

A Celebration of Joe Hoppe's Legacy at St. Patrick's Church, New Orleans

Marijim Thoene



Joe at Evening of Celebration

Introduction

Joe Hoppe has been organist and director of music for over 40 years at St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church in New Orleans, Louisiana, located in the business district at 734 Camp Street. This historic church, completed in 1840, is in the Gothic style with a vaulted ceiling, massive hand-carved doors, and towering stained glass windows. Here the Roman Mass continues to be celebrated in Latin, and here Joe Hoppe developed one of the finest music programs in the Archdiocese of New Orleans. He built a fine choir of volunteers, conducted choral masterworks with full orchestra, maintained the pipe organ, and in 2009 realized his dream of presenting the church with a new pipe organ, a magnificent instrument built by Patrick J. Murphy and Associates, Opus 53. Joe Hoppe retired from St. Patrick's in March 2010. This interview is intended to celebrate his remarkable contributions to the musical life of St. Patrick's Church, the community of New Orleans, and the lives of many international visitors, and to let you see some of the behind-the-scenes work of his remarkable tenure at St. Patrick's. His music has touched the ears and hearts of thousands.

Joe was born on February 13, 1938 in New Orleans. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in philosophy, from Notre Dame Seminary in June 1961. In 1964 he completed three and a half years of postgraduate studies in theology, where he studied the theory and practice of Gregorian chant with Father Robert Stahl, S.M., and sang in the Notre Dame Seminary Schola Cantorum, which participated in joint



High school graduation, 1956

concerts with the Saint Louis Cathedral Choir under the direction of Elise Cambron and Father Stahl.

In August 1968 Msgr. John P. Reynolds hired him as the organist for St. Patrick's Church, where, as Joe said, "There was no choir or cantor. I was the music program!" Over time he recruited singers, and had a choir of over 40 voices. In September 1990 he was accepted into the master's program at the University of New Orleans, where he studied organ with H. Gerald Aultman and choral conducting with Raymond Sprague. In May 1993 he was awarded a Master of Music degree, which coincided with the 25th anniversary of his employment at St. Patrick's. In September 2008 he was honored at a banquet at the New Orleans Country Club and awarded a Waterford crystal cross for 40 years of devoted and dedicated service to St. Patrick's Church. Also at this banquet, James Hammann, chair of the music department at the University of New Orleans, presented him with a "Distinguished Alumnus Certificate from the University of New Orleans Department of Music for Forty Years of Distinguished Service as Organist at St. Patrick's Church, New Orleans, Louisiana."

Here is Joe Hoppe who, when asked by a bride how long it takes to learn to play the organ, answered, with a twinkle in his eye, "Oh, a couple of weeks!"

Marijim Thoene: My favorite photo of you is as a young cleric. Knowing of your remarkable education, I'm not surprised that you should make that choice. When was this photo taken?

Joe Hoppe: In 1967 I was assigned as an assistant to the pastor (now referred to as Parochial Vicar) at St. Angela Merici Parish, and that is the photo that was printed on the weekly bulletin to introduce me to the parishioners.



Notre Dame Seminary, 1967

M.T.: You have all the qualities I think a man of the cloth should have—compassion, a fine education, integrity, reverence, a sense of humor. Are you glad that you chose to serve the church as a musician rather than as a priest, that you chose to follow "a road less traveled?"

J.H.: Yes. After two years in the active ministry, I came to the realization that for personal and spiritual reasons, I had to make a change in my life. After much prayer and consideration and consultation with my spiritual director, together we came to the conclusion that I should request an indefinite leave of absence from the archbishop. I made the request, and it was granted in February 1968. In August of that year, Msgr. John P. Reynolds, who was well aware of my situation and status, hired me as music director and organist for St. Patrick's Church.

M.T.: What led you to playing the organ and directing choirs?

J.H.: When I was 13, Sister Mary Celia, SSND (School Sisters of Notre Dame), was the organist at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church and music teacher in the grammar school. I was studying piano with her, and she suggested that I should learn to play the organ. My parents gave their consent, and she began to give me organ lessons on the 11-rank, two-manual Tellers-Kent pipe organ, dated 1920, in the church. This was back in the days when Novenas and such things as evening May Devotions were very popular. As soon as I had learned the very basics of the instrument, she had me learn one hymn at a time, and as I learned each one, she would have me play it during the service. Then she had me learn the accompaniment to the Latin Masses that the school children sang at the 8:00 am High Mass every morning of the week, and she would let me play for these Masses. This was while I was still in grammar school. When I was in high school, I joined the church's adult choir and sang with them.

When I was employed at St. Patrick's



At St. Patrick's Evening of Celebration, when Joe was honored for his 40 years of service to the church and when he received the Alumnus of the Year Award from the University of New Orleans, presented by his dear friend and department chair, Dr. James Hammann



St. Patrick's Church

in 1968, there was no choir. I was hired only to play the organ, and once in a while maybe sing for a morning High Mass. Between 1968 and 1987 I would invite musician friends to perform at the church for big feast days such as Christmas Midnight Mass or on Easter Sunday morning, but there was no organized music program. In 1987 I formed a male choir to sing an all-Gregorian High Mass on Passion Sunday of that year. Then in May I formed a female choir to sing a High Mass in honor of Mary. In September of that year, these two groups combined to form what became known as St. Patrick's Concert Choir. This continued until March 7, 2010, when it was disbanded.

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Joe with founding choir members Rose Mary Tichenor, Jane Wilson, and Rene Toups, 1990



Fr. Reynolds farewell, 2000



Joe at home practice organ, 1998

M.T.: To hear the Roman Rite sung in Latin is becoming a rare experience, yet you have kept this tradition alive at St. Patrick's Church. When did you learn Latin and how were you able to maintain a volunteer choir that could sing the Latin Mass so beautifully?

J.H.: When the liturgical changes went into effect after Vatican II (1962), the pastor at St. Patrick's Church was granted permission to continue the Tridentine Latin Mass because the Stella Maris Center (the Catholic Maritime Organization for Foreign Seamen) was directly across Camp Street from St. Patrick's; the reasoning was that the foreign seamen would not understand the English language being used in the new liturgy, but would be more at ease and understand the Latin.

At present there are at least two additional churches in New Orleans that celebrate with the Latin liturgy.

Singing Latin

When I was in grammar school, beginning in the fifth grade, the whole student body was taught to sing Latin by rote. We sang a *Missa Cantata* (High Mass) every morning during the week at 8 am. The Children's Mass was at 8:30 am Sunday,

and all the students sang; on Saturday morning at 7 am individual classes were assigned on rotating schedule. During the summer months, individual classes were assigned to sing the 7 am Mass six days a week.

In 1953, when I was 15 years old, the nun who was the church organist—and also my first organ instructor—hired me to play for all the High Masses in June, July, and August. I was thrilled when at the end of the summer I was paid \$150 for my services. The time I spent at Notre Dame was before the Vatican II changes went into effect. All the liturgies were in Latin. Even the philosophy courses had Latin textbooks.

When I started the choir at St. Patrick's, it was with men who volunteered to sing a Latin Gregorian chant Mass for what in the old days was called Passion Sunday (two Sundays before Easter) 1987. In May I had volunteer women sing a two-part Mass. We called this a "Mary Mass" in honor of the Blessed Virgin. Then in September of that year I put the two groups together and St. Patrick's Concert Choir was formed; some of these people assisted with the repair of the Möller.

All of the original members of the choir had sung Latin when they were in school, so Latin was not a problem. Most of these people knew how to pronounce Latin, but had a very limited knowledge of the meaning of what was being sung. As the years went along, there were very few members who had not been exposed to Latin, and the few who were not familiar with it were helped along by the older members of the group.

M.T.: Who were the greatest influences on your life as a musician and why?

J.H.: The two teachers who probably influenced me the most were Father Robert J. Stahl, S.M. (Society of Mary) and Elise Cambon. Father Stahl was in charge of the music program at Notre Dame Seminary for the six years that I was a student there. He conducted the Notre Dame Seminary Schola Cantorum, of which I was a member, and every day there was a 15-minute Gregorian chant rehearsal for the entire



Joe at the organ for the "Farewell to the Möller" concert given in January 2009, the day before the Möller was dismantled for the new organ

student body. Here I received my background in Gregorian chant. Eventually I was able to conduct the student body at High Mass when chant was sung. We sang two or three High Masses a week, and the entire student body was able to sing all of 18 Masses in the *Kyrie* and the Gregorian chant Propers of the Mass in the *Liber Usualis*. It was from Father Stahl that I received my foundation in chant, and learned much about choral conducting.

Dr. Elise Cambon, the organist at St. Louis Cathedral for 60 years, served on the faculty of Loyola Music School. I spent several semesters studying with her. She required hard work and dedication, and any success that I may have enjoyed as an organist must be attributed to her instruction and example.

M.T.: What have you enjoyed the most in your career as a musician?

J.H.: I have always enjoyed playing music, and playing for other people, either piano or organ. As long as I have been at St. Patrick's, whenever I played



Master of Music, University of New Orleans, 1993

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Christmas concert, 1988

a service, it was not unusual for me to play for thirty minutes before the service began. This was just as important for me as was playing for the service itself. I enjoyed improvising the long organ prelude and creating a prayerful and quiet time for anyone who was in church.

The most rewarding aspect of my tenure at St. Patrick's has been conducting large works for choir and orchestra. Over the years I conducted Haydn's *Mass in Honor of John de Deo* (also referred to as *The Little Organ Mass*) and the *Lord Nelson Mass*; Mozart's *Trinity Mass*, *Coronation Mass*, *Sparrow Mass*, and *D-minor Mass*; Dvorak's *Mass in D*; Charpentier's *Messe de Minuit pour Noël*; Rheinberger's *Mass in C*; Bach's Cantatas #142 and #190; Saint-Saëns' *Christmas Oratorio*; and Schubert's *Mass in G*.

Every time I listen to a recording of one of these performances, I have difficulty believing that I was able to put something like this together and achieve such glorious results. It humbles me and makes me grateful that I have been blessed to be able to do this.

M.T.: I know the crowning glory of your tenure at St. Patrick's Church is installation of the organ built by Patrick J. Murphy & Associates in 2009. However, before this, you yourself resuscitated the 1962 Möller instrument. Your efforts to rescue it in the 1980s are remarkable. Please tell us how you did this.

J.H.: In 1982, the 1962 Möller (#9614) became unplayable because of the deterioration of the pouch leather and reservoir leather in the organ mechanism. An estimate of the cost to make the needed repairs was in the neighborhood of \$60,000. At this particular time, St. Patrick's Church building was undergoing an extensive and expensive renovation (1977-1990), and the funds needed to repair the organ were not available. So the church purchased a small Allen organ to substitute for the Möller until the necessary repairs could be made.

In 1986 someone made a \$3,000 donation to the church for organ repairs. This was the seed money that began the restoration of the Möller. I dismantled and rebuilt the 1962 Möller in the 1980s. At



Christmas concert, 1989



Joe with Betty Noe (donor of the new St. Patrick's organ, along with her children, in memory of her late husband and their father James A. Noe, Jr.) and Patrick Murphy

this time I had a piano tuning, repair, and rebuilding business. I specialized in the old-time mechanical player pianos. This work on player pianos required the use of leather, pneumatic cloth, and hot liquid hide glue, many of the same materials that are used in a pipe organ. So René Toups, some of the choir members, and I decided to undertake the organ repair project. I purchased several books on organ construction and repair and the project began.

While the ceiling plaster was being repaired, the workmen did not properly cover and protect the organ pipes. As a result, several large pieces of plaster fell onto the Great pipes and damaged about a dozen pipes. Since Möller was still in business at this time, I sent the pipes back to Möller for repair or replacement. Much of the dirt from this work was not only dropped on the exposed Great and Pedal pipes, but it also found its way into the Swell and Choir chambers. So all the pipes of the organ had to be removed and cleaned, and all the windchests had to be cleaned. This was very dirty work. Our crew removed all except the bottom octave of three 16-foot sets of pipes and cleaned each one individually. When the pipes were removed and cleaned and all the pipe chests vacuumed, I replaced all of the pneumatics in the relay chest with new leather, and also re-leathered eleven of the thirteen reservoirs. We began this work in September 1987 and had the organ back together roughly tuned in time for Christmas Midnight Mass the same year. In January I hired a professional organ technician to tune the organ properly and do some voicing.

M.T.: Your final gift to St. Patrick's is the splendid organ built by Patrick J. Murphy, Opus 53. What prompted you choose him as the builder? And how were you able to accomplish this?

J.H.: The pitch on the old Möller was about 20 cents flat. It had been this way for years. Any time that the organ was tuned, it was tuned at that pitch. Finally in 2007 after we began the orchestra

Masses and all the instrumentalists complained about how difficult it was to tune their instruments to the organ, I decided that maybe it was time to bring it up to A = 440 Hz. I asked Jim Hammann if he would undertake this task for us, but it was a bigger job than Jim could handle at the time because of his involvement with the university. Since Jim could not undertake this task, he recommended Patrick J. Murphy. I engaged Patrick to tune the organ to 440. I was very impressed with his tuning ability and his overall knowledge about organs.

It had been over 20 years since I had completed the re-leathering work in 1987, and there were many indications that the Möller was going to need a rebuild in a very short time. After all these years, it was obvious that the leather I had installed was nearing the end of its usefulness.

Patrick Murphy was very impressed by the acoustics of the church, and expressed an interest in building a new organ for St. Patrick's. By this time his company had already constructed or completely rebuilt 52 pipe organs throughout the country. I suggested that he draw up a proposal for an instrument that he thought would serve our needs and submit it to the pastor. The proposal was submitted in the summer of 2007, and several organists whose opinion I respect examined it. Everyone felt that the organ described in this proposal would be a wonderful instrument for St. Patrick's Church. I presented the proposal to the Parish Council meeting in the fall of 2007, and the group was in favor of the new instrument. All we needed was the funds to pay for it. About a month later, Mrs. Betty Noe, a longtime choir member, informed me that she would underwrite the cost of the new instrument in memory of her late husband. By the end of December the contract was signed. In January 2009 the Möller was completely removed, 27 of the 29 ranks were reconditioned and used in the new organ, along with 23 new ranks, giving the new organ a total of 50 ranks. The week after Easter 2009, the new organ arrived and was installed in time to be used for the first Mass of a

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Patrick J. Murphy & Associates, Opus 53

newly ordained priest in June.

The Patrick J. Murphy organ was officially dedicated and blessed by the pastor, Rev. Stanley P. Klores, S.T.D., on Sunday, September 14, 2009, during the celebration of a Solemn High Mass, celebrated in the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite (the Tridentine Latin Mass). At this Mass the choir sang Dvorak's *Mass in D*, with only organ accompaniment. Dr. James Hammann was the organist, and I conducted. I chose this Mass for the dedication of the organ because it was originally commissioned to be sung at the dedication of a chapel.

M.T.: Thomas Murray, University Organist and Professor of Music at Yale University, played the dedication concert of the Patrick J. Murphy organ on December 6, 2009 for a packed church. I was delighted to be invited to play the second recital on February 28, 2010. The instrument and sacred space of St. Patrick's are perfect for the music of Bach, Franck, Langlais, Alain, and Hovhaness. One teenager commented that he thought Langlais' *Suite Médiévale* sounded "Gothic" and suited the architecture of St. Patrick's. High praise indeed!

You, Betty Noe and her children, Rev. Stanley Klores, S.T.D., and the builder, Patrick J. Murphy & Associates, are to be thanked for this pipe organ that will bring solace, joy, and hope to those who hear it. It is a marvel, and without you, it would not exist! We thank you, Joe Hoppe, for your determination, vision and legacy. Knowing you, you will continue to make wonderful things happen. ■

Marijijn Thoene received a D.M.A. in organ performance/church music from the University of Michigan in 1984. She is an active recitalist and director of music at St. John

*Lutheran Church in Dundee, Michigan. Her two CDs, *Mystics and Spirits* and *Wind Song*, are available from Raven Recordings. She is a frequent presenter at medieval conferences on the topic of the image of the pipe organ in medieval manuscripts.*

Photos courtesy René Toups

**Patrick J. Murphy & Associates
Opus 53
St. Patrick's Roman Catholic
Church, New Orleans**

GREAT

- 16' Violone (ext, 1-12 in façade)
- 8' Open Diapason
- 8' Principal
- 8' Harmonic Flute
- 8' Bourdon
- 8' Violoncello
- 8' Viola de Gamba (Sw)
- 4' Octave
- 4' Spitzflute
- 2 3/4' Twelfth
- 2' Fifteenth
- 1 3/4' Seventeenth
- IV Mixture
- 16' Bassoon (Sw)
- 8' Trumpet (Ch)
- 4' Clarion (Ch)
- 8' Bombarde (Ch)
- Chimes (Ch)

SWELL

- 16' Lieblich Gedackt
- 8' Diapason
- 8' Rohrflute
- 8' Viola de Gamba
- 8' Viola Celeste
- 4' Principal
- 4' Traverse Flute
- 2' Flautino
- IV Plein Jeu
- 16' Bassoon
- 8' Trompette
- 8' Oboe
- 4' Clarion
- Tremulant



Patrick Murphy organ at St. Patrick's Church

CHOIR

- 8' Geigen Diapason
- 8' Gedeckt
- 8' Erzähler
- 8' Erzähler Celeste
- 4' Geigen Octave
- 4' Koppelflute
- 2 3/4' Nazard
- 2' Blockflute
- 1 3/4' Tierce
- III Mixture
- 8' Clarinet
- 8' Trumpet
- Tremulant
- 16' Contra Bombarde (T.C., ext)
- 8' Bombarde
- 4' Bombarde Clarion (ext)
- 8' Cor de Hoppe (8' Tuben)
- Chimes

PEDAL

- 32' Diapason (1-12 independent 10 3/4')
- 16' Open Diapason
- 16' Violone (Gt)
- 16' Bourdon
- 16' Lieblich Gedackt (Sw)
- 8' Diapason (Gt)
- 8' Octave Diapason
- 8' Bourdon
- 8' Rohrflute (Sw)
- 4' Harmonic Flute (Gt)
- IV Mixture
- 32' Cornet
- 16' Trombone (ext, Ch)
- 16' Bassoon (Sw)
- 8' Bombarde (Ch)
- 8' Trumpet (Ch)
- 4' Clarion (Ch)

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