

Creed

The firm's creed includes the use of tracker action (usually suspended), slider windchests, flexible (but not wobbly) winding, and beautiful solid-wood organ-cases, everything of the highest quality and solidly made. It does not scorn nicking, nor string stops, nor swell-boxes nor many another transient taboo. Kenneth Jones organs are described as Classical and carefully avoid mere whims of fashion - the excesses of the very rigid neo-baroque have always been avoided and on the other hand the more recent neo-romantic fashion is not subscribed to. Kenneth Jones Pipe Organs are not the products of a soulless factory. Each is treated as an individual in all its aspects and carries within it the names of those who worked on it.

The ideal of an artistic unity is followed and Kenneth Jones (or another, specified Master-Organbuilder within the firm) is personally involved with each instrument from drawing-board to commissioning. The firm is compact enough for this approach yet productive enough for the undertaking of large commissions as well as small. Apart from new organs, the firm is often the first choice when restoration of an historic organ is undertaken.

The size of the firm and the number of staff is by deliberate choice and conviction and will not be expanded. A smaller number would take an unreasonable length of time to complete a large commission and with longer delivery periods would erode responsible pricing. With 20 or more staff a firm becomes a factory it has no organisational alternative — and what should be a crafted and artistic product becomes a manufactured machine. Some factory organs are of excellent technical quality and finish. But they are standardised to a great extent and they lack the all-important character, individuality and artistry that marks the finest musical instruments.

Several members of the team are practising musicians, organists and singers and this contributes to the artistic dimension in every hand-crafted organ which comes from Bray. Kenneth Jones himself has been a frequent performer (harpsichord, organ, piano-accompaniment) on radio and television and for some years was principal conductor of the Dublin Orchestral players.

Specifics

KEY-ACTION

Our new organs incorporate tracker (mechanical) key-action, as this is so significantly superior to any other on all counts from musicality through reliability to longevity. We do not feel that an organbuilder of artistic integrity can offer alternative actions (e.g. build some organs tracker, others electro-pneumatic). We are not being narrow-minded in this — for restorations, for example, we retain or reinstate the system of action used by the original builder whether this be tracker, tubular-pneumatic or electric, assuming it is part of the instrument's original aesthetic.

RESPONSIVENESS

Our key-action is suspended or key-tensioned. It is self-adjusting against climatic changes, by our own dummy-tracker system. The key coverings are ebony, African Blackwood, Ivora, bone, to choice; where appropriate for a restoration we use ivories salvaged from old keyboards. Otherwise, on principle, we will not use ivory, while for practical wearing qualities some other commonly-used hardwoods such as rosewood or grenadilla are unsatisfactory and we will not use them. For the most part our actions are made of wood, with aluminium for some wires and for rollers. We use a minimum of bushing and cloth washers, to prevent skeletal rattles, but properly designed key-tensioned action requires little or no bushing or bedding in any case, and pre-empts sponginess. In dimensioning of wind-chest grooves, windways, pallet-widths and lengths, action travel and key travel we inter-relate everything, our ultimate aim being maximum responsiveness, the full key-travel being exploited for control of rate of admission of wind to pipes. For very large new organs our tracker action is boosted *but not over-ridden or relayed* (unlike the Barker machine) by our unique and touch-responsive powered lever system which operates to augment the wind-supply to the pipes in a “servo” fashion.

COMPASS

We generally used to use the “standard” tracker compass of 56/30. More often we now build the manuals to 58 notes, and for particular circumstances we build to 61/32. We build pedalboards to our own “international” specification (which has been preferred by more than 80% of our U.S. clients) or to AGO specification if desired (RCO if this is demanded).

STOP-ACTION

We prefer to utilise mechanical stop-action in new organs with tracker key-action, but we do not insist on this rigidly. There are circumstances where electric stop-action is sensible, such as on large instruments or those which are used extensively for recitals or for elaborate accompaniments. And we install combination systems where appropriate. Mechanical stop-actions use steel with welded-on arms, proper bearings, solid wood traces, our own style of drawknobs and clear labels inset in the stop-jambs. Electric stop-actions use power solenoids with individual power supplies and control circuits (specially designed for us), for simplicity and reliability. If combinations are present, they use IC and computer systems; we are wary, however, of transient technology. We have built many organs where we have used a dual stop-action system, with a purely mechanical system having, in parallel, an electric system driving the mechanical for the purpose of combinations.

WIND

We use large-area traditional reservoirs (several in large organs), usually wedge-shaped,

and feed natural wind through controlled-section wooden wind-trunks, in many instruments (especially those where “romantic” registrations are commonly required to be used) we have also installed adjustable stabilizers, so that shocks are cushioned but the wind does not become sterile. These stabilizers are capable of being de-activated by a “wind control” drawstop when more flexible wind is desired.

WIND-CHESTS

Windchests or soundboards are individually designed and dimensioned, use laminated hardwood construction, with solid hardwood toeboards and flexible sealing of sliders.

ORGAN-CASE

Our organ-cases are of solid wood throughout. We take particular care and pride in matching each organ and its case and layout to the individual circumstance and architecture, and we do not impose a “house-style”. We will not choose to design a reproduction baroque or classical case for an installation in a modern church. The style of our organ-cases varies widely, for they are influenced by their surroundings. We are happy when we are told “that organ looks as if it has always been there”.

SITING

We do not believe that a “traditional” placement for an organ is always automatically right. We try to keep an open mind. For example a good gallery, with ample height, can be an excellent site, but to place an organ toward the rear of a low-ceilinged gallery is asking for trouble. It will look stunted (what can be seen of it) viewed from the floor of the room, and it cannot speak musically from its disadvantaged position. If the choir is in front of it, the organ cannot serve the room without over-saturating the choir. Even on such a gallery better alternative sitings are generally possible. Wherever the organ may be placed, we always consider the congregation or audience, the choir, the organist, the choir director, and the purpose of the room (such as a particular liturgy).

LAYOUT

We do not slavishly follow the “werk-prinzip” principle of design. We respect the architectural proportions and scale which are possible, and, to a substantial degree, the resulting disciplines. But we believe strongly that the neo-baroque or so-called classical layouts (historically they were remarkably localised!) are inappropriate, uncomfortable and even unmusical in many if not most churches today. We have enjoyed, and still enjoy, designing tall organ-cases, with departments one above the other, separate Pedal towers, Ruckpositivs etc. in lofty old cathedrals and churches, But mostly these buildings have little heating, and both diurnal and annual temperature variation and stratification are insignificant. And spacious acoustics are complementary. But in a typical smaller church the acoustics are relatively un-resonant, there is often carpet, and in the U.S. the A- frame style of construction predominates. The neo-baroque concept is too aggressive, all too often, and ungrateful in such surroundings. The more “romantic” organbuilders of

the last century knew what they were doing when they balanced their tonal schemes in a different way, and made more use of coupling with the room's natural space rather than spitting into it from a nest of over-concentrated sound sources. Wide temperature and humidity variations, and in particular the stratification which occurs with artificial heating (and even more so with air-conditioning) play havoc with tuning in a layout with two or more "storeys"; the result can be disastrous if the organ is gallery-sited and reaches up into the apex of the roof. We find that most such instruments are never in tune within themselves.

SWELL-BOXES

While we have built many organs without any department in a Swell-box under expression, we generally believe in specifying that the secondary department of any organ of more than 12 stops should be in a Swell-box, because this increases the versatility of the instrument. But it must be a really *good* Swell-box (rather than a semi-effective shuttered Brustverk, although such can be justified in certain particular cases) and when open, must not stifle the department in the least. We have evolved a particularly effective design.

MARKING

We prefer to have prospect pipes elevated sufficiently to be Out of reach, but if they have to be at lower levels we suggest the use of flamed copper, which is impervious to marking, fingerprinting or indeed scratching.

METAL PIPES

For metal pipes we use tin-lead alloys, normally between 15% and 59% tin and depending on acoustics, wind pressure, form of pipe and desired tonal character. We do not care much for the thinner type of tone associated with high tin percentages, although this need not apply to larger prospect pipes. Near-lead can be used for flutes but the tone of Principals of this metal, particularly if without ears, we find too stolid. Introduction of trace metals together with hammering are necessary, particularly for the larger pipes, and may be said to partly defeat the object; long-term safety from collapse is reasonably consistent with the impure metal of historic examples but today's examples have a very patchy record indeed. We install an inner foot of copper in the feet of all pipes of tin-lead alloy (whatever the proportions) where the body is of greater than 4 foot physical length.

WOODEN PIPES

For wooden pipes we use mahogany, oak and clear pine. We prefer wood for flute basses, particularly on the Pedal Organ, for carrying the weight of tone which is, in our view, the essential underpinning of a well-balanced tonal spectrum.

TUNING SLIDES

In an ideal world we would cone-tune open metal pipes of 2-foot and shorter, but we have too much experience of historic pipework and of damaged pipes, with “elephant” feet, compressed cut-up and deformed or split tops. As long as an instrument is tuned by us, or by someone we know, no problem arises, but this situation is not invulnerable, especially over centuries, and there are probably as many inexpert, even cruel tuner technicians as there are careful. A further point in relation to the U.S. in particular is that, mostly because of the wide temperature and humidity ranges, tuning tends to be carried out more frequently (whereas in Northern Europe the Principals may not be touched for years at a time). So we use tuning slides, but have designed and proved our own special type which has no detectable effect on tone, and tuning stability which we believe to be equal to cone-tuning.

TEMPERAMENTS

We generally use equal temperament, but often a slight modification of it; we feel that older temperaments discriminate too much against 19th and 20th century music.

FLUE-PIPE VOICING

We believe that every pipe must be designed and voiced on the basis of its working at ideal tonal efficiency. While a given pipe may be capable of being voiced in many different ways, over a wide range of volume, tone and attack, the closer the result is to the designed optimum for that pipe the better we are pleased. It is better to replace or re-scale pipes if, in the tonal finishing in the room, it is found necessary to coerce them for a particular result and it is our policy to make such amendments, if necessary, at our own cost. We believe in using relatively open footholes but also relatively wide flues, for narrow-flue, flue-regulated pipes are too susceptible to change of regulation and speech due to metal-settling and accumulation of dust and deposits. We believe in voicing for a precise initiation of speech, with nicking of languid where appropriate, and the importance of transients in initiation and decay. But we dislike pronounced chuff particularly the chirpy type, which we find distracting and wearisome.

REEDS

For reeds we favour shallots of the earlier English style (parallel or near parallel opening, flat heads straight or angled) or the domed French (either Cliquot or Bertounèche). We appreciate the Schnitger rationale for pedal 16' reeds, with their solid and firm tone and subdued harmonics, but in some situations we believe that a French-style Bombarde may be more appropriate. The Schnitger type of manual trumpet, with its full and strong bass and relatively weak treble, is too specifically related to the scaling and scale dynamics of Schnitger's Principals and Mixtures each family makes good the weakness of the other in particular areas of the keyboard and tessitura. We prefer a more balanced bass-treble relationship, with resulting greater utility in a much wider range of musical styles and periods, just as our attitude to Principals balances this.

VOICING ON SITE

Apart from basic preparation of pipes, we do all our voicing and tonal finishing in the actual room where the organ has been installed, not in a voicing-room in the workshop. We spend at least an average of a day in the room on the voicing of each stop, and for much of the time three of us are engaged on this painstaking work one at the pipes in the organ, one at the keyboards and one listening in various parts of the room, assessing and instructing. We do not know of any organbuilding firm which is more particular in this way. We believe in creating in the actual room the sound which is to satisfy and relate to that room.

DIFFICULT ACOUSTICS

While it is always more difficult to voice for a dead, un-resonant acoustic or unhelpful architecture, and such a room is no excuse for an ugly-sounding organ. Care taken in specification, scaling and design, and above all in the time spent in voicing and matching can result in beauty of sound even in the most difficult room.

TONAL SPECIFICATION

Generally speaking we believe that, with smaller organs, the tonal scheme for a given number of stops is relatively invariable. There may be shifts of emphasis of course. We believe that in smaller organs every stop on a manual is more useful and significant than on the pedals, apart from a Subbass 16' which single pedal stop (with manual-to-pedal couplers) is appropriate for that department. As the specification grows, the basic provisions of Principals, Flutes and Chorus are filled out. We like to include a string stop (mild, not narrow-scaled) at about 12 stops, the first reed at about 14. It is also about here that a second pedal stop becomes appropriate. And so a scheme develops. A specification, of whatever size, must be criticised without mercy, all redundancies and "quirks" eliminated. The best specification will always be that which performs all that will be asked of it with the least number of stops, beautifully matched and voiced. Larger organs have room for a greater number of unusual stops, and these can add interest, but let the advisor or organist make sure that they do not Oust more significant stops and that their presence is justified by more than the interest of their rareness! As the upper limit of size, Kenneth Jones believes that 65 stops on four manuals and pedals is possibly the maximum for the organ as a musical instrument of integrity.

TONAL SUMMARY

Our tonal design attitudes are the result of evolution. We conceive specifications as having a classical core, but drawn up in such a way that this core is augmented with sufficient registers to ensure that real justice can be done to all liturgical requirements and to all periods and styles of music, not least the so-called romantic. We believe that even a small organ should enable the musical interpretation of a very wide range, and that this does not imply unsatisfactory compromise. The versatility comes from the flexibility of a

well-balanced well-voiced logical scheme with artistic integrity and unity. The strength comes from within and our schemes are not ill-matched assemblages of incompatible schools and styles stitched together. Verbal descriptions of tone tend to sound unhappily flowery but we might describe our tonal objectives in words as the building of a broad musical spectrum where warmth of tone is as important as clarity and brightness and where an embracing richness is securely founded on good foundations with everything else in balance. And this must be as perfectly matched to the particular room, its acoustics and its musical needs, as possible.

ATTITUDE TO ELECTRONICS

We do not care for imitations, whether plastic “wood-grain” wall panelling, plastic flowers or pseudo organs. The more complex the electronics of the electronic “organ”, the more “realistic” the imitation, the more invalid the result. It is only uncritical ears, abused by constant exposure to loudspeakers, radios, televisions, automobiles, muzak, which are deceived. Even the best imitation can never sound better than the best audio recording of the real thing. Today’s electronic instruments are obsolescent as they leave the factory, and however relatively inexpensive they may be they are very poor value. The total unresponsiveness of electric key-action as opposed to good tracker action is just one aspect of the many musical reasons which obviously cause us to categorise electronic “organs” as inadequate substitutes.

Selection

How do you choose your organbuilder? Not by the brochures, the publicity material, the recordings or tapes (although all these can help). Not because a firm is large, or has built so many hundreds or thousands of organs, or has a well-known name. Not because a firm was established over a century ago (artistry is very seldom inherited). Not as a response to salesmanship.

What about price? Do not allow price to have any influence unless you are absolutely certain that you can relate it to an accurate assessment of relative quality and artistry. A beautifully made and beautifully voiced organ of ten stops is a much better choice than an equivalently priced organ of twenty indifferent stops.

What about delivery time? When a pipe organ is going to last as long as a tracker organ does, two or more years’ waiting is irrelevant. But you should not ignore the possible effect on the cost of, say, a five-year delivery period. If an organbuilder has a small output, and if his work is valued, you may expect a long delivery period and thus a higher cost, but it is in your best interests to see that the time scale is properly defined and can’t get out of hand.

You should seek information from people who have been involved with or who have experience of a firm’s work. You can find out about attitudes, honesty, commitment, responsibility in executing a commission, costing, even personal attributes of staff.

You should see, hear and examine representative examples of a firm's work and particularly in dull acoustics if your own room's acoustics are dull; rooms make the Sound and beautiful resonant acoustics can compensate for an indifferent instrument. You should not cause an organbuilder to waste his precious time, creativity and artistic energy in preparing details unless or until you have decided that he is an appropriate and likely person to build your instrument, and it is reasonable for him to be compensated for his planning or design work. A Master Organbuilder is every bit as qualified and professional as an architect. If you take his time and waste it, his other clients shouldn't have to pay.

You can only expect the best from an organbuilder if he feels his work is going to result in the building of his instrument, not if his brains are being picked, or if he is being involved for cosmetic "comparison" reasons, if his creativity is headed for the trash can.

Do not choose your organbuilder because you like instruments of his that you have heard and seen! Does that sound strange? Your own room is different, is unique, and no organ you have heard can be replicated in it.

Look beyond the quality (which you must ensure is present) to the individual quality of artistry.

You should choose your organbuilder in the certainty that, based on how he has met and dealt with other situations, he will build for you an equally individual and fine organ for your particular room.

General

We guarantee our organs for fifteen years. This is neither phoney nor hazardous, for once a tracker organ has settled-in it has a potential life of centuries.

We include in our contracts free maintenance of our organs for a period of one or two years, depending on size. This takes care of minor adjustments, and settling of tuning, while the organ becomes acclimatised. Subsequent tuning is available wherever our instruments are installed, and we have representatives in different parts of the United States; we also have colleagues who act for us locally in the United Kingdom.

Our contracts are in the currency of the client's country (for example in U.S. Dollars for the United States) and completely fixed-price, immune from escalation either through currency fluctuations or through rising costs.

Our terms of payment are variable, but normally involve a 30% Contract Deposit, with 50% payable on completion of the making of the organ, 20% one month after handing it over, finished and voiced, in the client's room.

