

CONFERENCE-CONCERT FESTIVAL: REFORMATIONS AND THE ORGAN, 1517–2017

SEPTEMBER 10–13, 2017, UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

IN COLLABORATION WITH THE WESTFIELD CENTER

The organ has been likened to a machine, a mirror, but also to the human form itself. Yet, in any of these interpretations, its identity is in flux; it reforms and transforms itself and its environment. This conference addresses this state of flux: reformations that took place while the organ accompanied; reformations of the organ itself and reformations by means of the organ; transformations in playing style, pedagogy, and performance practice; how the digital revolution affected the organ; and new recital cultures and the secular organ in history and today.

The conference will include a keynote lecture by Kerala Snyder and panels and recitals on both Fritts organs at Notre Dame. Christophe Mantoux, Kimberly Marshall, and Craig Cramer will perform on the new Murdy Family Organ in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. Annette Richards, David Yearsley, Robert Bates, Matthew Dirst, Paul Walker and Stephen Lancaster (organ/voice), Lieuwe Tamminga and Bruce Dickey (organ/cornetto), Kevin Vaughn, Nicole Simental, and Anne Laver will give

recitals on the Fritts organ and the Italian organ in the DeBartolo Performing Arts Center's Reyes Organ and Choral Hall. Panelists and lecturers include Robert Bates, Christopher Bragg, Lynn Edwards Butler, Jeffrey Cooper, Edmond Johnson, Christopher Marks, Paul Thornock, Kevin Vogt, Paul Walker, and Alexis van Zalen.

Registration for *Reformations and the Organ* is now open (direct link [here](#)). Given the limited number of seats in the Reyes Organ Hall, we anticipate registration filling up quickly. We encourage Westfield members not to delay in signing up!

The University of Notre Dame has made available a wealth of information about the new, unique, handmade organ for the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. You are invited to follow the links at this address: <http://magazine.nd.edu/basilica-organ/>, which will point you to several related articles, videos, and pictures. A picture gallery of Op. 37 can also be found on the Paul Fritts [website](#). The specification is available [here](#).

AN INTERVIEW WITH CRAIG CRAMER

The conference's main theme, Reformations and the Organ, appears to be about change: how the organ reflects—or endures—the changes happening around it, how the organ induces change, and how the organ and its practices change themselves. One could argue that this angle replaces traditional, more static ways of depicting the organ. Was this a deliberate new angle when planning the conference?

David Yearsley and Annette Richards wrote the brilliant conference theme. They beautifully captured the dynamism of the organ and its literature. The organ has evolved over the years, and nearly every country in Western Europe developed its own organ type.

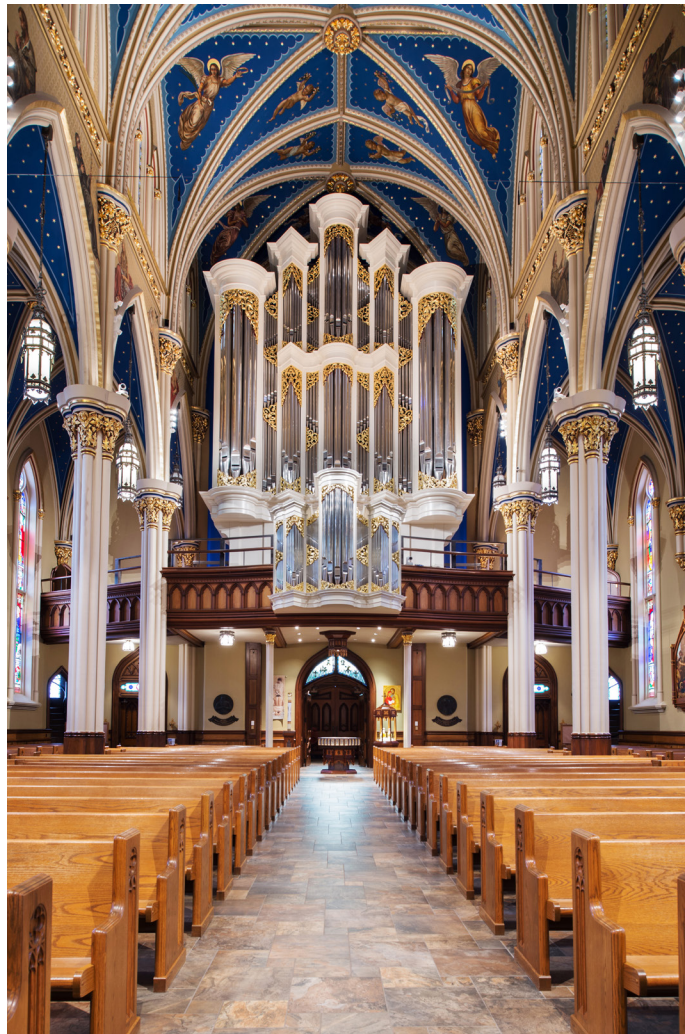


Craig Cramer

In the twentieth century there was a call for organ reform that started in Germany and in the Alsace and spread throughout Europe more or less. This reform was more successful in some countries than in others, but at least the movement sparked a discussion about how the organ can be rooted in its past without denying its present. The new organ at Notre Dame is a product of this reform and this discussion. It is clearly an organ that is inspired by the great historic organs, but it is also modern: it was designed on a computer, it uses modern materials in many of its key components, it was built with power tools where appropriate, and it is a mixture of

various national styles. When one considers that the technology that allows the organ to be the organ was finished between 1650 and 1700, it is remarkable that this gigantic instrument is still appreciated and used regularly today. The organ in a sense reached its final state, and yet it is still relevant today. There is perhaps no other machine for which one could make this claim. Usually when machines reach their final states they quickly become obsolete.

The ability of the organ to survive such radical change over the centuries is perhaps its greatest strength: it has never become codified or “finished” in musical terms. The organ constantly reforms and regenerates. The music naturally follows the instrument, and in the end we have a confluence of creative impulses that adds up to something great and dynamic.



Paul Fritts Op. 37. Photo: Barbara Johnston

Since David Yearsley and Annette Richards were mentioned in the first answer, I sent the same question to Annette, who answered me this:

The idea was indeed to embrace the fact that we would be celebrating the completion of a landmark new organ at one of the United States’ most distinguished Catholic universities in the 500th anniversary year of the Reformation. Clearly the Reformation itself had extraordinary implications for sacred music, especially for the organ. On one level, we wanted to invite participants to reflect on the constellation of ideas associated with the Reformation and the organ, but also, very importantly, to branch out imaginatively and consider these many broader notions of “reformation.”

The new Paul Fritts organ Op. 37, central to this conference, truly “reforms” practice in Notre Dame’s Basilica of the Sacred Heart.

It replaces the Holtkamp organ from 1978. What is, in practical terms, new about this organ?

The most salient feature of the Fritts organ is that it is deeply rooted in a historic tradition. The Holtkamp purported to be a completely new idea. To be sure, it had mechanical shortcomings, but perhaps its undoing was imbedded in its misunderstanding of how an organ works from the inside to the outside, if one may speak in those terms. The Holtkamp organ seemed always to be its own piece of equipment; it did not partake of ancient practices in organ building or voicing. It tried to blaze a new trail, and not successfully. It failed mechanically, it did not blend with the architecture, and it seemed almost to be steadfast in its refusal to make a musical statement.

Paul Fritts, as you know, has spent an entire career trying to come to grips with what makes the old European masterpieces magical. He is fascinated with how the old builders of many countries and traditions managed so consistently to blend the sounds and to make the organ a greater whole than its individual parts. The success that he has had over a long period of time should not be interpreted as a static or “winning” formula that he reproduces with every project. Quite the opposite: what I have observed in Paul’s work (as with our other great builders in the United States) is an evolution. Every organ has its character. The Basilica organ—as you will hear—speaks with a distinctly different voice than Paul’s organ in Notre Dame’s Performing Arts Center. Part of that difference is the acoustics of the room, of course, but the majority lies in the way the organ is conceived. The new organ in the Basilica fills the room with the breadth of the fundamental stops. The gravity of the sound, not sheer decibels, is what gets the job done.

As we can read in the Notre Dame Magazine, the new organ is based on “methods and materials that guild craftsmen in the Netherlands and northern Germany three and four centuries ago would recognize and understand.” Which considerations came into play when a mechanical-action organ with sand-cast pipes was commissioned?

This is the first time that Paul has cast pipes on sand. The result is exciting! We really did not know what to expect, but the way the pipes find their pitches, the articulation of the pipes, and the immediacy of the sound add up to a remarkable principal chorus. The sound is lively and shimmering, but it is not loud. The relaxed approach contributes to the deeply contrapuntal nature of the organ in a large acoustic. It is a sound that has to be experienced. Paul’s ability to add reeds in German, French, and Spanish style of course increases the versatility of the organ. We need not have worried that Paul would make it all work. One can draw the German or the French reeds, and they work remarkably well with the rest of the organ. For a really big splash, we have on occasion drawn everything together, and the sound is large, but never penetrating or painful. The organ has proven to be at home in accompanying the choirs, which sing a great deal of English cathedral-style music. It is a versatile instrument. The students and I have already learned a great deal from this organ. We have asked this instrument to perform a lot of tasks, and it seems to have risen to the challenge of being a solo instrument, an able accompanist, and an outstanding organ upon which to play hymns. We perform on it, we teach on it, and we listen to it accompany the liturgy, and so far I must say I have been impressed with its ability to meet all of these disparate functions. It is a large enough organ that one can find “mini” organs inside of it. It will take us years to plumb the depths of its vast resources, but I am confident that we will grow into the organ and it will play a rich and colorful role in the life of the Basilica and of the university at large. It is a monument organ, one that takes its place beside other important university organs in the United States.

The dedication recital was on 20 January—you yourself played. What can you tell our readers to expect? What does the organ “give” to the player, to the audience?

I designed the opening recital (which I will repeat at the conference) to reflect the different styles of reeds that Paul included in the organ. The first two pieces (Buxtehude and Bach) use the German reeds of course. An

anonymous Portuguese Batalla shows off the fiery reeds, especially those of the trompetia. The last two pieces (Dandrieu and Fauchard) delve deeply into the French side of the organ. I was thrilled to work with the organ, and it is a remarkably versatile and varied instrument. I think everyone will find something to like!

A full program of the conference has yet to be published. Can you give us a sneak peek at the highlights? What programs will we hear on the new organ, or on the other ones?

Because the Basilica is used constantly throughout the day, we felt it was best to confine our time in there to the evenings. In addition to my recital, we will hear two keynote recitals on the new organ, one by the fabulous American organist Kimberly Marshall, and the other by the young French virtuoso Christophe Mantoux. These will both be spectacular performances.

The bulk of the conference will take place in the Performing Arts Center on campus. We will hear lectures



The Basilica of the Sacred Heart

and recitals throughout the day. The organ hall has a Fritts organ that was installed in 2004. In the back of the hall we have an Italian organ from around 1680. It has five stops and is tuned in meantone. In addition, we have a pianoforte and probably will have a continuo organ that some performers may use.

We will hear a wide variety of performers, ranging from seasoned professionals to brilliant newcomers. These include Robert Bates and Matthew Dirst, Annette Richards and David Yearsley (who will give a concert of eighteenth-century four-hand music on multiple keyboard instruments), prize-winning Notre Dame alumnae Nicole

Simental and Kevin Vaughn, organist Liuwe Tamminga (from Bologna, Italy) with the peerless cornettist Bruce Dickey, as well as Anne Laver, Stephen Lancaster, and Paul Walker.

The keynote lecture will be given by Kerala Snyder, and a rich program of talks spanning the history of the instrument from the Reformation to the organ reform movement will fill out the program. It will be an exciting time for all of us!

Thank you very much for this interview!