



Spotlight on Crestwood Heavenly Sounds: The Organ

Easter Sunday my son and daughter-in-law joined me in church. It was the first time Dan had been inside Crestwood in 37 years. Like me when I first returned, he was a bit disoriented by the changes. He soon leaned over and whispered "They've moved the organ." The organ console used to be against the left wall and there were pipes on either side of the stage, he remembered. I realized it was time to think about the organ.

Earlier, when the organ was suggested for a Spotlight article, I was told we have a unique instrument with a strange history. My problem was, and continues to be, that I know absolutely nothing about organs. I was soon to find that descriptions of the instrument are shrouded in unfamiliar lingo, and in spite of Jane Johnson's patience, I couldn't learn enough to write in detail about the instrument itself. In the end, Jane actually helped with the manuscript in addition to answering numerous questions. I think you will find an interesting tale wrapped around our unusual instrument.

Jane, Crestwood's organist for the past twenty-two years, says our current organ is an unusual combination of parts from six or seven separate organs. In spite of its bit-and-pieces origins, the now almost-completed organ is well thought-out, and the unique joining of parts works well, she explains.

The patchwork organ building apparently began back when worship was located in Hopper Hall. At the time, Crestwood member Bob King, helped by Wendell Harris, began our organ building by scavenging parts from different deserted organs they located. When there was a church fire in Danville, they salvaged a damaged 8-foot dulciana (set of pipes) from the ruins and restored them to working order for our church. David Blondell, Crestwood Pastor then, doesn't remember if either of them had a background with organs, but King was an engineer. They apparently figured out what they were doing.

When our current sanctuary was built in 1971, Holloway Corporation (an organ builder in Indianapolis at that time) designed a new organ that included a few sets of pipes from the Hopper Hall instrument. In fact, Dr. Blondell says that's why we have two less windows on that side of the sanctuary as the organ placement was worked into the architectural plans.

Jane Johnson laughs at the state of the instrument then. The first organist at that time who will remain nameless, got fed up with the nature of the organ, and resigned, thinking Crestwood had no real plans to update the piece-meal instrument. Jane joined us eventually, and her past two decades with us proved him wrong. From the early 1980s to just recently, various additions were made to the organ by David Bottom, the Curator of Keyboard Instruments at the University of Kentucky.

The Holloway organ had an organ console (the keyboards and pedalboard that control the organ pipes) that came to Crestwood third-hand from an instrument in Paris, KY. In the 1980's and 1990's Jane occasionally played for weddings and funerals at Crestwood and remembers that label-maker tape was used on the console to indicate what each stop was. (Stops are the little knobs on the console that control which pipes are sounding at any given time.) That worked fine until the labels dried up and they fell off. But in 1999 we received donations that allowed the building of a new console made just for Crestwood by Randall Dyer and Associates of Jefferson City, TN. In time, more ranks (groups of pipes)

were gradually added as David Bottom gathered them from various organs being replaced elsewhere.

Jane speaks highly of the condition of our organ today. We have room for two more ranks of pipes which would help give the sound of the instrument more color and variety, she said. "I would love to see it get finished the way it was intended. It would be icing on the cake." It's a matter of finding local organ builders to build or find the appropriate pipes—and having funding, of course.

It would be wrong to close without mentioning more about Jane Johnson who makes our organ music soar each Sunday. I have to admit I didn't consider her skills until Covid arrived and I watched the service on zoom. One camera is placed behind her, and I am now able to watch in amazement as Jane plays on two keyboards with her hands while dealing with a full keyboard with her feet! The practice is a little like rubbing your stomach while patting your head, she admits. Your feet want to do what one of your hands is doing. To make things more challenging, a glance at her music shows she is reading three staves at the same time.

We are blessed to have such a talented, experienced person with us. Jane began playing the piano at age 7, enrolled at the University of Kentucky as a piano major but didn't like it, and switched to organ as she became acquainted with the instrument. She ultimately received master's degrees with emphases in sacred music and church music. Her working career was spent at UK as Director of Student Affairs for the College of Fine Arts, now retired. She is currently in her third term as Dean of the Lexington Chapter of the American Guild of Organists and has just been re-elected for two more years. She has been at Crestwood for twenty-two years.

Jane and Crestwood's organ (and sanctuary) are featured in a recent episode of *Organ Explorer* by Owen Sammons on You Tube. It is there that you will learn more details about our organ. There are views of the pipes and organ that you cannot see in church and Jane explains about the instrument in a way I cannot do justice. It is certainly worth the short amount of time it will take you to watch it:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCJoSfTJ21M>

Again, my thanks to Jane who helped with this writing. The learning curve was too long and steep for me to do this article justice alone. How fortunate we all are to have skilled musicians in our midst to bring the inspiring sounds to us each week regardless of our academic understanding.

And remember, if you have \$20,000-\$40,000 burning a hole in your pocket and you'd like to hear the full glory of a completed Crestwood organ, I bet Jane would host a concert in your honor!

If there is some area of the church you would like to know more about, please share your ideas with me. Let's explore together.

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