Pipe Organ Glossary

As with many institutions, objects, and activities, the pipe organ too has its own unique vocabulary and lexicon. Following are a few terms that you might hear in the course of a conversation, or see in print when it comes to the pipe organ.

**Console**  The work station for the organist. It consists of a cabinet containing the manual and pedal keyboards and the stop controls, arranged in a convenient and standardized manner as prescribed by the American Guild of Organists. From the console the organist the controls the combination of pipes being used and the volume of the instrument.

**Manuals**  The manual is the keyboard part of the organ that the organist plays with his or her hands. The organ console pictured has three manuals. Most church pipe organs have between 2-5 manuals. Each manual contains 61 notes compared to the piano which has 88 notes.

**Pedalboard**  The pedalboard is really just like another keyboard, only the organist plays it with their feet. While having its own division of pipes and typically being used to play the very low bass note pipes, almost any pipe in any division on the organ can be coupled to the pedals and played with the feet.
**Pipes**  The sound-producing elements of the organ, which distinguish it from all other musical instruments. Each pipe produces a single tone, and it takes a series of them, one per key, to play the entire gamut of the keyboard. Such a series is called a Rank, because the pipes are usually arranged in a row for mechanical reasons. Pipes are of two classes: flue pipes, with no moving parts except the air, like a whistle; and reed pipes, which have a vibrating tongue producing the tone and a resonator to modify its quality.

**Chests**  In the organ, the wooden boxes on which the pipes stand. These are usually rectangular, are filled with wind under pressure, and contain part of the mechanism (action) which allows wind into the proper pipes, causing them to speak as directed by the organist at the console.

**Blower**  The enclosed, electric motor driven fan that provides wind under pressure for the organ pipes.
**Stops**  A stop is an individual voice in the organ, composed of one or more ranks of pipes. Its name includes a number, like 16', 8', 4', 2' etc., which designates its pitch according to the length of its largest pipe (corresponding to low C on the keyboard). If it includes more than one rank of pipes it is a Mixture, with a Roman numeral in front of its name to indicate the number of ranks, as III or IV. The word stop is also applied to the control in the console which turns on the actual stop. The name comes from the original controls, which were introduced to shut off, or 'stop' some of the ranks so they did not all play at once, as they did in the earliest organs.

![Image of organ stops]

**Mixtures**  Organ stops consisting of more than one rank of pipes. Some, with high pitches corresponding to various harmonics or overtones of the notes on the keyboard, are used with 8', 4' and 2' stops to produce a brilliance and grandeur. These are especially useful in accompanying congregational singing. Others, lower-pitched, are solo stops when used in small combinations with other ranks.
Ranks  Rows of pipes graduated in length, one per key, corresponding to the entire compass of the keyboard. Each Rank has a different tone color or pitch, and providing multiple Ranks in an organ allows many different combinations, resulting in a great range of volume and tone quality. Ranks are described according to the length of the largest pipe, corresponding to the lowest key (2 octaves below middle C), as 16', 8', 4', etc. 61 pipes per manual (keyboard) rank and 32 pipes per pedal rank.

Divisions  Sections into which the pipes of an organ are divided, which are played from different keyboards. This permits contrasting tonal colors from the various keyboards, allows stops to be used for solos with different stops for accompaniment (when playing on two keyboards), and permits quick changes in registration by shifting from one keyboard to another.

Great Division  A grouping of pipes, normally not enclosed, played from the bottom manual of a 2-manual organ (or the middle manual of a 3-manual organ). It includes the loudest and brightest ranks of pipes, intended for accompanying congregational singing, and usually also contains a chorus of Flute pipes and often Reed pipes as well.

Choir Division  A grouping of pipe ranks played from the bottom manual of a 3-manual organ, normally enclosed, and thought of either as subordinate to the other divisions and intended to accompany the choir, or as a locale for solo stops that can thereby be played separately from other divisions.

Swell Division  A grouping of pipes located in a chamber or an enclosure equipped with Swell Shades, or movable louvers covering tone openings, which enable the organist to make the tone 'swell' or get louder, when desired. It is played from the top manual keyboard of a 2- or 3- manual console. The Swell contains stops to accompany the choir, and louder voices that benefit from the expression afforded by the swell shutters.
**Swell Shutters**  or expression shades, are movable louvers, normally vertical, which cover openings in chamber walls or in expression enclosures and which the organist can open or close with an expression pedal at the console. This arrangement allows the tone to be shaded, louder or softer, and affects all the pipes located within the enclosure. At least one unenclosed division is desirable to provide a contrast to the somewhat indirect sounds from the unenclosed divisions. Below is a picture of the swell division behind the moving swell shutters.

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**Expression Pedals**  Pedals used by the organist to manipulate the adjustable louvers or Swell Shades with which enclosed divisions of the organ are provided. The shades increase or decrease the volume, enabling the organist to give expression to the division or to adjust the volume of solo stops.
**Zimbelstern**  
A series of small bells, usually high-pitched and not tuned to specific intervals, which ring in a random sequence when activated. It adds a festive sparkle to larger registrations and is used on joyous occasions. Some have a decorative star that rotates while the bells are ringing, hence the name (Stern, German for star).

**En Chamade**  
A term describing pipes placed horizontally instead of vertically, and often projecting from the front of the organ case. This method is generally used for powerful reeds, like Trompette en Chamade, whose tone becomes more intense and is able to solo "above" the other pipes being played on the organ.
**Antiphonal Division**  A division of the organ placed at a distance from the main organ and the console, permitting echo-like effects as well accompanying choirs and smaller ensembles. Named from 'antiphon', or liturgical verses recited alternately by clergy and congregation. Can also be called an Echo Division.