



Williamson-Warne & Associates model for Eglise Saint-Pierre in Le Bouchet, France

Williamson-Warne & Associates of Hollywood, California has been commissioned to build a new organ for Église Saint-Pierre in Le Bouchet, France. The church was originally constructed in the 11th century, with additions and restoration work performed in the 13th and 19th centuries. The construction will begin in early 2011, with anticipated installation in the second quarter of 2012. When complete, it will be the first pipe organ built and installed by a United States organbuilder for a church in France. For further information and pictures, visit: <http://williamsonwarne.com/le_bouchet.htm>.



Lorna West, Judy Fargher, Pastor Tom Anderson, and Thomas Umbaugh

The Houghton Lake United Methodist Church dedicated its new **Johannus Rembrandt 497** four-manual organ in June. The service was attended by 376 people in the little resort community of Houghton Lake, Michigan. The extended service included hymn singing, organ solos, a piano/organ duet, a choral anthem, and a selection by the men's sextet. On the program were works by Gordon Young and unpublished works by Charles Callahan, *A Celtic Psalm Tune* (ST. COLUMBA), and Kevin Daly, *O Worship the King*. Both manuscripts were graciously provided by and performed with permission of the composers. The organ pieces

were performed by Lorna West, organist and choir director, and Judy Fargher, assistant organist. Mrs. West studied at Eastman Conservatory and graduated from Heidelberg University; Mrs. Fargher received her master's degree from Northern Illinois University.

The Johannus Organ Company's U.S. representative was Thomas Umbaugh of South Bend, Indiana. The order was placed on June 1, 2009, and delivery took place December 8. The instrument arrived the day before a large snowstorm that shut down the town, with the exception of the church's intrepid crew of 11 hearty volunteers. The instrument was put into service for the first time on Sunday, December 13.



Dennis Newman

A Catholic Church parishioner whose initial love of organ music led him into a 23-year career as a church musician is the winner of **Rodgers Instruments'** summer convention drawing for one year's free use of an organ in his home.

Dennis Newman, 55, recently became organist in his home parish at St. Helen's Catholic Church in Saginaw, Michigan—the same place where he was first inspired by the sound of the organ and by director of music Karen Rath.

For many years, he has attended the National Association of Pastoral Musicians national convention. This year, he stopped by the Rodgers booth in the exhibit hall and filled out an entry form for the drawing. Several hundred people at the NPM convention and the American Guild of Organists national convention entered. Newman will have an Insignia 548 organ installed in his home for the next year.

In addition to his church music role, Newman is a commissioned lay minister in the Diocese of Saginaw, and is also interested in youth ministry and serving the elderly with music. He is beginning his third year of study for a theology degree at Siena Heights University in Adrian, Michigan.

In the wind . . .

by John Bishop



It's the very Dickens.

Last week the American Institute of Organbuilders (AIO) and the International Society of Organbuilders (ISO) held concurrent conventions in Montreal. The convention was based in a large hotel adjacent to a suburban shopping mall. Montreal is a beautiful city, rich in history and cultural institutions, but the ubiquitous shopping mall is the same world over. The hotel was efficient and comfortable enough, but I thought it was ironic for a group of people like organbuilders who are widely experienced with beautiful architecture and design to be trapped in a place like that. This is the kind of place where the patterns on the carpets are intended to mask accidents.

I wrote recently in these pages about the decline of the church and how it has affected the pipe organ. You can be sure that much of what we heard officially and discussed privately was related to that decline. Greeting an old friend, I would ask how things are going. The response was typically something like, "we're busy, but we could be busier," which I took as code that means, "I have no idea what's going to happen next." Several colleagues told me that while they were busy now they didn't have much on the books for next year.

On the other hand, as I heard about the current and recent projects of many of my friends, I reflected that the quality of organbuilding is as good as ever, in fact perhaps better than ever. Reflecting on all this during my six-hour drive home brought to mind the opening words of the Charles Dickens novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness; it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity; it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness; it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair; we had everything before us, we had nothing before us; we were all going directly to Heaven, we were all going the other way.

While we might easily understand "the worst of times," the other phrase seems more elusive. But the convention reminded me of how much skill and creativity there is in those two organizations. Some of the most brilliant practitioners were there. In fact, one was suggested that should some disaster strike the hotel, organbuilding as we know it would end. Renewing friendships and making new acquaintances, I was reminded of some of the fabulous instruments produced by the firms represented.

And for me, the high point of the convention was a recital that certainly suggested the best of times. You must hear Isabelle Demers make music. This brilliant young artist is a musician's musician. There can be no assembly more critical

of organ playing than a convention of organbuilders, but the ovation that followed her performance was powerful and sincere. There was a remarkable level of energy and enthusiasm in the buses heading back to the hotel as conventioners expressed their delight and amazement. It was said more than once that if there will be artists like Ms. Demers around to play organs, then we had better keep building beautiful instruments.

The age of wisdom

American and European organbuilding was revolutionized during the twentieth century. On both continents Victorian symphonic instruments gave way to industrialization, and by mid-century organbuilders on both continents had started a period of intense self-examination leading to the return to earlier styles of organbuilding, dramatically increasing the artistic content of the industry's output. Today's organbuilders are deeply immersed in the study of organ history and technology, and in the magical, mystical art of blending organ pipes with the wonderful heritage of music written for the instrument. The European *Orgelbewegung* and the American *Revival of Classic Organbuilding* have led the trade to an apex of knowledge and understanding.

The age of foolishness

While all the collective learning of the past half-century has brought us to new understanding of the art, it has also introduced a foolish aspect. When the so-called tracker revival was gaining traction in the 1960s and 1970s, the general public was drawn into the debate. The layperson who listened to organ music for the love of it found it necessary to declare preference. It didn't seem possible to remain neutral. At first glance this might seem like an advantage—all that attention from non-professionals interested in understanding. But in fact I believe the tenor of the debate was harmful. Any potential new appreciator of the organ got dragged into the fray, and I fear that many were frightened off. Could be they would have preferred simply enjoying the music.

Also, while this movement was a true renaissance, there was no need to wait a couple centuries for historians to deduce that something interesting was going on. We all knew it at the time. We talked and wrote about it ceaselessly. And when you know you're part of a renaissance it's easy to let it go to your head. We presented instruments and performances that were artistically sophisticated and erudite, assuming that the public would appreciate without question. But that was a time when the public had more and more available to it. Transportation and communication was advancing, so the world was growing ever smaller. As a society, we learned to think little of teenagers traveling the world on exchange programs or sending photographs instantly through the ether. Remember when you used to have to get film developed? And we were deluged with myriad gadgets and entertainments till then unheard of. Organ recitals were among the most popular public entertainment in the 1920s. Now it seems a big deal when an audience breaks a hundred.

It was the epoch of belief.

I believe that the industries of organ building and playing have the opportunity for a fresh start along with the twenty-first century. We're far enough into the millennium to be comfortable saying the date. I remember that during the nineties we wondered what we could call a year. Would it be two-thousand-four, aught-four, oh-four? We're over that now. Although technology still advances with staggering determination, we're used to that, too. We believe that the Internet is

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an effective tool for communication and the dissemination of information. We're used to air conditioning, sophisticated automobiles, and high-definition television. We expect rapid innovation but I don't think we need to be distracted by it anymore.

The organbuilding revivals have progressed through the vitriolic stage to that in which good organs of any type are generally appreciated. There are few of us left who insist on hearing or playing only tracker action. It's a good time for another organ renaissance in which we shift our emphasis to communication with the audience; so instead of assuming that the public will automatically adore us for the fruits of our half-century of collective research, we set out with purpose to reintroduce them to the glory of the instrument, to the wide range of expression possible from a good organ, to the fun and excitement of hearing the world's greatest music presented on the King of Instruments.

It was the epoch of incredulity.

It's incredible that the pipe organ exists at all. I'm not saying I'm surprised it has survived this far, but that it ever developed in the first place. As we go through the extreme effort of building monumental organs, we reflect how unlikely, how incredible, how downright ridiculous it is to produce a 20- or 30-foot-tall whistle for the purpose of playing one note of one tone color at one volume. We might think that organs are priced by the rank, but an octave of 32-foot Principal pipes might cost \$100,000—that's \$8,300 per note!

As we work in a church, a visitor comes in, curious about what's going on. A ten-minute tour of the organ and its parts leaves him speechless, except to say, "I had no idea people still did this kind of work." The pipe organ is one place in our modern world where "analog" is impressive. To create a machine driven by huge electric blowers with pressurized air passing through hundreds of feet of conductors, with thousands of hand-crafted specialized whistles, with miles of wire

or tracker material, all to allow a single musician to command the acoustics of a vast room is incredible.

It's incredible but we can do it.

It was the season of Light.

I'm not going to address the issue of organ cases covering windows. I'm thinking about Light (Dickens capitalized it) in reference to faith and inspiration. The pipe organ is the original instrument of the church. It has been central to our expressions of faith in public worship for hundreds of years. Let's not forget that 500-year-old organs are still in service in Europe. I wonder if we (and I use the word "we" collectively to describe organists and organbuilders) have gotten so involved in the craft, history, and art of the instrument that we've overlooked the visceral reaction of the people in the pew when the organ sings out. I'm enough of a sap that I often find it difficult to sing hymns because I'm choked up by the effect of the organ.

We are well aware of the physics, the math, the nuts and bolts that comprise the organ, but we should put first the emotional impact of the instrument. Everyone in the room should be choked up.

It was the season of Darkness.

(Dickens' cap again.) I visit a church to inspect an organ that's being put on the market, and notice first the drum sets, amps, and microphone stands in the choir loft. "We want to get rid of the organ so we have more space for our musicians." Through my work with the Organ Clearing House I may be the guy who hears the most reasons for "getting rid" of a pipe organ:

- Our new pastor introduced a new style of worship.
 - The last guy to tune the organ said it needs a \$100,000 repair.
 - We may be closing the parish and putting the building up for sale.
 - We can't afford an organist. Or,
 - We can't find anyone who knows how to play it.
 - It seems so old fashioned.
- The list goes on.



The season of Darkness

There may not be much we can do about these things. But one thing we can do is to help our clients control the cost of owning and caring for an organ. As I've traveled around the organ world, I've had many conversations with colleagues about "what the organ needs." We revere the instruments and know that they function best when every part is in the best condition. But we may be shooting ourselves in the foot if we insist on too much.

It's not necessary to tune all the pipes every time you visit. In fact, it's often better to pick out the lulus and leave the rest alone. A good tuner can keep a simple organ in tune with an hour or two of tuning each year. We and our clients have gotten used to thinking that an organ should be tuned for Christmas and Easter. It goes on the list with sending greeting cards and dyeing eggs. But where I live, that means the organ is getting tuned twice during winter weather, sometimes less than three months apart. Do we always need both tunings?

It's nice to keep an organ clean, but it's not necessary to remove the pipes for cleaning every generation. And while it can be profitable to replace an organ's

console or blower, I think that many churches have been convinced to pay for such projects unnecessarily. It is the duty of the modern organ technician to avoid suggesting work that is not necessary for the continued use of the organ. It's essential to be sure that organ blowers are lubricated and in safe operating condition. It's important to be sure that the organ doesn't embarrass the player or the tuner. And it's important that the organ be in good enough condition to sound well to the ear of the layperson. But the fact is, when a church's music committee sees a bill for piano tuning for a hundred dollars and a thousand-dollar bill for organ tuning, the reaction is now frequently to stop tuning the organ.

It was the spring of hope.

This one is easy. I hope that the economy improves, making available funding for more interesting projects. I hope that our collective work continues to improve and to thrill congregations and audiences. I hope that pipe organs are still a valued part of our worship and cultural lives 50 years from now.

It was the winter of Despair.

I won't say I despair. I'll stay optimistic. But I have a growing sense that the future of the instrument is up to us. There was a time when organbuilders could assume that people would always be buying organs. The responsibility of the sales department was to be sure their firm got the job instead of the competition. Today it is the responsibility of the sales department to help sustain the future of the instrument itself. If we forget that, we're doomed.

We had everything before us, we had nothing before us.

It's up to us.

We were all going to Heaven, we were all going the other way.

Again, it's up to us. But I wonder if a lifetime tuning organs is rewarded by an eternity tuning harps. And if so, which way is that? ■



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