

MONTREAL: LA VOIE DE L'ORGUE  
A VISITOR'S NOTES ON THE MCGILL  
INTERNATIONAL ORGAN ACADEMY  
JULY 9-19, 1997

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In the age-old struggle for superiority between Canada's two largest cities, virtually every aspect of life, culture, business, and politics has served as battleground. Though the juggernaut of Toronto's financial and self-marketing supremacy routinely rolls over all Canadian cities in its path, Montreal has retained the "title" in at least two areas, and arguably many more. The first, clearly, is the contest for the world's most highly publicized and yet financially disastrous sports stadium: Montreal's Stade Olympique or "Big 'O.'" This often empty and occasionally crumbling structure was built to service the summer Olympic games in 1976, and it holds this dubious distinction easily, although in terms of relentless ongoing financial loss, Toronto's SkyDome has proved a more than worthy contender since its opening in 1989.

A second, lesser-known, and infinitely more desirable distinction of Montreal, and one openly acknowledged by Toronto with uncharacteristic humility, is its distinguished and thriving organ culture. In July 1997, four years after hosting the Third International Congress of Organists, Montreal added McGill University's International Organ Academy to the jewels adorning its crown of distinction on the organ world stage. Two years later, the Academy's 1999 "encore" promises still more of the same.

Honoring its city's distinctions, McGill University, which celebrated its 176th anniversary in 1997, had a distinguished organ tradition including such figures as Percival Illsley and Lynnwood Farnam long before it became one of the first schools in North America to embrace mechanical-action organs. In 1962, McGill commissioned one of the first mechanical-action organs from Casavant Frères, and in the late 1970s was among the first to commission a historic copy, the French Classic organ of Redpath Hall by builder Hellmuth Wolff. Not content simply to "air lift" into the present a piece of excised history for its own sake, McGill inaugurated the Redpath Hall organ with a 1981 international symposium, *L'Orgue à notre époque* ("The Organ in Our Time"), testifying to the importance of current scholarship, and casting an optimistic glance at the future.

The academy is the brainchild and nearly single-handed organizational accomplishment of John Grew, university organist and professor of organ and harpsichord for 25 years, working with a part-time staff of four and an army of volunteers. For it, 16 venues representing the work of ten, mainly Montreal area builders and many of the city's most prominent organists, opened their doors and arms to receive a new community of some 80 students, auditors, faculty, and staff. The kind of free, mutually supportive society of learning at all stages formed by the academy's unique setting and ambience was a marvel to behold, and a thrill to join. The 1997 academy faculty was James David Christie (Boston, U.S.), Olivier Latty (Paris, France) John Grew, Hank Knox, and Bernard Lagacé (all from Montreal). The students and auditors came from Ireland, Switzerland, Japan, and across Canada and the U.S.

On Wednesday, July 9, after registration and an opening reception and buffet supper at McGill University, came the true opening: a full concert by Olivier Latty on the von Beckerath (V/78, 1960) organ at the Oratoire St-Joseph. The virtuoso program chronicled the works of organists of his home cathedral Notre Dame-de-Paris from Claude Racquet (1598-1664) through to Pierre Cochereau and Jean-Pierre Leguay—and of course, in the form of a closing improvisation, Latty himself.

Classes commenced at six locations the following day, and continued through eight teaching days. Each of the five offered classes ("17th-Century North German" with Christie, "French Classic" with Grew, "The Art of Continuo" with Knox, "Bach Organ Works" with Lagacé, and "French Symphonic" with Latty) met for two-and-one-half hours daily in a regular Montreal venue. Although print and promotional materials were offered in both English and French, and though all members of the faculty had good command of the French language, the academy was officially held in English, ostensibly to save the time required for in-class translation. Faculty and staff ably accommodated participants more comfortable in French as needed.

In addition to the class instruction, the academy offered seven recitals featuring all of the faculty, plus local organists Marc-André Doran and Christopher Jackson. Montreal's organist community cooperated with no fewer than six non-academy-related organ recitals during the period, and several more for the many registrants who elected to arrive early or leave late to enjoy the city.

Another uniquely Montreal event was Friday evening's lecture-conference led by Elisabeth Gallat-Morin dealing with the career of Jean Girard and the development of the organ in New France from the 17th century onward. Girard was the first professional musician in New France and the bringer to North America of the now-famous *Livre d'Orgue de Montréal*, Gallat-Morin's 1978 540-page discovery of anonymous and attributed French classical organ works.

No classes were held on Sunday, July 13: an ecumenical Choral Eucharist began the day at Christ Church Cathedral under the direction of Patrick Wedd. Later, after a joint harpsichord/organ recital at Redpath Hall by Hank Knox and John Grew, a short bus ride to the beautiful Îles de-la-Visitation in the Rivière des Prairies northeast of downtown took the company to the day's final site. There, the historic Église de-la-Visitation (the oldest church building still standing in Montreal [1752]) hosted a recital by titulaire Marc-André Doran on the newly restored (Warren 1841/Wolff 1993) organ.

The final day of the academy consisted of a bus trip to Chambly, where Christopher Jackson performed a short program on the historic Warren, 1854/Juget, 1995) organ of St. Stephen's Anglican Church, and then on to St-Hyacinthe for a guided tour of the factory of Casavant Frères.

A mini-symposium was also held at Casavant's that day: a panel discussion entitled "The Future of Organbuilding and Organ Playing," recalling the theme of the larger symposium held at McGill 16 years earlier. Following a restaurant dinner given to pay tribute to distinguished Quebec organist Antoine Reboulot, the company reboarded its buses for Boucherville. Symmetrically, a second recital by Olivier Latry inaugurating the new organ at L'Église Ste-Famille (Casavant II/28, 1996) brought to a close both the mini symposium on an optimistic note, and the academy on an inspiring one.

## FOUR 1997 ACADEMY SNAPSHOTS

### Olivier Latry French Symphonic Repertoire Église St-Jean Baptiste

The session proper began with Franck's *Troisième Choral*. In discussing registration, Latry pointed out the inconsistencies between various editions, particularly those using English translations. He made an interesting distinction between organ and

"orchestral" writing in the Chorals, suggesting different treatments. He also made the point that through their history, the Chorals have been registered very differently, and organs have been built differently, so dogmatic rules of authenticity are risky. When asked frankly when "Anches" meant to employ upperwork as well as foundations and reeds, he answered just as frankly, "I don't know." When asked whether the different tempo marking for an echo of a certain passage had any significance, he remarked, "I really didn't pay attention to Largamente the first time, so why should I be bound by it the second time?"

Recalling (coincidentally) themes of the morning's *Stilus Fantasticus* session with James David Christie, he directed the slow, building chords of he opening to be played with a brief accelerando and grand ritardando, shaping them in a very dramatic way ... and then followed with a very quick release of the resolution. Another unexpected echo of the morning session was Latry's use of the image of a metal spring to describe the hurrying of notes through a gesture which Christie had used Vogel's legendary bouncing ping-pong ball. He also ascribed a great deal of importance to the understanding of building acoustics. Though hardly Notre-Dame or Sainte-Clotilde, the splendor of St-Jean Baptiste, and the acoustical home of every organ, is a vital musical parameter for the interpreter to consider and exploit.

To aid in structural understanding, Latry described the work in the basic terms of its "chorale" sections separated by the florid echoes of the opening, and the held chord/moving bass passages that close each phrase within and between the sections. He advocated a similar accelerando/ritardando treatment of these moving bass melodies as he had for the chords of the opening.

One noticed his tendency to "downshift" the meter of an accelerating section (i.e., a four becomes a two), not because of beats coming too fast, but because of the need for more forward movement. At the decrescendo before the famous trompette melody, he recommended holding the melody note after the chords were released (allowing the acoustics to describe an even longer decrescendo as the final note remained) and then allowing it to decrescendo on its own into the building. Mastering this little trick warranted several repetitions by the student, until chord decrescendo, length of holding the single note, and the note's own (later) decrescendo, were exactly right. In a particularly poignant verbal image, Latry used the poetic "un lueur d'espoir" ("a glimmer of hope") to describe the D pivot into this first section in A major. He later called the work's final A-major cadence the confirmation of this.

Franck's Cavallé-Coll-influenced writing, Latty said, relies throughout on the builder's characteristic scaling, making high melodies sing out over even thick left-hand accompaniments, and necessitating that left-hand solos be played on the Grand Orgue accompanied by a quieter Positif or Récit. He made a point of expressing his preference for plenum registrations *without* the manual 16' when the texture consists of a high, slow melody or chords accompanied by a more agitated accompaniment, keeping the high part purely high in character, and not interfering with the identity of the lower part.

In a few closing minutes devoted to Vierne's *Carillon de Westminster*, Latty related that throughout the *Pièces de Fantaisie* many errors exist, such as the famous English translation error that translated "R p" (intended to mean Récit, *piano*) into "Swell and Choir," as though the original had been "R P" (meaning Récit and Positif coupled).

Though he spoke well, and in serviceable English, Latty's true teaching was by musical example, at the organ. Unlike with many teachers, his demonstrations were often exactly what was needed to cause a positive response that all could hear. He conducted an engaging and entertaining class for nearly three hours without a break, at a time when many students in less inspiring company might well have been seen to nod off. This, and sending each and every listener, from the profession's foremost to near-beginners, away not just awake and personally enchanted but inspired.

### James David Christie in Concert Église de l'Immaculée Conception

The six colorful Dutch Renaissance dances that opened James David Christie's concert symbolized the whole program in their variety, the imagination and poise of execution, and the level of scholarship informing their performer. He constructed the set by drawing on unattributed compositions from the Susanna van Soldt and Camphuysen manuscripts, and framing them around Sweelinck's *Malle Sijmen* dance variations.

Christie concluded the first half of his program with Buxtehude: first, two preludes on *Nun lob, mein Seel, den Herren* (BuxWV 214) and *Von Gott will ich nicht lassen* (BuxWV 220), and then the more rarely heard *Te Deum* (BuxWV 218). The latter work is an essay in North German textures and styles, and Christie's treatment of it accentuated the contrasts, creating a suite of great variety well representing the genre of the versified canticle. The second half of the program featured *Bach's Partita on Sei gegrüßet, Jesu gütig* (BWV 768), and two of the Neumeister collection

preludes, *Allein zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ* (BWV 1100) and *Wenn dich Unglück tut griesen an* (BWV 1104), juxtaposing the well known with the less so.

Christie's own transcription of Vivaldi's *Concerto in D* (RV 93) was a remarkable shift in texture and style from the rest of the evening's music, and the thicker tutti passages perhaps a little much for audience members not used to plenum registrations containing tierces. But if they were jarred at the outset, the delightful concertino passages and the ears' gradual adjustment (not unlike getting one's eyes used to a sudden high light level) won them over. This unusual program item reminded us that there is no reason in the world this attractive music shouldn't be transcribed by performers other than Bach, Walther, and their contemporaries. Recalling one of Christie's remarks from that morning's class extolling the instructional benefits of a performer's study determining manual/pedal division from tablature-based text, I could imagine him promoting doing one's own transcription as a way of getting closer to and more involved with the music we play.

As a "member of the press," I had great freedom to attend classes on one or two of several occasions, since each ran daily throughout the academy. I made an effort wherever possible to attend the class given by an artist on the day of that artist's evening concert. In Christie's case, the evening's resonance with the morning lay within his always poised and commanding musicality, and in particular his sense of musical space. How an organist uses silence in music, in worship—even how he or she spends silent moments between movements, sections, and pieces—has a role in defining the musical experience that must not be underestimated. Having attended one of Christie's and other classes, my mind's eye could easily soar the gallery's considerable height and penetrate the interposed Rückpositiv to see Christie's clear and artful releases, even had my ear not clearly perceived them. His use of two assistants seemed impeccably choreographed, so that at no time did anything but music determine the spaces "in between."

Hank Knox

The Art of Continuo

Clara Lichtenstein Hall, Strathcona Building,  
McGill University

As Hank Knox walked in, coffee in hand as always, he briefly abused the one absent late sleeper *in absentia*, and distributed some handout recitatives from a Vivaldi cantata. His description of it ("your standard recitative text ... an excuse to get very emotional in a very short space of time, with pretty inconsequential

meaning”) and its principal character (“your basic pastoral character, a shepherd far out in the field bemoaning the cruel fate that keeps him so far from his beloved”) woke up the understandably sluggish class. As he put it ... “tormented and out in the fields with sheep ... a recipe for disaster.” The tone was set.

The harmonically rich excerpt, *Lungi dal vago volto*, was material intended for use with a soloist in tomorrow's class. Each active participant in the class had a go reading through it, displaying a wide range of ability in sight realization from Knox's added figures.

A few minutes (and a few warnings against continuo “mortal sins,” as he called them) later, Knox began talking about musical “sentences,” and text sentences that are in an ideal world the same length as the musical sentence. He stressed the importance of being very comfortable with the text's meaning and the soloist's speed and cadence. He suggested that no matter what our own feelings about the shepherd's rather exaggerated trauma, we must play as though the text were ours. Italian-style recitative, usually very emotional, gives a great deal of room for arpeggiation, addition of passing notes between thirds, and generally expanding and contracting the number of voices. The colorful contribution of a master continuo player at one with the text was the ideal not quite reached by any participant but firmly implanted in their minds, both in sound and concept, by their instructor. Along with comfort with the text, he encouraged sound and thoughtful preparation, so that one's expressive devices are not overused unconsciously.

Moving into French recitative (Clérambault, *L'Amour pique par une Abeille*), Knox conveyed some of the differences between it and Italian recitative. After a competent reading by a “guinea pig,” he pointed out that rhythm is most clearly defined in the bass, influencing both soloist and continuo player. The French style also contains a richer palette of ornaments (not the more “rolling” arpeggiated style of the Italian). Ornaments add volume, interest, and time, lengthening and otherwise emphasising important words. He remarked that 18th-century theorists and players were far less regimented in their part-writing than we are today—voices were dropped, added, and crossed much more freely, especially in favor of expressive effect.

On the subject of the delayed cadence convention (à la the average *Messiah* recitative performance), he suggested that it shouldn't be done anywhere near as often as it is. Because our ears are less tolerant of chordal appoggiaturas (brief, simultaneous dominant and tonic harmony at cadences), we tend to avoid the problem by delaying the cadences. The 18th-century

Dutch theorist and continuo player Heineken spent a great deal of effort trying to explain why chordal appoggiaturas most definitely *were* allowed, which at the very least suggests that plenty were doing it, rightly or wrongly.

The class was conducted entirely on harpsichord, and in discussion, Knox stressed that organ continuo is quite different, both as pertains to texture and sustained volume. In organ-accompanied expressive recitative, one deals more with note spacing and tessitura than with the number of notes and chord rolling, necessitating a unique, thoughtful, and informed practice. While very practical and entertaining, Knox's whole approach seemed to be summed up in these words, and in informal but consummate musicianship.

John Grew

### French Classic Repertoire

Redpath Hall, McGill University

The Redpath Hall French Classic instrument (Wolff, III/37), whose facade has for approaching 20 years been a central image of McGill's organ department, was one of the first historic copies to be commissioned in North America, and was inaugurated in May of 1981. It was in the shadow of this magnificent instrument that Academy Artistic Director John Grew led a class in his—and its—speciality.

He hinted in his opening remarks at the need to see French Classic repertoire as part of its time and inextricably linked to the music of other countries. Citing examples of French style influence in the music of Buxtehude and Bach, he reminded us that French Classic repertoire is not a little module separate from music history, but like other repertoire, it can be a window of understanding onto a great deal of other music.

The first musical material of the class was the “Et in terra pax à 5 voix” from the *Gloria* of one of de Grigny's Organ Masses. In connection with concern over accidentals, Grew cautioned that the absence of an accidental in an engraved edition is sometimes misleading, consciously omitted by someone who either thought its presence would be obvious, or who didn't know better. From this comes the concept of “retroactive accidentals,” added either by editor or performer to correct this state of affairs.

Later, in the “Récit de Tierce en Taille,” he made sure to point out the accompanimental basis on the 16' pitch, coupled to the pedal to take the bottom voice in the same sound. The trills should be somewhat simple, and each affected by its surroundings, so that the

ornamentation doesn't become too relentless. He felt the "Tierce en Taille" should be fairly free in rhythm, and the Tierce very flexible and expressive, likening it to the Germanic *Stilus Fantasticus*. A mood of serenity should prevail in order to leave the "excitement" or "fireworks" to later movements in the suite.

Moving on to a "Dialogue," he advocated a very light touch, pointing out that the reeds respond best to this, and presumably also that this encourages the relaxed wrist for true control over articulation and ornamentation. He said to be prepared to break rules like "no disjunct *notes inégales*" when it more clearly articulates or expresses a line such as a moving bass line competing with a higher accompaniment for prominence. He even suggested that bringing a smile to the listener's face was fine (scandal!). After the "Fugue à 5," which completed the *Gloria*, Grew turned briefly to the "Offertoire à 5," the greatest in the repertoire along with the one from Couperin's *Messe des Paroisses*.

During the session, Grew spoke of and demonstrated the concepts of disconnected notes seemingly joined by their sameness of articulation, and connected notes often having hiccups that paradoxically interrupt the line. He often returned to the virtues of musical horse sense (a couple of Francophone students had a bit of a giggle about this expression) when dealing with editions produced by musicologists, not musicians. Sometimes what musicologists sneer at as "modernizing" is sheer commonsensical correction of obvious errors. He suggested one watch for notated *inégalités* that are written briefly and clearly implied to continue throughout a piece. He cautioned against the contribution of 18th-century engravers more concerned with typographical beauty than with accuracy or readability.

Grew, as had Christie, took special pains to point out that early fingerings had to be a means to a *musical* end, rather than an end in themselves ... that if early fingering is so obvious as to be self-conscious, the performer is not doing his or her job.

Picking one's way through the inconsistencies between editions and their sources can be time-consuming, and Grew took care to provide the students with somewhat authoritative corrections for their scores. Grew's position of respect and authority on his subject was as clear and genuine as his love of the Redpath Hall organ, which in his hands gave the repertoire such a clear and inspired voice.

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The 1997 McGill International Organ Academy was the full flowering of an idea and a great deal of hard work on the part of many, and in particular John Grew and administrative assistant Tammy-Jo Mortensen. It provided a uniquely enjoyable and inspiring experience to participants at all levels, and whetted many an appetite for its approaching 1999 incarnation.

Since the 1724 arrival of Jean Girard, Montreal, its McGill University, and in a larger sense the province of Quebec seem inextricably linked with the organ's evolution—its path, or *Voie de l'Orgue*—in North America. Pioneer, pedagogue, inquirer, and dreamer, Montreal seems destined to continue in response to Saint Paul's exhortation to Timothy, quoted by Grew in his moderator's address to the mini-symposium, "Guard what has been entrusted to your care" (I Timothy 6:20). On behalf of fellow guardians in every city, this author thanks them heartily, and wishes them well.

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