

Help save a pipe organ

Joe Vitacco of JAV Recordings explains to Sarah Beedle his involvement with a restoration project in Brooklyn

Considering the readership of *OR*, watching YouTube may not be everyone's idea of entertainment. However, Joe Vitacco of JAV Recordings has thought 'out of the box' and is using this site (www.youtube.com/pipeorgancds) as an unusual method of raising funds to restore the Kilgen organ at Our Lady of Refuge, Brooklyn. This is intuitive as watching the workers from the Organ Clearing House remove the low C from the organ chambers to protect all the pipes while needed structural work was carried out in the organ chamber is nothing if not awe-inspiring as you watch them scramble about like monkeys. Joe joked that when he was young he wished the organ was bigger and had full-length 32' stops, but now that he was responsible for its removal and shipping he is grateful that the organ is only 25 ranks and doesn't have a 32' stop!

This restoration and preservation project is particularly close to Joe Vitacco's heart as Our Lady of Refuge was the first church where he heard and played a pipe organ, and in a roundabout way was therefore instrumental in him setting up his recording business. A.R. Schopp's Sons, a 100-year-old American pipe organ builder and the largest supplier of organ pipes in the United States today, is undertaking the work, restoring the instrument almost to its original state. Although Joe has many contacts in the organ world, he didn't know whom to ask to restore the original 1930s electro-pneumatic relay. Fortunately, Michael Quimby donated a virtually brand new Peterson relay which Peterson will kindly modify and adapt to suit the space. Quimby donated skins of kangaroo leather, which Schopp used to replace the pouches in the organ.

When you speak with Joe about this, he is amazingly blunt about actively wishing he didn't have to be involved; after all, it would have been easier for him to donate a small sum of money as he is asking people around the world to do. However, instead he is donating his time, effort and organ contacts to raise a considerable sum of money, \$50,000 to date and \$150,000 to go. To this end, Joe has issued a double CD with a 34-page booklet, *Resurrectio* (reviewed on p.80), of 13 organists and 12 historic organs to raise funds (he is making no profit from the project, all proceeds less bank charges and postage go to the organ fund). The names involved are eminent and all instantly agreed to be involved, again for no fee. Never fear, this isn't a throw together release: Joe has put his usual care and attention into the booklet – in addition to the usual musical information, each organist has written about the instrument which sparked their interest, a document which will make informative reading for future generations.

Although this task is immense in these tough economic times, Joe is following in successful footsteps as the funds to build the church which houses the organ were raised by a priest during the height of the Great Depression. The building cost \$400,000 in 1934 (the equivalent of \$6.5 million in 2008) and was completed debt-free at a time when unemployment was at 21% in the USA. The current Pastor, Father Michael Perry, has backed Joe all the way and Joe says he couldn't imagine a better fund-raising partner, one who has become an organ enthusiast along the way.

Joe particularly wishes to thank all involved with the project, including Father Michael Perry, Michael Barone, Léon Berben, John Bishop, David Briggs, Peter Richard Conte, Ken Cowan, Craig



Great and Choir Windchests with all of their pipes packed in pipe trays

Cramer, Joseph Dzeda, Christoph Martin Frommen, Michel Goussu, James Konzelman, Olivier Latry, Philippe Lefebvre, Jean-Pierre Leguay, Martin Lémery, Thomas Murray, Laurent Prades, Michael Quimby, Daniel Roth, Robert Schopp, John Scott, Stephen Tharp and Craig Whitney.

Joe says his ultimate goal is to give something back to Brooklyn and the organ world – a full working pipe organ that he hopes might spark the interest of some future organist, organ builder or record producer, just as it sparked his own.

The double CD is available in the UK through Allegro Music, 01885 490375 or www.allegro.co.uk (Allegro is also not making a profit on its sale). Alternatively it can be purchased direct from Our Lady of Refuge, at www.olorbrooklyn.org. The church also has a comprehensive section on the restoration drive on their website.



Great / Choir Divisions – front to back: Violin Diapason Unit, Spitzflute Unit, Octave, Harmonic Flute, Diapason, Twelfth, Fifteenth, Tromba, Clarinet, Rohr Nazard, Dulciana, Unda Maris



Members from the Organ Clearing House lowering CCC of the 16' Contra Bass to the floor of the church from the organ chambers



Member of the Organ Clearing House properly packing the pipes at Our Lady of Refuge for safe storage