



## THE ORGAN AND MORMON CHURCH MUSIC

*The September, 1975, issue of The Diapason (An International Monthly Devoted to the Organ, the Harpsichord and Church Music), carried a lead article entitled, "Mormons Ban Pipe Organs from New Meetinghouses." The article, which quoted in its entirety a new Church policy, elicited a number of responses which were published in the Letters to the Editor section of the November, January and March issues. We reprint the Church's policy statement below with selected responses from the Diapason's readers in the belief that they provide significant commentary on the place of the organ in church music. Interested readers are referred to the Diapason for additional discussion of this topic. Permission to reprint these letters was graciously granted by the Diapason.*

### ORGANS IN MEETINGHOUSES—SUGGESTED NEW POLICY

Effective May 20, 1975, only electronic organs are authorized for use in chapels of ward, branch, or stake meetinghouses. Organs other than those included on the following approved lists are not to be installed in meetinghouses either with or without Church participation.

The types and sizes of electronic organs authorized for ward and branch meetinghouses as recommended by the Church Musical Instrument Task Committee are as follows: Baldwin C-630, Conn Artist 721-2, Rogers (sic) 115: Price range \$4000/\$5500 (May 1975).

The type and sizes of electronic organs authorized for stake meetinghouses as recommended by the Church Musical Instrument Task Committee are as follows: Allen 182, Baldwin 11 CL, Conn Classic 830-C, Rogers (sic) 220: Price range \$6300/\$9300 (May 1975).

As of the effective date this new organ policy will apply to all Church meetinghouses, including projects under development. The Committee on Expenditures will consider possible exceptions on projects under development at this time, depending on commitments which may already have been made.

When it becomes necessary to replace an existing organ, whether it be pipe or electronic, the new policy which approves only electronic organs will apply.

The following are some of the reasons why the Committee on Expenditures has concluded that only electronic organs should be approved for meetinghouse use:

1. Economic differences in various wards and stakes should not determine the type or size of organ which is installed. Simplicity is desired in all chapel furnishings, including the musical instruments.

2. The primary purpose of organs in meetinghouses is for accompaniment, not for solo or concert use. Good electronic organs are adequate to accomplish this primary purpose.

There are few organists who can fully utilize a large pipe organ to its capacity; such utilization is generally restricted to solo or concert activities which are more appropriately held in concert halls.

3. Electronic organs are much less expensive initially than are pipe organs.

4. Qualified servicing for electronic organs is much easier to obtain than for pipe organs.

5. To install pipe organs without substantially increasing the space in the chapel area, it is necessary to utilize exposed pipes which are potentially more susceptible to vandalism damage.

6. The electronic organ requires less building space than a pipe organ and this results in less building costs.

7. Electric power requirements are substantially less for electronic organs.

8. Relatively few persons are actually capable of distinguishing a significant difference between the sounds of the two types of instruments; therefore it is concluded the electronic organ is quite adequate for meetinghouse use.

## RESPONSES

September 30, 1975

Dear Mr. Schuneman:

I have been asked to acknowledge your letter of September 19, 1975 and, on behalf of the brethren, to affirm the Church's policy with respect to pipe organs.

It has been felt to decline with thanks the offer to print an answer to the earlier article published in *The Diapason*. Nevertheless, the brethren appreciate your courtesy in extending this invitation to them.

Sincerely yours.

Francis M. Gibbons  
Secretary to the First Presidency  
The Church of Jesus Christ of  
Latter-day Saints  
Salt Lake City, Utah

The leading article on the front page of the Sept. 1975 *The Diapason* is entitled "Mormons Ban Pipe Organs from New Meeting Houses." What a shock, disappointment and surprise! The Tabernacle in Salt Lake City has had distinguished and large pipe organs for 100 years that have been played by the most competent and talented organists. For 45 years or more the organ and magnificent chorus have been broadcast throughout this country and abroad. With this great tradition of fine church and organ music behind it, how can it be that the governing body of the Mormon Church would issue such a ban?

Among the trivial and unconvincing reasons given for this edict is the notion that many people in the congregation can't tell the difference between a pipe organ and an electronic substitute.

Are organs in Mormon churches to be bought to satisfy the most musically illiterate members of the worshipers?

When an architect is chosen to design a new church, is a mediocre man chosen because many of the members can't tell the difference between good architecture and poor?

The purpose of the music in any church should be that it is an oblation to God. As such, it should be the best that the church can provide and not merely good enough to satisfy those that don't know what good church music is.

The average of musical taste in this country is still unfortunately quite low. Many people have their radio or television tuned in on boogie woogie or a swing band instead of the New York Philharmonic. Many people, unless it was pointed out to them, couldn't tell the difference between a \$50.00 fiddle and a \$100,000.00 Stradivarius violin.

Certainly if a church has the musical taste to want something better than an electronic and can afford to buy a pipe organ (even a small one), and doesn't have to go to headquarters to finance it, it certainly should be permitted to do so.

Granted that pipe organs are very high priced these days, but so are electronic substitutes for the musical results they can produce.

But for little more than the \$9,500 mentioned as a top price for an electronic, allowable under the ban, a three or four stop unit pipe organ can be obtained with the pipes enclosed in a swell box.

William H. Barnes  
Evanston, Illinois

I do not know anything about the Mormon method of worship, but I would assume that they do not utilize congregational singing, since the organ is used only for accompaniment. I have been in churches with the largest and most expensive electronic substitutes and I must conclude that none of them equals the pipe organ in the ability to lead congregational singing. (The function of the organ is to lead, not accompany congregational singing.)

Perhaps the areas where the members of the Committee on Expenditures live are different than the urban and rural areas where I live. Here, many churches with electronic organs are finding it difficult to find service for these instruments, and then only at great expense.

Small pipe organs do not require a very large amount of space. Small unit organs can be easily hung on existing walls. Both electric action and mechanical action organs can have the manuals built into the case, thus using little more floor space than a standard console. Also, organs that are encased provide much less susceptibility to vandalism to the smaller, more sensitive pipes since they are behind the larger facade pipes.

There is no question that the initial cost of the electronic organ is low when compared to a moderate or large pipe organ. However, even transistors and capacitors wear out. Whereas there are many organs still in use today that are two or three hundred years old, I wonder how many electronic organs will last that long.

Many people claim that they cannot tell the difference between a pipe organ and

an electronic substitute. Most of this type of person that I have talked to has little interest in anything musical. Many of these persons are unable to explain why a congregation seems to sing better when supported by properly scaled and voiced principal pipes.

Lawrence E. Bishop, Jr.  
Williamstown, Mass.

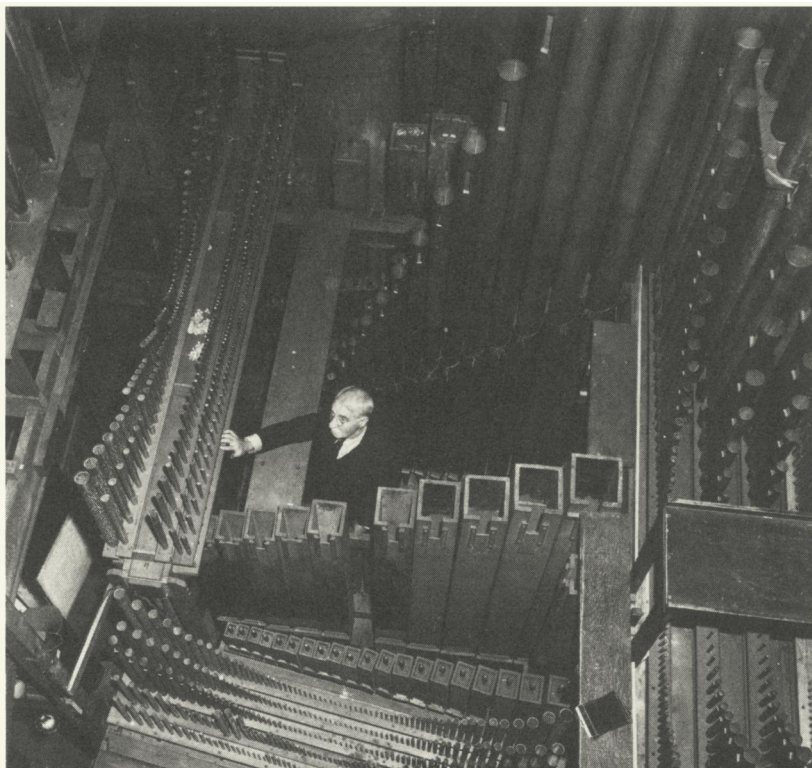
I shall never forget all the marvelous organ concerts from the Mormon Tabernacle played so beautifully by Alexander Schreiner and Frank Asper. Apparently, this new policy is not much in favor of utilizing the organ for this purpose anymore (article 2 under new organ policy). What a pity! I suppose we will hear electronic chord organs from the Tabernacle next!

A suggestion to the Mormons; since they have placed so much emphasis on conservation and maintenance, prices, etc., why not purchase some "do-it-yourself organ kits," thereby saving more money than ever? Another thought occurred, since they are so concerned about the electricity needed to power the organs, why not purchase some guitars, a couple of trombones, and a set of drums? This way, no maintenance and electricity are required at all—and they too, can share that exciting new feeling of "getting it all together" and "really being with it" in this devastatingly artistic new age.

Leroy N. Lewis  
Barnegat Light, New Jersey

The sad news of the Mormon organ ban is yet another triumph for church lay persons everywhere whose ignorance to the needs of music in worship has sent

Inside the organ works, Salt Lake Tabernacle organ



church music straight to hell. With their help, the Music Ministry has deteriorated to the point that the praise of God in music means dragging through a few hymns every week, the sleepy parishioners being barely heard over the weary monotone of the Inevitable Electronic. It is this attitude of "good enough for us" which has faced most music committees, and certainly the Mormons, with the question of how to cut the program to the pitiful minimum, instead of how to build one that continues to inspire the Christian with the spirit found in a wealth of church music.

... I hope this news sparks some action among concerned church musicians who see that without any outreaching and effective Music Ministry, lay persons will continue to see church music as a needless expense of their time and money, rather than as a vehicle for the praise of God. If we are to lead people in this direction, we must first deal with those who would just as soon amend the 150th Psalm to read, "Praise Him with trumpet and cymbal, as long as it's in the \$4000/\$5500 price range."

Howard Maple  
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

The reasons enlisted by the Mormons to support their directive authorizing the purchase of only electronic "organs" for meetinghouses are shocking in their placing of convenience before quality and their acceptance of the mediocre as arbiter of taste.

I make the following statements of rebuttal: (1) Music sung in praise of God deserves the best accompaniment, not that which is "adequate." (2) There is an ever-increasing number of highly trained organists who can fully utilize the resources of a small pipe organ (often a more exacting task than with a large one). (3) The maintenance of an electronic substitute may indeed be "easier to obtain," but reliable, qualified technicians are available in any field to provide service for clients who make serious and responsible commitments. The church that is truly interested in providing a music ministry of quality will be willing to make this additional effort. (4) One has little cause for worry if exposed pipework is only "potentially more susceptible to vandalism damage." The facilities of every institution in our society are susceptible to such damage, but we must not be frightened away from our aesthetic convictions. A church with iron bars instead of stained glass says more about the people inside than those without. (5) Relatively few people climb the spires and roofs of Europe's great cathedrals, but the masons who carved the sculpture in those lofty places spared no effort, omitted no detail—they built for the Glory of God, and knew that they owed Him the best they could offer. It may or may not be true that relatively few people can distinguish between the pipe and electronic instruments, but to establish the lowest common denominator as the criterion in deciding the medium of artistic expression in worship is exceedingly repugnant to me. The arts should uplift the people, and they cannot succeed in this if chained to that which is ordinary, that which is "adequate." (6) I can see philosophic merit only in the first reason listed in the directive. It is indeed unfortunate when a small congregation cannot command sufficient resources to acquire a fine instrument. But must we answer by making the lesser the law of the land?

Ron Rarick  
Lawrence, Kansas

On a purely pragmatic basis it is true that the organ is merely a handy tool with which to support (notice, happily, not to *lead!*) the vital, vibrant hymn-singing which is a hallmark of this denomination's worship gesture, a spontaneous

enthusiasm that has made the few occasions on which I shared in the music-making of its meetinghouses such a positive praise experience.

I am sorry to see those well-worn arguments on space, servicing and vandalism trotted out again in the pipe *versus* pipeless argument. Although misinformed and rather specious, at the least they are recognition of the difficulties posed by the continuation of traditions of craft and repertoire that pertain to what must be one of the most clumsy and non-utilitarian of musical mechanics. After all, as Kipling wrote, "You couldn't raft an organ up the Nile,/And play it in an Equatorial swamp."

However, any authoritative body with the power to mould the artistic manifestation of its people's worship is going to have to convince me of its credibility by publishing statistical data derived from qualified, properly conducted musical and/or psychological research before I shall accept that "Relatively few persons are actually capable of distinguishing a significant difference between the sounds of the two types of instruments . . ."

Also, is the Committee on Expenditures willing to run the risks involved in forcing talented young people to seek not only their training but also the practice of their skills primarily outside the church setting?

To me, the argument that economic differences among meetinghouses should not determine the choice of instruments is the saddest reason of all. For once again the variety and quality potential that make man a being of meaning and dignity must give way to a conformity whose governing criteria would be determined at the lowest economic and cultural denominator.

Is it really true that, regarding any religious denomination in a "free society," taste-shapers motivated by dollars and cents are able to legislate out of existence the ability of a congregation with imaginative, artistic members to develop in Service individuality and creativity of response, to deny that congregation the chance to incorporate in its physical plant the finest available equipment for the realization of something above the "adequate"?

If this be so, then I must return to Kipling's poem: "Let the organ moan her sorrow to the roof"!

Dr. Walter H. Kemp  
National President  
Royal Canadian College of Organists  
Toronto, Ontario

In answer to my inquiry to the leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), I have received from them a clarification relative to the Church policy on installing organs in places of worship and other buildings.

The policy of the Church does not preclude the installation of pipe organs in all Church buildings, but only in chapels where the comparative cost of a pipe organ is too high for a small congregation, or where there may be other circumstances which would make a pipe organ infeasible in the local situation.

The Church is now completing several hundred new chapels every year, and it is my feeling that there will continue to be a number of pipe organs installed in these new places of worship.

Sincere Greetings,

Alexander Schreiner  
Chief Organist  
Salt Lake Mormon Tabernacle