



Organ Recovery

*What's that sweet sound coming out of Herrick?
After 15 years of relative quiet,
the Mildred Miles Crew '45 Memorial Organ
is making music again*

AS PIPE ORGANS GO, the instrument that resides in Occidental's Herrick Memorial Chapel and Interfaith Center is somewhat discrete. The console sits off to the side, as it has since it arrived from Buffalo, N.Y., in 1966, bathed in delicate light from the afternoon sun that filters through the ornate stained glass window to the west.

And, unlike so many organs that display a vast array of pipes like a monumental holy boast, the Herrick organ's pipes—all 3,275 of them, ranging from 16 feet high to the size of a pencil—are hidden in cavities on either side of the chapel behind an unadorned white cloth facade.

Behind that cloth is a sight rarely seen. Step through a narrow side door, and you enter the cramped guts of the magnificent beast. Towering wooden pipes, powerful blowers, thin ladders, and scaffolding reaching three levels high, each lit only by a bare incandescent bulb. It's a strange and slightly anachronistic world back there.

But make no mistake, at 51, the Mildred Miles Crew '45 Memorial Organ is still a living, breathing thing.

"Oh, it tells you it's alive, don't worry!" says Manuel Rosales, president and tonal director of Rosales Organ Builders. Rosales has maintained the instrument, built by the Schlicker Organ Co., off and on since 1973. "When you've done a repair or some other work and you fill the organ with air," he says, "it comes alive and tells you right away if you've done a good job."

Though the organ was rarely used for some 15 years prior to its 50th birthday last October, Rosales, in conjunction with Kevin Cartwright of Cartwright Pipe Organ Co., undertook a major restoration on the neo-baroque-style instrument that was designed

for the chapel by Clarence Mader, Occidental's professor of organ and College organist from 1955 to 1968.

The anniversary was marked by a classical performance from master concert organist Nathan Laube, putting the renewed machine through its glorious paces, and once again on the cultural map of Occidental.

Donated to the College by husband Herbert A. Crew Jr. and other members of the family of Mildred Miles Crew (who died in 1964), the organ was inaugurated with an April 24, 1966, recital given by former Occidental music professor David Craighead, an eminent organist. Half a century ago, "the organ introduced this sound in a wonderful building in a beautiful setting that basically didn't exist in the L.A. area," says Rosales, who, working with architect Frank Gehry, created and curates the 6,134-pipe organ in Walt Disney Concert Hall.

In the 1940s, '50s and '60s, Oxy was the go-to school for pipe organ studies on the West Coast, and was home to a whopping five magnificent instruments. "I think there was a lot of interest among students who grew up going to church," says Edmond Johnson, Occidental's director of academic advising. "At the time, if you wanted to be a musician, being able to play the organ probably was your safest bet for a guaranteed paycheck because there were a ton of churches, and they all wanted organists."

A dedicated music historian, Johnson spearheaded the restoration project, sparking renewed interest in the Herrick organ. Not all such aging instruments are so lucky. "Today many churches have moved to different kinds of worship styles where they have praise bands, so organ is not the only option," he explains. "They're maintenance heavy, and a lot of people associate them as old-fashioned, kind of a more traditional thing. For some people that's a liability."

As interest waned at Oxy, the pipe organ program dried up. By the 1980s, the College's five-organ arsenal was reduced to two. "If you go through a period where you don't have any students, it becomes really hard to justify maintaining a program and the instruments," Johnson says.

Besides the Herrick Schlicker, the only other organ still on campus is the once mighty instrument in Thorne Hall, now unplayable. It began its life as a machine of worship at Temple Methodist Church in San Francisco in 1930, and arrived at Oxy in 1938 when the church went bankrupt.

USC emeritus professor of organ Ladd Thomas '59, who still teaches, played the Thorne organ regularly when it was a significant part of campus life. "It was a fine instrument in its day," says Thomas, who was awarded an honorary doctorate of music from Oxy in 1987.

For a performer, he adds, one of the biggest challenges was that the Thorne organ console was located in the front righthand corner of the room, while the pipes were all in the back. This distance created a delay between pressing down a key and the sound reaching the

player's ears as it traveled from the rear of the hall. "We used to joke that if nobody's applauding while you're bowing, it's because they're still listening!" Thomas says.

Nine years ago the aging organ was sold to a Florida church, yet it remains at Oxy—silent, gutted, and gathering dust in the darkness of Thorne Hall, still waiting to be picked up. If that ever happens.

The chapel organ's future is far rosier than its Thorne Hall counterpart. "We're trying to bring back the Herrick organ to a place of prominence," says David Kasunic, associate professor of music and department chair. That, of course, takes money. In fall 2014, Kasunic discovered the Crew Memorial Organ Fund, an endowment created in 1972 exclusively for maintaining the chapel organ.

"The organ hasn't been attended to for a while, so we had a great surplus," Kasunic says. "And Ed is such a terrific steward of this. We're designating him the organ and historical keyboards consultant for the music department so that he can continue on in this capacity."

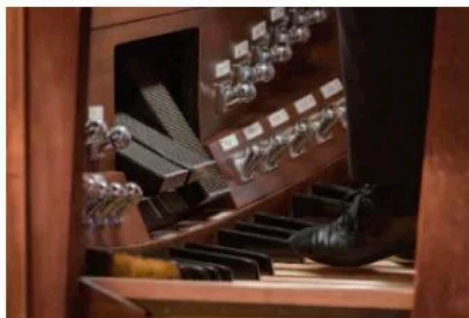
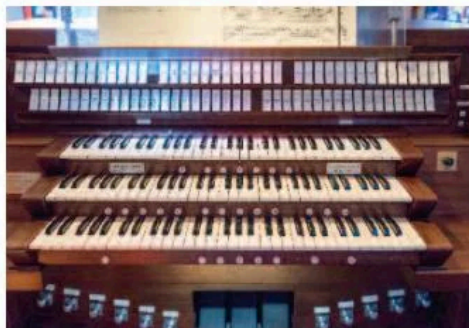
Kasunic says there are plans to involve the Occidental Glee Club and stage more concerts, including the Los Angeles Bach Festival—which the College hosted last October—and an annual show in conjunction with the American Guild of Organists.

The renewed focus on the Herrick organ "is bringing a

lot of alumni out of the woodwork with smiles on their faces," Kasunic says. "They're really happy to see us bringing the organ into the 21st century, and preserving its history by trying to find connections to music alumni of the past."

Of the multitude of sounds the instrument is capable of making, a sigh of relief is not among them. But the rich, breathtaking voice of the newly reborn Herrick organ will speak volumes for years to come. **O**

Gilstrap profiled John Branca '72 ("Good Vibrations") in the Winter issue.



ABOVE: To celebrate the Herrick organ's 50th anniversary, Timothy Howard (director of music and organist at Pasadena Presbyterian Church) performed Oct. 22, 2016, as part of the L.A. Bach Festival. **OPPOSITE:** Mildred Miles Crew '45, inset, occasionally served as organist for Student Church services.