

The present Cathedral of Monaco was consecrated in 1911; exactly one hundred years later, on December 8, 2011, the Archbishop of Monaco proceeded with the blessing of the new organ, the fourth since the consecration of the building. The first organ, attributed to François Mader, was located near the high altar; it proved to be insufficient and the need for a larger organ was rapidly felt. Charles Mutin, Cavaillé-Coll's successor, turned it into a 50-stop instrument that he installed in two parts placed on either side of the gallery; Émile Bourdon, titular organist, inaugurated it on April 8, 1922. After fifty years of service, this organ showed signs of wear, and was replaced by a 60-stop instrument built by Boisseau; Pierre Cochereau played the opening concert on October 10, 1976. Despite work done by Tamburini in 1987, the results weren't entirely satisfactory, and the appointment in 2006 of a new organist, Olivier Vernet, gave the impetus to consider a complete rebuild.

Following an international competition, the organbuilding company Thomas<sup>1</sup> was entrusted with the work. It was a challenging undertaking since "the specifications forced us not only to reuse most of the existing pipes, but also to recreate their original voicing, in order to conserve the soul of the former instrument in a new body."<sup>2</sup> In fact, the result is a completely new organ, with the exception of some pipes that have been carefully restored (many reeds had been cut too short). The frames, case, wind-chests, blowers, console, transmissions, and electronic systems are new. The organ builders and architects made the bold decision to remove the organ from the gallery-alcove where it was located, and to use innovative lighting as an architectural element in its own right. Says Dominique Thomas: "We created a resolutely contemporary façade, which plays on both the lightness, transparency and light, blending harmoniously with the architecture of the Cathedral while appearing as an original work of art."

The instrument has 77 speaking stops (105 ranks), with 106 stops at the console (the chamades 8' and 4' being playable on all keyboards and pedal at different ranges). Manuals I (Positif de Dos), II (Grand-Orgue), and III (Récit expressif) all have 58 notes (C1–A5). Manual IV (Dessus de Récit) has 41 notes (F2–A5), and the Pédale 32 notes (C1–G3). The key action is mechanical for manuals and pedal; the stop action is electric and assisted by a combination action of 30,000 combinations. The couplers are electric, but there is also a mechanical Positif/Grand-Orgue coupler so that the organist can recreate the typical "old feeling" when interpreting music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Dominique Thomas clearly explains the advantage of the electric coupling:

When playing symphonic or modern organ music, electrical couplers are not a drawback to the touch of the organist and



Orgues Thomas, Cathedral of Monaco



Positif and console seen from the side

have the advantage of not obliging excessive reduction of the touch. When using Barker levers for coupling in instruments of much smaller size, Cavaillé-Coll already considered the full opening of the pallet when the organist's finger was still only half way down an advantage.

There is also a playback system that enables organists to listen to their own playing from the nave.

The wind supply is particularly well designed: two Ventus blowers, 140 mm and 160 mm water column respectively, feed primary reservoirs that provide wind to wedge bellows for the Positif, Grand-Orgue, and Dessus de Récit. The Récit expressif, in turn, receives its wind from two reservoirs that feed the bass and treble separately, ensuring perfectly stable wind, while the wedge

bellows give some flexibility for playing the classic repertoire. The wind pressures used are:

- Chamades: 91mm
- Positif de Dos: 78mm
- Grand-Orgue: 91mm
- Récit expressif: 106mm
- Dessus de Récit: 91mm
- Petite Pédale: 112mm
- Grande Pédale: 134mm.

Dominique Thomas describes the tonal architecture as "primarily a French classical organ, opening toward the symphonic style." This organ falls in the French neo-classic organ tradition with its three traditional divisions, large symphonic Récit, and the well-furnished Pédale. This concept was first highly prized in the 1930–50s, then severely criticized in the 1960–70s. But it was, in fact, above all the modifying of existing instruments, both classic and symphonic, that was the subject of vehement condemnations.<sup>3</sup> What matters most, after all, is the resulting sound, and there is no denying that the new organ of Monaco is an amazing musical instrument. As Olivier Vernet quite rightly wrote: "As a synthesis of the past with the most elaborate contemporary technology, this wonderful instrument, thanks to the huge variety of its tonal palette, is an inexhaustible source of inspiration."

Notes

1. The Thomas workshop was founded by André Thomas in Ster-Francorchamps (Belgium) in 1965. His son, Dominique, took over the management of the company in 2000. The company currently employs 14 persons, has



Grand-Orgue Cornet V



Pipes inside the Récit expressif



Pedal pipes

built over 130 new instruments in 45 years, and restored some 40 eighteenth and nineteenth centuries organs. Website: <<http://www.orgues-thomas.com/website/>>

2. Jean-Charles Curau, Director of Cultural Affairs of Monaco.

3. See Jean-Louis Coignet, "Is the French Neo-Classic organ a failure?", *The Organ Yearbook* 1973, Volume IV.

Jean-Louis Coignet has worked in scientific research until 1980 while, at the same time, learning organbuilding. He was appointed tonal director of Casavant Frères, Expert-organier of the City of Paris in 1981, and Technicien-conseil for the Ministry of Culture in 1996, positions that he held until 2005. He is the author of "Notes on the Organ in the Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde," *THE DIAPASON*, August 2006, vol. 97, no. 8.

Photo credit: Jean-Louis Coignet, unless indicated otherwise

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For (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

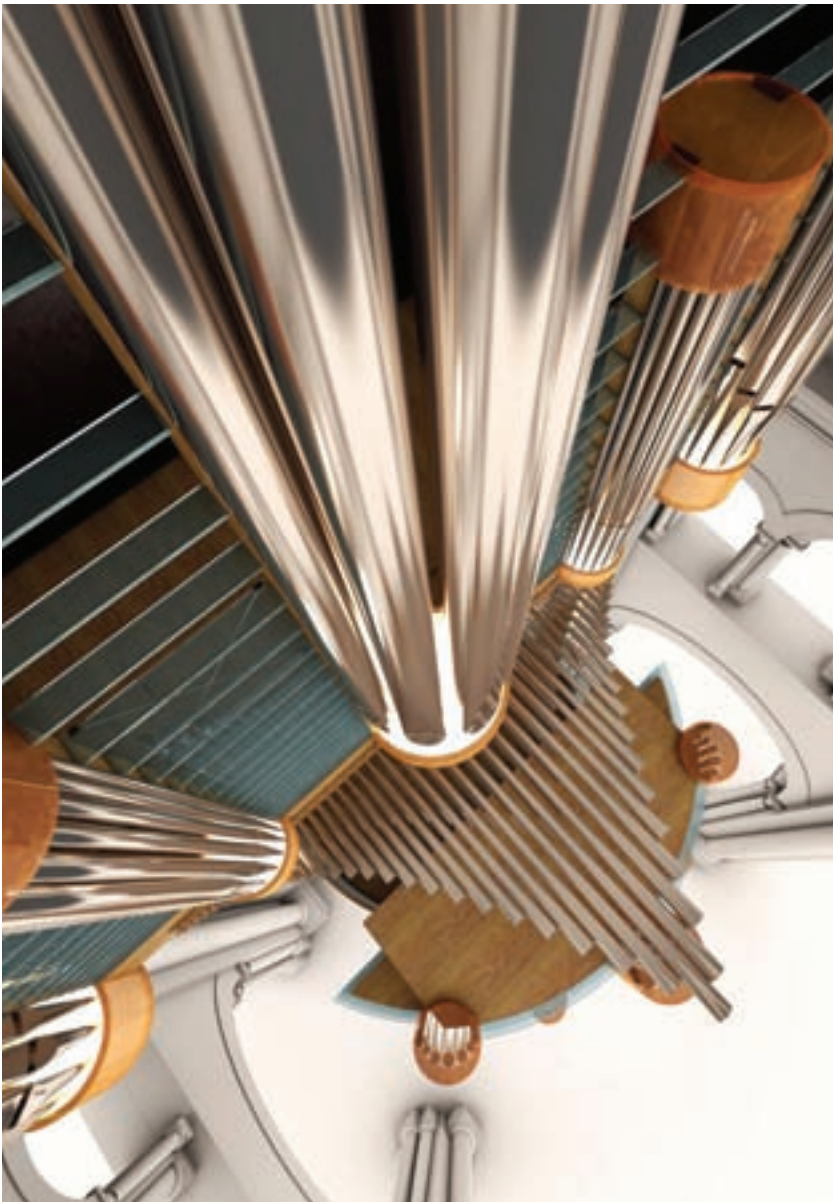
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From: \_\_\_\_\_





View from the top of the case (photo credit: Orgues Thomas)

<b>I Positif de Dos</b>	
8'	Montre
8'	Principal
8'	Bourdon
8'	Salicional
4'	Prestant
4'	Flûte à cheminée
2½'	Nazard
2'	Doublette
1½'	Tierce
1½'	Larigot
½-1½'	Tiercelette
	Fourniture III
	Cymbale IV
8'	Trompette
8'	Cromorne
4'	Clairon
16'	Chamade (tr 8')
8'	Chamade
8'	Chamade (tr 4')
4'	Chamade
<b>II Grand-Orgue</b>	
32'	Bourdon (C2)
16'	Montre
16'	Bourdon
8'	Montre
8'	Dessus de Montre
8'	Flûte Harmonique
8'	Gambe
4'	Bourdon
4'	Prestant
4'	Flûte
2'	Doublette

2'	Quarte
3½'	Grosse Tierce
2½'	Nazard
1½'	Tierce
	Grosse Fourniture III
	Fourniture V
	Cymbale IV
	Cornet V (F2)
16'	Bombarde
8'	Trompette
4'	Clairon
16'	Chamade (tr 8')
8'	Chamade
8'	Chamade (tr 4')
4'	Chamade
<b>III Récit expressif</b>	
16'	Bourdon
8'	Diapason
8'	Salicional
8'	Voix céleste
8'	Cor de Nuit
8'	Flûte Harmonique
4'	Prestant
4'	Flûte Octavante
2'	Octavin
1'	Piccolo
	Fourniture III-V
	Cornet III
16'	Bombarde
8'	Trompette
4'	Clairon
8'	Voix Humaine
8'	Hautbois



32' Contre-Bombarde wood pipes

16'	Chamade (tr 8')
8'	Chamade
8'	Chamade (tr 4')
4'	Chamade
<b>IV Dessus de Récit</b>	
8'	Bourdon
4'	Flûte
2½'	Nazard
2'	Doublette
1½'	Tierce
8'	Trompette
16'	Chamade (tr 8')
8'	Chamade
8'	Chamade (tr 4')
4'	Chamade
<b>Pédale</b>	
32'	Bourdon
16'	Soubasse
16'	Principal
8'	Flûte
8'	Bourdon
10½'	Quinte
6½'	Tierce
4'	Flûte
	Mixture V
32'	Contre-Bombarde
16'	Bombarde
16'	Basson
8'	Trompette
4'	Clairon
16'	Montre (tr M16' GO)
16'	Bourdon Expr (tr B16' Réc)
8'	Diapason Expr (tr D8' Réc)
16'	Chamade (tr 8')
8'	Chamade
8'	Chamade (tr 4')
4'	Chamade
2'	Chamade (tr 4')
<b>III/I</b>	
<b>IV/I</b>	
<b>I/II</b>	
<b>I/II mechanical</b>	
<b>III/II</b>	
<b>IV/II</b>	
<b>IV/III</b>	
<b>I/I 16'</b>	
<b>III/III 16'</b>	
<b>III/III 4'</b>	
<b>III/I 16'</b>	
<b>I/II 16'</b>	
<b>III/II 16'</b>	
<b>III/II 4'</b>	
<b>I/P</b>	
<b>II/P</b>	
<b>III/P</b>	
<b>I/P 4'</b>	
<b>III/P 4'</b>	
<b>IV/P 2'</b>	
<b>Tremblant Positif</b>	
<b>Tremblant G.O.</b>	
<b>Tremolo Récit</b>	



Bellows

On every keyboard:					
Sostenuto					
Cancel					
Crescendo 1					
Crescendo 2					
General Cancel					
<b>Mixture compositions</b>					
<b>Grand-Orgue</b>					
<b>Grosse Fourniture III</b>					
C1	2½	2	1½		
Ds2	4	2½	2		
Gs2	5½	4	2½		
Ds3	8	5½	4		
Gs3	10½	8	5½		
<b>Fourniture V</b>					
C1	2	1½	1	¾	½
C2	2½	2	1½	1	¾
C3	4	2½	2	1½	1
C4	5½	4	2½	2	1½
C5	8	5½	4	2½	2
<b>Cymbale IV</b>					
C1	1	¾	½	¼	
C2	1½	1	¾	½	
C3	2	1½	1	¾	
C4	2½	2	1½	1	
C5	4	2½	2	1½	
<b>Positif de Dos</b>					
<b>Fourniture III</b>					
C1	1½	1	¾		
C2	2	1½	1		
C3	2½	2	1½		
C4	4	2½	2		
C5	5½	4	2½		
<b>Cymbale IV</b>					
C1	1	¾	½	¼	
C2	1½	1	¾	½	
C3	2	1½	1	¾	
C4	2½	2	1½	1	
C5	4	2½	2	1½	
<b>Récit expressif</b>					
<b>Fourniture III-V</b>					
C1	2	1½	1		
C2	2½	2	1½		
C3	4	2½	2	1½	1½
<b>Pédale</b>					
<b>Mixture V</b>					
C1	2½	2	1½	1	¾



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