

# Casavant Frères

## *Introducing a New Instrument*

The introduction of a new organ is an exciting event that marks the end of many years of planning by a whole host of individuals who have worked to make this occasion possible. For an organist, this dream come true usually is a once in a lifetime experience. Without dictating what should or should not be done, we would like to make a few comments concerning this subject that are based upon observing similar events with other new instruments of all sizes in a variety of settings.

There will be much anticipation and excitement surrounding the unveiling of this new organ. Everyone will be anxious to hear its first sounds and the organist will be eager to show just what it can do. After all, most organists have dreamed their whole lifetime to be able to play a really fine instrument, one that is capable of providing the resources to play a wide variety of literature and to accompany choristers and congregation with registrations that can be varied to meet the needs of the music and text. Therefore it will be very tempting to show the full resources of the instrument at the occasion of its unveiling. Since first impressions are lasting ones, this positively anticipated event can turn into something quite different if it is not approached carefully.

One of the most important things is to introduce the instrument deliberately and carefully, especially with regard to the fuller sounds that it is capable of producing. Once an organ is labeled as being "too loud, too bright, too shrill, or too harsh" by members of the congregation, that distinction will take decades to erase, if indeed it can ever be overcome. Please remember that, to most of the members of any church, the sound of an organ is what they heard for years before the new one arrived. Members of the organ committee will have been exposed to other new instruments during their search process and you may have one or more organ enthusiasts in the church who have recordings and attend organ recitals, but for the majority of the congregation this will be a totally new experience. Also, due to the length of time between the removal of the old organ and the completion of the new one, you probably will have been worshiping without the sound of a pipe organ for some time. Therefore every sound will be new and different.

In choosing solo organ music for the first service and for a number of weeks thereafter, we suggest selecting pieces that show the variety of color of the organ rather than its power. Try to avoid performing something like the Widor Toccata for the first service, or if it really must be played, use a more conservative registration than what the music calls for or what you otherwise may want to use. There will be many occasions in the future when the organ's full resources can be employed with wonderful effect. The same conservative approach to the early or extended use of a big solo reed such as a Trumpet-en-chamade is important. Not unlike a very distinctive and potent spice used in cooking, such stop's effectiveness is inversely related to the amount of time it is played.

Probably the best advice is to avoid using anywhere near the full resources of the new instrument, certainly for the first service and for an appropriate period of time thereafter. Build gradually to that time when it is heard and carefully choose the occasion when it is used; even then control carefully the length of time it is heard. If

there is an initial gradual approach to the whole complement of sound of the organ, the instrument can be used to its fullest extent following this introductory period from that time forward with everyone celebrating the organ's resources and presence.

Usually a new organ has a much better developed chorus structure through mixtures than the instrument it replaced. These sounds certainly will be new to the ears of most of the congregation, therefore it probably is wise not to play repertoire that uses the principal chorus including mixtures for the first prelude. Save this for later after your listeners have grown accustomed to these sounds. It is a fact that most lay people don't readily accept sounds that are bright or brilliant. These sounds, which are characteristic of an organ, are generally not heard in other types of musical experiences. Older people are especially sensitive to such sounds so care must be given to a carefully planned gradual exposure of the upper work and brighter reeds. It has been determined that many times when a non-musician indicates that an organ is too loud, in reality what they are saying is that it sounds too brilliant to them. If literature and registrations are selected with care for a period of time such objections rarely will be a problem in the long term.

The resources of the new organ will be very useful in providing a variety of registrations for inspirational leadership of hymn accompaniments. At the beginning, and for a period of time, use the same type of restraint with regard to full and bright registrations in hymn registrations as mentioned above in relationship to solo literature. Introduce and accompany hymns using different combinations appropriate to the hymn text. Depending upon the acoustic of the room, the placement of the instrument, size of congregation and other factors it is often effective to use a single stop such as the Montre/ Principal/ Diapason 8' of the Great/Grand Orgue for an introduction and perhaps even the accompaniment. Do some experimenting to determine what will work with your situation. Variety will always be effective if it is done in relationship to the text of the hymn and its placement within the service. A quiet meditative hymn can be as powerful as the most energetic paean of praise.

### ***Inaugural Recital***

The choice of literature and performer for the organ's opening recital also should be given careful consideration. If you want to continue to provide such programs as a part of your music ministry and extend its outreach by such means, then the success of the first event will be critical to the future of the program in general. Even if there is no long-term goal of this type, there is no reason for the inaugural program to be anything but uplifting and positive.

The selection of a performer will be most important to the success of an inaugural event. Many times a church or donor will want to invite an organist from outside the congregation to perform the opening program. Just because a person plays recitals or has a nationally or internationally known name may not assure the success of a dedication program. A fine performer communicates with the audience both musically and verbally and will plan a program that demonstrates the resources of the new instrument rather than just the player's technique or interest in arcane literature.

Discuss previous recital experiences, especially dedication programs, with other organists and ask for their comments. Look for someone who receives enthusiastic recommendations for providing a well-structured and beautifully executed program.

If an outside performer is hired, do not hesitate to discuss the importance of the program being an inaugural recital where you want the resources of the instrument to be featured. Send a copy of the organ specification to the performer to study prior to the selection of music for the program. There should be variety in the selection of periods and styles of music, generally avoiding extended organ works that are more appropriate for a convention of professional organists than an audience of people who probably will be attending their first organ recital. After all, the goal is to have them leave having a positive experience that will make them want to return. If you receive the program and feel that it is not appropriate for your situation, do not hesitate to discuss the choice of music with the visiting organist or booking agent. Professional players usually have other literature to offer when and if they are asked.

Encourage the recitalist to use the instrument to involve everyone in the singing of a hymn. After all, congregational accompaniment is one of the primary reasons for having an organ in the church. Hymn singing may be in connection with the performance of organ pieces based on hymn tunes during the course of the program or can be an independent experience such as an encore. A really talented player can bring a recital to a powerful conclusion with an inspirational hymn accompaniment. If possible choose an organist who is comfortable and effective in this area so that this can be a special part of the dedication experience by allowing the listeners to participate.

With careful planning any new instrument can be received with genuine enthusiasm by those who hear it, causing church members to celebrate the completion of this important investment of their time and talents with joy and enthusiasm.

© Casavant Frères