

Hello all!

So lots of changes to Grace's collection of instruments! Let's go over a couple :)

You'll notice that the narthex now has a concert grand piano in it! We were very lucky in this regard—a friend of mine asked if we wanted it FREE OF CHARGE, and so we obviously jumped on it! It's an early twentieth century Chickering, hand built in Boston, Massachusetts (the Henry F. Miller in the choir loft was also built in Boston, around the same time—the “Golden Age” of piano building). For those who may not know, Chickering is one of “the Big Five” American piano builders—Baldwin, Steinway, Mason & Hamlin, Knabe, and Chickering. These represent the best of the best that the United States has ever offered, out of its literally thousands of piano manufacturers of the 19th and 20th centuries. Incidentally, only two American piano manufacturers remain—Steinway and Mason & Hamlin.

Chickering was the very first American piano builder (!!!) and is responsible for many of the innovations we see in modern pianos even today (ask me about overstrung bass strings—Chickering invented these)! Chickering was also the piano builder of choice to the White House for decades, and was Abraham Lincoln's favorite piano company!

Abraham Lincoln's White House had a Chickering grand piano it...and now Grace has one.

If only the before and after photos could do it justice...when this piano arrived at Grace in late December, it was in rough shape, cosmetically. Through trial and error and with the help of several of our members, we've shined it up quite a bit! If you're handy with woodworking/staining, feel free to take a look at it! The lid could still certainly use some attention.

Luckily for us, the entire insides of the piano have been replaced. It has been restrung, complete with a new pinblock and pins, as well as having had the felts, dampers, hammers, and action completely replaced. For those who may not know, this process is EXTREMELY costly, and is the reason that this piano sounds and plays so magnificently.

It is said that Chickering always knew how to give their instruments “soul”, so it's very fitting that this masterpiece should grace (haha...) our narthex.

Moving on to the sanctuary...

After nearly a year of searching literally every single day, we found a hand built Baldwin SD6 concert grand from the mid 1950's for the front of the sanctuary! I cannot speak positively enough about this instrument. Suffice to say, there's a reason countless artists chose Baldwin over Steinway every day. The tenor and bass are astonishingly rich, and the treble is crystalline and bell-like. For those who haven't yet heard it in our sanctuary, you're in for a treat.

The Baldwin came to us from Santa Barbara, California, where the temperate climate babied the spruce soundboard. It's also been restrung and outfitted with Abel (high-end German) hammers, and it will do exactly what you ask it to. Seriously, you should play it...it's capable of sounds thunderous to whisper-like.

And finally, as of today (I'm writing this in early January), Grace is now home to a beautiful Lowery Stardust organ! I'll confess—I have no idea what I'm doing with it, just yet. It has so. Many. Buttons. But from every demo I've seen, it makes an almost infinite number of sounds, and it can play itself!

Not that we're counting, but Grace is now home to three hand built concert grand pianos (concert grand = 9 ft in length) and not one but two organs. There may be only a handful of other churches in the world (if any) that can say the same.

Basically, Grace's appreciation for/support of music is awesome.

Pianists/keyboardists of the congregation—feel free to play the pianos! Maybe let's don't set things (especially drinks and keys) on them, and yeah, we definitely don't want to bang on them, but they were specifically brought here with the purpose of filling the building with music. I remember when I was growing up, Trinity Lutheran in Lowell was gifted a Young Chang baby grand piano. It was only 5 feet in length and certainly wasn't built by hand, but for a while it surely was my favorite piano in the world to play. May these beautiful instruments bring the people of Grace (and others) joy-full noise for many years to come.

Be well, my friends, and Happy New Year!
Peace,
Bradford Thompson
Music Director

