

McGILL SUMMER ORGAN ACADEMY 2001

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(Front Row: Hank Knox, Kenneth Gilbert, Luigi Tagliavini; back row: Dean McLean, Bernard Lagacé, Olivier Latry, James Higdon, Ludger Lohmann, James David Christie and John Grew)

Montreal is one of those great cities that combines the elements of manageable size, clean streets, efficient public transportation, good summer weather, excellent food, wonderful museums, continuous street festivals, and friendly people—all of whom speak both English and French. Among the summer festivities were an international fireworks competition (Spain received the first prize) and, of course, from July 16 to 26, the McGill Summer Organ Academy.

The third biannual academy attracted 85 students from nine countries—Canada, the United States, Barbados, France, Italy, Sweden, Poland, Bulgaria, and Australia, as well as Hong Kong—who studied with a distinguished faculty from Canada, the U.S., France, Italy, and Germany. The artistic director since the academy's inception has been McGill faculty member John Grew.

The academy's course plan is designed to allow for active participants or auditors to attend up to three two-hour classes a day, signing up for the same faculty members for the eight days of classes. Each faculty member had a specific repertoire list from which the active participants could select works they wished to perform: James David Christie (Sweelinck, Scheidt, Scheidemann, Buxtehude), Ludger Lohmann (Mendelssohn, Liszt, Brahms, Reger), Luigi F.

Tagliavini (Frescobaldi, Walther, Bach), Bernard Lagacé (Bach works from the Leipzig period), Olivier Latry (Franck, Dupré, Alain, Duruflé), John Grew (D'Anglebert, Boyvin, Corrette, Couperin, Lebègue, Clérambault, De Grigny), and James Higdon (organ music of the United States from Adler to Zwilich). In addition, there were two classes for harpsichordists conducted by Hank Knox (developing skills for the continuo player) and Kenneth Gilbert (Froberger, D'Anglebert, Couperin, Bach).

Montreal is blessed with a large number of fine organs. Each of the classes took place on an instrument that was generally appropriate for the repertoire being taught: Christie (von Beckerath), Lohmann (Casavant), Tagliavini (Wilhelm [Italian Style]), Lagacé (Wilhelm), Latry (Casavant), Grew (Wolff), Higdon (Casavant/Caron-Gagnon-Baumgarten).

The following observations about the courses arise out of my attendance at the following classes: Latry (eight classes), Grew (6), Higdon (2), Christie (1), Lohmann (1), Gilbert (1). Because of the generally unfamiliar repertoire, Higdon presented his classes in the format of an organ literature class—in this case, live performances of compositions along with discussions about the composers' works and place in the American musical scene. The classes of the other faculty were generally in the masterclass format. A student would perform and the teacher would make comments. The comments were directed to all the members of the class, not just the student who was performing. The students' performances were generally well prepared and at a level appropriate for a masterclass setting. Nearly all the faculty centered their comments around many of the same topics: accuracy of the text, editions, the sound of the instruments as well as their actions and the way in which the pipes speak, fingering, technique, articulation, rubato, phrasing, ornamentation, structural elements, the cultural milieu at the time of composition, a particular composer's character and attitudes, references, meaning. It was often the case that the faculty member's own demonstrations were the most efficient and effective way in which to convey their ideas. The ultimate goal always seemed to be to reach beyond the details and into the magical world of making music.

Each evening was an opportunity to hear a recital played by a member of the faculty. Except in two



Masterclass with Luigi Tagilavini (photo: Massimo Rossi)

instances, these recitals were performed on the same instruments on which the faculty members taught. The first of these recitals was by Hank Knox and John Grew. Knox performed works by Rameau and Frescobaldi. Especially effective were *La Poule*, *L'Enharmonique*, and *L'Egiptienne* by Rameau. John Grew performed on the French Classic style organ by Wolff in Redpath Hall. The sound of this Organ was especially satisfying in a work such as De Grigny's "Kyrie." Also performed was *Livre d'orgue de McGill* (1981) by Bengt Hambreaus, who had been on the McGill faculty. It was composed especially for the dedication of this unique instrument. James David Christie presented a recital of works by Spanish and German composers, none of whom lived past 1733. His breathtaking virtuosity makes this music come alive. The *Toccata ad manuale duplex* by Strunck and the *Fugue in G Minor* by Reincken received particularly thrilling performances.

Ludger Lohmann's recital seemed to be filled with major works. Liszt's *Fantasia and Fugue on Ad nos, ad salutarem undam* received a performance whose shapes were fantastic and

organic, drawing the listener from one moment to the next with a sense of inevitability, whose tone colors were orchestral, and whose extreme technical demands were met with complete skill. James Higdon performed works of four American composers: Larry King, James Mobberley, Stephen Paulus, and Leo Sowerby. Mobberley's *Critical Mass* involved electronic tape. This was a colorful work in which taped and electronic sounds contrasted and blended in marvelous ways. Sowerby's *Symphony* for organ received a performance from someone who is deeply committed to this music.

Tagliavini's recital of mostly Italian composers played on the Wolff organ in Redpath Hall was an event characterized by charm, color, and intensive listening. Charm was found in a piece such as the *Pastorale in G* by Pasquini. Especially colorful were the *Ballo della Battaglia* by Storace and *Sonata in C* by Pasquini. The performance of Frescobaldi's *Capriccio di durezze e legature* demanded intensive listening to the beauties and subtleties of the dissonances and their resolutions. Kenneth Gilbert was joined by Luc Beauséjour for a mostly two-harpsichord recital. Especially

enjoyable was the *L'Impériale—Sonata in trio des Nations, 1726* by François Couperin. The final recital was performed by Olivier Latry. In addition to thrilling performances of Duruflé's *Prélude et Fugue sur le Nom d'Alain* and Alain's *Deuxième Fantaisie*, he performed the North American premiere of *La Croix du Sud* by Jean-Louis Florentz. This work, which creates a vast landscape of sounds and motion, demands the highest technical ability and control of the instrument. Both the piece and the performance were impressive.

The field trip organized for academy participants took us into the beautiful countryside to visit an organ built by Orgues Létourneau Ltée, for St. Gilbert Church in St. Leonard, a suburb of Montreal, and to visit the Létourneau shop, where a large instrument for the Winspear Centre for Music in Edmonton was being erected. Following lunch at the shop, we traveled to the Benedictine Abbey Saint-Benoît-du-Lac. In the recently constructed abbey church, Bernard Lagacé performed a recital on the Karl Wilhelm organ. The abbey church, with its very striking architecture, was an appropriate setting for the large-scale musical architecture Lagacé created in his performance of Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in E-flat*. Also on the program were works by Scheidt, Scheidemann, and Buxtehude. One additional recital was offered on the day following the field trip. Jonathan Oldengarm, a doctoral student at McGill, played a recital of all Canadian composers on the Wilhelm organ at Christ Church Cathedral.

The academy began with a reception for all the participants and faculty. It included the unveiling of a bust of Lynnwood Farnam that had been given to McGill by Christ Church Cathedral, where Farnam had been organist from 1908 to 1913. Farnam also had taught at McGill during the same period.

It was an intensive two weeks, but it was refreshing, stimulating, and inspiring. The memory of this experience will remain with the participants for a very long time. Many are already looking forward to the next academy, which will take place from July 7 to 18, 2003.

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