

# A Commanding Voice

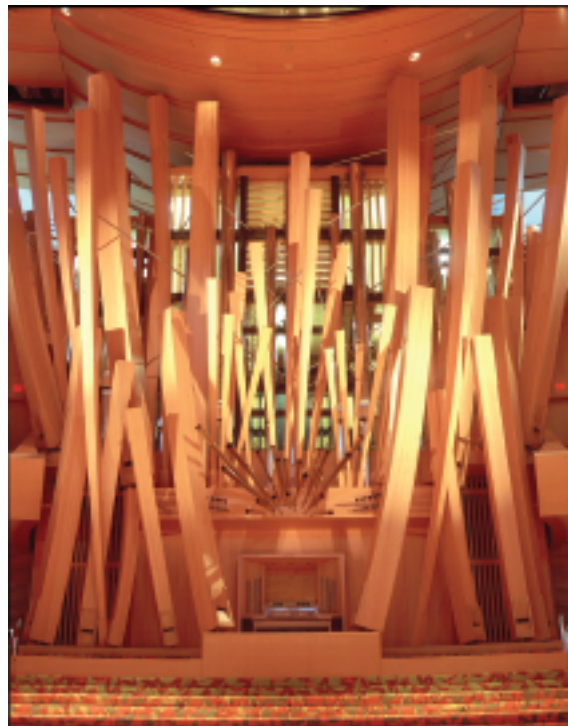
Pipe organs are popping up in concert halls nationwide. Now—what to play on them?

by Michael Barone

These are the best of times, or so they seem to those of us who relish the sonorous delight of a pipe organ in a concert hall setting. In recent months, two fine American orchestras have inaugurated lavish and costly new instruments: the Los Angeles Philharmonic at its eye-catching, Frank Gehry-designed, year-old Walt Disney Concert Hall; and the Madison Symphony Orchestra, venturing a first season in its brand-new Overture Hall designed by Cesar Pelli, only blocks from the Wisconsin capitol. Johannes Klais of Bonn, Germany built the instrument for Wisconsin, while behind Gehry's overtly postmodern Disney façade stands an organ engineered and constructed by the Glatter-Goëtts company of Oewingen, Germany, with tonal design and voicing by Los Angeles native Manuel Rosales. Both are marvelous.

These two orchestras join a significant list of other American orchestral associations and concert halls now in possession of recent or recently refurbished pipe organs by noted builders from Canada, Italy, England, and the United States: Dallas (Fisk), Seattle (Fisk), Jacksonville (Casavant/Quimby), Chicago (Moeller/Casavant), Boston (Aeolian-Skinner), and Cleveland (E. M. Skinner/Schantz). Additional new instruments are in-process or planned for halls in Philadelphia (Dobson/Rosales), Nashville (Schoenstein), Costa Mesa (Fisk), Atlanta (Dobson), and Miami (Mander); while San Francisco (Ruffatti),

Washington, D.C. (Aeolian-Skinner), and Milwaukee (Aeolian-Skinner/Austin) were somewhat ahead of the current surge of activity. After a long dry spell during which too many new halls specifically omitted pipe organs, most of the best recent orchestral performance facilities in the United States now, or soon will, match the capabil-



Disney Hall's new organ makes a flamboyant visual impression and a powerful aural one. It debuted in October with performances of the Saint-Saëns "Organ" Symphony, Lou Harrison's Organ Concerto, Strauss's *Festival Prelude*, and the world premiere of *A Scotch Bestiary*, a new work for organ and orchestra by James MacMillan. Also planned for the inaugural season are the *Jongen Symphonie concertante* and Copland's *First Symphony*.

ities of their traditionally fully-equipped European counterparts.

OK, we have the resources. How best should we use these marvelous, and expensive, gifts? You may think that the number of relevant organ works is small. Think again. Through recordings and broadcasts, perhaps even more than through live performances, I have become aware of a considerable repertoire for organ-with-orchestra, not least being the three centuries of organ concertos ranging from G.F. Handel to Calvin Hampton. There's more than just one "organ symphony," too. And the pipe organ earns its place in the symphony's space because it is used in core symphonic repertoire; who wouldn't yearn for the surging effect of that extra octave of bass that only the organ's 32-foot pedal registers can impart to a rich orchestral tapestry? Any conductor who attempts the final climax in Elgar's *Enigma Variations* or Respighi's *Pines of Rome* without the *obligato* organ presence does so at the risk of substituting a mere standing ovation for a season-ticket renewal.

Composers in a remarkably broad array, from Berlioz forward, understood that the palette of orchestral tone color remains incomplete without the sometimes subtle, sometimes seismic impact of a pipe organ's commanding voice. Saint-Saëns's Third would be just another nice symphony without its crucial organ part. Perhaps less obviously, Mahler's Eighth, Khachaturian's Third, Henze's Sixth, Ives's Fourth, Vaughan Williams's First and Seventh, and Liszt's *Dante* and *Faust* symphonies would be seriously diminished if denied the contribution of a concert hall pipe organ to their overall effect. The instrument is as indispensable in Respighi's *Roman Festivals* or *Church Windows* as in Janáček's *Taras Bulba* or *Glagolitic Mass*. Master orchestrator Richard Strauss calls for pipe organ in *Also sprach Zarathustra*, and also in his *Alpine Symphony*, *Joseph's Legend*, and even the final scene of *Salome*. Dare we dispense with his organ-focused *Festival Prelude*? Certainly not!

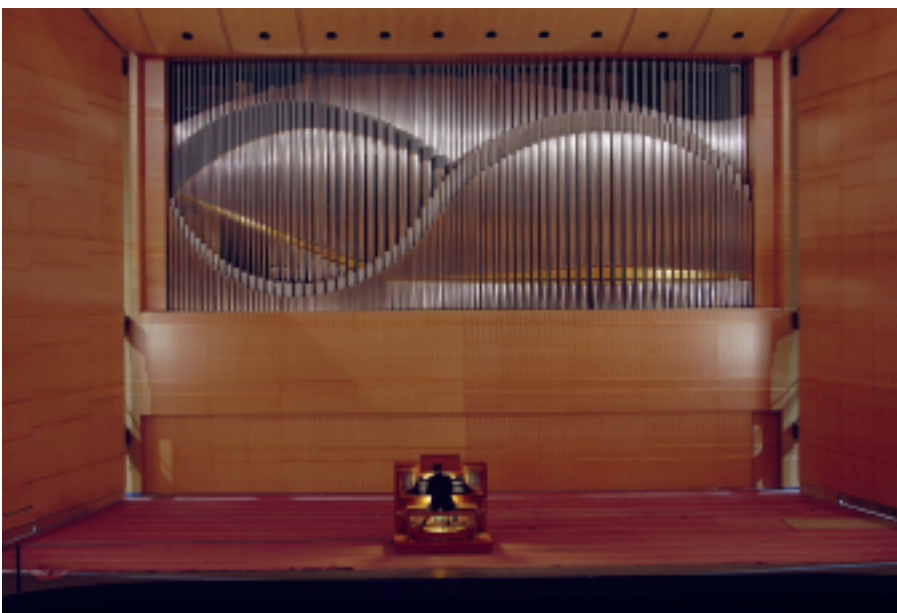
Remove the organ from Tchai-

kovsky's *Manfred*, Bartók's *Bluebeard*, or Mahler's "Resurrection" and you've got a flat soufflé. Holst's *Planets* may ask for only one or two incandescent organ outbursts, but forget them and you might as well be scanning the heavens from your basement. Play the organ part on an electronic imitator and sophisticated audiences notice—and complain—thus the recent interest in installing authentic pipes. (Honesty *is* the best policy.)

Franz Liszt may have been the first to offer the pipe organ a new voice in secular symphonic circles of the mid-19th century.

## King of Instruments

But perhaps I've gotten a bit ahead of our story by not first tracing the historic mingling of organ tone with other instruments. This concert role for the organ began tentatively in the multi-choral works of 17th-century Venetian composers. In the 18th century, Vivaldi included organ parts among his "concertos for diverse instruments," and Bach introduced virtuosic organ lines in several of the sinfonias opening his cantatas—movements he later recycled as keyboard concertos. But I think Handel deserves praise as the actual "inven-



In Madison, Wisconsin, the stage of the just-finished Overture Hall is dominated by the pipes of its Klais organ; the instrument has a moveable chamber that can be rolled onstage as needed. Inaugurated in September with the Saint-Saëns "Organ" Symphony, Madison's new pipes will also be featured this month in Jongen's *Symphonie Concertante*; Janáček's *Taras Bulba* and the Mahler Eighth, both with important organ parts, are scheduled in the spring.

His *Battle of the Huns* (1857), one of the least known of his dozen excellent and revolutionary orchestral tone poems, casts the organ as a "Christian presence" amid a heathen hoard. The organ enters with a quiet, chorale-like theme; but by the end, with all stops drawn, it has become an overwhelming power, driving the score forward to a thrilling, redemptive conclusion. This organ part may not be technically challenging, no stage for the virtuoso, yet its inclusion is absolutely compulsory in Liszt's powerful and provocative score.

tor" of the organ concerto, with his path-breaking works (sixteen of them) that fascinated audiences during the intervals of his oratorio productions. Other Londoners soon followed Handel's lead, among them John Stanley (6), Philip Hayes (6), Charles Wesley (6), and James Hook (20). Two of Bach's sons also wrote organ concertos: Johann Christian (6) and Carl Philipp Emanuel (2).

In France, Michel Corrette (6) and Jean-François Tapray (6) found their own way, while from later in the 18th century

## Top Ten, Times Two

### Barone's Top Ten List A

Works featuring the pipe organ that every orchestra maven should know

1. **Joseph Jongen** *Symphonie concertante* for Organ and Orchestra, Op. 81
2. **Francis Poulenc** Concerto in G minor for Organ, Strings and Timpani
3. **Joseph Rheinberger** Organ Concertos (No. 1 in F, Op. 137; No. 2 in g, Op. 177)
4. **Samuel Barber** *Toccata Festiva* for Organ and Orchestra, Op. 36
5. **Alexandre Guilmant** Symphony No. 1 in D minor for Organ and Orchestra, Op. 42
6. **Aaron Copland** Symphony No. 1 for Organ and Orchestra
7. **Howard Hanson** Concerto for Organ, Harp and Strings
8. **Paul Hindemith** *Kammermusik* Concerto No. 7 for organ and chamber orchestra, Op. 46, no. 2
9. **Camille Saint-Saëns** Symphony No. 3 in c, Op. 78, "Organ"
10. **Horatio Parker** Concerto in E-flat for Organ and Orchestra, Op. 55

### Barone's Top Ten List B

A few masterworks you can be excused for having missed (in alphabetical order)

- Enrico Bossi** Concerto in A minor for Organ, Strings, Horns and Timpani, Op. 100
- Alfredo Casella** *Concerto Romano* for Organ and Orchestra
- Michael Colgrass** *Snow Walker* (Concerto for Organ and Orchestra)
- Marcel Dupré** Symphony in G minor for Organ and Orchestra, Op. 27
- Alexandre Guilmant** Symphony No. 2 in A for Organ and Orchestra, Op. 91
- Naji Hakim** Concerto for Organ and Orchestra, "Seattle"
- Jacques Hétu** Concerto for Organ and Orchestra, Op. 68
- Stephen Paulus** Concerto for Organ, Strings and Percussion (1992)
- Joseph Schwantner** *September Canticle* for Organ and Orchestra (2002)
- Malcolm Williamson** Organ Concerto (1961)

—M.B.

come works by Haydn (5), Frantisek Xaver Brixi (3), Karl Stamic (3), and Joseph Anton Auffman (3), plus the Church Sonatas by Mozart (14) and a charming Pastoral by Gregor Werner. Neither Mozart nor Beethoven wrote organ concertos, but Beethoven did voice his specific appreciation of organists as the most capable of musicians, because of their improvisatory skills and multi-limbed virtuosity. And let us laud Mozart for good taste; he called the pipe organ the “king of instruments.”

By the mid-19th century, pipe organs could match the denser texture and higher volume of the Romantic symphonic ensemble, and thus the organ began to appear as a functional facet of the new orchestral texture. Liszt’s *Battle* really did start something. In 1866, the new director of the Brussels Conservatory, François Joseph Fétis, went “against his most confirmed feelings” but nevertheless followed Liszt’s 1857 precedent. Fétis acceded to

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the requests of his colleagues to write “a sort of symphony” to inaugurate the institution’s new concert room, with organ. His *Fantaisie symphonique* may be the progenitor of a new genre, for it gave the organ more than a mere walk-on role. From the very first chord, the pipe organ is boisterously present throughout the work’s thirteen-minute duration, and matches the symphonic ensemble both in volume and vigor.

After Fétis, the famed recitalist and teacher Alexandre Guilmant (who toured in the United States at the turn of the cen-

tury) also created several single-movement concert pieces for organ and orchestra. Much more substantial are Guilmant’s two grandly extravagant “organ symphonies,” from 1879 and 1911, the first of them predating Saint-Saëns’s Op. 78. Guilmant’s pair are derived from or related to works he also published as organ-only solos (covering his bets), in which guise he called them “sonatas.”

Guilmant’s colleague Charles-Marie Widor, famous for his ten “symphonies” for unaccompanied organ, also composed a pair of large-scale symphonic pieces for organ with orchestra, in 1894 and 1908, and combined movements from two of his solo organ symphonies into an arrangement for organ plus orchestra. Hearing is believing: In 1927, Widor’s star pupil, Marcel Dupré, created his own Organ Symphony (as well as a major Organ Concerto); and his protégé Jeanne Demessieux wrote a fragrant *Poème* for organ and orchestra.

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Numerous other composers in the Franco-Flemish pool continued this sweep of activity: Louis Coerne, Eugene Gigout, Léon Boëllmann, and Charles Koechlin; and later, Flor Peeters, Jean Langlais, Pierre Petit, and Charles Chaynes. Best of this bunch, though, are the marvelous scores of Francis Poulenc and Joseph Jongen. Poulenc's Concerto for Organ, Strings and Timpani (1938), an irrefutable masterpiece, was created with the assistance of organist friend Maurice Duruflé. With equal parts German Baroque fantasy and French theatre, it touches both heart and soul. Jongen's lavish and beguiling *Symphonie concertante* (1926) holds the prize for breathtaking grandeur and bravura. This is a "Rachmaninoff concerto" for organ, by way of Ravel. Its title combines notions of symphony and concerto; and many other works for organ and orchestra, regardless of what they are called, strive for a similar result.

Best of the Franco-Flemish bunch are Poulenc's Concerto for Organ, Strings and Timpani—an irrefutable masterpiece—and Joseph Jongen's lavish and beguiling *Symphonie concertante*, a "Rachmaninoff concerto" for organ.

### In the New World

It may seem as though you need to be an organist, or know one, to write imaginatively for the instrument. Famous as a teacher of general music composition in Munich, Joseph Rheinberger was himself a prodigious organist who, in addition to 20 sonatas, composed two marvelous concerti (1884, 1895) for his instrument—richly melodic and very satisfying pieces, even thrilling at times. Even his genial Suite for Violin, Cello, Organ and String Orchestra (1887), while mostly subdued in effect, includes a fiery finale.

Rheinberger's American pupil, Horatio Parker (also an esteemed teacher at Yale, where Charles Ives was a pupil) wrote but one organ concerto (1904), more than comparable to his mentor's, even adding a double-pedal cadenza. Well before Parker, Charles Zeuner composed for his own use what are likely the first two American-made organ concertos (1830-31), and organist and scholar Ebenezer Prout composed a similar offering; these two men seem to have had the bench to themselves until Parker came along.

But since Parker, Americans—organists and non-organists alike—have been quite friendly to the notion of organ-with-orchestra. Aaron Copland astonished everyone (particularly conductor Walter Damrosch) with his First Symphony (1924), very much a *symphonie concertante* for organ, created as a debut vehicle for his teacher, Nadia Boulanger. A capable pianist, Copland wrote intelligently and creatively for the organ, in a way that stretched the envelope. By com-

#### RANDOL BASS:

##### CASEY AT THE BAT

Based on the famous poem, and containing fragments from "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" and "Till Eulenspiegel," *Casey at the Bat* can be a thrilling inclusion for Pops, particularly if a well-known actor or local luminary is engaged as narrator. (7-8 min.)

3-3-3-3 4-3-3-1 1-3-1-1,  
Strings, Narrator

##### SHENANDOAH

So new that the parts are just being finished, *Shenandoah* is a sweeping, lyric setting of the famous folksong scored for large orchestra with prominent solos for horn, trumpet and flute. The work would bring a panoramic, spacious aura to any Americana program. (4-5 minutes)  
(call for orchestration)

#### DAVID CONTE:

##### FANTASY FOR ORCHESTRA

(10 minutes)

3-3-3-3 4-2-2-1 1-3-1-1, Strings,

#### HENRY MOLLICONE:

##### DANSA TRIMBULA

(16 minutes)

Sax., Accordion, 2 Perc., Strings,

## NEW WORKS for POPS

### THE MIDNIGHT RIDE OF PAUL REVERE

Poem by HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Music by JULIAN WACHNER

Commissioned by the Landmarks Orchestra of Boston, Longfellow's famous story was given 13 performances during the summer of 2004 under the direction of Charles Ansbacher and with the composer as narrator, receiving very positive critical acclaim. Wachner has shaped the piece in the manner of "Peter and the Wolf," using the instrument families of the orchestra to enhance the story.

(c. 20 minutes)

1-1-1-1 2-1-1-0 1-1-0-0, Strings, Narrator

### MAKE WAY FOR DUCKLINGS

Story by ROBERT McCLOSKEY

Music by DANIEL PINKHAM

Based on the very popular children's book which made the ducklings of Boston Garden famous everywhere. Commissioned and given many outdoor park performances in 2002 by Boston Landmarks Orchestra, and now recorded by them under conductor Charles Ansbacher with Senator Ted Kennedy as narrator.

(26 minutes)

1-1-1-1 2-1-1-0 0-1-0-0, Strings, Narrator

### A RAT'S TALE

Libretto by WILLIAM LUCE

Music by

HENRY MOLLICONE

"The Pied Piper Revisited" — the story is excerpted from Browning's *The Pied Piper from Hamelin*, and is appropriate for youth concerts or pops; chorus may be children or women.

(30-40 minutes)

2-2-2-2 4-3-3-1 1-3-1-1,  
Actor (Narr.), Treble Chorus

### patriotic occasions

#### DANIEL PINKHAM:

##### FANTASIA ON "AMERICA"

(3' minutes)

3-2-2-2 4-4-2-1 1-2-0-0,  
Strings, Chorus

##### LET THE WORD GO FORTH

John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address set for Narrator, SATB Chorus and String Orchestra; premiered in April 2004 at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston.

(13 minutes)

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## Repertoire

parison, the Pulitzer Prize winner Leo Sowerby, a virtuoso organist and church musician who wrote two concertos (1938, 1944), a *Concert Piece* (1951), and a *Medieval Poem* (1926) for organ and orchestra, seems rather doctrinaire. His pieces, and those of quite a number of other American composers, including Walter Piston and Normand Lockwood, were championed by broadcast and recording artist E. Power Biggs.

Samuel Barber, another sometime-organist, was commissioned to write his bravura *Toccata Festiva* (1961) for the new Aeolian-Skinner organ (since removed) at Philadelphia's Academy of Music. He, like Parker, enjoyed the visual excitement and technical challenge of a soloist playing with two feet (and no hands). Try that, you violinists.

Ned Rorem's life companion, James Holmes (an organist), provided some "insider knowledge" to the composer, but

when Rorem finally got around to writing his *Organ Concerto* (1985), it was not for Holmes but rather on commission. (One must buy the groceries, after all.) Emma Lou Diemer, composer of two organ concertos and a prolific creator in many genres, writes both for friends and on commission. She is a superb player, too. Stephen Paulus, now with three successful organ concertos to his credit (1992, 2002, 2004), was inspired to learn about the instrument by his businessman father, who was an avocational organist.

The American Guild of Organists commissioned an appealing pair of concert works for its national convention in Seattle in 2000. A perfect concert opener, Robert Sirota's *In the fullness of time* thoughtfully explores the notion of millennial revelation, with organ and orchestra in adroit balance; the "Seattle" Concerto by Lebanese-born Frenchman Naji Hakim mixes irrepressible rhythm and improvisational fluidity into a

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Aaron Copland astonished everyone with his First Symphony, created as a debut vehicle for his teacher, organist Nadia Boulanger. A capable pianist, Copland wrote intelligently for the organ in a creative way that stretched the envelope.

breathlessly cathartic romp, always on the brink. Both Sirota and Hakim are organists. Yet Joseph Schwantner, an outsider to the organ world, delivered a jewel in response to a commission from the Dallas International Organ Competition. His *September Canticle* (2002) is a profound and insightful reflection upon the tragedies of 9/11, music of powerful emotion and soothing balm. All three works are top-drawer, and the presence of the pipe organ brings their orchestral music to a higher emotional level.

#### From Lists to Live

Paul Hindemith, who claimed to know how to play every instrument, wrote insightfully for organ in his *Kammermusik* Concerto No. 7 (1928) and also in his profound final work, an Organ Concerto for Lincoln Center (1963) which Anton Heiller premiered. That same year, Heiller himself wrote an Organ Concerto, as one of numerous mid-20th-century Germanic composers with neo-classic leanings—Joseph Ahrens, Theodore Brandmüller, Harald Genzmer, Gunther Raphael—for whom the pipe organ was a natural outlet.

The myths and realities of the Canadian Arctic might not strike you as obvious themes for an organ piece, yet Michael Colgrass, a professional percussionist, uses them to explore some new dimensions of the organ as a “sound source” in his *Snow Walker* (1990), written for the Calgary Organ Competition. With uncanny verisimilitude, the organ functions both as ghostly presence and icy wind.

British composers after Handel have not been sitting on their hands. Perhaps because of the ubiquitous presence of pipe organs in most large English music rooms (every town hall had a pipe organ, well before the cities could support orchestras), there are plenty of opportunities for organs to sing along during the final pages of celebratory hymns and coronation marches—all banners waving, and the *bombardes* blaring, too. And a host of

English organist-composers have added colorfully to the repertoire. Check out Malcolm Williamson, Peter Dickinson, William Mathias, Charles Stanford, Percy Whitlock, Basil Harwood, Quentin Maclean, or Kenneth Leighton.

The lists go on. (Two Italians, Enrico Bossi and Alfredo Casella, deserve a mention.) And somewhere or other, someone has recorded most of these pieces. But now's the time to actually hear them live and, by getting the available repertoire on the boards, encourage living composers to try their hand at this game, too. Yes, every organ has its own personality, but writing for them is not as problematic as it may first appear. And while it may be true that more people hear organ music, live each week, than hear any other acoustic instrument, what's done in church is very different from what is and can be done in a concert hall. It is a showplace, is it not?

Years ago, as a high-school kid collecting records, I found Frederick Fennell's Eastman Wind Ensemble album (still available, now on CD) of William Walton's coronation march, *Crown Imperial*. On that disc, the Eastman Theater's old Austin pipe organ surges in and around the climactic final pages: a compelling presence, a necessary binder, a glowing energy. By a happy twist of fate, 35 years later I was honored to join Dr. Fennell onstage at the Meyerson Symphony Center in Dallas as host for a program of “Pomp and Pipes,” with the Dallas Wind Symphony and the late organist Paul Riedo at the Meyerson's incomparable Fisk instrument. We rocked 'em, baby. The music grabbed your guts—in a nice way. That's the “why” and the “how.”

Now, let's make it happen. *sf*

Michael Barone is host/producer of the weekly radio series *Pipedreams*, which is distributed by American Public Media ([www.pipedreams.org](http://www.pipedreams.org)). He served as an advisor to the Walt Disney Concert Hall organ project.

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