

The Organs of the *Collégiale*

There is evidence that an organ already existed in the *Collégiale* by 1474. City documents of this date show that Jehan Laisné, the first known organist of the *Collégiale*, was responsible for playing the organ on certain feast days.

The first organ for which the specification is known is an instrument of 11 stops and 45 notes built by Nicolas Barbier in 1583. This organ was enlarged over time with the addition of extra stops and manuals, a pedalboard and, in 1657, a Positif case containing 5 stops. The enlargements to the organ at this time were carried out by François Ducastel and the Positif casework was made by the carpenter Chambord.

The organ was located in the north gallery, facing into the nave in the fourth bay from the west. Three metal hooks and some marks in the stonework above the arcade arch are still visible today showing where the Positif case was attached to the wall.

By the time of the Revolution the organ had grown to 24 stops over 3 manuals and Pedal, but the instrument was sold around 1794. According to certain sources, however, the organ case was spared and stored somewhere in the galleries where, according to a written account, it may still have been located in 1819.

By 1842 another organ existed on a wooden and plaster tribune over the main west doors of the *Collégiale*. The specification and builder of this instrument are not known. In 1844, the organ and tribune were removed and a new organ was constructed by Daublaine-Callinet on the north side of the choir at ground level. This was an organ of 22 stops over 2 manuals and Pedal.

The firm of Daublaine-Callinet was bought by Ducroquet in 1845, and in 1855, Ducroquet was, in turn, bought by Joseph Merklin. It was, therefore, the firm of Joseph Merklin, the second most prominent organbuilding company in France after Aristide Cavallé-Coll, that took care of the organ in the *Collégiale* from 1855.

In 1895 criticisms of the instrument's architectural aesthetic started to be raised and a new organ was planned. The *Commission des Beaux-Arts* (the equivalent of today's *Monuments Historiques*) stipulated that the new organ should not be placed above the main west doors (on a new tribune) as this would mask the "magnificent interior gable" of the west end.

Joseph Merklin therefore agreed to build a new organ of 34 stops with 3 manuals and Pedal in the gallery of the north-west tower. Merklin reused a certain amount of pipework from the 1844 organ, and the case of that organ provided the new organ's secondary façade which faces into the triforium gallery. The façade facing the nave was designed in oak by the architect Alphonse Simil. The organ was inaugurated on 11 November 1897 in the presence of the Bishop of Versailles.

Around 1924 or 1925, Gutschenritter added an electric blower and two stops to the Pedal department, the 32' Soubasse and the 8' Flûte. The original foot-pumping mechanisms were left in place.

During the Second World War, bombs falling near the *Collégiale* blew in the windows near the organ which then suffered the effects of the weather. In 1952 the organ was restored by Georges Helbig using war-damage funds, however alterations were made that had a deleterious effect on the instrument. Thankfully these alterations were reversible in nature. In 1970, 18 years after its post-war restoration, the organ fell into disrepair and become unplayable.

With the neo-classical movement in full swing, the decision was made to build a new organ by Georges Danion rather than restore the Merklin. The Danion organ, with 41 stops over 3 manuals and Pedal, was constructed in 1988 on a newly-built tribune over the main west doors of the *Collégiale*.

Fortunately, at this time the decision was made not to destroy or reuse parts of the Merklin organ, leaving open the possibility of its future restoration. After many years of effort and consultation, supported in particular by Philippe Allio a local promoter of the Merklin organ, a project was launched to restore the instrument back to its original condition, incorporating the additions made by Gutschenritter in 1924/25. The restoration was

undertaken by the organbuilders Laurent Plet and Yves Fossaert and the organ advisor was Christian Lutz. The work was completed in 2013 and the organ was inaugurated by Daniel Roth on 25 May of that year. The instrument was listed as a *monument historique* in 2016.

During the 13 years before the construction of the Danion organ in 1988, the only playable organ in the *Collégiale* was a choir organ that was purchased second-hand by the parish and installed in 1975 (the Merklin had already fallen out of use). This organ was originally built by Jacquot-Lavergne and had 19 stops over 2 manuals and Pedal. It was located in a side chapel next to the south side-entrance to the *Collégiale* with its console in the choir. It continued in use until 2011 when it was removed ready for the construction of the new choir organ by Bernard Coge. Some of its pipework was incorporated into the new Coge organ.

The new Coge choir organ was built in 2013 thanks to the patronage of Philippe Allio. A substantial instrument for a choir organ, it consists of 25 stops over 2 manuals and Pedal. It is located in the tribune above the south side-entrance with its mobile console located in the choir. The organ is tuned to the same pitch as the Merklin (A435) allowing the two instruments to be used together.