

Sound Bite



where I found two dead notes. “Oh yes,” the organist said when I asked him about it. “That’s been a problem for a while.” Unfortunately, my schedule meant that I had to move on to the next church. Had the organist told me about the dead notes before I came, I could have fixed them and then tuned as time allowed.

On the other hand, please don’t be too specific. One organist went through her 90-rank organ and listed every note that she thought was out of tune. But what was she comparing each note to? It might have been the tuning rank that was slightly out of tune, rather than the note she referenced. A memo listing the few pipes that were making her crazy would have been more helpful than a list of 100 pipes to tune.



Luke Tegtmeier holds degrees in church music from Valparaiso University and Luther

Seminary. For 10 years he was a church musician in Minnesota. Since 2015 he has worked for Muller Pipe Organ Company near Columbus, OH. He welcomes your questions or comments: luke@mullerpipeorgan.com.

by Ben Hohenstein

How can musicians in traditional worship spaces make use of sound equipment/amplifiers in a way that won’t detract from the setting?

A sound system can be “obtrusive” in two ways.

One is visually. To cut down on that, a custom-designed system that is professionally installed would be the best choice. It could be matched to the color and architecture of the building. Installing multiple speakers around the room allows for each speaker to be smaller, since they’re responsible for a smaller area of the space.

The second is aurally. There’s a sweet spot where the amplified volume pairs naturally with the acoustic sound of the singer or instrument, so that the listener can’t really tell if the singer’s voice is carrying well or if they are actually being amplified. I often try to hit that sweet spot when I’m working with theater groups. Since it sounds

natural, the sound system is transparent to the listener, and they are not “taken out” of the experience. Push the volume too much and our brains tell us it’s not “real.” Sometimes that’s OK, but those sensitive to the issue would be unhappy. Also, this doesn’t really work with singers who don’t project: since they’re so much quieter, you have less room to amplify them before it sounds unnatural.



Ben Hohenstein works as a freelance audio engineer in southeastern

Wisconsin. Through his business, MKESoundMachine.com, he assists churches, bands, theaters, and many others in sounding their best. At his home church, Grace Lutheran in Milwaukee, Ben sings in numerous choirs and accompanies worship on tenor saxophone.

Do you have a sound or technology question for Ben? Send it to intempo@alcm.org. Please use the subject line “Sound Bite.” It may appear anonymously with an answer in an upcoming issue.

