

Don't count out the church organ just yet, some worship leaders assert

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ORLANDO, Fla. (ABP)—Sometimes worship music should be energetic, light or joyful, and that's when pianos, drums and guitars do the trick, Shaun King said.



Guest organist Joanna Wallace performs during worship at College Park Baptist Church in Orlando.

But then there are times when the sound needs to be "bigger and in your face," said King, senior pastor of [College Park Baptist Church in Orlando](#). That's when a church needs an organ.

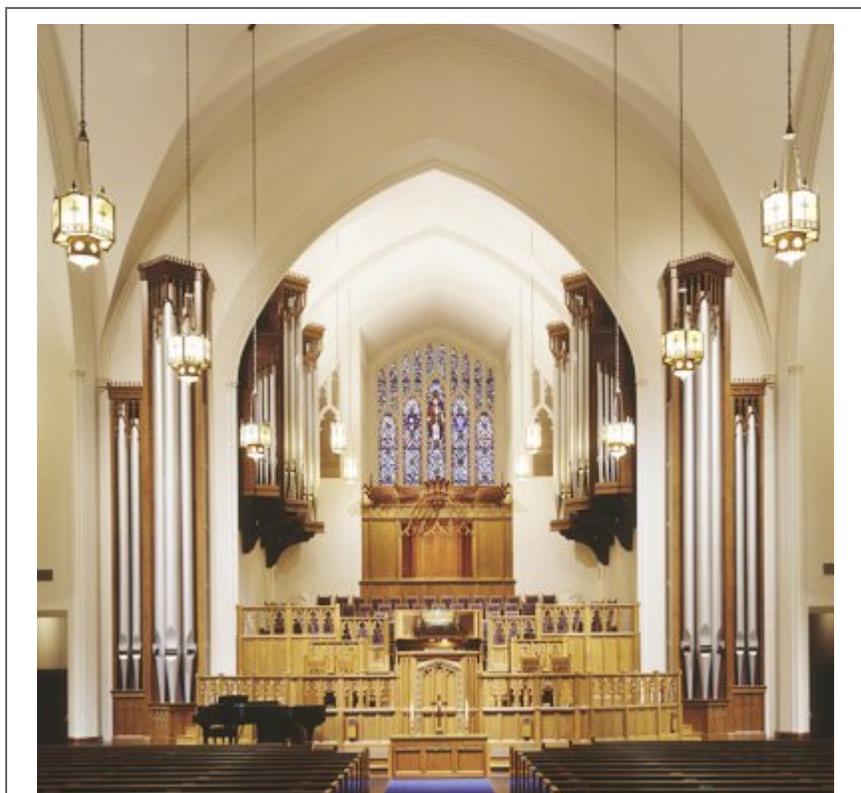
"When there needs to be a bigness that envelops everyone in the room, the organ can do that," said King. His church has had an organ all of its 85

years, and today blends it into an integrated worship style that ranges from praise and worship to orchestral.

Experts who play, study and make organs note King's attitude is becoming increasingly common in churches across the denominational spectrum.

The organ—whether electric, digital or pipe—is enjoying a comeback after suffering declines in the 1990s and early 2000s, despite price tags that range from the hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars.

"There are a lot of naysayers who say the organ is dead, but that's simply not true," said Frederick Swann, an internationally acclaimed organ master who performed on Crystal Cathedral broadcasts for 16 years.



Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth has the largest pipe organ in Texas, with more than 10,000 pipes, and the largest of its specific design in the world. (PHOTOS/ABP)

Swann, who also consults, leads organ workshops and gives recitals around the globe, said interest in the organ waned as modern worship forms surged in the late 1980s.

As a result, university organ programs suffered from lack of interest, and organists became generally harder to find.

"But they are now burgeoning with students again," Swann said of the college programs. And organ recitals at churches increasingly are packed, he said.

"This is good news for those of us who build pipe organs," said Charles Hendrickson, founder and president of the [Hendrickson Organ Co.](#) in St. Peter, Minn.

"It is true that pipe organs have been in decline for some years as churches sought other musical styles," Hendrickson said. "But a return to the traditional and classical pipe organ is encouraging after the earlier decreases."

The upward swing was being noticed as early as 2003 when PipeOrgans.com reported 100 to 200 new instruments were being built in the United States and Canada annually. Industry sales were around \$70 million a year, [according to the article](#).

With the exception of a dip during the recent recession, Hendrickson said, the outlook has continued to improve.



Shaun King, senior pastor of College Park Baptist Church in Orlando, said the organ helps connect worshippers with the historic roots of their faith.

Swann attributes the turn-around to what he sees as spiritual yearning for inspirational music. "A lot of people feel the organ has a soul, either through its beautiful quietness or enormous volume," he said. "It's a very thrilling sound."

More people apparently are feeling that way outside the church as well, said Brent Beasley, senior pastor at [Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth](#). Beasley's church hosts the largest pipe organ in Texas and the largest of its specific design in the world, said Swann, who consulted on its installation and played its inaugural recital in 1996.

Broadway's organ recitals are packed by listeners mostly from outside the congregation, Beasley said, which tells him there's a growing appreciation for the instrument in the general population.

Within the church, Beasley said, he's hearing from younger Christians who enjoy the organ, perhaps signaling an urge to explore their faith's roots.

"We're seeing a generation who grew up with contemporary worship, and a lot of them are looking for something else," he said.

David Mikesell, age 20, grew up worshipping at College Park Baptist in Orlando and has come to love the organ in worship. But he also likes the energetic praise-and-worship style at the student services he attends at Florida State University.

"There's an attitude that the organ can be stuffy," Mikesell said. "But I think Christian music has a long and rich history, and the organ is indispensable."