



Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King Liverpool

19th February 2021

Renovation of the Grand Organ of Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral

The Grand Organ of Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, with its four manuals, 88 speaking stops and 4,565 pipes, is undergoing its first significant renovation since it was installed in 1967, when the cathedral was consecrated and opened for worship.

During the last 54 years, the organ has been heard on TV and radio by millions and in person by many more, including the Queen and Pope John Paul II. It has been played by some of the world's most famous organists, including Flor Peeters, Jeanne Demessieux and Olivier Latry, and has featured on numerous CDs and DVDs. The organ's primary role, however, has been to enhance the daily services of the cathedral, fulfilling the mandate of Vatican II, which stated that '[the] pipe organ is to be held in high esteem, for it is the traditional musical instrument which adds a wonderful splendour to the Church's ceremonies and powerfully lifts up man's mind to God and to higher things'. Capable of providing gentle aid to prayer or a brassy fanfare for a civic procession, it can accompany anything from a solo chorister to an orchestra and a congregation of thousands.

Completed in 1967 by the English organ builders J W Walker and Sons of Ruislip, the Metropolitan Cathedral organ is recognised as one of the finest examples of classical organ building of the period and is listed Grade I in the British Institute of Organ Studies Listing Scheme. Its distinctive feature is the dramatic pipework façade, which was designed by the cathedral architect, Sir Fredrick Gibberd, who arranged an assortment of zinc and wooden pipes with brass trumpets *en chamade* (mounted horizontally) to contrast strikingly with the surrounding concrete pillars. Just as the profile of the cathedral makes its impact on the Liverpool landscape, so the organ makes its impact visually as one enters the building.

The renovation, anticipated for completion in autumn 2022, will be carried out by Harrison & Harrison Ltd of Durham, one of the leading organ builders in the UK, also responsible in recent years for restoration work in the cathedrals of Salisbury, Edinburgh and Lincoln, major work at King's College, Cambridge, the Royal Festival Hall and Westminster Abbey, and new or rebuilt instruments in Canterbury Cathedral and York Minster. Each one of the 4,565 pipes of the Metropolitan Cathedral organ will be removed, cleaned and restored. The wind system, which has been slowly failing, will be replaced and the electrical components of the organ will be updated to meet current regulatory requirements. The renovation is primarily being undertaken

with the aim of ensuring good mechanical function and safe access for maintenance in the long term, coupled with great care to retain the fine voicing and original tonal qualities of the organ.

Canon Anthony O'Brien, the Dean of the Metropolitan Cathedral, stated, 'The Metropolitan Cathedral is a unique building in this country, with many striking and original features. But above all, it is a place of worship and devotion. The organ plays an important role on a daily basis in cathedral life and it is our duty, after over 50 years of service, to ensure that the organ will continue to serve our congregation, and the wider city, for the next 50 years.'

The musical tradition at the Metropolitan Cathedral is largely the legacy of brothers Philip Duffy (Master of the Music 1966-1996) and Terence Duffy (Organist 1963-1993). Today, the cathedral has around 60 boy and girl choristers, 14 adult professional singers, a junior choir and a youth choir, all of whom are regularly accompanied by the organ in offering praise and worship to God. In recent years the cathedral has begun an organ school, with young people receiving lessons on the cathedral organ, and in turn sharing their talents with their parishes and schools. School groups visiting the cathedral regularly enjoy organ demonstrations. For Terence Duffy, who as Cathedral Organist for thirty years played for many of the great occasions since the cathedral was opened, the renovation is a long-held desire: 'The Walker organ was designed as an integral element of the new cathedral, and it was an honour to have played the instrument on an almost daily basis for over thirty years. This renovation is overdue and will restore the organ to be worthy of the cathedral and its liturgy.'

Dr John Rowntree, Organ Consultant for the project, comments that the renovation, which respects the remarkable artistic qualities of the instrument, and in particular the voicing of Denis Thurlow (arguably the most distinguished English voicer of the period), coupled with ensuring reliable functioning and safe access for maintenance, 'will indeed lift the hearts and minds of future generations coming to the cathedral'.

Andrew Reid, Managing Director of Harrison & Harrison Ltd, the company which will carry out the project, said, 'It is an honour for our firm to have the opportunity to renovate the inspirational organ of Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral. The organ is an important instrument of its style and period, and one firmly in harmony with its setting; it is rare to find both cathedral and organ dating from the mid-20th century on such a scale. We expect this work, especially the provision of a new wind system, to rejuvenate it.'

A major fundraising campaign to support the project will be launched in the near future, and donations towards the initial costs are warmly invited. Full details are available on the cathedral website, and regular updates on the progress of the renovation will be provided by both the cathedral and the organ builders on social media.
