

Crafts, professions of excellence

ORGAN MANUFACTURE

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The development of the French organ tradition was influenced by Belgic, German and Italian professionals from the very beginning. The history of the organ in France doesn't really begin



in the seventeenth century, of course. As you might imagine, the organ was a part of musical life in France long before then. Records indicate the presence of instruments in major religious institutions from the thirteenth century on, and some surviving sixteenth-century instructions for registration originated in France.

(Photo: The French Classical Organ at Montréal)

During this time, though, there was no distinctively French organ to be found. Instruments from the northern part of the country were heavily influenced by developments in the lowlands, and those in the south had strong similarities to organs in Italy. It was not until the seventeenth century that a truly French style of organ building developed, at first in the areas centered around Paris and Normandy. It was there that the first organs were built incorporating the features that have since been recognized as constituting the French Classical organ.

This set of characteristics dominated organ-building in France for over a century, from the first half of the seventeenth century through the waning years of the eighteenth. The qualities of endurance and longevity have contributed to the modern tendency to call these instruments "classic" or "classical." In addition, composers of the time wrote music that is intimately connected in style and genre with the organs themselves. The period of French Classicism is thus a "classic" example of cooperation and inter-relationship between the organ builders, their instruments, and the music composed for those instruments.

The French organ music school was formed in the first half of the 17th century. It progressed from the strict polyphonic music of Jean Titelouze (c. 1563–1633) to a unique, richly ornamented style with its own characteristic forms that made full use of the French classical organ. Instrumental in establishing this style were Louis Couperin (c. 1626–1661), who

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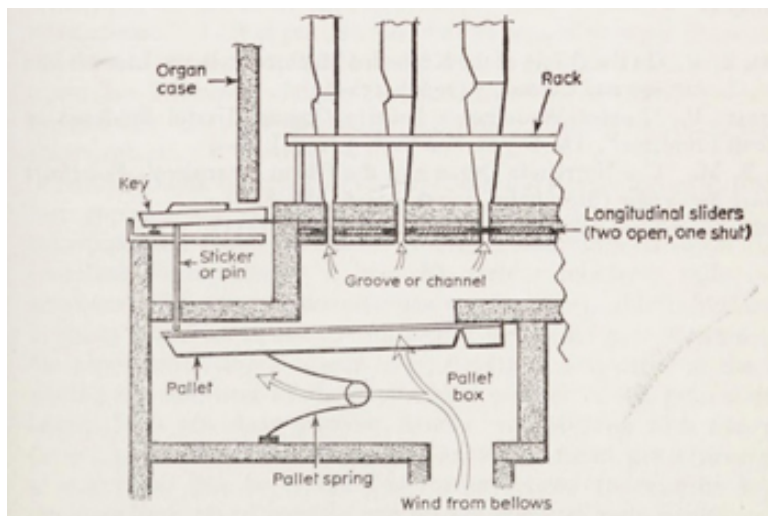
experimented with structure, registration, and melodic lines, expanding the traditional polyphonic forms, and Guillaume-Gabriel Nivers (1632–1714), who established the distinct forms and styles of what was to become the French organ tradition.

What are the skills and expertise of professionals in this profession?

The organ builder and/or restorer designs the instruments in accordance with the different musical repertoires, classical or contemporary. He works the wood of the buffet, rolls the pewter plates to make the pipes, creates the trumpets, the reeds of love...

The profession encompasses a broad range of specialist skills in wood-, metal- and leather work, alongside those required for the voicing and tuning of pipework and the designing of new instruments. The craft also includes the restoration, to particular standards, of existing pipe organs and the regular maintenance of a large number throughout France.

More specifically, the skills include carpentry, cabinet making, leatherwork, electrical work (mainly for modern control systems), tuning, voicing (making pipes speak at the right note),



design (including CAD), and conservation techniques. The crafts come together to produce a wide range of pipe organs from small single manual instruments to very large instruments comprising 3 or 4 manuals and pedals; the skills required also support the building and restoration of instruments with mechanical, pneumatic, electrical, or electronic control practice organs.

(Photo: First West-European Organ)

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What materials are used in this craft? Are they local materials?

The most important raw material in a pipe organ is wood. It is needed for almost all parts of it: the casing, pipes, windchest, bellows compartment, console, action etc. Having well-seasoned wood at hand is essential to building a good organ. This is the reason why the bigger organ-building companies have their own lumberyard from which they take the wood when they need it, and they see to it that the stocks are continually replenished. However the wood itself could purchase the wood from all over the world.



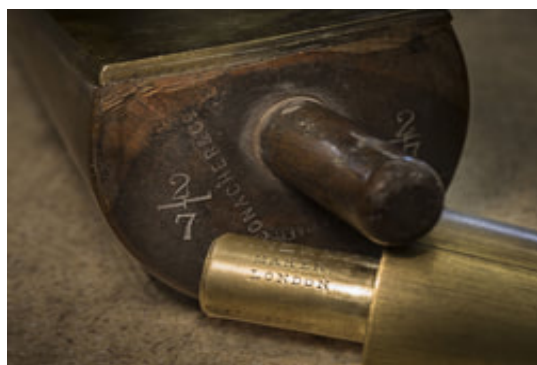
While the wood is picked from the company's lumberyard, the other raw materials for the manufacturing of the pipes (tin, lead, copper, ...) have to be ordered and all the other constituents bought from outside, like leather for the bellows, felt, small pieces, plastic, the blower motor, electronics, cables, screws, etc. Although the lamb leather which is mostly used in a French building tradition is also local and could be made by another craftsman.

(Photo: French lumberyard)

What are the specific tools used in this craft?

Flating tools: These are for pressing the upper and lower lips to a pre-determined proportion. We have a full complement of all mouth widths.

Hand plane: The base is made from lignum vitae which helps prevent any wear over the years. The angle of the iron blade is very different to a traditional wood plane.



Source:

<http://www.shiresorganpipes.com/tools-of-our-trade.html>

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Tuner: It is used to tune the pipes either to lower the pitch or to make it higher.

What markets are related to these professions?

In 2017, the organ builder counted around 60 companies or craftsmen (source Professional Group of Organ Builders of French Furniture - GPFO) spread over the whole of the national territory, with a greater concentration in Alsace.

The workshops are made up of an average of two to four workers (the largest has about fifteen). To respond to certain complex orders, companies are required to group together from time to time. About 70% of companies have a turnover of more than 75,000 euros. The manufacture of an organ can require from 3,000 hours (small organ of 10 stops) to 30,000 hours of work. A restoration lasts from 1 to 4 years and requires 5,000 to 20,000 hours of work. The maintenance of old or historic organs now constitutes the main part of the activity. Only half of the companies actually carry out an activity of creating or restoring instruments. The manufacture of living room organs today faces competition from electronic instruments.

The rediscovery of the neoclassical organ and the mastery of the restoration of classical organs of the Ancien Régime, such as organs of romantic aesthetics, allow organ builders to respond to orders for the construction or restoration of instruments similar to the foreign. Other development prospects are opening up internationally with the construction of new organs for concert halls and conservatories. The weight of export today represents 16% of organ billing turnover.

The opening of the market also leads to the awarding of French public contracts to neighboring European companies. The organ builder has to deal with an evolution of its environment and its markets. Companies in the sector are faced with several challenges: maintaining and transmitting traditional and complex know-how, adapting to changes in the professions, encouraging innovation (development of 3D) but also developing their markets (marketing, rationalization of supplies, exports...).

In France, public authorities are the main owners of immovable and movable property (including organs) contained in places of worship, encumbered property, for those present before the law of December 9, 1905 concerning the Separation of Churches and State , of a free, permanent and preeminent legal assignment to worship. The same applies to the ownership of organs in non-religious civil buildings (conservatories, concert halls).

The municipalities have the financial responsibility for the conservation of this heritage. Public procurement represents nearly two-thirds of the profession's turnover, which amounts

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to more than 20 million euros per year. This large share weakens the sector at the same time as it sustains it, companies being strongly subject to possible budgetary restrictions. The State, through the Ministry of Culture, certain regions and departments grant subsidies to municipalities.

Within the Ministry of Culture, the Directorate General for Heritage supports, through the regional directorates of cultural affairs (regional conservation of historical monuments), the policy of maintenance and restoration of organs protected as historical monuments due to of their historical, artistic and technical interest. The heritage code governs the procedures. The Directorate General for Artistic Creation (music delegation) accompanies projects to create new organs and can support work on unprotected organs.

Furthermore, the sector has benefited from an active sponsorship policy developed in recent years. In addition to the State and local authorities, many restoration or creation projects have benefited from the aid of the Heritage Foundation.

Where to learn this profession in France?

Bac Pro Crafts and craftsmanship organ builder option organ builder, 3 years - National School of Eschau <https://www.cffo-eschau.fr/>



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