

Lord of the instruments

Majestic pipe organs are manufactured in Halton Hills

Ranks upon ranks of gleaming pipes, gently sloped in their order of the sound value. Majestic consoles with ivory stop knobs, glowing ivory keys and careful craftsmanship in every construction feature of the control centre of the massive pipe organ.

The pipe organ has been, for centuries, one of the most influential instruments in music. From the days of Nero and the primitive pipe organ to mighty Wurlitzers that once provided sounds to compliment silent films of the early 20th century, pipe organs have shared history with greats of the musical world.

The pipe organ has earned an honored spot in musical tradition and thanks to the efforts of pipe organ manufacturers such as Keates Organ Company, of Acton, the instrument is enjoying a comeback. Many realize the sound of a pipe organ cannot be faithfully reproduced.

The Frederick Street plant operated by Keates employs many local craftsmen each with specific skills to add to the finished product. Woodworking is one of the main activities as the console housing the keyboards, wind chests, swell cases that house the pipes and bass pipes for that unique bass resonance are manufactured here in Halton Hills.

Manufacture of the organ takes about four months before the instrument is assembled and tested. Installation, along with the final voicing and tuning in the permanent location, takes another month.

Because of the lack of North American suppliers in the pipe organ field, Keates along with other North American organ producers, are forced to import many of the components such as metal pipes, keyboards, blowers, stop knobs and controls and the leather used in the wind reservoir to maintain constant wind pressure, from European sources where pipe

organs first originated hundreds of years ago.

It takes one pipe to produce one note. Additional voices of the organ are made possible by further sets or ranks of pipes. Many organs have pipes numbering into the thousands to produce the full range of musical excellence.

Many of the operations in manufacturing the organ are done by hand. Building and finishing the console, wind chests and supply chambers and tuning pipes for the proper tonal qualities are done by hand (and ear) with painstaking accuracy to make an instrument that will provide years of service.

Many European organs predate Bach and with careful attention have withstood the test of time.

Keates Organ Company has been located in Acton since 1961 and been honored with many world famous installations, such as the design and building of a five manual console used with an organ on a record album by Virgil Fox. Notes on the record album compliment the Canadian company for their fine design and craftsmanship in building the monstrous keyboards.

Knox Presbyterian Church in Georgetown is one of the local churches to have an organ built by Keates.

Organ technology has come along way from beginnings where wind pressure was supplied by bellows pumped by hand and wind pressure steadied by tanks of water.

Transistorized switching, low air pressure and electrical blowers have added greatly to the art of the organ. With few organ builders in existence, Keates is proud to be able to have several apprentices at their Halton Hills plant learning the art of the organ, its manufacture and the methods of producing the most majestic of all instruments.

And for \$70,500 you, too, can have a majestic pipe organ.



Master console maker, Mac McGugan at work.



Ken Zeigler works on the hand-made 16 foot Bourdon pipes.



at Knox Presbyterian Church, Georgetown.

