

INVESTING IN A PHOENIX ORGAN

By Don Anderson, President of Phoenix Organs America

PURCHASING A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT

Many top professional musicians who are not sponsored by one of the big musical instrument companies prefer to buy new instruments from specialists who make their particular instrument. Often these builders are individual craftsmen or small companies who devote their entire lives to their craft. The utmost care is taken not only with the manufacture of the instrument but in the design often with the individual customer in mind.

The same can be done with a church organ. Manufacturers of the best pipe organs are usually very small companies of a few craftsmen that wear many hats and go far beyond the requirements of factory workers and the end results are usually world class. The same is not usually the case for electronic organs as they are normally assembly line produced and not made for individual churches. Churches are barely able to get a custom console color to match the church furniture from these mass producers, much the same as typical piano manufacturers. Phoenix Organs was, from the beginning, intended to be built with the utmost care and attention to detail of the first mentioned type of instrument maker.

BUILDING ORGANS FOR LONGEVITY

Electronic organs got a bad reputation in past decades because they depreciated at a rate comparable to automobiles. Organ dealers and manufacturers, unlike pipe organ people, were primarily interested in making another sale especially when the customer discovered the limitations of the instrument purchased in good faith. Phoenix Organs have been designed and built to last beyond the life expectancy of the Phoenix electronics. Midi capabilities will allow future attachment via standard cables to any new organ sound producing technology such as the new PC-based systems that are becoming popular for home use. What about the actual organ console and components? Even pipe organ purists comment that Phoenix is one of the only electronic organ manufacturers that build consoles of pipe organ quality. This enables the organ to be retrofitted in the future because it is worth re-using. Other companies' products, even having been of better quality in the past than at present, are usually not worth re-cycling. The components are of pipe organ quality – dependable and trouble-free. In the distant future, if one of our organs needs repairs and we are no longer in the organ business or no other Phoenix technician is available, everything possible has been done to enable an independent organ technician to repair our products. Off-the-shelf components are one of the biggest points toward reaching this goal.

SERVICING PHOENIX ORGANS IN THE DISTANT FUTURE

Phoenix Organs, unlike its competitors, uses as many off-the-shelf components as possible. For example, unlike Allen Organs, we do not build our own power amplifiers. We use off-the-shelf high-quality amplifiers. Our power sequencer/conditioner/surge protector is made by another U.S. company, Furman. Our reverb units are from Lexicon; our power supplies are from Aztec and Progressive Dynamics in Michigan. The Phoenix Organ System is manufactured by Phoenix

in England. All of the ICs and other components in our electronics are off-the-shelf parts. Our standard keyboards are made by the world's largest keyboard company, Fatar of Italy, and for custom keyboards we use UHT of Germany, or Laukhuff of Germany. We do not make our own keyboards and this means that anyone can purchase the same ones as we do. Toe and thumb pistons are made by two respected US pipe organ suppliers, and our drawknobs are from Harris Precision, California. It is the same with all of the components listed.

This is not the case with the other major organ companies. Of course the memory chips contain sample and operational data that is unique to each organ and stored permanently inside each organ. This data is also carefully stored by us for future reference. The layout of the Phoenix System is simplified so that any electronics technician can find his way around it and replace most of the parts from common sources. The warranty is not cancelled simply because an independent technician has worked on it, but we do expect to communicate with any technician involved with a repair before anything is started. We can supply both telephone assistance and/or technical service manuals on our instruments for the use of an organ technician.

WHAT IF AN ORGAN COMPANY GOES OUT OF BUSINESS?

One of the world's largest organ companies in the 1960's and 70's was Conn Organs. Suddenly the company ceased to exist. Many Conn organs are still in use today and Phoenix has rebuilt some of their consoles so that they will continue in use for many more years to come. Large companies in particular can suddenly 'go under', especially when their massive payrolls cannot be met. Just because a company is large does not mean it is immune from closing down operations. It has been rumored, from a very reliable technician in the US with decades in the business, that one of the large, well-known mass-production organ companies "...is about to fold. This would be tragic, as all those organs out there would now be toast. No parts, unless someone bought them out."

It has also been stated that the other major mass-producer of digital organs has less than one quarter of their former staff, all laid off in just the past 2 to 3 years. Times are different in the present economy for any organ company. Phoenix's smaller, leaner business model has allowed us to weather tough economic times without lay-offs or any financial threat. As was seen with General Motors it is not a sure thing just because a company is large. Considering that church organs should last a minimum of 25 years, the reality is that technology does change. Organs now have MIDI connections and this can help drastically reduce the former high cost of upgrading an organ's sound. The Phoenix organ 'front end' not only makes it easy to connect a new electronic tone-producing system but it also makes it easy to attach a complete pipe organ. This is true for any Phoenix organ.

HOW LONG DO THE COMPUTER CHIPS LAST IN A PHOENIX ORGAN?

No one really knows how long computer chips last whether they are in an organ or a regular computer. Running on 5 volts DC makes it possible for them to last indefinitely. An organ subjected to power surges and/or a lightning strike can have a much shorter life expectancy if it is unprotected. Phoenix protects all of its components with a Furman power sequencer, which

has excellent protection against power problems. No equipment can be protected 100% against lightning. Experts insist that lightning produces static discharge in the air and will jump across and around even the best surge protectors.

PHOENIX COMPANY SUCCESSION

Phoenix Organs are built internationally. Manufacturing takes place in Canada, England, Ireland and Hungary. Each area has different tastes in organ building and this was acknowledged when the Phoenix Company was started in 1999. All are connected to Phoenix of England due to the fact that most of the electronics manufacturing and engineering takes place there but each company is independently owned and operated. For Phoenix in Canada, it is a family owned and operated business. Brothers Jim and Don Anderson are the owners. Don's sons who are principals of the company will take over the company eventually. Mark Anderson, 30, is head of design and woodworking; Phil Anderson, 27, is head of electronic assembly. Along with Don and Jim, these young men are dedicated not only to the continuation of the company, but also stand firm for the continued building of top quality church organs. Further to that Phil's son, Nolan, is 1 year old but so far has shown no interest in entering the organ business, but that could change.