

Casavant Frères



New York, New York — The Brick Presbyterian Church

Four manuals and pedals, 88 stops, 118 ranks
Detached movable drawknob console, compass 61/32
Electric slider action
Opus 3837, 2005
Photographs: Keith S. Toth

The Brick Presbyterian Church in the City of New York has been in continuous operation since 1767, with the exception of the period of time during the Revolutionary War. Brick Presbyterian Church became a separate and incorporated entity in 1809. The church moved to its third, and present location at Park Avenue and Ninety-first Street in 1940 into a building designed by Lewis Ayres of the architectural firm of York and Sawyer.

The church has had a long tradition of excellence in church music including a significant period under the leadership of Clarence Dickinson, who has been called the Dean of American Church Music. The first pipe organ to be used in the present building was the Ernest M. Skinner Company's Opus 280, which had been built for the previous church. It was enlarged and moved to the new church in 1940 by E. M. Skinner & Son. Some stops from this instrument were incorporated in the instrument that the Austin Organ Company installed in 1963.

In July 2002, Brick Church commissioned a new four manual organ from Casavant Frères. This instrument results from Minister of Music, Keith S. Toth's vision to have an uncompromised French Symphonic organ. The aim has been to provide the church with an instrument worthy of the magnificently restored sanctuary, and the New York musical community with an ideal medium on which French composers, such as Franck, Widor, Vierne, Guilmant and Dupré may be played with authenticity. With the invaluable guidance of Tonal Director Emeritus, Jean-Louis Coignet, we embarked on a truly fascinating three-year journey.

Visits to lesser-known but virtually untouched Cavaillé-Coll organs in France and Spain were of tremendous assistance in refining the tonal parameters of the project by providing a broad survey of pipe construction and voicing techniques used by Cavaillé-Coll.

The style of the organ is based on the late work of Cavaillé-Coll, which is to say instruments dating from 1870. The organ specification is deeply rooted in the large instrument that Cavaillé-Coll built in 1873 for Albert Hall in Sheffield, England. This instrument, which was a kind of paradigm of the French Symphonic organ, impressed the Baron de l'Espée so much that he ordered a similar organ for his castle in Ilbarritz, France. The main features of this instrument included a well-balanced proportion of foundations, mutations and reeds on the various divisions, and three enclosed divisions, Récit, Positif and Solo.

Great care was taken in order to give the organ an ascending voicing treatment typical of the best French Symphonic organs. The Grande Fourniture II-VII (with 16' and 32' resultants), Positif Plein-Jeu harmonique and Récit Plein-Jeu harmonique follow the pattern of the *progression harmonique* and, like the Cornets, reinforce the trebles where reeds begin to fade.

In spite of its strong similarity with the Sheffield organ, this organ is not a copy of any former French Symphonic organ. However, we have emulated the building and voicing techniques employed in both Cavaillé-Coll's and Merklin's late organs, including:

- Ample winding with double rise bellows and wooden wind trunks.
- Differentiated wind pressures
- Tuning slots for all open flute pipes with the slots calculated according to rules from one of Cavaillé-Coll's last voicers who had worked for the Baron de l'Espée in Ilbarritz
- Harmonic pipes are cut dead-length according to Cavaillé-Coll's practice

Similarly, nicking was done with great care in order to achieve smooth initiations of speech, by taking information from pipes found in “untouched” – in other words, little known – symphonic organs. The result of this approach to the pipes and their voicing is a sound that displays breadth, warmth and a peculiar charm.

Interestingly, this project, on which we worked at the same time that we were celebrating our 125th anniversary, took us back to the roots of the firm founded in 1879 by Claver and Samuel Casavant. Not only did we take inspiration from the work of our own founders but also this project again revived our appreciation and respect for their work. The Casavant brothers completed their apprenticeship as organ builders in France in the late 1870s, where they met Cavallé-Coll and heard some of his instruments for the first time. Among these was the then new 66-stop organ installed for the *Exposition Universelle* in the *Palais du Trocadéro*, which made a grand impression on them.



The terraced console was designed after Casavant consoles of the first two decades of the twentieth century.

The organ's wind system, with double rise bellows, was designed and built similarly to large Casavant organs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, many of which we have restored in the recent years. Of special interest are the double walled expressive enclosures and extra thick expression shades that have been employed in order to increase the dynamic range of the expressive divisions. Further details may be found in the reprint of the March 2006 cover feature article of *The American Organist* magazine in the Published Articles section of the website.

Grand Orgue		Récit	
Bourdon (from 16' & Pédale)	32	Bourdon	16
Montre	16	Diapason	8
Bourdon	16	Flûte traversière	8
Montre	8	Viole de gambe	8
Salicional	8	Voix céleste (CC)	8
Bourdon	8	Cor de nuit	8
Prestant	4	Voix éolienne (TC)	8
Quinte	2-2/3	Fugara	4
Doublette	2	Flûte octaviane	4
Grande Fourniture III-VII	2-2/3	Nazard	2-2/3
Fourniture II-V	1-1/3	Octavin	2
Cymbale III-IV	1	Cornet harmonique II-V	8
Basson (Ext.)	16	Plein Jeu harmonique II-V	2
Baryton	8	Bombarde	16
Grand Orgue Grave		Trompette harmonique	8
Grand Orgue Muet		Basson-Hautbois	8
		Voix humaine	8
Grand Chœur		Clarinette	8
Violonbasse (Ext.)	16	Clairon harmonique	4
Flûte harmonique	8	Trémolo	
Violon	8	Récit Grave	
Flûte octaviane	4	Récit Muet	
Grand Cornet V (MC, from Cornet V)	16	Récit Octave	
Cornet V (TC)	8	Sostenuto	
Bombarde	16		
Trompette	8	Pédale	
Clairon	4	Soubasse (Ext.)	32
Grand Chœur Grave		Flûte	16
Grand Chœur Muet		Contrebasse	16
		Violonbasse (Grand Chœur)	16
Positif		Soubasse	16
Quintaton	16	Montre (Grand Orgue)	16
Principal	8	Bourdon (Récit)	16
Dulciane	8	Grande Quinte	10-2/3
Unda maris (GG)	8	Flûte	8
Flûte harmonique	8	Violoncelle	8
Bourdon	8	Bourdon	8
Prestant	4	Grande Tierce	6-2/5
Flûte douce	4	Quinte	5-1/3
Nazard	2-2/3	Grande Septième	4-4/7
Flageolet	2	Octave	4
Tierce	1-3/5	Flûte	4
Larigot	1-1/3	Cor de nuit	2

Positif (continued)

Septième	1-1/7
Piccolo	1
Plein Jeu II-V	1-1/3
Clarinete basse	16
Trompette	8
Cromorne	8
Clarinete soprano	4
Trémolo	
Positif Grave	
Positif Muet	

Pédale (continued)

Contre Bombarde (Ext.)	32
Bombarde	16
Basson (Grand Orgue)	16
Bombarde (Récit)	16
Trompette	8
Baryton (Grand Orgue)	8
Tuba Mirabilis (Solo)	8
Clairon	4
Effet d'orage	

Solo

Flûte majeure	8
Flûtes célestes II ¹	8
Violoncelle	8
Céleste	8
Viole d'amour	4
Flûte de concert	4
Nazard harmonique	2-2/3
Octavin	2
Tierce harmonique	1-3/5
Piccolo harmonique	1
Clochete harmonique	1/3
Tuba magna (TC, from 8')	16
Cor de basset	16
Tuba mirabilis	8
Cor français ¹	8
Cor anglais ²	8
Tremolo	
Solo Grave	
Solo Muet	
Solo Octave	
Sostenuto	

¹ Pipework from the former Skinner organ² Nineteenth century French pipework