

Casavant Opus 3719

The Cathedral's magnificent Casavant organ, installed beginning in 1993, has established itself as a landmark instrument in the Midwest, receiving acclaim from visiting local organists and internationally known concert artists. A significant annual series of musical events, many of which include the organ, has been hosted with great success by the Cathedral Arts Committee. Casavant has been equally proud of the instrument.

History - 1993

In 1990, St. Paul's began an intensive search of representative organs throughout North America to find an instrument to replace our water-damaged Reuter organ that would meet St. Paul's future needs as a cathedral. Casavant Frères Ltd. of St. Hyacinthe, Quebec, was selected to build the new organ.

The organ design, created by Cathedral organist Canon David Raymond in conjunction with Casavant, consisted of 68 ranks of pipes, 51 speaking stops, 3,916 pipes, and a three-manual console. The specification was designed to accompany festive services and the traditional choral literature in keeping with the great Episcopal traditions. The organ chamber was refurbished at the same time the instrument was installed. The chancel was enlarged with expanded seating for the choir and liturgical participants to accommodate larger liturgies.

The architectural changes and structural upgrades required extensive interface between our resident architect and parishioner John Wetherell, Neumann Brothers, and Casavant. Organist David Raymond traveled to Quebec to inspect the new organ on the staging floor at the Casavant shop. The organ was then shipped to Des Moines in June 1993 on two large 18-wheel trucks. At this point the instrument had a total of 42 ranks installed with preparations for an additional 16 ranks.

The biggest challenge was getting the 2,700-pound console into the building as no single entry way provided the necessary width. The monumental floods of 1993 slowed the installation (with no water in the city of Des Moines, including the church), forcing the French-speaking Casavant installers to be relocated to different hotels three times.

Once the organ was installed, tonal finishing began, much of it at night to avoid routine traffic noise. Organist David Raymond played the dedicatory recital in October 1993 as part of a weeklong festival of nightly events featuring a variety of organists from Iowa and the Midwest.

History - 1997

The original 1993, successful as it was, left the Choeur, Antiphonal, and Chamade divisions of the organ incomplete due to the substantial financial resources required. Only the Tuba in the Choeur division was included in the 1993 installation. The 1993 installation also omitted the Bombarde 16' of the Grand Orgue. However, the summer of 1997 brought a generous donation from a parish family which enabled the installation and completion of each of these divisions, all of which had all been prepared for but were not yet completed. Installation, voicing and regulation took place in late July and early August. At this point the organ was virtually complete with the number of ranks totaling 68.

The Choeur division, scaled and voiced to be a bit more diminutive, includes many new and interesting color stops as well as additional smaller stops suitable for choral accompaniment. The Antiphonal division provides a useful alternative division for both service and concert settings and includes a full principal chorus as well as flutes at 16', 8', and 4'. The Chamade division, consisting of horizontal pipes handsomely done in polished cooper with flared bells, offers a stunning and heroic trumpet sound for the Cathedral's many festive occasions and liturgies.

History – 2009

The original vision of the organ included a real 32' flue stop. Inclusion of this stop with the early installation phases was not possible, once again, due to the economics involved. In the meantime, the Basse accountique 32' (a resultant 32' stop), would have to suffice. However, this would change with another generous donation from the same parish family that underwrote the 1997 addition.

Engineering plans and design were drawn up by Casavant to provide a Contre Violon 32'. This would be a 12 note open wood extension of the Violonbasse 16' from the Grand Orgue (the “Great” division). The pipes, beautifully executed in oak, are placed in two towers, each tower resting on the floor level on the left and right sides of the antiphonal division. Each tower is self contained and includes six pipes, a blower, and reservoir. Notes 7 – 12 are full length with the overall interior height of the Cathedral governing the limits of pipe length. Notes 1 – 6 are Haskell which makes the overall height of these pipes half length. The stop provides a warm, rich tonal foundation for the entire organ.

Current Status

The organ continues to play a vital role in the life of the Cathedral. It has proven to be a valuable, capable, and consummate instrument for both service and recital settings. It is used in virtually all weekly liturgies and special services. In addition, it has provided central Iowa with an exciting recital venue hosting nationally and internationally acclaimed organists as well as many area and regional organists. Kudos to Casavant Frères Ltd. for providing an instrument that is held in virtual universal acclaim.

History – 2009

The original vision and design of the organ had always included a 32' flue stop.