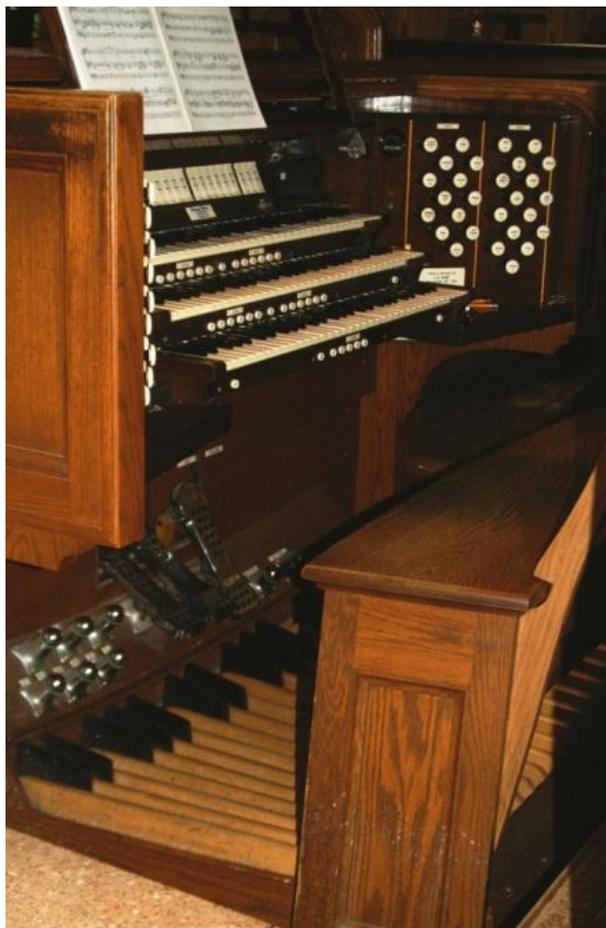


# THE ORGAN AT CHRIST'S CHURCH CATHEDRAL



The pipe organ is a musical instrument that produces sound by driving wind through pipes selected by a keyboard. Because each organ pipe produces a single pitch, the pipes are provided in sets called *ranks*, each of which has a common timbre and volume throughout the keyboard compass. Most organs have multiple ranks of pipes of differing timbre, pitch and loudness that the player can employ singly or in combination through the use of controls called *stops*. Organs are unique to their location, each pipe scaled during the handcrafted process at the factory and then being “voiced” to speak into its new acoustical home. Changes in the acoustical environment or location will require a re-voicing to take place. This almost total amount of handcrafting makes the instrument the valuable and long lasting instrument that it is, some having been playing uninterrupted for almost 500 years.

The origins of the pipe organ can be traced back to the hydraulis in Ancient Greece in the 3rd century BCE, in which the wind supply was created with water pressure. By the 6th or 7th century CE, bellows were used to supply organs with wind. Beginning in the 12th century, the organ began to evolve into a complex instrument capable of producing different timbres. By the 17th century, most of the sounds available on the modern classical organ had been developed. From that time, the pipe organ was the most complex device around, a distinction it retained until displaced by the telephone exchange in the late 19th century. In the early 20th century, pipe organs were installed in theaters to accompany films during the silent movie era, in municipal auditoria, where orchestral transcriptions were popular, and in the homes of the wealthy, often

equipped with player mechanisms. The beginning of the 21st century has seen a resurgence of organs installed in concert halls. The organ boasts a substantial repertoire, spanning 400 years.

The organ at the Cathedral has three keyboards called *manuals* played by the hands, and a pedal board played by the feet, each of which has its own group of stops. The organ's continuous supply of wind allows it to sustain notes for as long as the corresponding keys are depressed, unlike the piano and harpsichord whose sound begins to decay immediately after attack. This organ contains more than 4,000 pipes.

The original organ at the Cathedral was built by Johnson and Son of Westfield, Massachusetts in the 1860's. It was located in the space between the current Dean's Vestry and the first pillar of the nave, on a forty-five degree angle. It would be a unique location for an organ as other Cathedrals in this area of Canada at the time would install the organ in a balcony at the rear of the church. Of course, given the absence of the current chancel area, this was the most direct location and, being angled to the congregation, gives evidence that the organ had an important role in leading congregational song. This modest instrument seems to have served the Cathedral well.

In the 1920s as the existing chancel was built, the question of the organ and its location needed a renewed vision. Consequently, in 1924 Casavant Frères Ltée built and installed a new three manual organ in the chancel behind the finely crafted wooden facades. The Casavant brothers, Claver and Samuel had brought their established organ building expertise from their native France to Canada in 1879 settling in St. Hyacinthe, Quebec. They had won the Grand Prix at the International Exhibition held in Antwerp, Belgium in 1930 and built organs around the world, including Canada, the United States, France, the West Indies, South and Central America, South Africa, and Japan. Their organs have been praised by many famous organists over the last 100 years, including Guilmant, Vierne, Widor, Bonnet, Lemare, Dethier, Courboin, Bingham, and many others who inaugurated and played Casavant organs. Casavant organs are also found in

leading colleges, universities and conservatories in the United States and Canada. Since Casavant's inception, the company has continued to build almost 4000 organs to date which can be found on every continent throughout the world.

Incorporated into this new instrument were some of the wooden pipes from the original 1860's era instrument, pipes still in use today. The organ pipes and related wind chests and playing action are divided on either side of the Chancel. Some pipe work is enclosed by mechanical shutters not unlike Venetian blinds. These shutters can be opened or closed by use of a foot pedal, thus allowing for a smooth gradual change in loudness and providing expressive dynamic range. This is particularly helpful for an instrument where once the key is depressed and the pipe sounds nothing can inherently change the nature of the sound. As the organ of the early part of the 1900's aimed at representing a symphonic sound, control of dynamic shading was a key element.

The sound and style of Casavant organs has varied throughout the company's history. The Casavant brothers themselves, Samuel and Claver Casavant, reflected mostly influences from contemporary France, but they traveled widely and visited many European instruments. They later brought in an Englishman, Stephen Stoot, under whose direction the tonal palette reflected additional influences from England. So it is that the organ at the Cathedral is a blend of French Romantic and Victorian English tonal influences. This is evidenced by the full and rich foundation sound of the instrument punctuated by other expressive colours that bring a reedy or even trumpet-like sound out of the organ. These are colours that made the Casavant organs such a success story in accompanying congregational singing and choral repertoire in churches all over. Almost every church in southern Ontario in this period had a Casavant organ installed and the name of the company became a household word.

Later tonal directors, Lawrence Phelps and Gerhard Brunzema, contributed styles from the German "Organ Reform Movement." A movement initially inspired in Europe and gaining momentum during the late 1950's and early 1960's in North America, it demanded a heightened clarity and (over) emphasis on higher pitched stops. This movement away from the symphonic style consequently suggested that the more contrapuntal music of Johann Sebastian Bach was best expressed through clearer, more distinct sound than afforded by the conventional organ building of the time. Sadly, it often led some over-zealous organ "reformers" to radically alter an instrument. The result of this reckless redesign left an instrument which was neither bird nor fowl. Unfortunately this was the fate to which the Cathedral organ succumbed. George Veary, Cathedral Organist during this time as well as others expressed dissatisfaction with the results. In an attempt to restore the instrument to more of its original sound, a modicum of restorative work was carried out in the 1980's. Nevertheless, there still remains much work to be done.

Ongoing maintenance is crucial to the longevity of the organ and to that end some fine curatorial work continues to be performed in the form of regular tunings (approximately 4 per year). In fact, in the fall of 2012, a full tuning was undertaken checking on each of the some 4000 pipes. The instrument is going to require future capital improvements including an updated playing console and some further tonal refurbishment to restore the full glory of the instrument as it was initially envisaged and built.

The organ at the Cathedral is a glorious instrument able to represent the vast repertoire composed over the centuries as well as thrill with improvisations and service music revealing the power and majesty as well as the sensitive and lyrical.

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