



February 2000 Meeting Notice

Tour of the Paul Fritts and Co. Organ Builders, Tacoma WA **by Paul Fritts, owner** **Organ performance by Professor David Dahl, Pacific Lutheran University**

Date: Saturday, February 5, 2000 - 10:00 AM

Place: Pacific Lutheran University Lagerquist Hall, then Paul Fritts & Co shop (12 blocks away)

Directions: Meet first at PLU - South of Tacoma on Interstate 5, exit 127 eastbound on Highway 512. Take the first exit (Steele) and turn left on Steele. Follow this four lane street as it crosses 112th and continues past McChord airbase, turns 90 degrees left, then 90 degrees right and at Wheeler (sign is the only one on the right side of the street) turn left. When Wheeler ends you are at the back side of PLU Lagerquist Hall, part of the Mary Baker Russell Music Center. There is a large lot with plenty of free parking, or park on the street.

After a short performance/demonstration at PLU, we move to the Fritts shop, 12 blocks east on 121st street. The shop address is 630 East 121st St.

Organ building is an exciting and exacting art with a tradition stretching back more than six hundred years. Many of the instruments throughout Europe built centuries ago are still in service today. Anyone who has taken an acoustics class was surely introduced to basic principles of acoustics with the pipe organ column example. The pipe organ represents a grand culmination of acoustics, physics, mechanics, music, art and science - and has done so for well over half a millennium. They are often called "the king of instruments."

Paul Fritts and Co. is one of about 20 firms in the country which builds "tracker" or mechanical-action organs, as opposed to electric or pneumatic actuation. This means the action allowing air to pass to the pipes is purely mechanical. The design of the tracker organ hasn't changed much since medieval times. Pressing a key activates a series of levers, springs and push rods that let the air pass to the pipes. The distance between the keys and the pipes can exceed 30 feet.

Organs vary greatly in size, but examples like we will view, the Fritts built Gottfried and Mary Fuchs Organ at PLU's Lagerquist Hall, can cost \$1 million, weigh 8 tons, contain 3800 pipes and take years to design and construct.

Every component is designed and made in their Tacoma shop. All wooden parts are constructed of woods carefully seasoned and selected. For the metal pipes, alloys of lead and tin are prepared and cast into sheets in the shop, from which the pipes are formed. Final voicing and tuning is done after installation. Fritts organs may be thought of as modern expressions of organ qualities that defined the period known as the Golden Age of organ building, the 1500s - 1800s.

We will meet first at PLU to see and hear the Gottfried and Mary Fuchs Organ at Lagerquist Hall. Professor David Dahl of PLU will play a short recital for us. We will then move 12 blocks

to the Fritts shop to see the construction facilities.

Paul Fritts is a Tacoma native. Pipe organs have been a significant part of his life from an early age along with studies that included music and violin performance. Through 1980 he worked with his father completing organ projects throughout Washington and Alaska. He then formed a partnership with Ralph Richards, and the Fritts-Richards shop built eight organs from 1986-89. The partnership was reorganized as a sole proprietorship at the end of 1989. Paul has earned a worldwide reputation for excellent wood craftsmanship and attention to detail. The installation at Pacific Lutheran University is the twenty-first instrument to be built by the firm. The group has built or renovated organs in churches, universities and private homes all over the country, including St. Mark's Cathedral in Seattle, Grace Lutheran Church in Tacoma, the University of Washington, Arizona State University and Stanford University-Memorial Chapel. Future projects include an organ for Princeton Theological Seminary, a "Bach" Central German inspired organ for Vassar College, a chapel organ for St. Mark's Cathedral in Seattle and a major recital organ for Notre Dame University.

David Dahl, M.A., A.A.G.O., is professor of music and university organist at PLU, as well as director of music ministries at Christ Church in Tacoma. He has served in both positions since 1970. Active as a teacher, performer, clinician and organ advisor for more than 30 years, he has had a lifelong interest in the history of organ building, particularly the development of mechanical-action (tracker) organs in America, both historic and contemporary. He has served as advisor for more than 30 pipe organ projects in the Pacific Northwest during the past 40 years.

PLU organ data: <<http://www.plu.edu/pluexper/interest/organ/facts.html>>

NON-MEMBERS ARE WELCOME TO ATTEND