INTRODUCTION TO THE ORGAN CONSOLE
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One of the most intimidating parts of the learning the organ is managing and mastering the various devices of the organ console. The principals of organ console management remain the same regardless of size. Organs generally include many if not all of the following: draw knobs, rocker tabs, thumb pistons, toe pistons (toe studs), expression and crescendo pedals, and other registration aids.

Music Rack

Rocker Tabs
Draw Knobs
Swell
Great
Set Piston

Expression and Crescendo Indicators
Thumb Pistons
General Cancel

Expression Pedals
Toe Pistons
Pedalboard

Crescendo Pedal

Console

The control center of the organ is called the Console. It could even be considered the organist’s “cockpit.” From the console the organist can control the keyboards, pedalboard, stops, couplers, expression pedals, crescendo pedals, pistons, rocker tabs, and many other registration aids.

Keyboards

Organs located in LDS meetinghouses are generally limited in size to two manuals (a keyboard played by the hands) and a pedalboard (a keyboard played by the feet). Each keyboard is named for the Division or section of pipes that it controls. The divisions on a two-manual and pedal organ are named the Great (lower keyboard), Swell (upper keyboard), and Pedal. Other common names (USA) for divisions on larger organs include: Choir, Positive, Solo, Antiphonal. The keyboard manual is generally five octaves (61 notes), while the pedalboard is two and one-half octaves (32 notes).

Stops

Different voices or sounds on an organ are controlled by Stops. The term “stop” is derived from the ability of an organist to either “engage” or “stop” the flow of air to individual organ voices. Each stop
usually controls one Rank (or set) of pipes. Stops that control multiple ranks of pipes are referred to as Compound Stops. (Roman numerals indicate the number of ranks included in a compound stop.)

The names given to individual stops reflect the tonal characteristics and construction of different ranks of organ pipes. Stop nomenclature is a relatively good indicator of the style of organ building. Stop names found on organs built in the north German Baroque style are generally derived from the German language, while similar stop names on organs built in the French Romantic style will usually be French. The lack of consistency and standardization in stop nomenclature can be confusing to a beginning organist, since identical stops may be given different names.

Stops are activated at the organ console by pulling out Draw Knobs located on the Stop Jambs on some organs. On other organs, the organist selects stops from the Rocker Tabs located below the Music Desk and above the upper manual.

**Couplers**

Stops located in one division can be played from the keyboards of other divisions through non-speaking stops called Couplers. The “Swell to Great” coupler, as its name suggests, allows stops drawn in the Swell division to be played on the Great manual. Coupling manuals together can also allow stops from different divisions to be combined. Through the use of couplers, the organist can create a wide variety of tonal effects. Couplers also allow all the stops of the organ to be played simultaneously from one manual.

No pitch designation is needed when an organ has couplers only at unison pitch. Pitch designations are given when an organ is supplied with Octave Couplers, which add the pipes an octave above (Super-Octave Coupler) or below (Sub-Octave Coupler) each note that is played. The super-octave coupler is usually indicated with 4’ in the nomenclature, while the sub-octave coupler is indicated with 16’. The unison coupler is often indicated by the 8’ when octave couplers are included.

Couplers that allow stops from different divisions to be combined are referred to as Inter-Manual Couplers, while octave couplers used within a single division (an example would be Swell to Swell 16’) are called Intra-Manual Couplers. Some organs feature Unison Off Couplers. Using these couplers prevents stops drawn in a particular division from sounding at their normal or “unison” pitch.

**Pistons**

Organists combine organ stops in many different ways, resulting in a wide variety of sounds. The combination of stops used for a particular organ composition (or smaller section of a composition) is referred to as the Registration.

The Combination Action is used by organists to switch registrations more quickly than changing stops by hand. The most common combination actions features Pistons, which are programmable buttons that can be Preset by the organist. Thumb Pistons are located beneath the keys of each manual, while Toe Pistons (also called “toe studs”) are located above the pedalboard.

Pistons are divided into two main categories: general, divisional. All piston not included in one of these categories are considered specialty pistons, and are designed for a specific tasks. The majority of all pistons fall into either the general or divisional categories. General Pistons allow organists to preset registrations that involve all stops and couplers throughout the entire organ. Divisional Pistons, on the other hand, are used when setting registrations involving stops from a specific division only.

Many organs have only one set of pistons — general pistons. These are centered underneath one or both manuals. If an organ contains both general and divisional pistons, the general pistons are usually located underneath the manual(s) on the left.

Not all pistons fit into the general and divisional categories. Pistons that do not fit into either of these...
categories are can be safely assigned to the specialty category by default. Included in this specialty
category are the ever-important **Set Piston** (used to set general and division combinations pistons) and
the **General Cancel Piston** (used for canceling combinations as its name implies).

Other uses for pistons include the **Tutti Piston** (also referred as the **Sforzando Piston**), this
**Reversible Piston** adds the full organ resources of the organ. Other reversible pistons add or subtract
predetermined individual stops or couplers. (Examples of reversible pistons could include a toe piston
that controls a Bourdon 32’ stop in the pedal division, or a thumb piston that controls the Swell to Pedal
coupler.)

Uses for thumb and pedal pistons are seem almost limitless; they can be used to engage novelty stops like
the **Zimbels stern**. They can also be used to activate technology like **MIDI** (Musical Instrument Digital
Interface) or utilized with devices like **Transposers**.

**Expression and Crescendo Pedals**

Expression and crescendo pedals control the volume of the organ through different means. **Expression
Pedals** control the volume of the organ without requiring the addition or subtraction of individual stops.
In a traditional two-manual pipe organ, the Swell division is enclosed in a box with shutters that are
opened and closed by an expression pedal.

Most LDS meetinghouse organs have either one or two expression pedals. If only one expression pedal is
present it will usually affect the volume of the entire organ. When two or more expression pedals are
present, each pedal will control the volume of a different division.

An organ may also have a **Crescendo Pedal**, which is located to the right of the expression pedals.
Pressing the crescendo pedal with the ball of the foot will gradually engage the stops of the organ in a pre-
determined order, beginning with the softest stops and ending with the loudest; pressing with the heel
will reverse this process.

*Presented by Daniel Berghout at the 2008 Brigham Young University Organ Workshop.*