

The Pleasant Grove Experience

Advertisement in ROS Quarterly Leads to Recording of Organ Music

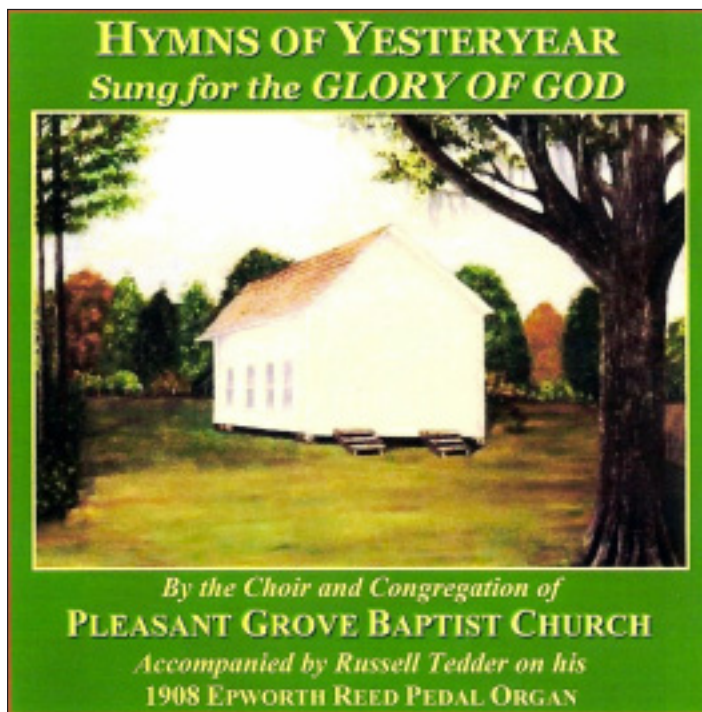
by Russell Tedder

AN advertisement in a recent *ROS Quarterly* led to a recording on a CD of great hymns of faith sung to the accompaniment of my Epworth reed pedal organ. In the Winter 2005 issue, ROS member David Stone of Huntsville, Ala., requested CDs of organ music suitable for churches. As an amateur organist and member of ROS, I responded with an offer of a CD that I had recorded in 2004.

This initial contact led to exchanges of e-mails between Dave Stone and me that resulted in a bond of friendship in the ensuing months. This bond came not only from our mutual love of reed pedal organ music, but by our common experiences in our early years. Although he grew up in rural



Pleasant Grove Baptist Church was established in 1879. (Photo courtesy of Patricia Rowell.)



An artist's rendition of the early wood framed Church built at the turn of the 20th century is featured on the cover of the CD album. The Estey reed pedal organ was used here from 1925 to 1950. (Author's collection.)

Kentucky and I in rural North Florida, the similarities of our upbringings are remarkable. Both included personal experiences with reed pedal organs in country churches during the 1940s.

As our discussion of reed organs progressed, Dave suggested that I try to arrange for a small rural church with

strong congregational singing capability to record a CD of old hymns with me accompanying them on the Epworth organ.

My first thought was to find a small church in the Little Rock area where I now live. However, I later decided to ask the Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, a rural church in



Russell Tedder plays the prelude, "How Firm a Foundation," on his Epworth reed pedal organ in the Sunday morning worship service at Pleasant Grove on October 29, 2006. (Photo courtesy Joe Burroughs.)

Taylor County, Fla., where I grew up, if the people there would like to participate in such a project. The response

was very positive.

Pleasant Grove has a 35-voice choir that would be a credit to many larger churches. In 2002, the Church moved into an attractive new building that seats 300 in its



Minister of Music Clyde Cruce directs the choir and congregation and organist Russell Tedder during the recording session at Pleasant Grove. (Photo courtesy Sandy Tedder.)

sanctuary, an ideal location for recording. Along with the choir and congregation, Pastor Danny Lundy and Minister of Music Clyde Cruce were highly supportive throughout the project.

The Church decided that the recording session should be a worship service and not a performance. Using the theme, "For the Glory of God," plans were made to devote the Sunday evening worship service on October 29, 2006 to the recording. During the extended two-hour worship service,



The choir and congregation of Pleasant Grove sing an old hymn to the accompaniment of the reed pedal organ. (Photo courtesy Sandy Tedder.)

approximately 75 voices in the choir and congregation sang the old hymns while I accompanied them on the Epworth organ. There were no re-takes.

The purpose of the album is to record and preserve for posterity the singing of some of the great hymns of faith to the accompaniment of a reed pedal organ much like the Estey organ that the Church used from 1925 until 1950. My mother was the organist during these years.

Clyde Cruce, the very capable Minister of Music, read selected verses from many of the great hymns of faith to convey the Gospel story before the choir and congregation sang.

The album begins with an organ solo of "I Will Arise and Go to Jesus," a minor key composition from the old *Southern Harmony* songbook. The song was popular in churches during the 19th and early 20th centuries. It is one of



My Epworth reed pedal organ was built by Williams Organ Company of Chicago in 1908 and was used in a small country church in neighboring Madison County, Fla., until I acquired it over 40 years ago. ROS member Coleman Kimbrell of Florence, Alabama restored the organ to its original condition in 2003. (Author's collection.)

the hymns that would have been sung *a cappella* at Pleasant Grove from the time of its organization in 1879 until the Estey reed pedal organ was bought in 1925.

The first hymn accompanied by the organ is the majestic "How Firm a Foundation." Like each succeeding hymn, it conveys the Gospel story.

Other hymns include: "At the Cross," "When We All Get to Heaven," "Brethren, We Have Met to Worship," "There Is Power in the Blood," "Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound," "Tell Me the Story of Jesus," "We'll Work Till Jesus Comes," "The Old Rugged Cross," "Blessed Assurance," "Standing on the Promises," "On Jordan's Stormy Banks," and "There's a Land That Is Fairer Than Day."



Sammy Tedder monitors the controls as he records the hymns sung to the accompaniment of the Epworth reed pedal organ at the Pleasant Grove Experience. (Photo courtesy Sandy Tedder.)



While the author looks on, David Stone discusses his display of reed pedal organs with a group at the Pleasant Grove Experience. (Photo courtesy Sandy Tedder.)



Russell Tedder plays the Epworth reed pedal organ in preparation for the recording session. (Photo courtesy Sandy Tedder.)



David Stone's Cobb organ was an object of much interest from those who attended the Pleasant Grove Experience. (Photo courtesy Sandy Tedder.)



Minister of Music Clyde Cruce directs the choir, congregation and organist during the Pleasant Grove Experience. (Photo courtesy by Sandy Tedder.)

One verse each of two of selections are sung *a cappella* to replicate singing in worship services in the early years before the Estey organ was acquired in 1925.

The last hymn by the choir and congregation is "Take the Name of Jesus with You," a very fitting admonition for the worshipers as they leave to return to their daily lives.

The album closes with another organ solo, a lively rendition of the Stamps-Baxter hymn, "Where the Soul of Man Never Dies." Beginning with the words, "To Canaan's Land, I'm On My Way," this hymn demonstrates the range of capabilities of the Epworth reed pedal organ. More importantly, it expresses the believer's assurance of eternal life.

My good friend David Stone came down from Huntsville, Ala., to participate in the recording service. David owns

eleven reed pedal organs of varying types and brought three to display in the foyer of the Church. Included in the display were an Army Chaplain's box organ, a box organ made in Japan, a Cobb organ, and my Estey box organ.



David Stone's Japanese made box organ on display during the Pleasant Grove Experience. Reed pedal organ literature was also available for those who were interested. (Photo courtesy Sandy Tedder.)



The HYMNS OF YESTERYEAR album was recorded in the sanctuary of this new building which the Church moved into in 2002. It is located on Alton Wentworth Road between the villages of Shady Grove and Eridu in rural Taylor County, Florida. (Photo courtesy Patricia Rowell.)

Dave answered questions from the many who stopped to view and inquire about the organs. The Cobb organ seemed to generate the most interest.

Dave's sister and brother-in-law, Larry and Lois Summers of Georgetown, Ky., and Cape San Blas, Fla., also attended. Other guests for the special event were members of my family from Brooksville, Lakeland and Tallahassee, Florida, and many friends and family members from the nearby county seat town of Perry, Florida.



In the shadows of the trees in the peaceful grove surrounding the Church, the headstone markers in the Pleasant Grove cemetery are silent reminders of those who cherished worship services with reed pedal organs. (Photo courtesy Sandy Tedder.)

For Dave and me, our families, and others from our generation, this recording recreates sounds of our early youth. Beyond nostalgia, we believe that this recording captures an important chapter in the history of religious music in this country.

For slightly less than a century the reed organ was an integral part of worship in thousands of small churches throughout this land. During the two World Wars, and in times of peace, chaplains used the folding or box organs issued to them when conducting worship in chapels, on training grounds, or on battlefields. As missionaries worked in many lands they carried with them the portable organs, and often later acquired larger organs as they established churches.

Whether in small churches, in military settings, or in the mission fields, the reed organ stood up remarkably well to the extremes of temperature and climate. Those reading this publication almost certainly love the old reed organs and the music they provide. But, for far too many now, these instruments seem only an antique or relic. We feel that recordings demonstrating the capacity of these instruments, as well as their various usages, should be much more available. We wonder if there are others who might consider recording projects.

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