

Maxine Thévenot

Review of **Prairie Sounds** in **The Diapason Magazine**, July 2021

Prairie Sounds, Maxine Thévenot, organist. The McGuigan Organ, Casavant Frères Opus 1409, 1930/1993, Holy Rosary Cathedral, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. Raven Recordings, OAR-162, \$15.98. Available from ravencd.com.

Maxine Thévenot grew up in rural Saskatchewan and graduated with a Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Saskatchewan. Shortly afterward she spent some time helping with work on the McGuigan Organ, Casavant Frères Opus 1409 of 1930, in Holy Rosary Cathedral, Regina, which was being restored and enlarged by the builder in 1993. This gave her what proved to be very valuable experience of the inner workings of organs in her future career as a concert organist. The instrument is particularly interesting as it was one of the last large instruments built when Joseph-Claver Casavant was tonal director. Thévenot is clearly very fond of the instrument, as manifested in her making this recording. After her experience working on the cathedral organ Thévenot obtained her Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees at the Manhattan School of Music. Since 2010 she has been director of music and organist of St. John's Episcopal Cathedral in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

David Leroy McIntyre (b. 1950) is a pianist, organist, and composer working in Regina, Saskatchewan, since 1976. He has written seven books of organ pieces, and "Joyfully," of which this is the premier recording, is from his *Organ Notebook 2: Postludes and Processionals*, published in 2002. He explains in the booklet that this was one of several pieces composed to play while "trying to be an organist" at Saint Paul's Anglican Cathedral in Regina in the late 1990s. It is a short, boisterous fanfare, both pleasing and accessible.

Next, Thévenot plays two movements from *Suite de deuxième ton* of the French Classic composer Jean-Adam Guilain. These demonstrate very well the eclectic strengths of the organ in making possible authentic-sounding performances of a wide variety of musical styles. Both the "Tierce en taille" and the "Trompette" sound most convincing as registered by Dr. Thévenot on this instrument.

Denis Bédard (b. 1950) belongs to the Canadian prairies

by adoption rather than by birth. He came originally from Quebec City and obtained his bachelor's degree in organ with highest honors from the Conservatoire de musique de Québec. He studied further in France and with Gustav Leonhardt in Amsterdam. He returned to the Conservatoire de musique de Québec as a professor and was organist of several churches in Quebec City before moving west to the University of British Columbia in Vancouver in 1997. Since 2001 he has been director of music and organist at Holy Rosary Cathedral in Vancouver. He is represented on this recording by his variations on Ralph Vaughan Williams's hymn tune, *Sine Nomine*. This work consists of five relatively short sections— "Maestoso" (basically a statement of the chorale), an upbeat dance-like "Allegro moderato," "Très calme," "Allegro non troppo," and a loud arpeggiated "Maestoso." Rich harmonies are reminiscent of the music of Herbert Howells.

Gilles Maurice Leclerc, born in Ottawa in 1960, has bachelor's and master's degrees in music from the University of Ottawa and has composed a great deal of liturgical choral music as well as producing excellent repertoire for organ. His *Récit de tierce en taille*, of which this is the premiere recording, is written in a neoclassical style similar to works of the same title by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century composers such as Louis Couperin, Nicolas de Grigny, and Louis Marchand.

The English composer Philip Moore (b. 1943) studied at the Royal College of Music and the University of Durham, following which he was a music teacher at Eton College and assistant organist of Canterbury Cathedral, before becoming organist of Guildford Cathedral in 1974 and then in 1983 of York Minster until his retirement in 2008. York is about as far from the prairies as possible—the Yorkshire moors have a very different topography—but nevertheless his *Laudate Dominum*, of which again this the first recording, fits well with the other music on the compact disc. Moore wrote this piece as a commission from Robert Patterson, a former organ scholar at York Minster, for a recital at Saint Paul's Cathedral in London, and it is written for the physical layout of the Saint Paul's organ, with its divisions on either side of the choir, in the dome, and at the west end. The Casavant organ at Holy Rosary Cathedral, unlike Saint Paul's, is all in one place, but though the absence of "surround sound" might make

a difference to the effectiveness of the piece in a live performance, it does not matter on the recording. As the title—Laudate Dominum (Psalm 150)—suggests, the work is a paean of praise played in massive chords.

Based in Toronto, Ruth Watson Henderson (b. 1932) has long been a leading Canadian composer of choral and organ music. She wrote *Celebration* to mark the centenary of the Royal Canadian College of Organists in 2009. It subsequently went on to win first prize in the Annual Festival of New Organ Music in Westminster Abbey, where Maxine Thévenot performed it. Once more this compact disc incorporates the world premier recording. Like the Philip Moore piece, *Celebration* features massive chords on the organ but has very much more of a forward rhythmic thrust. It reminds me of a couple of other pieces, both, oddly enough, named *Cortège*. These are *Cortège Académique* by the Canadian composer Ernest MacMillan, and the “*Cortège*” (no. 3 of *Trois Improvisations*) by Louis Vierne as reconstituted by Maurice Duruflé.

The rest of the compact disc consists of core repertoire by European composers. The first of these pieces is the well-known *Adagio in E Major* by Frank Bridge, primarily remembered as the teacher of Benjamin Britten. The received opinion, as reflected in the leaflet, is that Bridge was an innovator who communicated his advanced ideas to his student Britten. My own take, however, is that progressive though he may originally have been, he was later radicalized by the experience of teaching Benjamin Britten, so that his later work is much more progressive than his earlier work. What I particularly like about the *Adagio in E Major* is the way Bridge makes repeated modulations with a skill that rivals that of César Franck. Maxine Thévenot’s interpretation ranges between extremely tender and very thrilling.

By a happy coincidence we next get an opportunity to experience César Franck’s masterful modulations in the *Prélude, Fugue, et Variation*. The registration, particularly the reeds, well demonstrates the excellent training the Casavant brothers received in France.

Clara Schumann wrote her *Prelude and Fugue in D Minor*, op. 16, no. 3 for piano, but Maxine Thévenot plays it here in Barbara Harbach’s organ transcription. The work translates very well onto the organ and receives added depth from having a substantial pedal part. The warmth of the prelude, played on foundation stops, contrasts with the rather crisper style of the fugue, which gradually builds up toward the end.

The final work on the compact disc is César Franck’s *Pièce Héroïque* wherein the Casavant organ again displays its suitability for romantic-symphonic French repertoire. The full organ at the end, particularly the pedal, is quite thrilling. Maxine Thévenot has done the musical world a great service by showcasing one of the Casavant brothers’ masterpieces in the cathedral at Regina in the Saskatchewan prairies. Besides the more well-known works she includes several very interesting and unusual works by contemporary composers. Furthermore, her playing is, as always, excellent. —John L. Speller Port Huron, Michigan

Review of **Prairie Sounds** in **The American Organist**, June 2020

Currently canon precentor of the Cathedral Church of St. John in Albuquerque, N.M., Maxine Thevenot returns to her native Saskatchewan to make this attractive program on the instrument for which she provided assistance in its 1992 restoration. Recorded in June 2019, twelve diverse works, some familiar, others less so, combine to make a delightful program that reveals the well-rounded musicianship and technical assurance of the performer, and the sonic diversity of the beautifully restored Casavant. Four of the works are by Canadian composers, three of which are given their premiere recordings.

The program opens with a jaunty performance of Canadian pianist-composer David L. McIntyre’s *Joyfully*, a brief extract from his *Organ Notebook*, volume 2. Other Canadian composers included are Gilles Maurice Leclerc, a former president of the RCCO and a prolific composer of music for organ and the Roman Catholic liturgy (*Récit de tierce en taille*); Ruth Watson Henderson, former accompanist of the Toronto Children’s Chorus and Festival Singers of Canada and one of Canada’s best-known composers (*Celebration*); and Denis Bedard, currently, organist and music director at Holy Rosary Cathedral in Vancouver (*Variations on Sine Nomine*). The French Classical tradition is represented by the relatively obscure Jean-Adam Guilain (1680- 1739), remembered for his first book of suites based on the *Magnificat*, from which we hear *Récit de tierce en taille* and *Basse de Trompette* from the *Suite de deuxième ton*. Two English composers make an appearance: Philip Moore (*Laudate Dominum*, written for the organ of St. Paul’s Cathedral, London, and here given its premiere recording) and Frank Bridge (the ravishing *Adagio in E Major*). A delightful inclusion is the rarely performed *Prelude and Fugue in D Minor* by Clara Schumann, demonstrating her inspired and excellent musical craftsmanship, equaled only by her remarkable 60-year career as one of the finest concert

pianists of her time. Marcel Dupre's evocative Angelus is balanced by two works of Cesar Franck, the Prélude, Fugue et variation and Pièce Héroïque, the vigorous performance of which concludes this program.

The program is well chosen for this instrument. Ms. Thevenot chooses registrations that demonstrate the flexibility of the organ while being authentic to the various musical styles, which she faithfully represents in performance. The inclusion of works by Canadian composers whose music deserves a wider hearing this side of the border is most welcome, as is the documentation of an instrument by a long respected builder located in a region less familiar to many.

Review of **Prairie Sounds** by **Robert Delcamp** in **The American Record Guide**, May/June 2020

Thevenot is Music Director and Organist at St John's Cathedral in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This varied program shows off the 1930/1993 3-manual, 57-rank Casavant in Holy Rosary Cathedral, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. The Franck, Dupré, and Frank Bridge pieces will be familiar to organists, but the Clara Schumann, Philip Moore, and the ones by Canadian composers David McIntyre, Denis Bedard, Gilles Leclerc, and Ruth Henderson will be unfamiliar. Canada has a rich and vibrant organ tradition and these pieces are well worth investigating. The playing is fine if a bit clinical, but all of a sudden fervor and passion make an appearance in a blazing performance of the Piece Heroique. Would that Thevenot had brought that excitement to the entire program. I could have done without the Schumann and Franck pieces and preferred more Canadian composers. At a mere 56 minutes there would have been plenty of room. Notes on the organ and music with specification and photos.

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