

Unit 8

Expressive vs. Non-Expressive Pipes

Organ pipes always sound at full volume. It matters not how gently one depresses a key on an organ, the pipes called into use sound at their maximum volume. So, how does one control the volume of a pipe organ?

In order to control the volume of a pipe organ, one or more of its divisions must be enclosed in a box with shutters (a.k.a. shades) that open and close. In the picture (right), notice pipes sitting inside an enclosed division with *swell shutters* (*shades*). These shutters are opened and



closed by the organist at the console, using *swell shades* (a.k.a. *swell shoes* or *expression pedals*). Thus, when the swell shades are fully open, the full sound of the pipes is heard. The full sound of the pipes is diminished according to the number of shutters that are partially or fully closed, or opened.

Historically, certain divisions of the pipe organ are *exposed* or *under expression* depending on the organ building school practices at the time the organ was built. It is generally agreed that the idea of putting some of the organ's pipes in a box with shutters happened around 1712 with the English builder Abraham Jordan. A more in-depth study of the development of expressive and non expressive divisions of the organ comes at a later stage in your organ study.

In the first photograph (below), the swell shutters are closed. In the second, the shutters are partially open. In the third photograph the shutters are fully open.

