

ST. JOHN CANTIUS PARISH
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
CASAVANT FRÈRES—SAINT-HYACINTHE, QUEBEC
JL WEILER INC.—CHICAGO, ILLINOIS



Gallery organ (back gallery)



Echo organ (north transept)

CASAVANT FRÈRES has occupied a prominent position in the organbuilding profession since the late 19th century. The installation of a repurposed four-manual Casavant organ at St. John Cantius Parish in Chicago marks the first truly historic restoration of a large, unaltered Casavant organ designed and built under the direction of the founders of the world-renowned firm.

Historical Background

The organ at St. John Cantius was restored and installed as a collaboration between JL Weiler Inc. and Casavant Frères, and is the 1,130th commission received by Casavant Frères since its founding in 1879. The organ was originally installed in 1926 in the then newly built St. James M.E. Church, located at the corner of Ellis Avenue and 46th Street in Chicago. The organ contract, for the sum of \$28,890, was signed the previous year for a four-manual, 54-rank instrument, plus a 61-note Deagan Harp and 25-note Deagan Chimes (both operated by Casavant-made actions). Interestingly, the former St. James Church, which was destroyed by fire in April 1924, was the home of a four-manual Casavant organ built in their South Haven, Michigan, shop in 1915.

Opus 1130 is intimately related to Tina Mae Haines, organist at St. James Church. A former student of the famous French organist Alexandre Guilmant, Haines was a respected church musician of her time. She was instrumental in having the church select Casavant for this important project.

Historical Significance

How many unaltered four-manual, 85-year-old pipe organs can we visit nowadays in large urban areas? For Casavant, Opus 1130 was the 37th four-manual organ installed in the United States (first installation at St. Francis Xavier Church in New York City in

1903). To our knowledge, there are very few unaltered four-manual organs left from the Casavant brothers' years in the United States, and certainly none for hundreds of miles around Chicago.

Of note is the use of electropneumatic, pitman-type windchests for the entire organ, an uncommon practice for Casavant at that time. The Casavant brothers were fond of their patented ventil-type windchests, which the firm used routinely until 1933, the year that Claver Casavant, the founding president, passed away.

What We Found at St. James Church

For a number of years, we wanted to work together on a project involving a large Casavant organ from the brothers' years, celebrating and preserving their mechanical and musical aesthetics. The perspective of restoring Opus 1130 represented a remarkably exciting opportunity from the outset. We made a comprehensive evaluation of the organ at St. James Church in February 2011. This enabled us to determine (1) the exceptional value of this Casavant organ; (2) that, with carefully planned work, it was possible to restore the organ to its original condition; and (3) how to divide the work between our two firms to achieve the best results possible.

Basically, we found the organ as it was installed in 1926. We were amazed to see that all the original material was still there. The pipework, which was in excellent condition, was still equipped with its original tuning devices (scrolls, etc.). However, the organ, which had probably never been cleaned in 85 years, was terribly dirty and had not been maintained for many years. There had been significant water damage in the Swell division coming from a leaking roof.

At St. James Church, the organ was installed in two chambers on either side of the chancel (Great, Choir, and Pedal divisions in the south chamber; Swell and Solo divisions in the north

chamber), with the Echo located in an elevated chamber on the south side of the back gallery. A visit to St. John Cantius to take complete measurements of the back gallery and the north transept enabled us to do a space study, which confirmed that the organ could be reinstalled successfully.

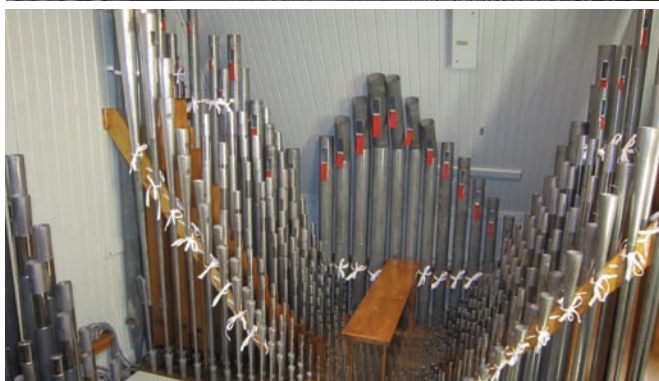
Restoration Process

After reaching an agreement with St. John Cantius in July 2011, our crews worked together to remove the entire organ from St. James Church. This huge task was made even more daunting by the fact that the ceiling of both organ chambers threatened to collapse; they had to be supported temporarily during the removal process. In order to undertake this historic restoration with a common understanding of the goals, approach, and techniques to be used, Jeff Weiler made a special trip to Saint-Hyacinthe for a full day of productive discussions with all the Casavant craftspeople involved in the project.

The JL Weiler team was responsible for restoring all the pipework (repair damaged pipes, recondition all reed stops, repack stoppers, etc.), the original Casavant “Supremo” blower, the Harp, and the Chimes.

The Casavant team was in charge of restoring the organ chassis (windchests, wind system, expression), replicating the Swell windchest that had been heavily damaged by water, reconfiguring the organ layout for installation in the back gallery at St. John Cantius, which involved modifications (consistent with the original construction techniques) to the framework, expressions enclosures, and windlines, building new casework for both the main organ in the gallery and the Echo organ in the transept, and rebuilding the original console. After the organ chassis was assembled in the Casavant shop, the JL Weiler and Casavant teams met in Saint-Hyacinthe in April 2013 to plan the upcoming installation.

Our crews worked together to install the organ in June and July 2013. While the hot summer days made this complex task



Swell before (top) and after (bottom) restoration

even more demanding, the work was done very efficiently, thanks to the careful planning and ongoing dialogue with the good people of St. John Cantius.

After the installation was completed, Jeff Weiler did the tonal finishing of the organ on site, a painstaking process that involved cautious listening to make sure every pipe spoke well in its new home—in other words, recapturing the organ’s original voice. In the sumptuous acoustics of St. John Cantius, Opus 1130 sounds better than ever!

Conclusion

Restoring Opus 1130 has been a fascinating journey for our teams, which shared their respective expertise and complemented each other admirably in this multifaceted mission. We humbly believe that the outcome of this historic restoration speaks for itself.

We want to salute the vision of St. John Cantius Parish’s leadership, especially Fr. Frank Phillips and Fr. Scott Haynes, for making the decision to save this historically significant Casavant organ, and for their much appreciated confidence in our abilities. We also want to express special thanks to Thomas Diez, project manager at St. John Cantius, for his outstanding guidance and exceptional collaboration throughout the entire restoration process.

This restored Casavant organ, which is a one-of-a-kind example in North America, if not worldwide, has already proven to be a wonderful complement to the awe-inspiring liturgy and music at St. John Cantius Parish. This is our greatest reward. It is our desire that this remarkable installation will mark the beginning of a new appreciation of the work of the Casavant brothers and continued collaboration restoring other grand instruments that have marked the glorious history of pipe organ building in North America.

SIMON COUTURE, Casavant Frères

JEFF WEILER, JL Weiler Inc.

From the Church

The story of Chicago’s St. John Cantius Parish is like that of many churches built in the late 19th century in industrial cities, but with a much better ending! It is the story of immigrant ingenuity, craftsmanship, and fortitude, resulting in inspirational architecture—magnificent structures with acoustical and architectural properties the likes of which will never be recreated. The St. John Cantius story is rife with historical intrigue, including a notable ecclesiastical art collection and the glorious, three-story mahogany Baroque high altar displayed at the World’s Colombian



Echo before (left) and after (right) restoration

St. John Cantius Catholic Parish
Chicago, Illinois
Casavant Frères and JL Weiler

Opus 1130 • Four manuals, 49 stops, 54 ranks
(1926; restoration 2011–13)

GREAT (II)
(wind pressure: 4")
16 Double Open Diapason
8 First Open Diapason
8 Second Open Diapason
8 Doppel Flöte
8 Gemshorn
4 Octave
4 Harmonic Flute
2 Mixture IV
8 Trumpet
Chimes (Echo)

SWELL (III) (expressive)
(wind pressure: 4"–7")

16 Bourdon
8 Open Diapason (7")
8 Violin Diapason
8 Salicional
8 Stopped Diapason
8 Viola da Gamba
8 Voix Celeste II
8 Aeoline
4 Violina
4 Flauto Traverso (7")
2 Piccolo
2²/₃ Dolce Cornet III
16 Double Trumpet
8 Cornopean (7")
8 Oboe
8 Vox Humana
4 Clarion (7")
Tremulant
Chimes (Echo)

CHOIR (I) (expressive)
(wind pressure: 6")

16 Contra Gamba
8 Open Diapason
8 Concert Flute
8 Dulciana
8 Unda Maris
4 Flute d'Amour
2²/₃ Nazard
2 Flageolet
8 Cor Anglais
8 Clarinet
Tremulant
Celesta (c⁰–c⁴)
Harp (Celesta Sub)

SOLO (IV) (expressive)
(wind pressure: 12")

8 Stentorphone
8 Gross Flute
8 Viole d'Orchestre
8 Viole Celeste
8 Tuba
Tremulant

ECHO (expressive)
(wind pressure: 3¹/₂")

8 Echo Diapason
8 Cor de Nuit
4 Fern Flute
8 Musette
Tremulant
Chimes (25 notes) (g⁰–g²)

PEDAL

(wind pressure: 4"–6")
32 Double Open Diapason
(extension) (with independent quints)
16 Open Diapason
16 Bourdon
16 Gamba (Choir)
16 Lieblich Gedeckt (Sw.)
8 Flute (ext.)
8 Stopped Flute (ext.)
8 Cello
16 Trombone (6")
Chimes (Echo)



Console

Exposition in Chicago the same year the church opened, 1893. The parish boasted a school and 23,000 families by the mid-1920s. St. John Cantius suffered a marked decline as the loss of factory jobs, highway construction, and urban flight took a collective toll—it's a familiar story.

When present Pastor Rev. C. Frank Phillips, CR, arrived in 1988, parish membership had diminished to just a few hundred families. The church building was in disrepair, and the small collection was not enough to pay the bills. Yet, the latest chapter in the St. John Cantius story is much different than most. It includes lessons of faith, patience, rebirth, and the extraordinary transformational power of art and music, all of which played a role in a 25-year, multimillion dollar effort to restore the church to its former glories. Today, the parish once again numbers thousands of families, and people travel from hours away to experience not only the pre-Vatican II solemnity of the Tridentine Latin Mass, but also the beautiful music that is a part of the lifeblood of St. John

Cantius for the parish and community. Thus, the restoration of sacred music has been a cornerstone in Fr. Phillips's strategy of rebuilding the church and developing ties to the art and music community.

St. John Cantius has experienced rejuvenation through sacred music, which now includes eight choirs and a 30-piece orchestra under the direction of Fr. Scott Haynes, SJC. Perhaps the culmination of this renewal occurred in October 2013, with the installation of Casavant's Opus 1130, an organ weighing 23 tons, with four-manuals and nearly 4,000 pipes, rescued from a church near the University of Chicago, St. James Methodist, which closed its doors in 2011. The organ has been rechristened "Tina Mae," honoring the noted St. James organist Tina Mae Haines, concert organist, co-founder of Chicago's Sherwood Conservatory, and Chicago Symphony lecturer, who was instrumental in commissioning Casavant Frères to build Opus 1130 in 1926. "They really pulled out all the stops when they built this organ!" says Fr. Haynes.

The motto of the Canons Regular of St. John Cantius, the religious community of priests and brothers serving the parish, is "restoration of the sacred." So, along with the restoration of sacred art and architecture, St. John Cantius is deeply interested in restoring the great musical tradition of sacred music. With an active performance schedule of chamber music, operas, and plays, the church also provides great sacred music each Sunday, singing Gregorian chant, as well as Masses and motets by composers like Victoria, Mozart, Vierne, and beyond. When the Casavant Opus 1130 organ became available, it was an opportunity "to restore the sacred"—through the glory of the pipe organ. The musical experience of those enjoying the rich variety of music at St. John Cantius are now greatly enhanced by the glorious sounds of the mighty Tina Mae!

FR. SCOTT A. HAYNES, SJC
Associate Pastor and Director of Music