

George Fincham's tonal palette: some thoughts on tonal design

John Maidment

EXTRACT FROM OHTA JOURNAL JULY 1995, pp.12-17.

Based on a paper delivered at the XVIIth Annual Conference of the Organ Historical Trust of Australia on 28 September 1994 at Christ Church, Warrnambool, Vic.

George Fincham, who was born in London in 1828, was apprenticed to Henry Bevington, organbuilder, of 48 Greek Street, Soho, on 1 May 1843, at the age of 14-1/2 years. This apprenticeship ran for a term of seven years, after which Fincham worked briefly as a foreman with James Bishop, another distinguished London organbuilder, before departing for Australia in 1852.

Both Bevington and Bishop were conservatively minded organbuilders and the range of stops in their instruments differed minimally from those built in the previous century, apart from the introduction of the Clarabella and improved manual and pedal compasses. There was not the sense of innovation to be found in the work of William Hill (based upon continental precedents) or, slightly later, Henry Willis.

Fincham would have doubtless visited the Great Exhibition of 1851, as a young man, and inspected the wide range of organs exhibited. The instruments by the continental builders Schulze, from Germany, and Ducroquet, from France, created a profound impression (and lasting influence) but it cannot be established that Fincham's organbuilding style was in any way affected by what he had seen and heard.

When Fincham began building organs in Melbourne in 1862, his tonal vocabulary was limited to the type of stops he would have been familiar with in the organs built by Bevington and Bishop. The diapasons consisted of a modest-scaled unison, Principal, Twelfth, Fifteenth and Mixture, or Sesquialtera, of three ranks, composition 17.19.22, a pattern he followed consistently well up to 1900 and beyond. The flutes were exclusively of wooden construction and could be divided into those of open or stopped formation. The open flutes consisted of a Clarabella (usually with a stopped bass) - no doubt influenced by the work of Bishop, a 4ft open Flute and a 2ft open Piccolo. The stopped flutes were usually limited to a 16ft manual stop termed Double Diapason (actually a Bourdon) and an 8ft Stopped Diapason. 4ft wooden stopped flutes were not adopted at this time. Small-scale flues were limited to a Dulciana, and, very rarely at this time, strings such as a Viol di Gamba (Bell Gamba) of flared conical formation, or a Keraulophon. Pedal stops were limited to a small-scaled wooden Open Diapason, and less often a Bourdon 16ft. Reeds were restricted to a Trumpet (which could appear on either great or swell), a Cornopean (frequently adopted, even on single-manual organs) and an Oboe.

Changes to this fairly rigid early pattern were influenced by a number of factors:

1. Imported organs
2. Consultants/organists
3. Changing repertoire
4. Correspondence with other builders/journals
5. Experimentation/innovation
6. Ideas introduced by employees such as Hobday or Dodd
7. Stylistic shift
8. Changing concepts of tonal design

IMPORTED ORGANS

Imported organs were a potent influence on Fincham's work and resulted, as far as can be ascertained, in the introduction of many new colours. The work of many distinguished English and continental builders arrived in Melbourne from the 1860s onwards, including the illustrious names of Gray & Davison, William Hill & Son, T.C. Lewis & Company, Merklin-Schutze & Cie, Henry Willis and J.W. Walker & Sons. Many of the instruments built by these firms included stops which were alien to Fincham's initial tonal vocabulary, as outlined earlier.

The most potent influence was the Hill & Son organ which was opened in the Melbourne Town Hall in 1872. From this instrument Fincham derived numerous tonal colours, including the following registers:

Violon, Harmonic Flute

Salicional, Flute Octaviante

Harmonic Gemshorn, Tuba Mirabilis

Suabe Flute, Posaune

Many of the features of this instrument, such as the enclosed chorus of imitative reeds on the solo organ (Bassoon, Clarinet, Orchestral Oboe, Vox Humana, Oboe Clarion) were copied by Fincham for such instruments as the Melbourne Exhibition of 1880, Adelaide Town Hall, Freemason's Hall and the Australian Church. In fact, the 1880 Exhibition instrument was a larger development of the Hill model. Fincham's frequent adoption of tapered ranks, however, predates the Hill instrument (1871: Christ Church, Daylesford and All Saints', East St Kilda).

Selected stops from other imported organs also doubtless acted as models. The Walker organ at St Stephen's, Richmond included a flared Gamba on the great, a formation which subsequently surfaced in the late 1880s as the large-scale *Loud Gamba* on great organ divisions. The Gray & Davison organ at St Patrick's, Ballarat (1867) possessed a Keraulophon, a speciality of the builders, and this stop was adopted with alacrity from the 1870s onwards,

appearing up to the first decade of the present century. The use of Geigen Principals in the swell may be attributed either to the Lewis organ at St George's, East St Kilda (1881) or the Hunter organ imported by Fincham in 1887. Strangely enough, Fincham never made stopped metal Gedacts, in the Schulze-Lewis style, and only in one organ did he incorporate such a register to my knowledge (1875 for Henry Miller; to John Knox Church, Gardenvale 1878), this black metal stop being of earlier provenance. Lewis's organbuilding style exerted little influence; this is only discernible in the use of two-rank great quint Mixtures, of bold voicing, in several Adelaide Fincham & Hobday instruments.

CONSULTANTS/ORGANISTS

Fincham worked with a number of consultants in the tonal design and construction of his instruments. Dr G.W. Torrance and Fincham built 17 organs in collaboration. Torrance's predilections may be seen in the provision of a great Stopped Diapason in preference to a Claribel in several instances (Balaclava, Maldon).

REPERTOIRE

The need to perform orchestral transcriptions doubtless resulted in a wider range of flute, string and reed colours being provided.

The range of flutes was expanded to include Hohl Flutes, Harmonic Flutes, Suabe Flutes, Wald Flutes, Rohr Flutes, Flautinas and Flageolets. We can observe interesting pairings of Flute stops: Hohlflote/Rohrflote (cf Hill at Adelaide Town Hall); Gedact/Suabe Flute; Claribel/Wald Flute. At the Australian Church, some more exotic pairings were to be found: Lieblich Gedact/Gedact Flute; Flute Harmonic/Flute Octaviante.

The organ at the Australian Church also included no less than four tapered ranks: Gamba 8ft on the great (a Cone Gamba); Gemshorn 4 and Harmonic Gemshorn 2 on the choir (a pairing also used at Christ Church, Warrnambool shortly afterwards); and solo Spitzflute 8ft, the only situation in which Fincham adopted such a register.

The range of strings was expanded from the earlier Keraulophons to include Gambas, Celestes, Salicionals (more rarely) and the unenclosed great Loud Gamba. Wooden Violons appeared on pedal divisions. The Dulciana was sometimes accompanied by a gentle undulating Angelica.

Both chorus and imitative reeds increasingly occurred in greater variety. The Posaune and Trombone appeared together with the frequent adoption of Clarions in larger organs. At the Australian Church, the great 8ft reed was called Tromba, and the swell reed Horn, but these are the only known instances of this practice and it is believed that the names did not necessarily indicate a change in voicing or scaling practice. The influence of the Hill orchestral reed chorus at Melbourne Town Hall has been mentioned. Clarionets appeared not only in the choir divisions of three-manual organs, but also as unenclosed reeds on the great division of two-manual organs. An Orchestral Oboe and a Vox Humana were considered indispensable for larger instruments. At the Australian Church, a Cor Anglais 8ft was provided, but the resonators of this stop do not have inverted bells, but merely have capped and slotted bells (Henry Willis also made his choir Cor Anglais stops at Blenheim Palace (1891) of Oboe formation).

CORRESPONDENCE / READING

It is recorded that Fincham corresponded frequently with his friend, the London organbuilder Alfred Hunter, who supplied him with the latest technical information. No doubt, Hunter also supplied pipe scales and voicing information. Overseas journals, such as *Musical Opinion* and the *Musical Standard* published extensive articles on contemporary organs and included large numbers of specifications, in which Fincham could have discerned changes in tonal design.

EXPERIMENTATION / INNOVATION

Fincham's adoption of 10-1/2 inch wind for both the flue and reed stops of the fourth manual, named *Grand Organ*, for the 1880 Exhibition Building, was a remarkable innovation, made necessary by the vast size of the building and the need for astonishing power. The voicing of the two *Tubae* was no doubt copied from that of the Hill specimens at the Melbourne Town Hall, but the fluework (Gemshorn chorus 8-4-2 and Horn Diapasons 8-4) was quite likely the heaviest wind pressure upon which such stops had so far been voiced. Regrettably, no evidence survives for how these stops were scaled and voiced, although it would seem that the pipes were of very large scale, of heavy metal and with wide mouths.

IDEAS INTRODUCED BY EMPLOYEES

Many of the organs built by the Fincham & Hobday partnership show interesting characteristics, especially those built in Adelaide under Arthur Hobday's supervision. These included the insertion of a 2ft Harmonic Piccolo on the great in lieu of a Fifteenth, a two-rank great Mixture and the frequent adoption of a great Clarinet of large scale.

STYLISTIC SHIFT

As the 19th century wound to its conclusion, the incidence of upperwork on Fincham's instruments declined and more unison registers were inserted. Larger instruments often included at least four unison flues on the great, including an Open, Loud Gamba, Claribel and Dulciana. The swell, in larger instruments, included three unison reeds: a Cornopean, Oboe and Vox Humana.

CHANGING CONCEPTS OF TONAL DESIGN

Fincham's work is consistently conservative for much of the period 1862-1900 except during the later 1880s and early 1890s, when opportunities existed for building larger instruments, and the influence of Arthur Hobday was possibly strong. For example, tierce Mixtures were rigorously adhered to, except for the largest organs (1880 exhibition, Australian Church and St Kilda Town Hall) when five rank quint and unison mixtures 15.19.22.26.29 were provided.

Double reeds were adopted sparingly. They appeared on the largest instruments, on pedal divisions as a Trombone, but 16ft manual chorus reeds were a rarity and only adopted at the 1880 Exhibition (great and swell), Australian Church (swell), St Kilda Town Hall (swell), St Mark's, Wellington (swell: prepared-for) and St Mary's, West Melbourne (great).

OPPORTUNITIES

Fincham was fortunate to have the opportunity to build a number of large instruments in which he was able to demonstrate an expanded tonal vocabulary. These included the following:

1872 Exhibition organ (Horn Diapason)

1880 Exhibition organ (many stops, especially orchestral and heavy pressure registers and 32ft pedal stops)

1888 Exhibition organ -> Freemason's Hall (orchestral registers, 32ft Subbass)

1890 Australian Church (remarkable development of tapered, flute and orchestral tonalities)

1892 St Kilda Town Hall (enlightened tonal design, with elements of above)

1895 St Mark's, Wellington (rebuild with double reed on swell, double string on choir)

After 1895, and Hobday's departure, there are no further tonal developments until the earlier years of the present century where string registers were expanded to include narrow-scale registers such as the Viol d'Orchestre and String Gamba.

GEORGE FINCHAM'S TONAL VOCABULARY

summary table

Diapasons

cylindrical

Open Diapason, Horn Diapason, Violin Diapason, Geigen Principal [Doubles at 16 and 32ft, Principal/Octave, Twelfth/Octave Quint, Fifteenth/Superoctave, Sesquialtera, Mixture, Glockenspiel].

tapered

Gemshorn 8 + 4 + 2, Harmonic Gemshorn 2

small-scale

Dulciana, Angelica [Vox Angelica], Dulcet, Dulciana Mixture

Flutes

open

Clarabella/Claribel, Hohl Flute, Wald Flute, Suabe Flute, Clear Flute, Piccolo, Flageolet, Flautina

harmonic

Harmonic Flute 8 + 4, Flute Octavante, Harmonic Piccolo

tapered

Spitzflute

stopped

Bourdon/Double Diapason, Stopped Diapason, Gedact, Lieblich Gedact, Rohr Flote, Gedact Flute

Strings

Viol de Gamba (Bell Gamba), Keraulophon, Gamba, Celeste, Loud Gamba, Violon 16 + 8, Viola, Violoncello, Salicional

Reeds

chorus reeds

Trumpet, Posaune, Cornopean, Horn, Tromba, Clarion, Trombone, Double Trumpet, Tuba Mirabilis 8 + 4.

flared

Oboe, Oboe Clarion

->

imitative

Bassoon, Clarionet, Orchestral Oboe, Cor Anglais, Vox Humana.