

Singapore's answer to Notre Dame de Paris

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Singapore is a small tropical island state with only eleven functional pipe organs. Like the cosmopolitan population, however, these instruments constitute diverse styles. Despite having been a British Crown Colony until 1959, Singapore boasts not only English but also German and Danish instruments with romantic, neo-baroque and eclectic tonal concepts. Welch (1988) provided a brief account of most of the organs in Singapore. In this article, the fruit of recent research, the organs of the Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Good Shepherd are examined for their architectural and musical value.

The organ in the west gallery stands out in several respects. Although the Klais installation of 2002 in the Esplanade concert hall (McVicker 2003) is considerably larger and has a much higher international profile, the cathedral instrument possesses artistic traits that are less conventional. Welch (1988) suspected that the organ was the Cavaillé-Coll *orgue de chœur* exported to Singapore (Eschbach 2003), but cathedral records have since revealed that the organ was built in 1912 by Bevington & Sons of London.

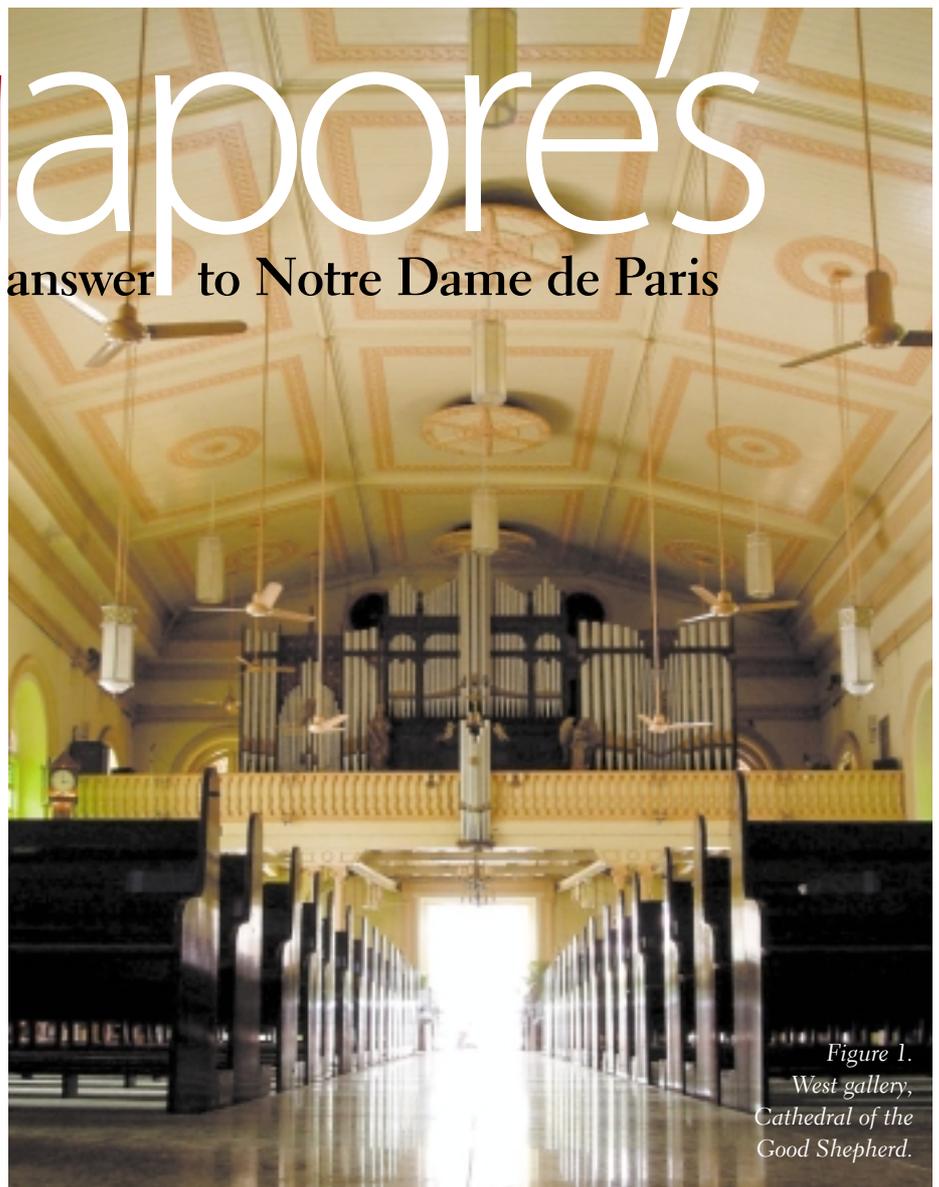


Figure 1.
West gallery,
Cathedral of the
Good Shepherd.

The non-extant Cavaillé-Coll instrument has been traced to the French missionary church of Saints Peter and Paul.

Asymmetry is a key aesthetic element of the façade (*fig. 1*) which is not seen elsewhere in Singapore. Only the symmetric central section, typical of organs of the period, is Bevington's work. The left and right sections were constructed by Robert Navaratnam, the sole organ builder in Singapore, using the limited resource of pipes that could be salvaged from the war-looted Hill, Norman & Beard organ in the Victoria Memorial Hall (Singapore). These sections

Figure 2. The author at the gallery organ. Figurines and statues added by Robert Navaratnam.

accommodate stops added by him in the 1990s. Navaratnam served his apprenticeship at Emil Hammer (Hemmingen); German influence can be found in the decorative 'Rückpositiv' and the tonal modifications discussed later. Although the manuals and pedals have been replaced, the Cavaillé-Coll-style reversed console (*fig. 2*) is original and unique in Singapore. Due to collapsed lead tubing, the Bevington tubular pneumatic action has been converted to electro-pneumatic action. Navaratnam was responsible for reviving the organ from its unplayable state in the 1970s to the lively musical instrument of today.



Figure 3. Bottom octave,
Hohlflöte 8.

Present disposition

GREAT 56 NOTES, ORIGINALLY 58

Open Diapason	8	
Violin Diapason	8	
Dulciana	8	(tenor C) bottom octave Hohlflöte 8
Hohlflöte	8	closed zinc bottom octave (fig. 3)
Principal	4	
Lieblich Flöte	4	
Gemshorn	2	
Mixture	1 1/3	IV old Klais pipes
Krummhorn	8	old Klais pipes
Trumpet	8	Laukhuff
Glockenspiel		made in Singapore

SWELL (ENCLOSED) 56 NOTES, ORIGINALLY 58

Gedeckt	8	zinc bass
Geigen	8	
Viol d'Orchestre	8	
Celeste	8	(tenor C) Viol d'Orchestre
Gemshorn	4	
Harmonic Flute	4	
Flautina	2	
Rohrquinte	1 1/3	old Klais pipes
Terz	1 3/5	old Klais pipes
Cymbel	1 1/3	III old Klais pipes
Cornocean	8	Bevington replaced with pipes by Möller
Trumpet	8	(Great)

PEDAL 30 NOTES

Bourdon	16	
Bass Flute	8	metal; VMH; made in Singapore
Bombarde	16	rolled zinc; VMH
Trumpet	8	(Great)
Trumpet	4	(Great)

COUPLERS

Swell/Great, Swell/Pedal, Great/Pedal
Swell octave/Great

WIND PRESSURES

80mm
100mm (Bombarde 16 and Bass Flute 8)
VMH: salvaged from the 1931 Hill, Norman & Beard organ, Victoria Memorial Hall

Expectedly, an abundance of unison tone and lack of harmonic corroboration is observed in the Bevington specification. The 'principal chorus' on the Swell is softer but brighter than that on the Great because the Open Diapason possesses a fuller tone than the quasi-diapason obtained by drawing both the Gedeckt and Geigen on the Swell. Contrary

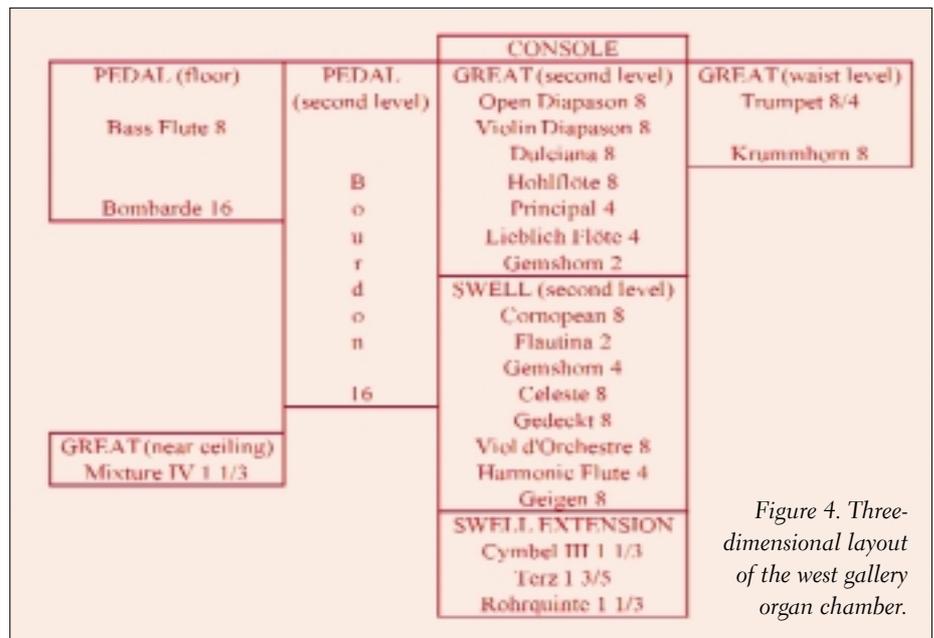


Figure 4. Three-dimensional layout of the west gallery organ chamber.

to usual practice is the employment by Bevington of the Cornocean as the only reed where a Trumpet or Oboe would have been generally deemed more appropriate. In this case, however, the hornlike Cornocean blends more readily with the flues in the absence of mixtures.

The manual divisions and Bourdon 16 are fed by two reservoirs arranged in series, the second acting as a booster and backup. Bevington pipework stands on the original *Kegellade* while the newer pipes are planted on unit chests. The stop layout is shown in fig. 4. Flutes alternate with strings to minimise acoustic interference. Pitch layout in the Swell (fig. 5) is opposite to that in the Great, with the more acute stops situated at the front. This reduces the risk of the Swell upperwork being excessively attenuated by enclosure and the position of the swell box at the back of the chamber. However, the brightness of the German Cymbel and mutations allows for their placement in a rearward extension of the swell box. The opposing pitch layouts of the Great and Swell may also account partly for the abovementioned brightness of the Swell 'prin-

icipal chorus' compared to the Great.

With the stops introduced by Navaratnam, the organ is one of the most versatile in Singapore. Solo possibilities are increased by the Krummhorn (fig. 6) and the quint and tierce mutations all of which are gifts from Klais Orgelbau. The two octave-quint mixtures transform the romantic chorus into a neo-baroque plenum for the benefit of repertoire and modern-day congregational singing. One of the stops rescued from the Victoria Memorial Hall is the Bombarde 16 which substantially reinforces the weak pedal department. This stop, originally on 10" of wind, has been refitted with thinner Laukhuff tongues. Despite the support of a pedal reed, however, a Principal 16 is needed to produce the true *Gravität* so prized by JS Bach.

The coexistence of pipes from several schools (see disposition) results in a spicy, unblending tonal structure that may not appeal to some organists. However, in order to appreciate such a tonal structure, one only

Figure 5. Swell division with Great Organ visible through shutters. Front – back: Viol d'Orchestre 8, Gedeckt 8, Celeste 8, Gemshorn 4, Flautina 2, Cornocean 8. Note that the shutters do not extend to the bottom.





Figure 6. *Krummhorn* 8.

Present disposition

MANUAL I (UPPER MANUAL)

pipes by private German craftsman

Gedackt	8
Prinzpal	4
Waldflöte	2
Larigot	1 ¹ / ₃

MANUAL II

Holzflöte	8	<i>old Klais pipes</i>
Geigen Principal	8	<i>old Klais pipes; VMH</i>
Flute	4	<i>old Klais pipes; VMH</i>
Swiegel	2	<i>old Klais pipes</i>
Siffflöte	1	<i>old Klais pipes</i>

COUPLERS

I/II, I/P, II/P

WIND PRESSURE

80mm

needs to consider the robust and dramatic sound of the symphony orchestra whose components were never 'voiced' to blend together. Anton Bruckner, whose monumental symphonies are based on organ textures, relied on the contrasts between orchestral instruments to promulgate musical ideas. Notwithstanding the tonal disjunction, the Bevington portion comprising the oldest playing pipes in Singapore can be heard in its original state except the Cornopean stolen during the war and the Swell Gedeckt 8 whose cork stoppers have disintegrated and been replaced with metal caps. The present Möller Cornopean, donated by *The Diapason* contributing editor Robert Coleberd, is the only specimen of the American Classic style in Singapore.

Complementing the main instrument is a choir organ (fig. 7) built in 1994 in the north transept. The case is the only complete example of Navaratnam's work. *Werkprinzip* elements are present in the façade in the form of *Brustwerk*, *Oberwerk* and diminutive 'pedal towers'. However, these do not reflect the internal layout. Reminiscent of mediaeval organs are the flat placement of pipes and the arrangement of pipe mouths in horizontal lines. The case has a triangular roof and stands on four stilts, much resembling the traditional *kampong* (village) houses found along the rural coasts of Southeast Asia. This scheme saves space, aids sound projection and achieves a pleasing synthesis of Europe and the Far East.

Being the only acoustical space in Singapore containing two organs, the Cathedral is the only place where antiphony is possible. Magnificent effects can be created by juxtaposing the two sound masses emanating from opposite ends of the nave. Furthermore, the nave is the most reverberant among the Singaporean churches possessing pipe organs. Antiphony was recently demonstrated by the author and the *titulaire* in an unusual performance of the Introduction of Léon Boëllmann's *Suite Gothique*. The *Grand-Choeur* sections were played on the gallery organ in alternation with the *Récit* sections played on the choir organ. It reenacted a spectacular performance which the author had witnessed during mass at Notre Dame de Paris.

Although they

are not in the league of historic European instruments, the organs of the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd are very remarkable in the local context and capable of making beautiful music under the command of a passionate artist. They are therefore worth conserving as parts of Singapore's kaleidoscopic cultural heritage for the enjoyment of future generations.

Acknowledgements

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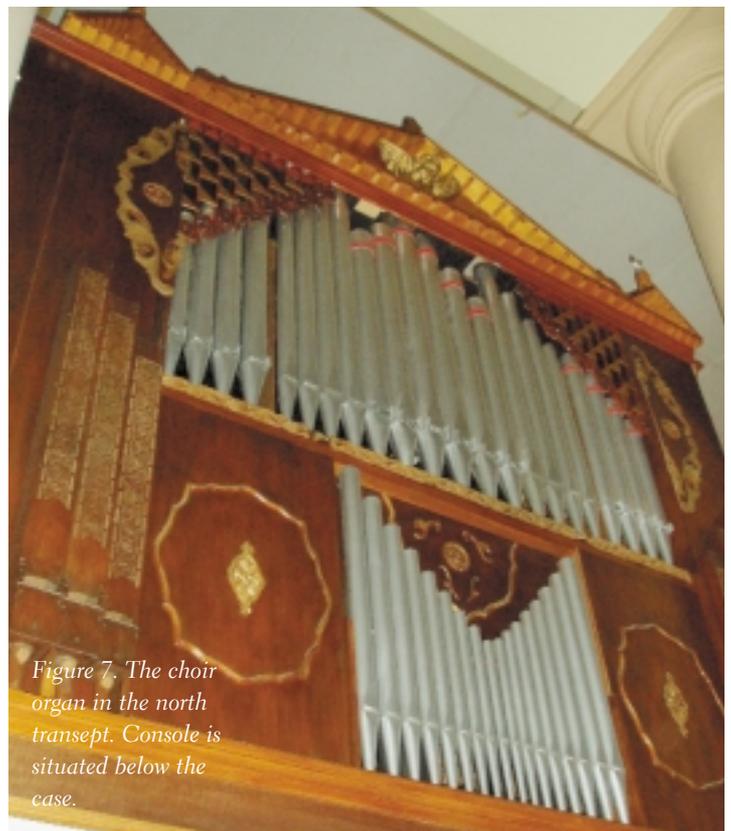


Figure 7. The choir organ in the north transept. Console is situated below the case.