

Orgues Létourneau Limitée,
Saint-Hyacinthe, Québec
Opus 125
St. Paul's Episcopal Church,
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

From the builder

Whether organbuilder or organist, most of us savor the process of planning for a grand instrument with four or five manuals, multiple 32' stops, and an extravagant Solo division on heavy wind. But such projects are rare; the development of more modest instruments is undoubtedly a greater exercise of an organ builder's creativity. Pipe organs should be flexible and colorful no matter what their size; playing even the smallest instruments—and listening to them—should always be a rewarding experience.

Each Létourneau instrument is carefully planned to sit comfortably within its surroundings, not just in terms of its physical size but also in the organ's tonal inclinations. The pipe organ must be a powerful and expressive tool in the church's music ministry, so it is hardly unusual to develop and later tweak an organ's specification to a denominational liturgy or a specific repertoire the organ needs to serve. The instrument at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, is an example of these sentiments in practice, with the result that our Opus 125, a small but uncommonly capable pipe organ, fits seamlessly into its new home.

From our first meetings with the organ committee at St. Paul's, it was clear this dynamic group put a high value on music and quality. The parish itself observed consistent growth throughout the twentieth century and the church's facilities expanded commensurately, culminating in the dedication of a new sanctuary in 2002 with seating for 300 people. For the sanctuary's opening, the parish's aging M. P. Möller unit organ was relocated, though it was clear this was a stopgap solution. The little Möller was out of its depth, and as the church's organ committee recognized, it needed to be replaced with a larger instrument properly scaled for the worship space.

Sitting in an apse-like space at the front of the sanctuary, the new organ's casework was designed to complement the surrounding architecture and furnishings, while displaying some influences from the organ cases of Hook & Hastings. The polished tin façade pipes are taken from the bass of the Great 16' Violonbass in the central flat, while the basses of the Great and Pedal 8' principals fill in the outer two flats. The instrument is located immediately behind the church's choir, and one of our goals with the organ's internal layout was to keep as much of the organ above impost level as possible. Not only does this help the organ project sound unimpeded down the nave, but it equally spares the choir from exposure to excessive decibels.



Opus 125 in the chancel of St. Paul's Episcopal Church (photo credit: Fant Smith)

The Swell division is centered behind the façade where it addresses the room fully; the individual swell shades are 1¾ inches thick, and, coupled to a responsive mechanism, the Swell offers a tremendous dynamic range. The lowest octave of the 16' Bassoon is sited at ground level underneath the Swell, but its full-length resonators rise up such that the pipes speak into the Swell box. Meanwhile, the Great division is divided into two chests—C and C# sides—on either side of the Swell, where its elevated position and the Swell sidewalls actively direct sound down the nave. Like the Swell 16' Bassoon, the Great 8' Trompette's Pedal extension, the 16' Trombone, features full-length resonators for superior tone.

As with the parish itself, it was a joy to get to know and work with the church's director of music, Angela Tippet. A student of the legendary Dr. Wilma Jensen, Angela is Professor of Organ at Middle Tennessee State University and is the founding director of the acclaimed Nashville Chamber Singers. Our discussions focused on how we could extract maximum flexibility out of a small instrument, and a collective decision was made early on to build the organ with electro-pneumatic windchests. This cleared the way for the limited number of borrowings and extensions between and within divisions respectively.

The result of our discussions is a stoplist with a wide variety of foundation tone ranging from the delicate Swell 8' Bourdon to the keen Swell strings to the

rich Great 8' Open Diapason. Out of 23 ranks in the manuals, some 13 ranks play at 8' or 4' pitches. Both manual divisions have mild 16' flue stops that are duplexed to the Pedal; the Swell 16' Bourdon has a particularly gentle and effective character. The presence of two 8' trumpet stops in the specification permits a choice in dynamic and color, with the bolder Great 8' Trompette living up to its French nomenclature. The Pedal division is relatively modest, but with a number of intelligently borrowed stops and elegant balancing between the ranks, there is always more than one choice to balance the manual registrations. Equally, the Pedal's traditionally dominant role in tutti combinations is pleasingly fulfilled.

The organ is played from a two-manual console, with terraced stopjambes that combine a comfortable playing position with excellent visibility. The console is built with a rigid internal structure and casters to enable mobility within the church's chancel area. It features a complete system of divisional and general pistons with 256 levels of memory and a general piston sequencer.

No successful organ project is the product of one person or one company, and Opus 125 was no exception. We were assisted at every turn by the good people of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and we would be remiss if we did not single some of them out for thanks. Ed Rogers was a key member of the organ committee and did much of the research and stoplist evaluations that

led to us being a frontrunner in their selection process. George Carlson graciously volunteered hours of his time to serve as our man on the ground in Murfreesboro, and we know the organ's installation was accomplished in record time in no small part due to his tireless coordination. Vestry member and choir member Wendi Watts was another tremendous supporter of the St. Paul's organ project, whose steadfast resolve to see it through was an inspiration to all of us. Finally, the Rev. Polk Van Zandt listened to the church musicians' and parishioners' hopes for a new instrument to enhance worship and to provide new ministry opportunities. Without his invaluable support, the campaign for the new organ would never have been achieved so readily or in such a short period of time.

In closing, organists and organbuilders alike get periodically swept up in emphasizing the number of stops or ranks in a pipe organ rather than the instrument's essential musical character. Like our clients, we are pleased that our pipe organ for St. Paul's Church has proved to be as flexible and colorful as anyone could hope. Opus 125 stands as a testament to the faith and vision of St. Paul's parish; we are collectively delighted that this instrument has so quickly established itself as a key component in St. Paul's music ministry.

—Fernand Létourneau, President
—Andrew Forrest, Artistic Director
—Dudley Oakes, Vice President for Sales
Orgues Létourneau Limitée

Orgues Létourneau Limitée, Opus 125

St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Murfreesboro, Tennessee

GREAT (85mm wind)		SWELL (expressive, 80mm wind)		PEDAL		Full complement of inter- and intramanual couplers Electro-pneumatic windchests
16' Violonbass	61 pipes	16' Bourdon (wood)	61 pipes	32' Resultant (derived from 16' Subbass and 16' Bourdon)		
8' Open Diapason	61 pipes	8' Gamba	61 pipes	16' Subbass		21 independent stops 26 ranks 1,459 pipes
8' Spindle Flute		8' Voix Celeste (from G8)	54 pipes	(wood, 100mm wind)	32 pipes	
(C1–B24 wood)	61 pipes	8' Bourdon	12 pipes	16' Violonbass (Gt)		
8' Violoncello	12 pipes	4' Principal	61 pipes	16' Bourdon (Sw)		
4' Principal	61 pipes	4' Traverse Flute (harmonic)	61 pipes	8' Principal (100mm wind)	32 pipes	
4' Open Flute	61 pipes	2' Octavin (harmonic)	61 pipes	8' Violoncello (Gt)		
2' Fifteenth	61 pipes	1½' Larigot	61 pipes	8' Bass Flute (from Subbass)	12 pipes	
1½' Mixture II–IV	213 pipes	16' Bassoon-Oboe (full length)	61 pipes	4' Choral Bass (85mm wind)	32 pipes	
2½' Cornet III (F18 to F54)	111 pipes	8' Trumpet	66 pipes	16' Trombone (from Gt 8' Trompette, full length)	12 pipes	
8' Trompette	66 pipes	8' Oboe	12 pipes	16' Bassoon-Oboe (Sw)		
				8' Trompette (Gt)		



St. Paul's Episcopal Church



Console



Panoramic view of sanctuary



View from the nave

From the organist/director of music

Opus 125's story began more than ten years ago, when the parish of St. Paul's built a new worship space. The congregation had outgrown what is now our chapel, and a lovely nave with excellent acoustics was completed in 2002. Funds for a new organ were not included in the capital campaign, however, so the six-rank M.P. Möller Artiste from the old worship space was moved into the nave. Needless to say, the instrument simply could not keep up!

When I became the organist and director of music in 2004, the senior warden of our vestry asked what our options were regarding adding to or replacing the current organ. We obtained a proposal from a builder in our state to renovate and augment "Ethel" (as the Möller had now been named by the choir) and even at a very reasonable \$150,000, rebuilding Ethel proved too much for the vestry to add to an already tight budget. It seemed as if an organ project of any kind was out of the question.

It was the determination of Ed Rogers, a choir member who is also an experienced organist, who kept the momentum going. He knew exactly what kind of sound I had in my head and set to work to find a good match. Ed spent countless hours listening to examples from builders' websites and even visiting churches on his own to narrow the field.

Ed quickly settled on Létourneau as the right builder for St. Paul's and took several of us to visit the Abbey of Gethsemani, a Trappist monastery near Bardstown, Kentucky; Christ United Methodist Church in Louisville; and Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. Each of these instruments was very different, yet just right for their spaces. I fell in love with their common denominators: warm principals and lush strings.

The parish received some very generous donations to its small organ fund, and this helped the vestry decide to use these donations as seed money for a new instrument rather than simply repair the Möller. Within a matter of months of launching a new pipe organ campaign, the entire amount was pledged—and all this in the worst economy since the Great Depression!

By the end of 2011, the contract was signed and Opus 125 was being built. The excitement was palpable as Andrew Forrest regularly sent pictures of the progress from the shop. Every few weeks the congregation was greeted in the narthex by pictures of its newest member. We were also fortunate to have choir member George Carlson volunteer to serve as project manager. An ex-Marine, ex-engineer, and ex-verger in the Episcopal Church, George was the perfect person to prepare the site for installation.

On Tuesday, June 19, 2012, the huge truck containing Opus 125 arrived from Canada. More than 50 congregation members met in the parking lot to help unload. After a prayer—in French and in English—everyone from age eight to over 80 carried in those precious pipes. It was a great day in the life of St. Paul's.

It seems that the instrument was assembled in no time at all, and we all became very attached to Michel, Michel, and Eric from Létourneau. They were very cordial in allowing congregation members to watch, and even let our rector install the last piece! The tremendous care and craftsmanship with which this instrument is built is remarkable: it's as beautiful on the inside as it is on the outside.

The voicing process completely amazed me. The skill and tenaciousness of the voicers to get just the right sound

is what makes Opus 125 such a wonderful instrument. With only 26 ranks, certain stops had to play dual roles: the Great 8' Open Diapason had to serve as a solo stop as well as the foundation of the principal chorus. Likewise, the Swell 8' Oboe had to be used as a solo stop as well as a light ensemble reed for choral accompanying. To me, that is the beauty of this instrument: each stop maintains its own character while still being part of an ensemble sound.

It has been a whirlwind year for St. Paul's. From the dedication service with Bishop John Bauerschmidt celebrating the Eucharist and my teacher Wilma Jensen accompanying the anthems, to a Nashville AGO program for organ and instruments featuring my colleagues from Middle Tennessee State University, to the dedication recital by Sewanee's Dr. Robert Delcamp—all have been well-received by our parish and community. We even hosted two organ crawls for children: one on the eve of the dedication service for the families of our parish, and another during the school year for our Cub Scout pack. To the people of St. Paul's, the installation

of Opus 125 completes the vision of the "new" nave of 2002.

From the beginning, I wanted an organ that could do three things: lead congregational singing, accompany choral anthems, and play a wide variety of solo organ repertoire. The Létourneau team accomplished all three goals, with only 26 ranks. As Wilma Jensen said when she was preparing to assist with the dedication service, "This is a very flexible instrument, which should accommodate the many needs of the Episcopal liturgy quite well." Of course, she is absolutely right; I could not have asked for better variety or a more versatile instrument. Colleagues who play Opus 125 consistently mention the lush strings, the soaring flutes, and the warm 8' principal around which the organ is built: all the sounds I fell in love with many years ago.

—Angela Tipps
Organist and Director of Music

Cover and page 26 photos by Fant Smith; other photos by Kenneth Stein, www.photosbystein.com