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# THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH RYE, NEW YORK

## CASAVANT FRÈRES COVER FEATURE

The Presbyterian Church of Rye, New York, is a handsome Gothic structure designed by Richard M. Upjohn in 1870. Its tall, arched nave, with hard surfaces throughout, provides a wonderful room for music. This is the fourth building for a congregation which traces its roots to the late seventeenth century. Records show that there was an organ as early as 1861 and that the first organ for the present building was an Odell placed in the north transept.

In January 1982 Casavant Frères completed the new 4-manual, 68-rank organ, given by Miss Esther Jackson in memory of her sister Edith. The installation followed a four-year period of evaluating the church's needs. The existing rear gallery held a 31-stop Hillgreen-Lane organ from 1906 until 1947, when the organ was moved to a chamber at the right of the enlarged chancel; Seth Bingham played this organ during his tenure as organist, 1908-1913. The gallery was built at a time when the church had only a solo quartet and a few volunteers—there was no space for a substantial instrument and several large choirs. Had the organ and choirs been restored to the rear gallery, an enormous empty chancel would have resulted, dramatically changing the style of worship.

The enlarged chancel, with communion table brought forward, places the choir behind, facing the congregation. The organ layout necessitated bringing the wall behind the choir six feet closer to the congregation, improving the proportions of an otherwise tunnel-like space, replacing a linoleum tile floor with wood parquet, removing four obstructive lanterns, and obtaining new chancel furniture. The project also involved a new sound system, in consultation with acoustician David Klepper, improved lighting, and an updated pulpit and lectern.

The organ chamber, which previously housed a 1966 Angell organ, has 22-foot ceilings and wide openings to the chancel and nave. The organ placement has been greatly improved by bringing the Grand-Orgue and much of the Pédale to the front wall of the chancel, immediately behind the choir, thus projecting down the center of the nave. This required careful negotiation, since small portions of a handsome chancel window are obstructed; double-glazing of the window helps maintain consistent temperature. Since 16-foot and 32-foot Pédale stops are located behind the expression boxes of the Récit and Positif divisions in the chamber, those divisions are elevated higher than usual to project the Pédale sound.

The spatial requirements in the chancel did not allow for a mechanical-action organ, but the L-shaped layout and movable console afforded by an electropneumatic organ are great advantages. We chose a French style for the organ because of its versatility in performing literature, playing services, and accompanying a choir that sings much oratorio repertoire. The grandeur of



Robert Moncrief at Rye Casavant  
(photograph by Vince Antolini)

the organ also seems appropriate to the spacious building.

The specifications reflect both variety of color, and foundation sound. The 8-foot flutes include a big solo flute and a chimneyed flute on the Grand-Orgue, a stopped flute on the Positif, and an open flute on the Récit. The 4-foot flutes include open, harmonic and koppel flutes. Distinctively different cornets appear on each manual, and a broad range of reeds is included. The borrow of the 16-foot Basson to the Pédale is useful in German Baroque music, and all of the Pédale borrows have proven judicious and effective. There are no borrows or extensions other than in the Pédale division. The Solo Trompette harmonique is enclosed in the Positif box, making it possible for use where the expressive English tuba is indicated, as well as functioning as a chorus or solo reed above full organ. Though it might seem unusual, the celeste with the Récit open flute is quite lush and beautiful.

The drawknobs, combination thumb pistons, manual natural keys and pedal sharps are made of rosewood, and the manual sharps are of rosewood with ivory caps. The swell boxes are of solid oak, and chancel and nave expression shades can be operated independently. The movable console is all-electric and has a carved Gothic case. The chamber openings are faced with Gothic wrought-iron grilles.

Tonal finishing was by Yves Champagne and Kenneth Wolfe, artistic direction by Jean-Louis Coignet, and installation by Roland Bonneau. Casavant was represented by Donald Corbett and Ronald Miller. Opening recitals were played by Robert Moncrief on February 7, Frederick Swann on March 7 and Gerre Hancock on May 1, 1982.

ROBERT MONCRIEF

### GRAND-ORGUE (I)

(61 notes)
16 Bourdon
8 Montre
8 Flûte à pavillon
8 Bourdon
4 Prestant
4 Flûte ouverte
2 Doublette
2 $\frac{1}{2}$ Cornet III
2 Fourniture IV
$\frac{3}{8}$ Cymbale III
16 Basson
8 Trompette
4 Clairon
Tremblant
Clochettes
Solo/Grand-Orgue
Récit/Grand-Orgue
Positif/Grand-Orgue

### RÉCIT EXPRESSIF (III)

(61 notes)
16 Bourdon (wood)
8 Flûte ouverte
8 Flûte céleste (TC)
8 Viole de gambe
8 Voix céleste (GG)
4 Octave
4 Flûte octaviante
2 $\frac{1}{2}$ Nasard
2 Octavin
1 $\frac{3}{4}$ Tierce
2 Plein Jeu V
16 Cor Anglais
8 Trompette
8 Basson-Hautbois
8 Voix humaine
4 Clairon
Tremblant

### POSITIF EXPRESSIF (II)

(61 notes)
16 Quintaton
8 Principal
8 Bourdon
8 Dulciane
4 Octave
4 Flûte
2 $\frac{1}{2}$ Nasard
2 Doublette
2 Quarte de nasard
1 $\frac{3}{4}$ Tierce
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ Larigot
$\frac{2}{3}$ Plein Jeu IV
8 Trompette
8 Cromorne
Tremblant
Récit/Positif

### SOLO (IV)

(61 notes)
8 Trompette harmonique

### PÉDALE

(32 notes)
32 Soubasse (ext)
16 Contrebasse (wood)
16 Soubasse (wood)
16 Bourdon (G.O.)
8 Octavebasse
8 Bourdon (G.O.)
4 Octave
4 Flûte ouverte (G.O.)
2 $\frac{1}{2}$ Mixture V
32 Bombarde (ext)
16 Bombarde
16 Basson (G.O.)
8 Trompette (G.O.)
4 Clairon (G.O.)
Solo/Pédale
Récit/Pédale
Positif/Pédale
Grand-Orgue/Pédale

Opus 3506, 1981  
50 stops, 68 ranks, 3863 pipes

**Robert Moncrief** has been organist-director of music of the Presbyterian Church of Rye since 1977. A native of Hanover, Pennsylvania, he is a graduate of The College of William and Mary, and the Yale Institute of Sacred Music. He has served as the assistant organist of Bruton Parish Church, Williamsburg, and Manhattan's First Presbyterian Church, and as director of the Yale Divinity School Choir. His teachers have included Dorothy Ballinger, James Darling, Robert Baker and Vernon de Tar. He recently completed a term on the Executive Board of the New York City AGO Chapter.