**Report on the Noack organ at Lakeside Presbyterian Church**

**(revised 2/11/22)**

Background and context:

The organ at Lakeside Presbyterian Church was built by the Noack Organ Co. of Georgetown, MA. (Opus 144). Fritz Noack was the founder and President of this company until his retirement in 2015. Fritz, a native of Germany, was widely recognized as an important builder of Mechanical-Action (Tracker) organs in North America. The date on the console of the Lakeside instrument is 2003, but I believe the final installation was not completed until 2004. Lakeside’s organist when the contract was signed was Frank Perko, a graduate organ major at CCM. To my knowledge, Frank was also the only consultant on this project. Frank resigned and left the area before the installation of the organ began. I was hired in 2002 and was on the scene during the renovation of the sanctuary and subsequent installation of the organ.

Noack Opus 144 was an important addition to the Cincinnati/NKY organ community. When it was installed, it was the largest three-manual tracker organ in the area, and was used regularly by the CCM Organ Department for teaching and for degree recitals. The organ was used annually for the Strader Organ Competition. Lakeside hosted a three-year recital series, inviting several American, European, and local organists to play. It was used during a national convention of the Association of Anglican Musicians, and later as one of the featured instruments during an American Guild of Organists Pipe Organ Encounter. The organ was also featured in two professional recordings made by ARSIS Audio, a subsidiary of E. C. Schirmer Music Publishing. (I had the privilege of being the organist on those two CDs).

However, during all this time, I was gradually becoming aware of ongoing mechanical and tonal problems which will be enumerated below. Also, acknowledging that the perception of sound can be subjective, I was personally disappointed in some of the musical sounds the organ made, especially the tonal colors of the various reed stops. I also felt that the action of the organ (the connection between the console and the pipes) didn’t feel as sensitive or responsive as it should.

Within the last several months, I have asked for evaluations from two organ building/maintenance firms; M. P. Rathke, Newtown, OH, and John Dower of Lincoln Pipe Organs, Lincolnton, NC. Referencing both of those reports, I will list the various problems currently found in the organ, as well as some of the proposed solutions. Some of these problems are difficult to explain in writing, so gathering around the console will always be the best way to offer explanations.

Some of the following problems MUST be addressed. Other problems SHOULD be addressed, while others COULD be addressed in order to bring the organ up to its full potential. I’ll also acknowledge that in a few cases, the lines between must, should, and could might blur, depending on who is offering the opinions. In my own order of importance:

1. Pedal offset chests; a written description of this problem would be unwieldy. It needs to be explained verbally.

2. Collapsing metal pipes; this would also be an unwieldy topic to put in writing, but it is exactly what it sounds like. I can explain the problem, probable causes of the problem, and proposed solutions.

3. Defective tremulant; the original tremulant is currently too noisy to use and simply needs to be replaced. This would not be an expensive item.

4. Badly engineered/constructed swell shades; once again, this should be a verbal explanation.

5. Deteriorating reeds; the potential seriousness of the reed problems has been brought to my attention by Mike Rathke since John Dower made his first visit, but some of the issues causing flue pipes to collapse are probably in play here as well. John is currently planning to return to Lakeside on or around February 22 to do a more comprehensive evaluation of the reeds.

6. Combination action upgrade; combination action works similarly to the light panel that controls sanctuary lighting. There are currently only eight channels available, which can be very limiting. A new combination action should have at least 64 channels and be operated with digital rather than manual controls. Once again, a verbal explanation is in order.

7. Providing access to the trackers that run under the chancel floor;

there’s currently no way to do this. Eventually, access WILL BE necessary. A re-do of the floor between the console and case would be prudent at this time. This would not actually be done by John Dower, but by a local contractor under John’s guidance and supervision.