of varying sizes. Adjacent is a very large workbench piled with thicker boards that are likewise riddled with holes. They have burned countersinks that give the place a smoky smell. The placement of the holes and their sizes on all of these boards appear almost random, even chaotic. Return in a few days, however, and order reigns: rackboards are neatly joined to toeboards, and pipes are planted on them, straight, tall and recognizably organ-like. The floor is tidy. Welcome to Meridith's area.

Meridith Blanchard was raised in the scenic southeastern Minnesota river town of Winona. She attended Dr. Martin Luther College, a Lutheran teachers college in nearby New Ulm. In those days, Meridith, like every DMLC student, was required to study organ for a period of time, since graduates would be serving parochial schools and would also be expected to play for church services. While in school she met classmate Robert Sperling, a New Ulm native, who was already fascinated by pipe organs. Meridith taught for one year in Menomonee, Wisc., and in 1960, she and Bob were married.

In 1961, after a brief stay in Milwaukee, Bob and Meridith moved to Highland, Illinois, where Bob's brother John was a voicer at the Wicks Organ Co. In 1965, Bob left his voicing position at Wicks, and the family moved back to New Ulm. While Bob commuted, working for Hendrickson Organ Company in St. Peter, Minn., and Dobson in Lake City during the 1970s and '80s, Meridith raised the children and later, when they were in school, worked as an optometrist's assistant and a bank teller. Along the way, she assisted Bob in the tuning and repair of organs. In 1985, Bob decided to put an end to commuting, and moved Meridith and his two youngest daughters to Lake City. One of the trucks that had just delivered Op. 29 to St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn., was put to use as a moving van on its return trip through New Ulm, when several of Bob's co-workers packed up the family belongings on a truck that just the day before held thousands of organ parts.

Upon arrival in Lake City, Meridith soon was employed by Dobson and found her niche in the construction of windchest toeboards and the racking of pipes. This latter aspect of windchest construction, in which the pipes are carefully fitted so that they stand perfectly vertical, is very important: if they are not absolutely plumb, the pipes will soon lean and eventually collapse. Her aptitude for this work suggested other tasks, and in her 18 years in Lake City she has made windchests, assisted with pipemaking, prepared pipes for voicing and wrapped them for shipping, made and assembled console and key action components, releathered pneumatic windchest actions, and assisted in the restoration of historic organs. Meridith is a practical person, never afraid to get dirty or do work that isn't glamorous. Frankly, she is the sort of industrious, all-around worker that we wish we could clone.

After Bob's untimely death in 2000, Meridith decided to stay in Lake City and continue working at the Dobson shop. Her five children are spread out around her in every direction, most only a day's drive away. Cindy is a ranger with the National Park Service, Sandy is a computer programmer, Randy is an electrician, Becky a veterinarian, and Sharon a construction manager. Each of them inherited Bob's love of science and the natural world, and Meridith's pragmatic nature and good humor. She enjoys traveling to visit her growing brood—but, of course, she would *never* think of spoiling the grandchildren.

Meridith has been active in her church, singing alto in the choir, serving on the Altar Guild, and filling several roles in the Sunday School including teacher and superintendent. The same talented hands that carefully craft organ parts serve her well in her free time. She enjoys sewing, knitting, crocheting, cross stitch, quilting, baking and gardening. The thought of her potato rolls, which she brings in for coffee break from time to time, is causing her biographer to salivate even as he types this.

Meridith represents the ideals of the shop: she is intelligent, skilled, industrious and agreeable. We are proud of her many accomplishments, and of her long-time association with us.





The Cathedral during Mass of Dedication

The Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, Los Angeles, Calif., has been the site of increasing activity involving Op. 75 (IV/105; 2003). Even though not yet fully completed, the organ has been used for daily Masses since the building's opening and Mass of Dedication in September, 2002. Cathedral Organist Sal Soria practices nearly every afternoon and so the instrument is heard informally by the thousands of touring visitors each week.

Several recent events gave the Cathedral and Dobson Pipe Organ Builders opportunities to introduce the instrument to members of the greater organ community. Last October the American Institute of Organbuilders held its convention in Los Angeles. Members were given a demonstration of the organ by company President Lynn Dobson, Tonal Director John Panning and Sal Soria. On January 13, the Los Angeles Chapter of the American Guild of Organists held its monthly meeting at the Cathedral. Over 400 members heard Lynn Dobson speak about the instrument, after which organist Soria played a stunning half-hour program of music by Bach, Dupré, Howells and Sowerby. The Reverend Monsignor Kevin Kostelnik, Cathedral Pastor, closed the evening with a "verbal tour" of the Cathedral. In addition, Op. 75 was the cover feature of the April 2003 issue of *The American Organist*.

In March, Frank Brownstead, Cathedral Director of Music, announced *The Wednesday Midday Recitals* to be held every Wednesday of the year (except Ash Wednesday) from 12:45 to 1:15, following the daily 12:10 p.m. Mass. The series will feature organists from the Los Angeles area, and is coordinated by William Beck, Dean of the Los Angeles Chapter of the American Guild of Organists. An up-to-date schedule may be found on the Cathedral website at www.olacathedral.org.

The Easter Sunday Liturgy from the Cathedral was broadcast on NBC-TV affiliates nationwide on Easter morning. A full Easter Mass, with the Cathedral Choir, organ and brass, was recorded earlier in March to allow production for broadcast on Easter Sunday.

All of the tonal finishing and final tuning of the instrument is now complete except for three stops. The Solo Trumpet 8' and Clarion 4' proved inadequate in the overall tonal scheme and will be replaced. The Viole Celeste 8' from the previous organ, but not originally planned to be included in the new organ, will be now installed in favor of the less useful Solo Super Octave 2'. The Celeste will join the fabulous Viole d'Orchestre 8' already in the Solo. All three stops will be installed this summer.



Op. 78 at St. John UMC

The installation of Op. 78 (III/42), for **St. John United Methodist Church**, Augusta, Ga., began on February 3, 2003, and was completed by late March. The mechanical action instrument, with electric stop action and combination action, features a solid American cherry case with hand-carved basswood pipe shades. Two large windchests for the Great and the Pedal upperwork are placed at impost level. Positioned in the center and slightly above is the Swell, while the Solo is located on top of the Swell. The Pedal 16' bass pipes are on electric action windchests behind the case. Making up the façade is the Great Prestant 8' and a portion of the Pedal Octave 8'. The cross suspended over the altar was designed and built by Dobson. It is also of solid cherry, stained darker than the organ case, and gilded. Voicing of the instrument is now underway and is scheduled for completion by the end of May.



Op. 81 (II/29), for **Kenilworth Union Church**, Kenilworth, Ill., is under construction in the shop. The windchests are well on their way to completion, the console's mechanical chassis and outer case are being built, and various organ case parts are beginning to appear. The instrument will be housed in twin white oak cases on either side of the chancel area, with a detached and reversed console. The drawing at left is the original façade design rendered by Lynn Dobson. It shows the Great/Swell case and console on the left; the Pedal case will be on the right. Due to its chancel placement and the less than ideal acoustics of the room, the instrument is generously scaled and will be voiced in a bold manner. Margaret Kemper, former National President of the American Guild of Organists, is the Director of Music. Installation of the organ is scheduled for this coming summer.

It shows the Great/Swell case and console on the left; the Pedal case will be on the right. Due to its chancel placement and the less than ideal acoustics of the room, the instrument is generously scaled and will be voiced in a bold manner. Margaret Kemper, former National President of the American Guild of Organists, is the Director of Music. Installation of the organ is scheduled for this coming summer.

THE LITTLE ORGAN THAT COULD

Imagine an organ builder's surprise and delight when his modest instrument, installed in a small church, becomes the catalyst not only for a vital church music program, but also for a first-rate annual concert series of 24 events per season!

Meet Trinity Lutheran Church, Manhattan Beach, Calif., home to our Op. 56 (II/17; 1992). Located just south of Los Angeles' LAX airport and the aerospace research and technology complex, the unassuming 1970s building seats about 180 people and possesses a clear, intimate and inviting acoustic. The organ and an adjacent choir area are situated to the left of the altar.

Pastor Lynn Bruer and Organist/Director of Music Karla Devine have worked together since before the organ arrived. They plan two Sunday services at which any of four children's choirs or an adult choir may sing. Instrumentalists from the congregation join in providing prelude music or choral accompaniments. The organ is an integral part of every service.

"We knew from the beginning that we also wanted to share our new instrument with the community," Karla recalls. After the dedication in the fall of 1992, a second recital took place the following spring. Soon Karla began a noon series on the first Friday of the month, with farm market fresh lunches provided by volunteers at nominal cost. She also made the bold move to invite hymn writer Jaroslav Vajda and organist David Schack to present a hymn festival. The Trinity Concert Series had begun!



Karla Devine, Artistic Director

"By 1994 the Series had taken on the format we have today," says Karla, who serves as Artistic Director. "We have an organ anniversary concert, my own Christmas concert, a spring hymn festival, a choral concert and extra programs as opportunities come up," she says. "The hymn festivals are great, since they involve singers from the community and provide opportunities for the congregation." The

Friday *Bach's Lunch Recitals* include eight programs; half are organ solo, the rest include instrumental and vocal offerings. A new component of the Trinity Concert Series is *Saturday Previews*, nine monthly programs previewing the Beverly Hills Public Library's prestigious *Sundays at Two Recital Series*.

In the beginning Karla just asked her friends to play. Now she has a lengthy waiting list of performers from all over. The roster of guest organists alone is impressive: Michael Burkhardt, David and Susan Cherwien, John Ferguson, Robert Hobby, Edward Murray, Frances Norbert, Gregory Peterson, David Schack and Mark Sedio. Several of them have appeared twice. The incredible 2002-2003 Series publicity brochure reads like a who's who of the greater Los Angeles classical musical scene!



Dobson Op. 56 (II/17; 1992)

Organ Specification

GREAT	SWELL	PEDAL
8' Prestant	8' Gedackt	16' Subbass
8' Rohrflöte	8' Gemshorn	8' Bourdon (<i>ext.</i>)
4' Octave	4' Spillflöte	Great to Pedal
2' Waldflöte	2½' Nazard	Swell to Pedal
IV Mixture 1½'	2' Gemshorn	Tremulant
8' Trumpet	1½' Tierce	Zimbelstern
Swell to Great	8' Hautbois	Mechanical action

The Series is self-supporting from free-will offerings and fundraisers. Karla explains, "Our *Patron Dinners* are elegant \$100 per plate affairs in gorgeous oceanfront homes, with a gourmet chef from Trinity Church in the kitchen. Our *Benefit Suppers*, at \$35 per plate, are slightly less formal events in members' homes and feature an informal recital." One of the main Series concerts is designated a fundraising program, and, for a \$100 contribution, patrons may select a professionally recorded CD of a *Saturday Preview* performance.

The Trinity Concert Series is an artistic success because of its unwavering emphasis on quality and the determined hard work of a large group of volunteers. Helping Karla manage everything are two key people. Lois Alton is Chair of the Recital Committee and oversees all arrangements and finances. Jim Eninger, an aeronautical engineer with Northrup-Grumman, shares in artistic decisions, produces all printed publicity material and concert programs, maintains the Series' outstanding website (www.palosverdes.com/tlcmusic) and e-mails concert reminders.

We at Dobson Pipe Organbuilders salute the members and staff of Trinity Church for an inspiring, first-class endeavor that many larger churches can't match. We're also pleased that our Op. 56 so inspired the people at Trinity and that it is enjoying a full and happy life making music!



Bethany Lutheran College, of Mankato, Minn., presented the young German organ virtuoso **Johannes Unger** on February 27, 2003. Bethany's Trinity Chapel is the second campus home to Op. 10 (II/24; 1979/1996). The organ was originally built for the old college chapel as a two manual, 21 rank

instrument. After some tonal additions and a dramatic case revision it was moved to Trinity Chapel when that building was dedicated in 1996.

Westminster Presbyterian Church, Des Moines, Ia., presented resident organist **Ruth Harris** in the annual *J.W. Korte Memorial Recital*, March 16, 2003, featuring Op. 14 (II/38; 1981). The recital was part of the "Westminster Fine Arts Series."

The Church of St. Michael, Stillwater, Minn., is celebrating its Sesquicentennial as well as the 20th anniversary of Op. 23 (II/34; 1983) with an ambitious year-long series of special events. Included are a number of programs involving the organ: January 19, resident organist **Laura Edman** and the **St. Croix Brass Quintet** presented *A Brass and Organ Spectacular*; March 16, a concert with brass players from **The Minnesota Orchestra** and the **St. Paul Chamber Orchestra** along with organist **Katherine Handford**; May 4, a unique and diverse program featuring five keyboard players on two Steinway pianos and Op. 23.



St. John Lutheran Church, Storm Lake, Ia., sponsored the **Concordia Men's Chorus**, from Concordia Lutheran Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., in a service of anthems and hymns on December 14, 2002. Chorus Director **Rev. Henry Gerike** accompanied the service on Op. 55 (II/32; 1992). The instrument has also been featured recently in several "Pipes Spectacular" events with **Dr. Larry Schou** of the University of South Dakota, Vermillion, S.D.

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Kalamazoo, Mich., celebrated the 10th anniversary of Op. 57 (II/42; 1993) on February 23, 2003, with Choral Evensong and a recital by Organist and Choirmaster **Eric Strand**. Featured were works of Bach, Elgar, Arvo Pärt and Dan Locklair. Evensong was sung by the combined choirs of St. Luke's and St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Battle Creek, where Mr. Strand's wife, **Jacqueline Stilger**, is the Organist and Choirmaster.



Presbyterian Homes, Evanston, Ill., has its "Gift of Music" schedule of recitals currently underway. Playing Op. 64 (II/24; 1994), this season's artists include **Eric James Budzynski**, **Per Ahlman**, **Thomas Wikman**, **David Christiansen**, **Liya Petrides** and the 2002 winner of the American Guild of Organists National Young Organists Competition, **Timothy Olson**.

West Market Street United Methodist Church, Greensboro, N.C., continues its "Tuesday Music" mid-day recitals, many featuring Op. 71 (III/58; 1999). Resident organist **Susan Bates** performed several of these last fall, as well as a formal solo recital on April 27. The spring schedule includes Greensboro organists **Donald Armitage**, **Patrick Murphy**, **Kristin Farmer** and Music Director **Alice Ann Johnson**.

The 2003 National Conference of the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians has announced a Hymn Festival with **John Ferguson** on July 2, 7:00 p.m., at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, Los Angeles, Calif., featuring Op. 75 (IV/105; 2003).

Westwood Lutheran Church, St. Louis Park, Minn., continues celebrating the Dobson renovation of their 1964 Holtkamp organ last fall: December 15, a **Michael Burkhardt** hymnfest for the season; January 19, 2003, resident organist **Kristina Langlois**; March 16, past and present Westwood organists; April 12, The Twin Cities Chapter of the American Guild of Organists Regional Student Organ Competition.

St. Paul Lutheran Church, Rockwell City, Ia., recently celebrated the rededication of their 1975 Holtkamp (II/17) with a recital by **Charla Waite**, Milan, Ill. A gift from First Presbyterian Church of Rockwell City, the instrument was moved across the street last fall by volunteers under the supervision of Dobson.

Dobson Pipe Organ Builders, Ltd., was named to the first annual *Iowa Commerce Top 100* by The Iowa Association of Business and Industry. The company shares the list with other perhaps slightly better known Iowa firms such as Maytag Appliances, Pella Windows and Winnebago Motor Homes.

LOOKING BACK

25 Years – Following the restoration of the 1891 Schuelke (II/11) at the historic Elfsborg Lutheran Church, Pomeroy, Ia., in late 1977, the early months of 1978 were taken up with the design and building of Op. 6 (II/19) for Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, George, Ia. Carl Staplin of Drake University, Des Moines, Ia., played the dedicatory recital on March 13, 1978.

20 Years – Op. 22 (II/16) for Zion Lutheran Church, Cologne, Minn., was delivered in January, 1983. It was the third of three modest instruments built in late 1982; the others included Op. 20 (II/18) for Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Dayton, Ia., and Op. 21 (II/18), the second of two instruments for Iowa State University, Ames, Ia. Op. 16 (I/3) had been installed there in 1981.

The contract for Op. 23 (II/34) for the Church of St. Michael, located in the scenic river town of Stillwater, Minn., provided the company with the ideal opportunity to build a substantial instrument in the high rear gallery of a spacious room with excellent acoustics. The dedicatory festivities took place in June of 1983 with Twin Cities organist Howard Don Small at the organ. A recording of the organ was made that year by Raven Records (OAR-120) featuring Lynn Zeigler of Iowa State University, Ames, Ia. Many prospective Dobson customers have made the trip to Stillwater to hear this important instrument. Please see *Newsbits* for a picture.

10 Years – Op. 57 (II/42), for historic St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Kalamazoo, Mich., was finished in early 1993. The large two manual instrument anchors a rich music program with a long history of excellence and was the company's third installation in Michigan in three years. Please see *Newsbits* for a picture.

To celebrate a newly completed 4,500 sq. ft. addition to the Dobson shop, the company held an Open House in March. Set up in the erecting room at the time were Op. 58 and Op. 61. Pictured below, Op. 58 (I/3) is a portative for the chapel at Winnetka Congregational Church, Winnetka, Ill., installed in April. The



company won a liturgical art award from *Modern Liturgy* magazine for the visual design of this instrument.

Op. 61 (II/34) for Faith Lutheran Church (ELCA), Des Moines, Ia., was completed by early summer. This organ features a colorful toucan that swoops down out of the case when the Nightingale stop-knob is drawn.

THE ORGANBUILDER NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2003

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