

Summer Institute for French Organ Studies 2009

Gregory Peterson

Start with two world experts on French organ building and organ music, add seven qualified, eager American organists, stir them together with extant examples of the finest French organs, and let steep for a couple of weeks in the rich culture of Bordeaux and Eprenay, France. This is the recipe for the Summer Institute for French Organ Studies (SIFOS). Since 1986, organ builder Gene Bedient of Lincoln, Nebraska and Jesse Eschbach, Professor of Organ and Chairman of the Keyboard Division at the University of North Texas School of Music, have teamed up to direct this biennial seminar. It is not your grandmother's recipe for the typical European organ tour, however, where a large group travels from instrument to instrument with minimal opportunity to play. Instead, a select group of performers and scholars is given the chance to delve deeply into the appropriate repertoire for each instrument through masterclasses and individual practice time, culminating in a group recital, open to the public, at the end of each week.

Participants in this year's course were Michael Chad Leavitt, student, Manhattan School of Music, New York; Gregory Peterson, Assistant Professor of Music and College Organist, Luther College, Decorah, Iowa; Patrick Allen Scott, student, University of Texas, Austin, Texas; Timothy Wissler, organist, children's choir director, Cathedral of Christ the King, Atlanta, Georgia; Marilyn Witte, Cantor, Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Lancaster, Pennsylvania; and Andrew Yeargin, student, Manhattan School of Music, New York. Elaine Mann, director of music, Grace Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, joined the group for the second week.

First week Sainte-Croix Church, Bordeaux

The group gathered on Sunday, May 24, in Bordeaux, a cosmopolitan port city on the Garonne River approximately 300 miles southwest of Paris. With a population of one million, Bordeaux is the seventh largest metropolitan area in France and is the capital of the Aquitaine region and a major wine-producing center. This beautiful, historic city was described by Victor Hugo as a combination of Versailles and Antwerp. Lectures, masterclasses, practice sessions, and the public recital took place at the Sainte-Croix Church, on the site of a 7th-century abbey. The current structure with its Romanesque façade was built in the late 11th to early 12th centuries and boasts a magnificent organ from 1741 by Dom Bédos, meticulously restored in 1997 by the French organ builder Pascal Quoirin. Every aspect of the instrument—winding system, key and stop action, pipe restoration and replacement, casework—was restored with the utmost care and concern for historical accuracy. This famous instrument is known throughout the city and is a source of much local pride. It was not uncommon to hear “Oh, the Dom Bédos” exclaimed by a local after being introduced as an organist visiting the city.

Dom Bédos five-manual organ

A unique aspect of the five-manual Dom Bédos instrument at Sainte-Croix is the 32' plenum of the Grand-Orgue. The 32' Bourdon lays the foundation for the searing Grand Plein-Jeu of this post-classical organ, building up through the 16' Montre, 8' Montre and Second 8' Montre, Prestant, Doublette, Grosse Fourniture and Grand Plein-Jeu of 13 ranks. In addition to the customary Nazard and Tierce, there is a Gros-Nazard of 5⅓' and a Grosse Tierce of 3⅓', a late addition to the French Classical organ, after 1690. The Grand Cornet, two



Façade of the 1741 Dom Bédos, Ste. Croix, Bordeaux



Abbey Church of Ste. Croix, Bordeaux

8' Trompettes and the Clairon complete the division. The Positif de Dos, based on an 8' Montre, contains the usual plenum, mutations, and Cromorne. In addition, there is an 8' Trompette, Clairon and Voix Humaine. The third manual contains the Bombarde 16' and Gros Cromorne 8'. According to Gene Bedient, this could be the first Bombarde division in France, as there was not much use of this division before 1750. The Récit is a short keyboard of 32 notes, with a Cornet V and Trompette 8'. This chest has the expressive *Tremblant doux* and raucous *Tremblant fort*. The Echo is also a shorter keyboard of 39 notes containing a Cornet V. The pedalboard is extended down to F, known as the *ra-valement* for exciting, thunderous pedal effects from the Bombarde 16' and first and second Trompettes. The division also contains a Clairon, 16' Flûte, 8' Metal Flûte, 8' Wooden Flûte, and Flûte 4'. Shove couplers allow the Positif and Bombarde to be coupled to the Grand-Orgue. All of this—plus a generous acoustic of four to five seconds' reverberation—made for a most satisfying performance of repertoire selected by Jesse Eschbach, including excerpts from François Couperin's *Messe pour les couvents* (Kyrie, Elevation—Tierce en taille and Offertoire); the Tierce en taille, Basse de Trompette and Grand jeu from *Liure d'Orgue* of Pierre DuMège; En taille, Fugue [à cinq], Récit de Cromorne and Dialogue sur les Grands Jeux from *Veni Créateur* by Nicolas de Grigny; and two *Noëls* by Jean-François Dandrieu, *Il n'est rien de plus Tendre* and *Allons voir ce divin Gage*.

Lectures and masterclasses

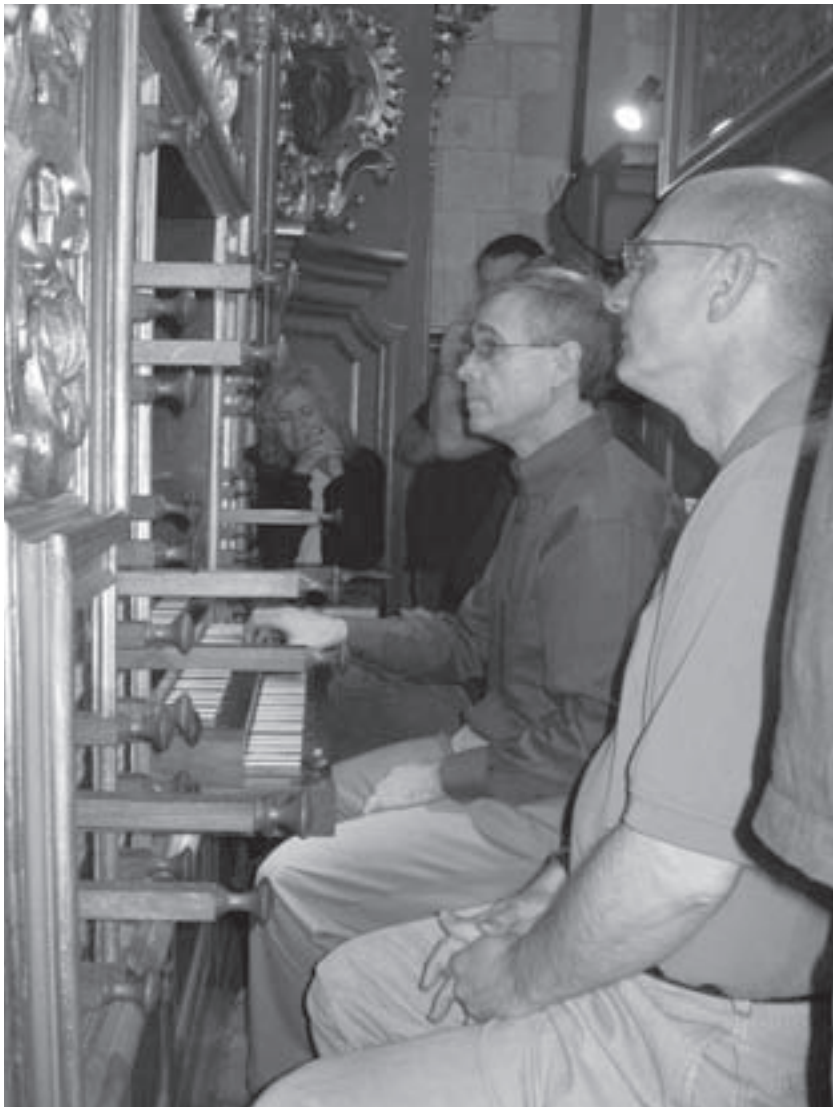
An anteroom in the gallery, containing an historical exhibit with large posterboard illustrations from *L'Art du Facteur d'Orgues* by Dom Bédos, provided sufficient space for the daily morning lectures. Gene Bedient covered wind systems and key action in classical French organ building, as well as pipework, tonal issues, and temperament in the 17th and 18th centuries. Under his guidance, participants were able to crawl into the immaculately clean case and hand-pump the organ's six bellows. It was interesting to note the subtle change in the organ's sound when hand-pumped as opposed to using the electric blower. And it was quite an aerobic workout to boot!

Jesse Eschbach lectured on French post-Classical style and registration in France pre-1665 and 1665–1710. There was much fascination with the Grosse Tierce 3⅓' and its musical application. It was used for the bass or left hand, combined with the 16' Bourdon and 8' flute. Professor Eschbach also addressed the use of *notes inégales* and ornamentation, pointing out that ornamentation is a product of what the organ will invite, depending upon which division is being played, how much air is in the pipe channel, the registration, and acoustics, as well as the performer's *bon goût*. The correct use of ornamentation in French music can often bring fear and trepidation to the performer. Professor Eschbach's helpful explanation encouraged spontaneity and improvisation as a way to bring local surface detail to the performance. Multiple handouts enhanced the lecture material. Dr. Eschbach's knowledge and passion for this music was also in evidence during each of the late morning masterclasses, where his expert teaching motivated everyone to move ahead in their interpretation and understanding, resulting in a stylistically informed and aesthetically pleasing recital.

Pentecost is celebrated as a national holiday in France, and it was fortuitous that the birthday of the Christian



SIFOS 2009 group photo (l to r): Jesse Eschbach, Chad Leavitt, Marilyn Witte, Patrick Scott, Kevin Yeargin, Tim Wissler, Greg Peterson, Gene Bedient



Jesse Eschbach teaching a masterclass at Ste. Croix, Bordeaux, Tim Wissler at the console

Church fell on the weekend between the first and second weeks of this summer's institute. Most participants headed to Paris for the weekend, braving the crowded trains to take advantage of festival Masses at major churches in the capital, especially Notre Dame, Sainte-Clotilde and Saint-Sulpice.

Second week Church of Notre Dame, Epernay

Nestled in the verdant hills of the Champagne region, the "Champagne City" of Epernay (population 25,000) was the site for the second week of lectures, masterclasses, and the recital. Located on the left bank of the Marne River about 17 miles southwest of Reims, Epernay is home to two magnificent organs by the celebrated 19th-century French builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll. Classes and the recital took place at the Church of Notre-Dame, an imposing structure begun in 1898 and completed in 1915. Bombardment on the night of July 24, 1918 caused considerable damage to the nave. Rebuilding was not completed until April 1925. This building replaced

a 16th-century edifice that was demolished due to severe collapsing.

Cavaillé-Coll organs

The 1869 Cavaillé-Coll instrument was moved into the rebuilt church and is housed in the north transept of the cruciform nave with 34 stops distributed over three manuals and pedal.

Grand-Orgue

- 16' Bourdon
- 8' Montre
- 8' Bourdon
- 8' Violoncelle
- 4' Prestant
- 2' Doublette
- Plein-jeu harmonique
- 16' Basson
- 8' Trompette
- 4' Clairon

Positif

- 8' Quintaton
- 8' Salicional
- 8' Unda Maris
- 4' Flûte douce
- 2' Doublette
- 1' Piccolo
- 8' Clarinette
- 8' Trompette



Andrew Yeargin, Patrick Scott, Chad Leavitt and Gregory Peterson view the Orgue de Choeur in the apse of Ste. Croix, Bordeaux

Récit expressif

- 8' Flûte traversière
- 8' Viole de gambe
- 8' Voix céleste
- 4' Flûte octaviante
- 2' Octavin
- 8' Trompette
- 8' Basson-Hautbois
- 8' Voix Humaine

Pédale

- 16' Contrebasse
- 8' Basse
- 4' Flûte
- 16' Bombarde
- 8' Trompette
- 4' Clairon

The dedication recital was given by Alexis Chauvet and Charles-Marie Widor on December 2, 1869. The organ was restored in 2001 by Bernard Hurvy.

SIFOS participants also had use of an 1897 Cavaillé-Coll instrument at the Church of Saint-Pierre et Saint-Paul.

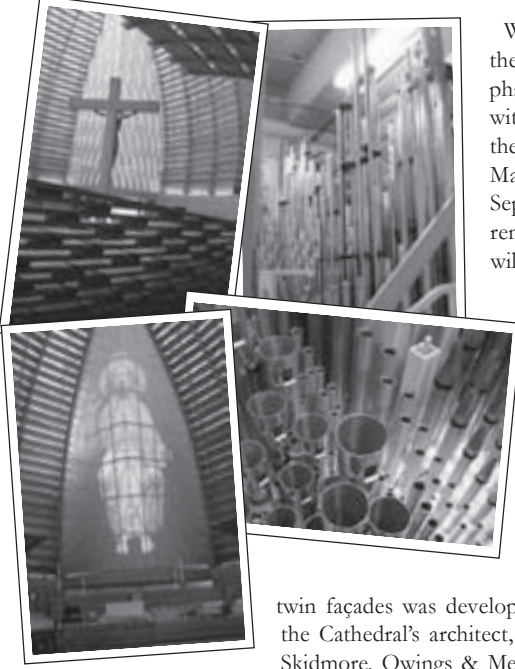
Also three manuals and pedal, this later instrument has a few more mutations and small pipes, perhaps showing the influence of Alexandre Guilmant. Both instruments are typical in the layout of the *tirasses*, *ventils* and *coupler* pedals, and employ a Barker machine, the pneumatic lever to assist the playing action of the coupled Grand-Orgue, developed by Charles Barker and first used to great success by Cavaillé-Coll in his 1841 instrument at Saint-Denis, Paris.

Lectures and masterclasses

Cavaillé-Coll was a disciple of Dom Bédos, evidenced by his well-annotated copy of *L'Art du Facteur d'Orgues*. The lectures during this week by Gene Bedient brought forward the connections between these two significant builders and covered the innovations and mechanics that are the hallmark of the 19th-century French organ. Jesse Eschbach lectured on "Rousseau, Revolution, and

The Cathedral of Christ the Light

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We are pleased to announce the completion of the first phase of our organ project with the Cathedral of Christ the Light in time for the Mass of Dedication held on September 25, 2008. The remainder of the instrument will be constructed in our

workshops over the coming six months and will be installed during the late summer of 2009. The completed instrument will feature four manuals, 75 independent stops (excluding borrows), 90 ranks and 5,335 pipes.

The design of the organ's twin façades was developed in collaboration with the Cathedral's architect, Craig Hartman of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, and will suggest a natural forest with numerous wooden pipes.

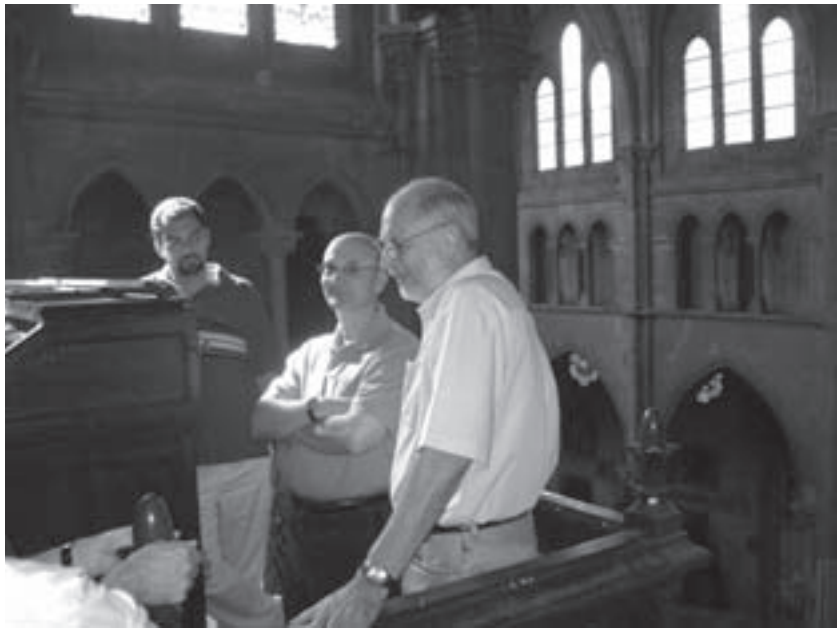
We are honoured to have been selected by the Cathedral of Christ the Light's Organ Committee to design and build this significant new pipe organ for Oakland's resonant new Cathedral. For more information, visit our website at the address below or the Cathedral's website at www.ctlcathedral.org.

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Gene Bedient, Jesse Eschbach and Chad Leavitt behind the 1869 Cavallé-Coll console, Notre Dame, Epernay



1869 Cavallé-Coll nameplate and manuals, Notre Dame, Epernay



Jesse Eschbach teaching a masterclass at Notre Dame, Epernay, Chad Leavitt at the console

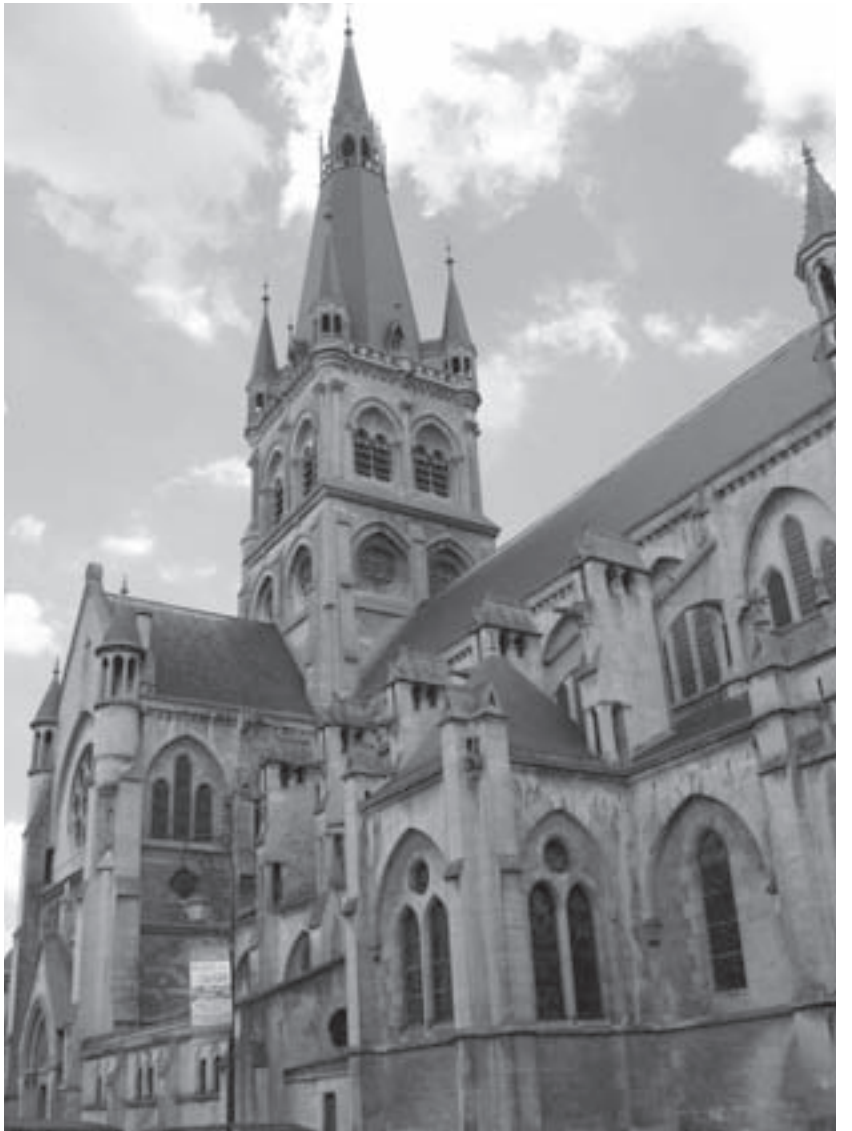
Restoration: An Overview of Cultural and Political Influences in France Affecting Sacred Music in the Nineteenth Century,” “Post Classical French Organ Registration from Dom Bédos to Georges Schmitt,” and the concept of plenum in nineteenth-century France. The masterclasses again centered on selected repertoire including César Franck’s *Grande Pièce Symphonique*, op. 17 and *Prélude, Fugue et Variation*, op. 18, Marcel Dupré’s *Prélude et Fugue en Sol Mineur*, op. 7, the Adagio from Louis Vierne’s *Troisième Symphonie pour Grand-Orgue*, Pastorale from the *Première Sonate en Ré Mineur*, op. 42 by Alexandre Guilmant, and “Tu es petra” from the *Esquisses Byzantines* by Henri Mulet. The resulting recital was a thrilling conclusion to the week and a testament to the enduring legacy of this

music as an outgrowth of the partnership between artisan and artist.

French culture

Of course, no time spent in France would be complete without a total immersion into the food and wine that is the *sine qua non* of French culture. After working hard each day, participants enjoyed festive repasts at gourmet restaurants carefully selected by Gwen and Gene Bedient. As with organ registration, there is great variety in French cuisine, adventurously sampled by all participants, adding to the collegial camaraderie permeating the institute.

Is it possible to say that an organist has not lived without hearing the thrilling Grand Plein-Jeu of Dom Bédos or a beguiling Cavallé-Coll harmonic flute? The Summer Institute for French Organ



Notre Dame, Epernay

Studies is a rich, cultural and musical immersion. Try it. It will transform your playing and teaching—perhaps even your life. To learn more about the Summer Institute for French Organ Studies and plans for the 2011 Institute, visit the Bedient Organ Company website at <www.bedientorgan.com>.

Gregory Peterson is Assistant Professor of Music and College Organist at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, where he teaches or-

gan and church music, conducts the Luther Ringers, and serves as cantor to the student congregation for daily and Sunday chapel services in the College’s Center for Faith and Life, playing the 42-stop mechanical-action organ by Robert Sipe. He holds the DMA from the University of Iowa, MM from the Yale Institute of Sacred Music, and the BA from Luther College. An active recitalist, he has performed in Europe and throughout the United States. He is represented by Concert Artist Cooperative, <www.concertartistcooperative.com>.

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