

New Organs

Juget-Sinclair Organbuilders, Montréal, Québec, Canada, Op. 35 Musée de l'Amérique française, Québec City, Québec, Canada

In the 1980s, Québec musicologist Élisabeth Gallat-Morin found records in the archives of the Archdiocese of Québec of an 18th-century correspondence between Canon La Corne—a canon of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Québec City who was residing in Paris—and his confreres in Québec City. These letters concerned his search on their behalf for an organ for the cathedral. Sometime after renovations to the building had been completed in 1744, the canons sought to purchase a new organ of exceptional quality from a Parisian builder, and in 1753 they asked La Corne to negotiate the purchase.

Alerted to the discovery of these documents, the French organologist Pierre Hardouin found in the *Minutier central des notaires de Paris* (a section of the French national archives housing notaries' documents) the contract of sale for the instrument between the Parisian builder Robert Richard and Monsignor de Pontbriand, then Bishop of Québec. Among the extant references to his work, it seems that Richard was known in particular for his mechanical instruments and *serinettes* (small automated barrel organs whose name derives from the French word for "canary"). In 1753 the contract was signed, and the completed instrument with one divided manual and ten stops with pulldown pedals arrived in Québec City that same year. A few years later, during the 1759 siege and bombardment of Québec City in the North American theatre of the Seven Years' War, the instrument was destroyed.

In 1998, the *Musée de l'Amérique française* hosted an exhibition featuring the musical heritage of New France. It inspired Kenneth Gilbert to assemble in September of that year a committee of organists and scholars—which included Antoine Bouchard, Élisabeth Gallat-Morin, Richard Paré, Benjamin Waterhouse, and later Hubert Laforge—to examine the possibility of reconstructing this historic instrument. Ten years later, on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the founding of Québec City, funds had been assembled and Juget-Sinclair Organbuilders was selected to realize the reconstruction.

The organ was installed in the *Musée de l'Amérique française* (the former chapel of the Québec seminary), which neighbors the cathedral. Situated in a museum, the instrument is not put to liturgical use, nor is it required to play the full breadth of repertoires. The project afforded the opportunity to build an authentic copy without the practical compromises necessitated by the everyday use of religious and academic institutions.

Although the extant documents are silent on many details of the original instrument—the layout of its façade, for example—the goal was to rebuild it, faithful to the original in every known respect. The artisanal aspects of its construction were historically inspired, and every detail of the instrument, whether musically important or not, was built using historic methods. The rollerboards, for example, are made of wrought-iron, the rollers entirely hand-forged.

The work was based to some extent on Dom Bedos, but greatly informed by extant historic instruments. In preparation for the project, Denis Juget visited a number of French organs—the mid-seventeenth-century instrument in the southern border town of Vicdessos, the historic instrument in Louvie-Juzon, and the celebrated 1734 instrument by Louis-Alexandre Clicquot in Houdan. As a historic model, this organ possesses many qualities (such as its historic tonal design and voicing, key action, and wind supply) that facilitate playing with an early keyboard technique.

However, the embrace of an uncompromising authenticity resulted in limitations that even instruments designed to replicate historic models do not normally impose (e.g., pure meantone temperament, historic console layout with a French pedalboard of authentic dimensions, pulldown pedal with no 16-foot stop, etc.). In this way, both the historic qualities and the limitations can assist the player in adopting an idiomatic approach to technique and registration.

The instrument was erected in a balcony encircling the second story of the museum interior. At the request of the museum, the pumping mechanism was positioned alongside the main case to render the bellows—and, if operated manually, the *calcant*—visible to the public on the floor of the chapel. The wind system consists of two multi-fold wedge bellows that can be operated in one of three ways: 1) manually, 2) by means of an electric blower, using one of the bellows as a reservoir with curtain valve, or 3) by automated pumping in which the blower raises the bellows one at a time. This method imitates hand blowing by incorporating the organic pressure variation of falling bellows and keeping the electric motor separate from the instrument's speaking wind supply.

There were discussions about which temperament the instrument should have. Historically, pure meantone temperament was gradually giving way to modified temperaments throughout the course of the 18th century. Yet, meantone temperament likely prevailed longer in the 18th century in the Catholic churches of France and New France (i.e., Québec) than on the harpsichords in secular use (indeed, Dom Bedos still considered it the recommended temperament as late as 1778 in his famous treatise). In the case of the present instrument then, the choice of temperament could have gone either way. Nevertheless, as the reconstructed instrument would not be required to play liturgical services, this was a case where taking the more radical route was an unusually feasible and tantalizing option, and the decision was made to use a quarter-comma meantone temperament (i.e., with eight pure thirds).

The instrument was inaugurated on October 4, 2009—250 years after the destruction of the original instrument—by Michel Bouvard, organist of the Basilique Saint-Sernin in Toulouse. On October 11 a lecture-recital tracing the history of the project was presented by Kenneth Gilbert. The organ has been in regular use since then for concerts, teaching, and demonstrations.

—David Szanto

Specification

- 8' Bourdon
- 4' Montre
- 4' Flute à cheminée
- 2½' Nazard
- 2' Doublette
- 1½' Tierce
- Fourniture III
- Cimble III
- 8' Cromhorne
- 8' Trompette

Tremblant doux
Tremblant fort
Divided stop action (between c' and c#') except for Fourniture and Cimble

Suspended tracker action
Manual compass (52 notes): C, D–e'''
Naturals in cow bone, sharps in ebony
Pedal compass (permanent pulldown mechanism): C, D–c'
18th-century French-style pedalboard in oak
Quarter-comma meantone temperament, a' = 392 Hz
Two multi-fold wedge bellows
Casework in white oak
Hand-carved pipe shades by Mathieu Patoine, sculptor (Val-David, Québec)
Console built into the rear of the instrument
Trompette and Cromhorne pipes by Voix Humaine (pipe makers, France)



Juget-Sinclair Op. 35, Musée de l'Amérique française, Québec City (photo credit: Robin Côté)



Keyboard (photo credit: Robert Patrick Girard)



Left stop jamb (photo credit: Robert Patrick Girard)



Right stop jamb (photo credit: Robin Côté)



Bellows (photo credit: Robert Patrick Girard)



Keydesk (photo credit: Robert Patrick Girard)