

# Dedication of Casavant Opus 3875 Kauffman Center, Kansas City, Missouri

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The opening of Kansas City's Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts in September 2011 ended a sixteen-year search for a new location to house three of the region's leading performing arts organizations—the Kansas City Ballet, Kansas City Symphony, and Lyric Opera of Kansas City. Civic leader and philanthropist Muriel McBrien Kauffman first articulated the vision of the Kauffman Center in the mid-1990s. After her death, daughter Julia Irene Kauffman worked to bring this vision to reality. Designed by world-renowned architect Moshe Safdie, whose work encompasses a wide variety of structures including airports, government buildings, libraries, museums, and residences, the Kauffman Center boasts two major performance spaces—the 1,800-seat proscenium-style Muriel Kauffman Theatre, home to the ballet and opera, and the 1,600-seat Helzberg Hall, which hosts a variety of local, regional, national, and international artists and performance groups, in addition to serving as the home of the Kansas City Symphony. Ground-breaking ceremonies for the Kauffman Center were held October 6, 2006, and the grand opening weekend of the Kauffman Center was held about five years later on September 16–17, 2011, capped off by a free public open house September 18, which drew an astonishing 55,000 people during a six-hour period.

As discussions for the Kauffman Center were initiated in the 1990s, John Obetz, Principal Organist at the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now Community of Christ) in Independence, Missouri, and other area organists approached Julia Kauffman about the idea of including a pipe organ in the plans for a new concert hall. Obetz invited the people involved with the Kauffman Center's planning to the Community of Christ Temple in nearby Independence, home to what was then a new organ by Casavant Frères Opus 3700 (1993), where he played sections from the *Symphony No. 3 in C Minor*, op. 78, by Camille Saint-Saëns. A tour of the organ for committee members followed, and the seeds for the new concert hall organ were sown.

As an organ committee was formed and various organ builders considered, the committee traveled once again to the Community of Christ Temple to hear Casavant Opus 3700, demonstrated by Obetz's successor Jan Kraybill. This eventually led the committee to select the Casavant firm to design and construct the organ for the Kauffman Center—it would be the Kansas City metropolitan area's second large Casavant organ. James David Christie, Professor of Music at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Oberlin, Ohio, Distinguished Artist-in-Residence at Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts, and organist for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, was hired to serve as the organ consultant for this new instrument, which has since been named the Julia Irene Kauffman Organ.

The inaugural recital weekend March 10–11, 2012 featured James David Christie performing an eighty-minute recital containing a varied selection of music, which included several compositions that are largely unknown to organists. Tickets for the inaugural recital sold out quickly, to the surprise and delight of many. In response to the demand for tickets, the Kauffman Center staff and Mr. Christie generously offered to provide a second recital scheduled for the following evening—which also sold out. Christie's decision to perform two nights in a row was particularly dramatic, given the scope and difficulty of the program he presented. I attended the second performance (March 11) and was situated in the Mezzanine Left section of the hall, one level up from the main floor seat-



James David Christie at the the Julia Irene Kauffman Casavant Organ, Opus 3875 (photo by Mary S. Watkins, courtesy of Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts)



Christie addresses audience (photo by Mary S. Watkins, courtesy of Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts)

ing. The Julia Irene Kauffman Organ is prominently featured at the front of the Helzberg Hall, a beautiful facility awash with wood and soothing blue colors. The organ's façade features both wooden and metal reed, principal, and string pipes angled forward and sideways. A mesh screen separates the visible façade from the other organ pipes.

The recital opened with remarks of welcome from Jane Chu, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Kauffman Center, Julia Irene Kauffman, James David Christie, and Casavant owner Bertin Nadeau, who presented a token organ pipe to Ms. Kauffman on behalf of the company. Since the organ employs mechanical action and the console is connected directly to the instrument, closed-circuit cameras were employed so that the audience could view Christie's pedal and manual movements on two huge screens that were posted on the stage floor. Whenever he played a pedal part that was particularly interesting for the audience to see, a small additional screen linked to a camera that was focused on Christie's feet was displayed at the corner of each screen, thus providing further enjoyment and interest to everyone. The quality of the projected image was positively superb.

The first half of Christie's program, which consisted of forty minutes of music, was devoted almost solely to music of France, Germany, and Italy written during the Baroque period. Christie opened the program with Louis Marchand's well-known *Dialogue* from his *Troisième Livre*, showcasing the organ's fiery *Grand jeu*, the mellow 16', 8' and 4' *fonds d'orgue*, a breathy Flûte harmonique from the Récit division, the

Grand Chœur's *Cornet décomposé* and the Positif Cromorne. Those in the audience who were anxiously anticipating the entrance of the Pédale division's 32' Contre-Bombarde did not have to wait long—Christie engaged this stop for the final two measures, revealing a sound that was surprisingly smooth and refined. Christie's beautifully nuanced, yet dramatic playing showed a thorough mastery of the French Classical style, which lent a magisterial air to the opening of the program that was extremely fitting.

Dieterich Buxtehude's *Passacaglia in D Minor*, BuxWV 161, followed, demonstrating the Grand Orgue's refined 8' Montre and the uncoupled plena of the Positif and Grand Orgue divisions, the latter accompanied by the Pédale's principal plenum colored by the division's smooth 16' Basson. Christie built the organ's registration to climax with the Pédale division's 32' Montre, which provided a firm underpinning to the composition's conclusion. The next two works, *Rondò in G Major* by Giuseppe Gherardeschi and *Ballo della Battaglia* by Bernardo Storace, were unfamiliar to almost everyone. Christie charmed the audience by adding the Rossignol in the *Rondò* while the Storace dialogued the organ's principal and reed choruses.

One of the program's most sublime moments was Christie's performance of Johann Bernhard Bach's *Ciaccona in B-flat Major*, an attractive work of about ten minutes' duration that allows the organist to explore an instrument's varied stops and choruses. Christie both opened and closed this composition with the arresting 8' Cor de Nuit from the Récit division. Other solo flute stops featured included the Grand Orgue and Positif 8'

Bourbons, the faint but quaint Positif 16' Quintaton and that same division's delightful 1' Piccolo, a stop not often found on organs even of this size. The Positif 16' Clarinette, a delicate string and celeste, and the Clochettes accompanied by the Positif 4' Flûte douce each made brief appearances. Christie imbued this work with a mesmerizing dance-like spirit that demonstrated his informed musicianship and technical finesse.

The program's first half concluded with Johann Sebastian Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor*, BWV 565. Christie dialogued the toccata's opening statements on the Grand Orgue and Positif divisions, whose notes were immediately humbled into silence by the thundering pedal point that followed. He effectively dialogued the fugue's middle section episodic material by ascending all four manuals in stair-step fashion, creating both an aural soundscape and visual interest for the audience. Christie unleashed the organ's full resources for the final few measures of the fugue, creating a drama and excitement that could have engaged even the most casual listener.

Christie conveyed his love of Baroque-era music superbly by combining a thorough understanding of the performance practice traditions of different countries within this era, a freedom and spontaneity uninhibited by technical showmanship, and a warmth and sensitivity that is often missing in performance of this era's music. His use of the organ combined informed scholarship, which those in the profession appreciated, with the ability to show a wide range of the organ's different sounds that were obviously appreciated by the enthusiastic audience. The character and voicing of the plena and stops demonstrated in this half of the program was some of the finest this reviewer has heard from Casavant—so much so that this reviewer wishes that the organ were more present in the hall. Whether the need of greater presence is due to the full house that yielded a drier acoustic than that in which the organ was voiced, the need for more manual coupling, the organ's dependence on higher-pressure stops to effectively convey *forte* and *fortissimo* dynamic levels, or the general need for increased wind pressures are issues that will no doubt be analyzed and hopefully rectified with more study and the passage of time. Likewise, there is much anticipation over how the instrument will perform with a full orchestra in the hall.

The program's second half comprised forty additional minutes of music featuring primarily works of French composers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and a work by Christie himself, composed in the French idiom in the early years of the twenty-first century. I believe that the Julia Irene Kauffman Organ finally found its voice with the opening chords of Guy Ropartz's *Sortie* (from his *Six pièces*), and it was immediately obvious that while the organ can play earlier literature competently, it is music of the French symphonic style in which this instrument feels truly at home. The organ sounded more present in this work due to the presence of the Grand Chœur division's hooded reeds, which in this reviewer's opinion must be engaged for the organ's presence to adequately fill the hall. The organ chamber's lights were turned on for this piece's entirety to clever effect, so that the audience could have an excellent view of its pipes and expressive division shutter movements that are located behind the mesh screen. The dynamic volume of the organ's expressive divisions increased the most when the shutters were opened the first third to half way. Unfortunately, the remaining two-thirds to half of the distance that the shutters moved produced no further dynamic contrast and the movement of





The Julia Irene Kauffman Casavant Organ, Opus 3875, Kauffman Center, Kansas City, Missouri (photo credit: Tim Hursley)



The Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, Kansas City (photo credit: Tim Hursley)

some shutters was slightly spasmodic and not completely smooth. Surely, this small post-installation issue will be attended to in the coming months.

Ermend Bonnal's *La vallée du Béhor-léguy, au matin* from his *Paysages euskariens* evoked a flood of soft and meditative flute and string sounds; the Pédale 32' Soubasse provided just the right touch as the work drew to an introspective close. Christie gave an impassioned performance of Jehan Alain's most famous composition, *Litanies*, creating truly visceral excitement as he played the work's final two pages—some of the most difficult in the organ literature. The fervent outpouring of the soul described by Alain on the work's opening page was tangibly felt. Christie, in turn, delivered the most heartfelt playing of the evening in his own *Elégie*, a work composed in 2006 and dedicated to his former teachers: Sister Dolorette Recla, FSPA, and Jean Langlais. A plaintive solo flute permeates the work's opening, and Christie created a truly ethereal effervescence by coupling many of the organ's string and celeste stops together; the work eventu-

ally died into oblivion. The effect was magical. Christie concluded the program with the *Final* of Alexandre Guilmant's *Sonata No. 1 in D Minor*—a piece he frequently performs. However, as was evident in this performance, he never seems to tire of it—his technical prowess was impressive and he yielded an overall exhilarating effect. The audience gave Christie a well-deserved standing ovation, and he responded with an encore—the second movement from the Guilmant Sonata (*Pastorale*). This piece allowed Christie to demonstrate stops he had not yet featured—the Récit Voix humaine, which beautifully conveyed the French mystical sentiment often associated with this stop. This aura was further heightened by the softly rumbling pedal accompaniment provided by the 32' Soubasse and other soft pedal stops. The Grand Choeur Cor Anglais, which had not yet been featured in the program, dialogued nicely with the Récit division's Hautbois with the return of the main theme in the composition's final section. When all was said and done, the whole program clocked in right at two hours,

the audience having been fed a varied feast of music from several countries and historical eras.

Although the organ sounded more present in the hall during the second half, I still wished for more presence in the room. From where I was sitting in the hall, the sound of completely full organ adequately filled the hall, but even more sound would not have been an unwelcome guest. While the designated star of the evening's performance was the Julia Irene Kauffman Organ, organist James David Christie deserves equal recognition for the knuckle-busting program he dispatched with such *élan*, especially considering that he played this recital two times in two days for sold-out audiences. Christie's performances on the Julia Irene Kauffman Organ represent only one facet of the organ's mission. The public will experience how this organ functions as both an orchestra member and a solo instrument with orchestra in its future performances with the Kansas City Symphony.

The benefits that the classical music scene in Kansas City has received from the construction of the Kauffman Center have been immediate and tangible. Kudos are especially in order to Julia Irene Kauffman for her generosity and to John Obetz and the organ committee who lobbied for the organ's inclusion in Helzberg Hall. The building of any new organ gives organists everywhere cause for celebration; the appearance of the Julia Irene Kauffman Organ is no exception. I have high hopes that Christie's recital represents the dawning of a new chapter for the pipe organ in the Kansas City music scene that will inspire performers and audiences for years to come. ■

David C. Pickering is Assistant Professor of Music at Kansas State University and organist at First Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, Kansas. He is an active recitalist, having performed throughout the United States and Canada. Pickering's three recordings feature the organ music of American composers Daniel Gawthrop, Alice Jordan, and Leroy Robertson. He has also authored articles on these composers that have appeared in *The American Organist* and *THE DIAPASON*. His degrees in organ performance (DMA, MM, BM) are from the University of Kansas and Brigham Young University.

Casavant Opus 3875  
The Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, Kansas City, Missouri

GRAND ORGUE (I)

16'	Montre	70% tin
8'	Montre	70% tin
8'	Bourdon	22% tin
4'	Prestant	70% tin
2½'	Quinte	70% tin
2'	Doublette	70% tin
8'	Cornet V (MC)	50% tin
2½'	Grande Fourniture II-IV	70% tin
1½'	Fourniture IV-V	70% tin
¾'	Cymbale IV	70% tin
16'	Bombarde	70% tin
8'	Trompette	70% tin
4'	Clairon	70% tin

GRAND CHOEUR (IV)  
Expressive

16'	Bourdon, 1-24 wood	22% tin
8'	Bourdon, 1-12 wood	22% tin
8'	Violoncelle, slotted	70% tin
8'	Flûte harmonique	70% tin
8'	Voix angélique, slotted	70% tin
8'	Voix céleste (TC), slotted	70% tin

5½'	Grand Nazard	50% tin
4'	Flûte	50% tin
3½'	Grande Tierce	50% tin
2½'	Nazard	50% tin
2'	Quarte de Nazard	50% tin
1½'	Tierce	50% tin
8'	Cor anglais	50% tin
16'	Trombone	70% tin
	full length, hooded	
8'	Trompette harmonique	70% tin
	hooded	
4'	Clairon harmonique	70% tin
	hooded, breaking to 8' at #45	

RÉCIT (III) Expressive

16'	Bourdon doux, 1-24 wood	22% tin
8'	Diapason, slotted	70% tin
8'	Cor de Nuit, 1-12 wood	22% tin
8'	Flûte traversière, slotted	70% tin
8'	Viole de Gambe, slotted	70% tin
8'	Voix céleste, slotted	70% tin
4'	Octave, slotted	70% tin
4'	Flûte octaviante	70% tin
2½'	Nazard harmonique	70% tin
2'	Octavin	70% tin
1½'	Tierce harmonique	70% tin
2'	Plein Jeu harmonique III-VI	70% tin
16'	Bombarde, full-length	50% tin from C2
8'	Trompette harmonique	50% tin
8'	Hautbois	50% tin
8'	Voix humaine	50% tin
4'	Clairon harmonique	50% tin
	no breaking back	
	Tremblant à vent perdu	

POSITIF (II) Expressive

16'	Quintaton, 1-12 stopped wood	50% tin
8'	Principal	70% tin
8'	Salicional, slotted	70% tin
8'	Unda Maris (TC), slotted	70% tin
8'	Bourdon	50% tin
8'	Flûte harmonique	70% tin
4'	Prestant	70% tin
4'	Flûte douce	50% tin
2½'	Nazard	50% tin
2'	Quarte de Nazard	50% tin
1½'	Tierce	50% tin
1½'	Larigot	50% tin
1'	Piccolo	50% tin
1'	Plein Jeu V	70% tin
16'	Clarinette	50% tin
8'	Trompette	70% tin
8'	Cromorne	70% tin
4'	Clairon (no breaking back)	70% tin
	Tremblant à vent perdu	

PÉDALE

32'	Montre, wood, ext	
32'	Soubasse, wood, ext	
16'	Contrebasse, open wood, slotted	
16'	Montre	70% tin from C2
16'	Violonbasse, open wood, slotted	70% tin from C2
16'	Soubasse, stopped wood	
10½'	Grande Quinte, open wood, slotted	
8'	Flûte	22% tin
8'	Violoncelle, slotted	70% tin
8'	Bourdon	22% tin
6½'	Grande Tierce	22% tin
4½'	Grande Septième	22% tin
4'	Flûte	22% tin
32'	Contre-Bombarde, wood, ext	
16'	Bombarde, wood, full length	
16'	Basson, full length, 50% tin from C2	
8'	Trompette	50% tin
4'	Clairon	50% tin

Couplers

Grand Orgue/Pédale  
Grand Choeur/Pédale  
Récit aigu/Pédale  
Récit/Pédale  
Positif/Pédale  
Grand Choeur/Grand Orgue  
Récit/Grand Orgue  
Positif/Grand Orgue  
Octaves graves  
Récit/Positif  
Grand Choeur/Positif  
All expressions to Récit pedal

79 stops, 102 ranks, 5,548 pipes



October 6-11, 2012

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