

Elegant BSO organ gets

By KEITH POWERS

New pipes. A new console. And a computer inside.

Audiences returning to Symphony Hall next month for another season of music won't be able to see anything different about the familiar gold-pipe facade that looms above the stage.

But while the Boston Symphony Orchestra toiled in Tanglewood this summer, and the Boston Pops jaunted through Japan, the Symphony Hall organ underwent a major makeover.

Though it's not the largest in town — the Trinity Church and Christian Scientist organs are much larger — it is a distinctive instrument.

"It's a thoroughbred, that's for certain," said Michael Foley, president of organ builder Foley-Baker of Tolland, Conn.

George Hutchings built the original BSO organ in 1900. In 1949, G. Donald Harrison and his Aeolian-Skinner Co. redesigned and rebuilt it. Harrison's plans proved too expensive for the orchestra's budget, and many pipes and features in his original model had to be omitted.

In February, Foley-Baker removed the innards of the organ, took apart the electro-pneumatic engine that makes the whole thing work and has been analyzing and rebuilding the elegant old machine. It's the first major reconditioning since '49, and includes installation of many of the pipes Harrison planned to use in the first place.

"Harrison was a great voicer. He was the type who could visualize the



sound he wanted, and then design and build it," said Foley. "I'm not disturbing his work at all, just getting closer to his original intentions."

The entire organ is being cleaned up, with additional ranks of pipes — some larger than any the old organ ever had — and a new console being added. The new pipes were installed in July, and the removal of the facade offered a rare glimpse into the huge loft, filled with thousands of pipes that sits behind and above the stage.

Foley founded Foley-Baker in 1968 as a piano business, gradually switching over to organ reconditioning. "I just love pipe organs," Foley said. The company services about 250 organs a year, and also has reconditioned two other large Boston pieces — the Trinity Church organ and the massive instrument in the Christian Science church across the street from Symphony Hall. The Symphony Hall work will take two years to complete.

"We started in February," Foley said. "Our crew took out all the pipes in three nights during the graveyard shift. Nobody even noticed."

Though reinstalling the pipes is the first major milestone in the project,



STAFF PHOTOS BY TARA BRICKING

PIPES ARE CALLED: Foley-Baker workers guide the Symphony Hall organ to a moving truck, above. The crew is renovating the organ, which includes the cleaning of thousands of organ pipes, above left.

the process of making the organ sound great is just beginning.

"It'll take us another year to deal with the tonal aspects of the organ," Foley said. "And we're building an entirely new console, to make it easier for organists to see conductors."

The electro-pneumatic engine that powers the organ also is being reconditioned.

"It really was antiquated mechan-