

COVER FEATURE

CASAVANT FRÈRES

MODEST-SIZE INSTRUMENTS

SUCCESSFUL APPROACHES



Calvary Lutheran Church, Morganton, N.C.

Like most organbuilders, we love to talk about our large instruments. There is something rewarding about these installations, and we are always sure to create an impression on those we talk to.

In the last few years, under the tonal directorship of Jacquelin Rochette, an accomplished organist who joined Casavant some 25 years ago, we have had the privilege of building a number of large instruments for concert halls, academic institutions, and, of course, houses of worship. All of these have drawn a lot of attention to our current work. We are fortunate to be commissioned every year to build large new organs. However, the core of our activity remains two-manual instruments of fewer than 30 ranks.

The Casavant brothers built hundreds of small instruments (as small as five ranks) for churches, chapels, schools, and convents. The most popular of these instruments, developed around 1910, was a two-manual, seven-rank organ built with tubular-pneumatic action, a type of action that then was less expensive than electro-pneumatic. Generally, it had two 8' and one 4' stop per manual, plus a Bourdon 16' extension in the Pedal. As an option, one could add an Oboe 8' to the expressive Swell. The brochure presenting these modest-size instruments opens with a rather provocative introduction that reveals the colorful personality of Samuel Casavant.

For a long time, we were asked to develop a small organ at a moderate price. . . . Our small organs differ from the large ones in power only. The tone of the different stops is the same as stops of similar character in larger instruments, and we have provided these new products with all the improvements our experience has taught us. . . . Therefore, it is with confidence that we respectfully offer a felicitous substitute for the screaming harmoniums that make church services so painful for anyone with a modicum of musical sense.

Designing a successful small instrument always represents an interesting challenge. In that context, a clear vision and a disciplined approach are the key elements in the success of the project. A productive dialogue between the builder and the purchaser, including consultant, acoustician, etc., normally leads to making the right choices in order to provide the best instrument for a given situation, respecting the space and budget available. For the builder, it is crucial to manage the project in such a way that the necessary attention is given from the initial design stage through its completion. The choices to be made are mainly related to the tonal and visual aspects of the project, as well as the type of action to be used. Even if they are contemplated separately, these

aspects of the project are intimately intertwined and need to be developed in parallel.

Project Management

There is a persisting myth in some factions of the organ world that larger workshops are careless builders producing “cookie cutter” instruments. While there have been examples of such practice some decades ago, the reality of pipe organ building today does not leave any room for such organizations. The larger workshop, however, offers the luxury of having on its staff highly specialized crafts people working along with traditional organbuilders. This wealth of expertise becomes extremely valuable when we are embarking on designing and building successful modest-size instruments.

Our past customers know how much attention we give to all our projects, from the initial design stage to the tonal finishing on site, which is supervised by our tonal director. Because of the space and budget constraints, the challenges of building successful small organs are that much greater. We are happy to face the problems and come with creative solutions.

A good example of this is the twelve-rank instrument we have installed at **Immanuel Episcopal Church** in Glencoe, Maryland, a quaint country church with a seating capacity of 125. As in many churches, the stained glass window had to remain the main

focal point in the chancel, so it could not be hidden, even partly, by the new organ. The main constraint was that the organ footprint could not exceed six feet wide by six feet six inches deep on either side of the chancel, which represented an interesting challenge for designing the windchests. For this project, we used our own electro-pneumatic, unit-type windchests, which give greater latitude in the layout of the pipes. Considering the limited tonal resources that would fit into such a space, using this type of windchest allowed us to achieve more flexibility in the stoplist, by having the possibility of judiciously extending ranks to different pitches and borrowing stops from one division to another. With the exception of the Open Diapason 8' and Pedal Subbass 16', the entire organ is expressive. The tonal resources include all the characteristic sounds of the pipe organ: a complete principal chorus, two flutes of contrasting character, a Sesquialtera, a set of soft strings, and an Oboe that is extended at 16' as a Bassoon. The two graceful cases of stained walnut truly make the organ look as if it has always been in the church.

Tonal Approach

At Casavant, we believe in choruses. The challenge of designing a modest tonal scheme is to ensure that the specification shows as much cohesiveness as does a larger instrument, except for the fact that choices are more defined (e.g., one trumpet only, instead of two or three). In addition to having complete principal and flute choruses, we make sure that the stoplist provides ample foundation, especially to lead congregational singing and to support choirs, as well as featuring the broadest tonal palette possible in terms of color stops.

Of course, there are many ways to approach the tonal design of a small instrument, in order to bring together discipline and flexibility. At the **First Presbyterian Church** in Red Wing, Minnesota, the intimate space (the sanctuary is wider than deep) did not require a large instrument or one with significant power. What was needed was an organ with rich color and resources for use in the variety of roles that the instrument is called to fill. In order to provide considerable flexibility, both manual divisions are expressive. Interestingly, the instrument includes a wood Principal 16' in the Pedal that provides an impressive undergirding for the manual divisions.

Similarly, the tonal scheme of our new organ at the **Congregational United Church of Christ** in Iowa City, Iowa, favors a very warm sound, with the emphasis put on the fundamental tone. In addition to the 8' principal and flute one normally expects to find on the Great, a stringy Salicional 8' adds richness to the 8' line. The Swell features both an Oboe and a Clarinet that provide different solo colors while contributing to the full Swell sound. Six ranks from the previous organ were incorporated into the new tonal scheme. We are pleased that this instrument represents a compelling addition to the music scene in Iowa City, which is blessed with a number of excellent instruments designed after Baroque models.

In Arlington, Texas, we have recently completed instruments of similar size in two Episcopal churches. While rather different in concept, both are equally refined tonally.

At the **Episcopal Church of St. Peter and St. Paul**, the organ is installed in the gallery with the choir, in an excellent position for musical leadership. The specification features an interesting synthesis of elements borrowed from different traditions of organbuilding, which blend into a very cohesive ensemble. Among other things, the organ includes two cornets of contrasting characters, a gentle Sesquialtera in the Great and a broad Cornet décomposé in the Swell. **St. Mark's Episcopal Church** dedicated its new church in 2007, after many years of planning. From the outset, it was determined that the new sanctuary would be designed to encourage music making. Consequently, the new organ literally "blossoms" in the acoustically reverberant nave. Tonally, the instrument was designed especially to serve the Anglican liturgy. It includes no fewer than five 16' stops; all the manual reeds are under expression.

Visual Approach

Most projects for modest-size instruments are limited in budget. As we hear sometimes, we could simply "spend the money on the pipes" and keep the organ's visual impact to a minimum. However, it is not that simple; the reality is that the organ is seen before it is heard. Moreover, because most people have developed greater visual perception than aural aptitudes, we strongly believe that if the instrument has a pleasant visual presence in the room where it is heard, the listener will be more receptive to its sound. With this said, the challenge remains to be able to design a case (or a facade) that respects the budget available while blending elegantly in the room where the organ will be installed.

The light and spacious sanctuary of **Holy Rosary Catholic Church** in Burlington, Ontario, a vibrant parish in the suburb of Toronto, did not immediately suggest an obvious position for a new organ. Following careful study and using the asymmetrical placement of the altar and cross as a guide, we chose to place the freestanding case at the front left corner, where it contributes to the overall balance of the nave. This instrument represents a fine example of Didier Grassin's work as director of Casavant's mechanical-action organs workshop.

At the First Presbyterian Church in Red Wing, Minnesota, a devastating fire destroyed the previous 1857 church. Discussions regarding a new organ began at the same time that architectural plans for the new church were being developed. This was undoubtedly the best way to guarantee the organ's successful integration into the new sanctuary. The instrument occupies a central position at the back of the chancel. The elegant casework was designed with Gothic details that were taken from the tracery of one of the church's large stained glass windows that sustained major damage in the fire.

Because the space allotted for the contemplated organ was inadequate, **Calvary Lutheran Church** in Morganton, North Carolina, decided to undertake a major sanctuary renovation, including significant improvements to the acoustics. The organ is located against the chancel wall. In order not to compromise the space for the organ, the existing stained glass window was integrated into the elegant organ casework and provided with backlighting.

Type of Action

When talking about organ design, one can hear all kinds of preconceived ideas, even myths, about the different types of action. At Casavant, we are comfortable building instruments using mechanical action or electric action, using either slider windchests or electro-pneumatic (pitman-type) windchests.

How do we determine the type of action to recommend for a small organ, in order to propose an instrument that will serve the music program best? In all cases, we first define the needs with great care. The type of action is determined with pragmatism after discussing and pondering the possibilities with the musicians.

Mechanical action, which is appreciated for its precision, among other things, represents an excellent solution when the space available naturally leads to this solution, in order that the discipline (simple direct tracker runs, windchest layout, etc.) of the instrument can be respected. At Holy Rosary Catholic Church in Burlington, Ontario, the greatest challenge for the design of the instrument came from its internal layout, which had to fit a tiny triangular footprint.

Of course, when the conditions to design a successful mechanical-action organ are not there, we prefer to recommend electric key action rather than forcing a mechanical concept to fit a dogma. We favor slider windchests when there are no or few extensions or borrows in the stoplist and when space is limited, as we did at the Congregational United Church of Christ in Iowa City, where the organ is located in an existing chamber. Electro-pneumatic windchests are preferable when higher wind pressures are required and when there is a need for more duplexed stops, as at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Arlington, Texas, where the Swell reed stops are borrowed to the Great and the Pedal.

Conclusion

Designing and building modest-size instruments has always been a vital part of Casavant's activity. Our long experience has taught us that a clear vision and a disciplined approach are essential to the success of these projects.

We always work to create a collaborative spirit that nurtures the creativity and enthusiasm of all those involved in the process, in order to establish a stoplist that will serve the musical needs effectively and to concur on a visual design that will have the right presence in the room, as well as to determine the best type of action for a given situation. Continued collaboration and the indispensable attention given to all stages of the project are instrumental in its successful completion.

To have the opportunity of designing and building small instruments is truly exciting. The solutions we need, especially in cases where the installation of a genuine pipe organ does not seem to be the obvious choice, surely represent one of the most rewarding aspects of our work.

SIMON COUTURE
DIDIER GRASSIN
JEAN-LUC HÉBERT
JACQUELIN ROCHETTE

**ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
ARLINGTON, TEXAS**

GREAT

16 Bourdon (ext.)
8 Principal
8 Rohrflöte
4 Octave
4 Spire Flute
2 Fifteenth
1½ Mixture IV
16 Bassoon (Sw.)
8 Trumpet (Sw.)
8 Oboe (Sw.)
16 Festival Trumpet (from 8')¹
8 Festival Trumpet¹
4 Festival Trumpet (from 8')¹

SWELL

8 Stopped Diapason
8 Viola da Gamba
8 Voix céleste (TC)
4 Principal
4 Spindle Flute
2½ Nazard
2 Flute
1½ Tierce
1 Plein Jeu III
16 Bassoon (ext.)
8 Trumpet
8 Oboe
Tremulant
8 Festival Trumpet (Gt.)¹

PEDAL

32 Bourdon (resultant)
16 Contrabass
16 Subbass
16 Bourdon (Gt.)
8 Octavebass (ext.)
8 Rohrflöte (Gt.)
4 Choral Bass
4 Rohrflöte (Gt.)
16 Posaune
16 Bassoon (Sw.)
8 Festival Trumpet (Gt.)¹
8 Trumpet (Sw.)
4 Oboe (Sw.)

¹ Prepared for future installation
26 ranks, electro-pneumatic action

**EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER AND
ST. PAUL
ARLINGTON, TEXAS**

GREAT

16 Bourdon (ext.)
8 Open Diapason
8 Chimney Flute
4 Octave
4 Spindle Flute
2 Fifteenth
2½ Sesquialtera II (TC)
1½ Mixture IV
8 Trumpet
Tremulant
8 Festival Trumpet
8 Oboe (Sw.)

SWELL

8 Stopped Diapason
8 Viola da Gamba
8 Voix céleste (TC)
4 Principal
4 Spire Flute
2½ Nazard
2 Piccolo
1½ Tierce
1 Plein Jeu III
16 Bassoon
8 Oboe
Tremulant
8 Festival Trumpet (Gt.)

PEDAL

32 Bourdon (resultant)
16 Subbass
16 Bourdon (Gt.)
8 Octave
8 Stopped Flute (ext.)
4 Choralbass
16 Posaune
16 Bassoon (Sw.)
8 Trumpet (ext.)
8 Festival Trumpet (Gt.)
4 Oboe (Sw.)

29 ranks, electric slider action

**HOLY ROSARY CHURCH
BURLINGTON, ONTARIO**

GRAND-ORGUE

8 Montre
8 Flûte à cheminée
4 Prestant
2 Principal italien
1 Mixture III
8 Trompette

RÉCIT

8 Bourdon
4 Flûte à fuseau
2 Doublette
2½ Sesquialtera II
8 Douçaine
8 Tremblant

PÉDALE

16 Subbasse
8 Octavebasse (G.-O.)
8 Trompette (G.-O.)

15 ranks, mechanical (suspended) action

**CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST
IOWA CITY, IOWA**

GREAT

16 Cello (ext.)
8 Principal
8 Salicional
8 Chimney Flute
4 Octave
4 Flute
2½ Twelfth
2 Fifteenth
2½ Cornet II (AA)
1½ Mixture II-IV
8 Trumpet
Tremulant
Chimes

SWELL

8 Viola da Gamba
8 Vox Coelestis (TC)
8 Bourdon
4 Geigen Octave
4 Flauto Traverso
2 Gemshorn
1½ Larigot
1½ Mixtur II-III
8 Oboe
8 Clarinet
Tremulant

PEDAL

32 Acoustic Bass (resultant)
16 Cello (ext.)
16 Subbass
8 Octave Bass
8 Stopped Flute (ext.)
4 Octave (ext.)
4 Flute (ext.)
10% Théorbe (derived)
16 Trombone
8 Trumpet (ext.)
Chimes

29 ranks, electric slider action

**CALVARY LUTHERAN CHURCH
MORGANTON, NORTH CAROLINA**

GREAT

16 Bourdon (ext.)
8 Principal
8 Chimney Flute
4 Octave
4 Conical Flute
2 Fifteenth
1½ Mixture II-IV
8 Trumpet
Carillon

SWELL

8 Bourdon
8 Viola da Gamba
8 Voix céleste (TC)
4 Principal
4 Spindle Flute
2½ Nazard
2 Flute
1½ Tierce
1½ Quinte
16 Bassoon (ext.)
8 Oboe
Tremulant

PEDAL

16 Subbasse
16 Bourdon (Gt.)
8 Octavebass
8 Chimney Flute (Gt.)
4 Octave
4 Chimney Flute (Gt.)
16 Posaune (ext.)
16 Bassoon (Sw.)
8 Trumpet (Gt.)
8 Oboe (Sw.)
4 Oboe (Sw.)

23 ranks, electro-pneumatic action

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
RED WING, MINNESOTA**

GREAT

16 Bourdon (ext.)
8 Principal
8 Chimney Flute
8 Flûtes célestes II
4 Octave
4 Open Flute
2½ Nazard (TC)
2 Italian Principal
1½ Tierce (TC)
2 Fourniture II-IV
16 Bassoon (Sw.)
8 Trompette
8 Oboe (Sw.)
Tremulant

SWELL

8 Major Flute
8 Viole de gambe
8 Voix céleste (TC)
4 Principal
4 Spindle Flute (ext.)
2 Doublette
1½ Quint
16 Bassoon (ext.)
8 Trompette (Gt.)
8 Oboe
Tremulant

PEDAL

32 Resultant
16 Principal
16 Bourdon (Gt.)
8 Principal (ext.)
8 Chimney Flute (Gt.)
4 Octave
4 Spindle Flute (Sw.)
16 Bassoon (Sw.)
8 Trompette (Gt.)
4 Oboe (Sw.)

23 ranks, electro-pneumatic action