

# A NEW ORGAN FOR YALE UNIVERSITY

by Martin D. Jean

**T**HIS IS THE INAUGURAL YEAR of Yale's Taylor & Boody organ, Op. 55, and we are celebrating this beautiful new addition to our collection of musical instruments with a festival of concerts, recitals, services, and lectures featuring Yale's finest musicians and numerous distinguished guests. This celebration represents the culmination of nearly ten years of planning at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music.

This instrument is the first major organ built at Yale in over 35 years. As originally conceived, the organ was to be strictly for teaching and was to have been housed in a small organ studio seating only 25 people. It took little imagination to realize the true benefit of installing a larger organ in lovely Marquand Chapel, and thanks to the vision of then ISM Director Margot Fassler, we now have an instrument that can be used not only for teaching, but also for liturgies and concerts.

This Taylor & Boody organ has been designed to fit into the already distinguished collection of organs on Yale's campus. The romantic Skinner Organ (1928) in Woolsey Hall and



the more classical Holtkamp (1950) and Beckerath (1971) organs in Battell and Dwight Chapels each were built by the leading builders of their day. The same is true for this new organ for Marquand Chapel. Taylor & Boody has distinguished itself for over 35 years as one of the world's truly great organ building firms with instruments in St. Thomas



Church Fifth Avenue in New York; at Holy Cross College in Worcester, MA; and in St. Mark's Church in Goshen, IN, among many others.

Given the repertorial styles for which the existing Yale organs had already been designed, it was critical for us to build an instrument that complemented, without duplicating, those strengths. It seemed useful to build an instrument in Marquand designed to play music of earlier periods, though it will not be limited to that. The mission of the Institute is also lived out in this organ in that it will lead generations of congregations in the singing of sacred song.

Thus, the idea emerged for an organ styled after those of the great North European organ builder Arp Schnitger (1648-1719). During my sabbatical in 1999, I had been introduced to a Schnitger organ in the tiny village of Lüdingworth, in the far north of Germany. This organ was of a size that could fit in the Marquand space, and the room's acoustics and dimensions were not dissimilar to those of our chapel. Taylor & Boody sets out to make a study of this sweet and colorful instrument, and were inspired by it in the design of this new instrument. I wish you much joy and inspiration in the years to come as we revel in the beautiful sounds of this magnificent Taylor & Boody organ.

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## PERSONAL NOTE

# VISITING OPUS 55 IN ITS BIRTHPLACE

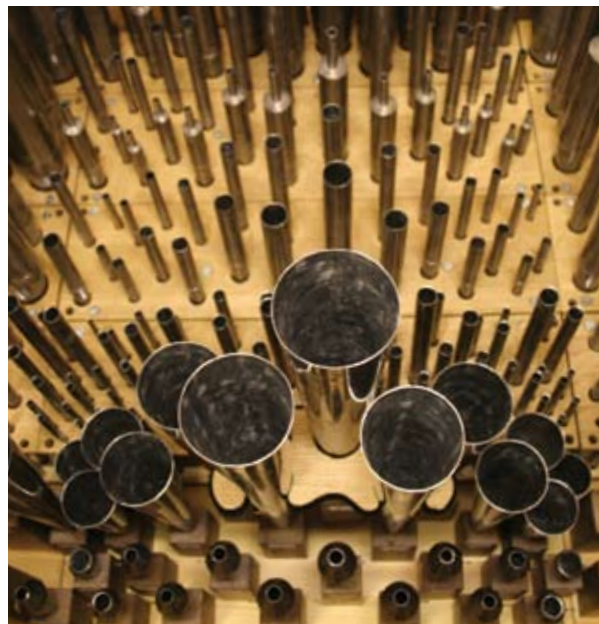
by Nicholas Wolterstorff

**I**F YOU FOLLOW THE GOINGS-ON AT THE ISM, you already know about Opus 55. Opus 55 is the new organ commissioned by the ISM and recently installed in the refurbished and expanded balcony of Marquand Chapel at Sterling Divinity Quadrangle. It is the 55th in the series of organs built by Taylor & Boody, an organ-making firm located outside Staunton, VA.

Last year I was a senior fellow at an institute attached to the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. Since Staunton is only about 30 miles from Charlottesville, I wanted to see the organ in its birthplace, before it was shipped up to New Haven. In early May, George Taylor invited me to come out to see the organ. It was an extraordinarily moving experience. I'm sure I won't fully succeed in explaining why; but perhaps I can give some intimation.

There were two persons inside my skin that day. One of those persons was a member of the advisory board of friends of ISM and a recently retired member of the YDS faculty, where I regularly taught a course in theological aesthetics. I retain a great deal of affection for both of these institutions. The organ made me very proud of my connections with ISM and Yale.

The other person inside my skin that day grew up in a farming village in southwest Minnesota, where my father was a cabinetmaker and his father, my grandfather, a cabinetmaker be-



fore him. My grandparents and their family emigrated from the Netherlands in the second decade of the last century; and some of the woodworking tools my grandfather took with him from the Netherlands have been passed down to me. His first and last name were the same as mine; burned into the wood parts of these tools are the initials N.W.

My father taught me how to identify different kinds of wood and how to prize the unique qualities of each. And he taught me reverence for wood. He taught me that wood could be violated – that usually it *was* violated – and that to violate it is to treat God its Maker with dishonor. He thought that covering wood with paint is usually a violation; one should use clear finishes that bring out its natural beauty.

And he taught me craftsmanship. He taught me the difference between better and worse ways of cutting wood, the difference between better and worse ways of attaching one piece of wood to another, the difference between better and worse ways of finishing wood. He taught me what each kind of wood is capable of and what it is not capable of.

Sometimes, when I have tried to communicate to students what a good work of philosophy is like, I have said that good philosophy combines vision and craftsmanship. Though few students would have known it, with the word “crafts-



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manship” I was alluding to my own experience of being reared in a cabinetmaker’s family. On a few occasions I have even spoken, metaphorically, of making tight-fitting dovetails. But I noticed that a mystified expression came over the faces of the class; so in later years I have only spoke of craftsmanship, not of dovetails.

This was one of the two persons within the same skin who went out to see Opus 55 in its birthplace on a Friday afternoon in early May.

The shop of Taylor & Boody is located about five miles west of Staunton, in the stupendously beautiful hills and mountains of western Virginia. After luxuriating for a while in admiration of the bucolic scenery—goats, sheep, cows, and horses grazing in the valleys—we went up to the door and were greeted by George Taylor, who for the next two hours acted as if he had nothing else to do than show us around and answer our questions.

I now know that Opus 55 is constructed so that air pressure can be provided both by an electric motor and by a grad student stepping up and down on pedals. I know lots of other such details about this extraordinary instrument. But what bowled me over that day was not so much these exotica, as the fact that the people in this shop were just as interested in the visual aesthetics of the organ as they were in its musical qualities. Visually, it is beautiful.

But what especially moved me, as you will have guessed, is the craftsmanship that was going into the making of this instrument, and the pride in craftsmanship that was tangible there in the Taylor & Boody shop. There is very little craftsmanship that goes into the making of an automobile; it’s all done by people operating machines, and by people operat-

ing robots which operate machines. There’s no handwork. Of course the Taylor & Boody shop uses electric saws and

drills. But the lead for the pipes is poured and rolled out by hand; the sheets of lead are cut by hand, bent by hand, and then soldered. The wood is sanded by hand, and everything is fitted by hand. One of the young workmen, himself an organist, was painstakingly sanding a piece of walnut to make it fit just right into a pipe. I asked him why he was an organ builder. “Because it’s an obsession,” he said.

I spend most of my days working with words and ideas at a computer. That’s what I am doing right now, as I compose this article. What I saw that day was people using their hands to shape material—wood, lead, leather, paint—treating that material with respect, drawing out its potential for being part of a

beautiful instrument in Marquand Chapel. High tech, we read, is taking over the world; human beings are becoming mere robots. Call it Heidegger’s Lament. And watch out, because the Chinese are getting better at it than we are.

Maybe. But there in the beautiful hills of western Virginia, craftsmen and craftswomen were lovingly using their hands to caress the natural world into glowing and singing in ways that it itself can never dream of. When you see and hear Opus 55, be mindful that what gave birth to this work of visual and auditory beauty is human beings loving the natural creation with their hands.

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