The World's Largest Pipe Organ
The Midmer-Losh Organ in the Atlantic City Convention Hall
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From the March/April 1999 issue of the ATOS journal, Theatre Organ

The pipe organ in the 41,000-seat main auditorium of the Atlantic City Convention Hall was designed by New Jersey State Senator Emerson Lewis Richards (1884-1963) and built by Midmer-Losh of Merrick, Long Island, New York.

Although the instrument is noted for its unique seven-manual console with its 1,235 stop tablets, there is also a movable five-manual console. This smaller console has 673 stop keys and was disconnected from its 150' cable some decades ago. It is currently on display in the building's foyer. The contract for the organ was signed in May 1929, and the work was completed in December 1932. A staff of 80 worked on the instrument at the height of construction. It is thought that the majority of pipes were made by the Midmer-Losh firm, but it is known that some special reed stops (e.g. Brass Trumpet, Egyptian Horn, Euphone, Musette Mirabilis) were made by Anton Gottfried. The German firm of Welte provided the Echo organ with a wooden Tuba d'Amour and a Bassoon with papier-mache resonators.

The pipes are in eight chambers arranged in opposite pairs on the left and right sides of the auditorium, and the present scheme is the third design that Richards conceived. The first, to be housed in six chambers, was to have 43,000 pipes, but this number was reduced to 29,000 when it became apparent that space and finance would be a problem. The later addition of two more chambers allowed some of the original scheme's voices to be reinstated and other new stops to be added. The number of pipes as shown in The Guinness Book of World Records is 33,112 but most authorities agree that this figure may be slightly inflated.

The instrument has 314 voices (230 flues, 84 reeds) comprising 447 ranks (363 flues, 84 reeds), 22 percussions (7 melodic, 15 non-melodic) - a total of 336 stops. Among these are four voices on 100 inches of wind and 10 voices on 50 inches (including the 32' Bombarde and Diaphone registers on the Pedal organ). The loudest stop, the Grand Ophicleide (16' and 8') has "more than six times the volume of the loudest locomotive whistle" (according to The Guinness Book of World Records). Despite being constructed of plain pipe metal (quarter-inch thick in places), the Grand Ophicleide has a very 'brassy' tone. George Losh, Vice-President of the Midmer-Losh Co. said it sounded like "Sousa's band playing fortissimo." The instrument's former curator is said to have always warned stagehands before the stop was used!

Other features include a number of flue ranks with double languid pipes. These allow the use of high wind pressure without any loss of brightness from the tone. Pressures ranging from 3.5 to 100 inches were
originally provided by eight D.C. blowers, totaling 394 horsepower. These were replaced in the early 1990s by A.C. blowers rated at almost 1,000 horsepower.

On a voice-by-voice basis, 69 percent of the instrument is straight, i.e. 217 voices are not extended at all (although six of them are duplexed). However, at the seven-manual console, the picture is rather different, with over 600 of the 852 'speaking' stop keys controlling the 97 extended voices.

A summary of the instrument's 21 departments is given below:

PEDAL RIGHT (11 voices, 11 ranks)
PEDAL LEFT (10 voices, 16 ranks)
UNENCLOSED CHOIR (6 voices, 7 ranks)
CHOIR (29 voices, 37 ranks)
GREAT (38 voices, 63 ranks)
GREAT-SOLO [flue division] (13 voices, 13 ranks)
GREAT-SOLO [orchestral reed division] (12 voices, 12 ranks)
SWELL (36 voices, 55 ranks)
SWELL-CHOIR (17 voices, 17 ranks)
SOLO (22 voices, 33 ranks)
FANFARE (21 voices, 36 ranks)
ECHO (22 voices, 27 ranks)
GALLERY I (4 voices, 10 ranks)
GALLERY II (7 voices, 9 ranks)
GALLERY III (6 voices, 9 ranks)
GALLERY IV (8 voices, 8 ranks)
BRASS CHORUS (8 voices, 10 ranks)
STRING I (11 voices, 20 ranks)
STRING II (24 voices, 36 ranks)
STRING III (9 voices, 17 ranks)
Percussion

In addition to the above, there are departments that consist entirely of stops which are borrowed from other departments. Second touch registers are provided for the Pedal, Choir, and Great claviers (originally, the Swell and Solo manuals were to have this facility too). The Gallery Pedal sections, left and right, are derived from manual stops housed in the various Gallery (balcony) chambers. The Great-Solo's registers (playable from the Great manual) are duplexed to the Solo manual where they are separately playable, regardless of what registers are in use on the Great-Solo. Similarly, the Swell-Choir, on the Swell manual, is playable from the Choir keyboard as the Choir-Swell. Registers on the Grand Choir and Grand Great departments are derived from specially extended Pedal stops which are playable throughout the 85-note compass (seven octaves, CCC-c5) of these manuals. The Swell manual has a 73-note compass (six octaves, GGG-g4), but its lowest five keys exist largely for cosmetic reasons. The upper four manuals, and all of the smaller console's keyboards, have the usual 61-note compass.
The instrument was deeply unpopular among the city's residents, having been built largely during the Depression, when 'the man in the street' didn't have two dimes to rub together. The organ was perceived as a toy for a handful of snobs and there was some lively correspondence on the subject in local newspapers. A court case, in which Midmer-Losh sued the city for the balance due on the instrument, didn't help matters either. (The firm won, but went bust soon afterwards, although it was later resurrected by George Losh). Consequently, the instrument's very existence was played down, for fear of further inflaming the prevailing passions. Unfortunately, this rather ignominious start in life seems to have sealed the instrument's fate, to the extent that it is almost "the world's most forgotten organ."

By the time all the fuss died down and it was realized what a national treasure the organ was, lack of funding inhibited making needed repairs. The cost of repairing the instrument had risen sharply and it continues to do so. The remote combination action, housed in the building's basement, was completely flooded and rendered unusable by a hurricane in 1944, and some of the gallery chambers have suffered water damage due to roof leaks. Access to the ceiling chambers (Fanfare, Echo, and String III organs) has been prohibited by the presence of asbestos (scheduled for removal in 1999).

Although the organ seems to have been primarily designed for the performance of serious music, it has mainly been used for lighter programming. Daily recitals became weekly recitals and, eventually, the instrument was used only for accompanying skaters and ball games. Its use continues to decline and, at present, only the Pedal Right, Great, Great-Solo, and Solo organs are playable. The remainder of the instrument is rather dusty, though not generally in poor condition. Indeed, the workmanship is of such a high standard that getting the whole organ into playable order again may not be too difficult a task.

A thorough professional survey is now needed to assess what remedial work is needed, and a major fund-raising campaign must be undertaken in order to preserve the organ for future generations.

It was with this task in mind that the Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ Society, Inc. was formed as a non-profit publicly supported foundation. The organization exists to stimulate both national and international interest in, and support for, the preservation and restoration of this historically significant instrument. The society's concern also includes the very fine Kimball organ (four manuals, 55 ranks) in the Convention Hall's ballroom.

Stop lists, photos, publications and other details for both organs are available on the Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ Society website at [http://www.acchos.org](http://www.acchos.org)