



MÉCÉNAT
GRAND ORGUE
CATHÉDRALE
DE BORDEAUX

Birth of a Great Organ

The Newsletter of the Great Organ of Bordeaux Cathedral

Editorial

With the dismantling of the organ scheduled to begin in February next year, autumn 2025 marks the season of administrative and technical preparations.

Indeed, organ builders require two months to plan the complex logistics of this project.

A major coordination meeting was therefore held last October. The companies involved in the various components of the project (instrument, casework, site setup, and scaffolding) were all present.

More details will be shared throughout this newsletter.

Alongside preparations for the physical work, the organ pipe sponsorship website has continued to expand with new features. Setting up this platform has required significant effort, and work is still ongoing. A "News" section was added at the end of summer, which complements this newsletter with more frequent updates and additional visuals.

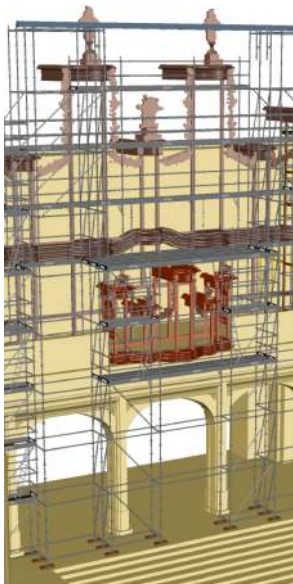
We would like to take this opportunity to warmly thank the very first sponsors!

In this issue, in addition to the recurring sections you'll find in every edition, we also present the first chapters of article series that will unfold in the upcoming newsletters — such as the introduction of the organ builders and the history of the cathedral's organs.

News: Preparing for the Works

In early October 2025, the cathedral became a site of forward planning. Dismantling a cathedral organ is a complex operation that requires meticulous preparation, especially since both the instrument and the historic case must be entirely removed.

A large scaffolding structure will be erected to lower the thousands of components making up the instrument (nearly twenty tonnes perched high on the west gallery). Some parts weigh close to half a tonne; certain pipes exceed five meters in length and weigh over 150 kg. Removing the case for full restoration is particularly delicate, due to its unusual dimensions and the fragility of its joinery. Many aspects must be anticipated over the eleven weeks planned: logistics, site installations, street access, detailed sequencing of operations, equip-



Contents

Issue 2 - Autumn 2025

1 News: Preparing for the Works

The dismantling of the organ is a complex operation. Preparations began during a week of work last October...

2 Rieger Organ Builders 180 Years of History (Part I)

The journey of one of the oldest and most renowned organ builders in the world...

3 The Cathedral and Its Organs 700 Years of History (Part I)

It spans nearly seven centuries of history! In this issue, we explore the first chapter, from 1330 to the end of the Renaissance.

4 What is an organ?

Part Two: 2,000 Years of History.

5 Frequently asked questions.

Each quarter, we answer your questions!

6 Cathedral life brief.

News from the cathedral...

7 Did you know?

The pipes, from the smallest to the biggest.



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CATHEDRA

ment, and the transport of components to the Austrian and Breton workshops in multiple semi-trailers.

The schedule must also be coordinated with the broader restoration of the cathedral, and future needs of the organ must be assessed — particularly in terms of electrical systems — while respecting heritage conservation requirements.

An intensive week of work took place in early October. Wendelin Eberle and Stefan Niebler, director and voicer of the Rieger organ company, together with Gwennin L'Haridon (Orglez), led surveys, measurements, acoustic studies, and technical meetings with the project management team to lay the groundwork for a model dismantling.

On the side, the team travelled to Toulouse to study the Saint-Sernin organ, a masterpiece by Cavaillé-Coll and a key reference for Bordeaux.

The target is set: the organ will be dismantled by the end of March. The organ works will then make way for the restoration of the building itself, starting in April. At the end of this intense week, all participants appreciated the excellent collaboration



The organ in Saint-Sernin (Toulouse, France) is one of the main references for Bordeaux.

and quality of the exchanges. This climate of mutual trust and high-level professionalism bodes well for a smooth construction process and a fruitful partnership for the next phases of the project.

Rieger Organ Builders – 180 Years of History (Part I)

The Rieger company was founded in the 19th century in Austrian Silesia. After completing his apprenticeship in Vienna, Franz Rieger (1812–1885) opened his workshop in Jägerndorf (now Krnov, Czech Republic), delivering his Opus 1 in 1845 for the church in Burgberg — an organ with 20 stops across two manuals and pedalboard. He was officially registered as a craftsman in 1852. The family business was passed on in 1873, when Franz's sons Otto (1847–1903) and Gustav (1848–1920) took over the company under the name Franz Rieger & Söhne, restarting the opus numbering. Their Opus 1 was awarded a medal at the 1873 Vienna World Exhibition. In 1879, the firm became Gebrüder Rieger and began to industrialize, adopting new techniques, expanding its catalogue, and opening a branch in Budapest (1890). Around 1900, Rieger employed up to 200 people, had produced over 3,000 organs, and was exporting as far as Gibraltar, Istanbul, Jerusalem, and Rome.



Keyboards construction in Jägerndorf manufactory.

Otto Rieger (1880–1920), the second to bear the name, took over the company following his father's death. The aftermath of World War I proved difficult. Otto died suddenly at age 40, and Josef von Glatter-Götz (1880–1948), a childhood friend of Otto Anton Rieger who had joined the company's management in 1918, succeeded him and officially purchased the firm in 1924. Production resumed with around 100 employees, while the company's aesthetic and technical approach evolved in response to the organ-building debates of the interwar period. A satellite workshop was established in Mocker (Leobschütz). On the eve of World War II, Rieger accounted for a significant share of organ exports to Germany. In 1940, Egon von Glatter-Götz, Josef's son, was killed on the front; from 1943



The vast Jägerndorf factory in the interwar period.

to 1945, the workshop was requisitioned to produce munitions. The year 1945 marked a turning point: the Glatter-Götz family and part of the German-speaking staff were expelled, and the Krnov factory was nationalized and merged with the Kloss workshop to form Rieger-Kloss. At the same time, Rieger's Austrian history was being rewritten. As early as 1946, Josef von Glatter-Götz and a team of former collaborators restarted operations in Schwarzach (Vorarlberg) by taking over the former Behmann organ workshop. This would become the "new" Rieger Orgelbau, which gradually rebuilt its team, methods, and network from this site — ultimately becoming one of the leading European firms in both new organ construction and restoration. In 1983, the leadership passed to Caspar, Raimund, and Christoph Glatter-Götz, continuing the company's development. Then in 2003, a new chapter began with Wendelin Eberle — former technical director — becoming head of the firm. Under his leadership, Rieger modernized its processes, stabilized its team, and reaffirmed one of its founding principles: controlling every step of production in order to ensure the highest quality.



The Cathedral and Its Organs – 700 Years of History (Part I)

The first recorded mention of an organ in the cathedral dates back to 1352, in a transaction between the archbishop and the chapter concerning the door that connected the archbishop's palace to the church of Saint-André, located "at the end of the organs." It is likely that this organ already existed by the time the choir was joined to the nave in the 1330s.

The organ was destroyed when the western vaults collapsed in 1427. A contemporary account reads: "The earthquake was so strong in Bordeaux on Candlemas Day that the vault of the great nave of Saint-André, in the place where the organs are now, fell to the ground." The organ was immediately rebuilt by Jaquet de Resta and later restored in 1438 by Héliot Portier. Once reconstruction of the western bays' vaults was completed, significant repairs took place in 1521, and the organ was enlarged. Already by then, it stood on a gallery at the rear of the nave.

In 1531, at the request of Archbishop Charles de Gramont, a new organ loft was built, followed by a Renaissance-style rood

screen (jubé). From that point on, the cathedral housed two instruments: the grand organ at the back of the nave and the choir organ, located on the rood screen on the epistle side, between two pillars.

The grand organ, rebuilt on the new gallery, had an impressive appearance. An English traveler, Andrew Boorde, passing through Bordeaux in 1535, wrote: "In the cathedral of Saint-André are the finest and largest organs in all Christendom. These organs contain various instruments and mechanisms of giants and stars that move their jaws and eyes as fast as the organist plays."

Both instruments were regularly improved. In 1594, the organist Guillaume repaired the grand organ and added a "douziesme" stop to the smaller organ for a hundred crowns.

The grand organ was repaired again in 1601 by a Dominican friar.

To be continued...

Make the heart of Bordeaux's new Grand Organ beat: become a sponsor of a pipe!



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What is a pipe organ, part 2: A Bit of History

The history of the pipe organ begins in Antiquity with the invention of the hydraulis by Ctesibius, a Greek engineer from Alexandria in the 3rd century BCE. This ingenious instrument used water pressure to stabilize the air supply needed to make the pipes sound. Although very different from modern organs, the hydraulis already established the fundamental principle of the instrument: producing sound by blowing air into pipes via a keyboard.

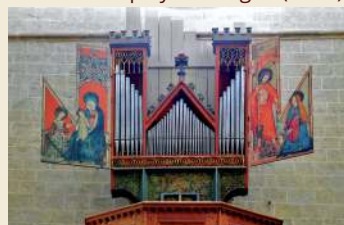


Mosaic depicting an ancient organ. Roman villa of Nenning, near Trier (circa 2nd century CE).

Over the centuries, the organ underwent slow but steady development. From the early Middle Ages, it became part of religious architecture in the West, gradually establishing itself as a central element of liturgical life. The introduction of hand-operated bellows, followed by the windchest (which distributes air to the pipes), allowed for more precise musical control. By the end of the Middle Ages, the first large organs appeared, equipped with multiple keyboards and a variety of stops. The basic principles of the modern organ — wind-blown instrument, keyboards, grouped pipes controlled independently — were already in place by the 15th century.

During the Renaissance and Baroque periods, the organ became a true sound laboratory. Each European region developed its own style: the brilliant Iberian organ, the refined Italian organ, the powerful and radiant French classical organ, the richly colored German organ ideal for

Organ of the Basilica of Valère in Sion. Considered to be the oldest playable organ (1430).

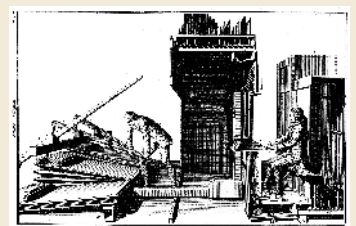
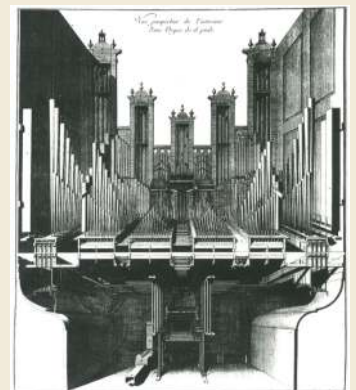


counterpoint. Organ builders pushed the limits of invention, and composers — including Sweelinck, Buxtehude, and Bach — fully explored the instrument's expressive potential.

In the 19th century, the organ underwent a radical transformation. In France, Aristide Cavaillé-Coll designed symphonic organs, modeled after orchestras of the time, with sophisticated mechanisms capable of expressing the full range of Romantic emotion. The stops became more powerful and nuanced, and the instrument increasingly resembled a full orchestra in itself.

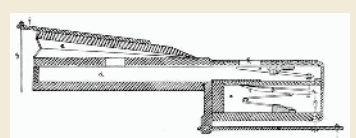
In the 20th and 21st centuries, organ building has continued to evolve between tradition and innovation. New instruments are created in the spirit of historical research or contemporary experimentation, while countless older organs are restored or rebuilt with deep respect for traditional craftsmanship.

Thus, for over two thousand years, the pipe organ has never ceased to evolve — adapting to styles, spaces, and uses, following technological advances — all while preserving the fundamental principles established over 500 years ago.



Two engravings from "The Art of the Organ Builder" by Dom Bedos de Celles.

Engraving of a "Barker machine" designed in the 1830s to lighten the organ's key action.



Cathedral Highlights

Cathedra's 2025 season ended beautifully, capping off a special anniversary year that celebrated ten years of musical engagement. This milestone season concluded last October at the Church of Notre-Dame with a Baroque program. It was widely praised for its musical quality and the presence of a loyal and curious audience. A highlight of the year was the 10th anniversary performance held in Pey Berland Square, which drew a crowd of 8,000 spectators. Over the summer, the Organ Festival featured four high-level concerts on the choir organ. These recitals, showcasing major works from the repertoire, resonated strongly with audiences, offering fresh and enriching musical experiences. The educational outreach component also reached a high point: nearly 600 students attended two organ-accompanied cine-concerts on October 13, featuring Chaplin and Méliès. This engaging and playful



introduction to cinema and the organ fully aligns with Cathedra's mission of cultural transmission. Meanwhile, preparations are underway for upcoming restoration works at the cathedral. Ahead of the interior restoration of the nave, preliminary work has begun in the transept and the northwest and southwest towers. These include rerouting the electrical system, redistributing the networks in anticipation of clearing the current installations, and creating storage and utility spaces essential for the smooth execution of the works and the ongoing use of the building. Lastly, following its success in 2024, Luminiscence returns for a second edition. This immersive light and sound show will once again illuminate the cathedral, running through to early January 2026.



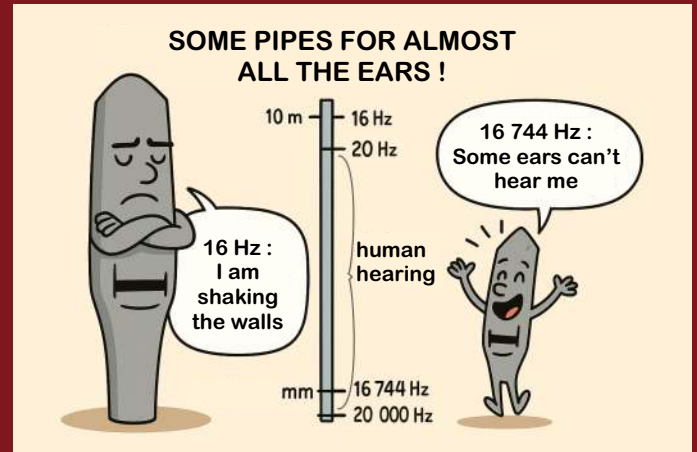
In the Next Issue...

- Rieger Organ Builders – Part II
- The Cathedral Organs: Seven Centuries of History – Part II
- What is a Pipe Organ? – Part III
- ... and more news, updates, and articles ...

Did you know?

Pipes from the Largest to the Smallest...

In a grand organ, pipes range from over 10 meters tall (in the 32-foot register) to just a few millimeters (in the 1-foot register or smaller). The lowest notes reach around 16 Hz, at the very edge of human hearing; the highest can soar up to 17,000 Hz. The organ thus spans nearly the entire audible spectrum — from deep rumble to barely perceptible whistle.



Frequently Asked Questions

Each quarter, we answer your questions!

- **How were the companies selected for the work?**
- Through a public procurement process in the form of a call for tenders, in accordance with the French Public Procurement Code.
- **As a sponsor, will my name be engraved on a pipe?**
- Yes ! On the website orguebordeaux.fr, you can sponsor the organ and have your name engraved on a pipe of your choice starting from €500 in donations.
- **When will we be able to hear the new organ?**
- Probably in 2030, during the organ's blessing ceremony and official unveiling. Some sponsorship packages offer the opportunity to hear the organ in preview — either during a pre-inaugural evening or through early sound demonstrations on site during special construction visits.

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