

## Gulangyu Organ Museum



The original organ in the Emmanuel Episcopal Church, Newbury Street, Boston, Massachusetts, seen in the photo above, was built by Casavant Frères Ltée., Saint-Hyacinthe, Canada, as their Opus 700 in 1917. This organ was rebuilt from the church's previous Hutchings 1890 Opus 216, a three manual 52 stop organ.

The organ was built in a gallery-level case at the rear of the sanctuary. It had a traditional style console with roll top.

This was a very large instrument using electro-pneumatic chests. The four manual console controlled 10 divisions, 107 stops, 136 registers, 120 ranks, bringing it to a total of 7,311 pipes. Manual compass was 61 notes and Pedal 32 notes.

The organ was offered for sale through the Organ Clearing House in

2004 and it was purchased by a wealthy Chinese businessman, Hu Youyi. The Casavant organ was shipped out of the United States in 2007 and taken to the small island of Gulangyu, China. There it was put into storage at the Gulangyu Organ Museum awaiting reconstruction in a new purpose-built concert hall.

Maree and I travelled to China in 2012 and made a

special trip to the city of Xiamen on the central coast between Shanghai and Hong Kong, then by boat to the beautiful island of Gulangyu, often known as the Piano Island. It is the music capital of China. There are numerous music-related museums and exhibits in Gulangyu, but the most imposing of all is the Gulangyu Organ Museum.



The front portico of the Gulangyu Organ Museum  
Photo: Bruce Duncan





In the Museum are numerous organs and pianos, perhaps the most startling being the fully restored Norman and Beard organ which stands immediately under the huge dome over the entrance hall. This organ had been brought to the island from a church in London which had closed and was restored by an Australian organ builder.



However, upstairs in several rooms we found the Boston organ laid out in its dismembered state. The console was showing the century-old look of neglect. At the time of dismantling the organ it was apparently unplayable, and had been in that state for some time.

The new owner was, at that time, negotiating for land on the island on which to construct a special concert hall. Gulangyu is not a large island and is a very desirable place for wealthy people to live, so to obtain a large block of land required considerable negotiation.

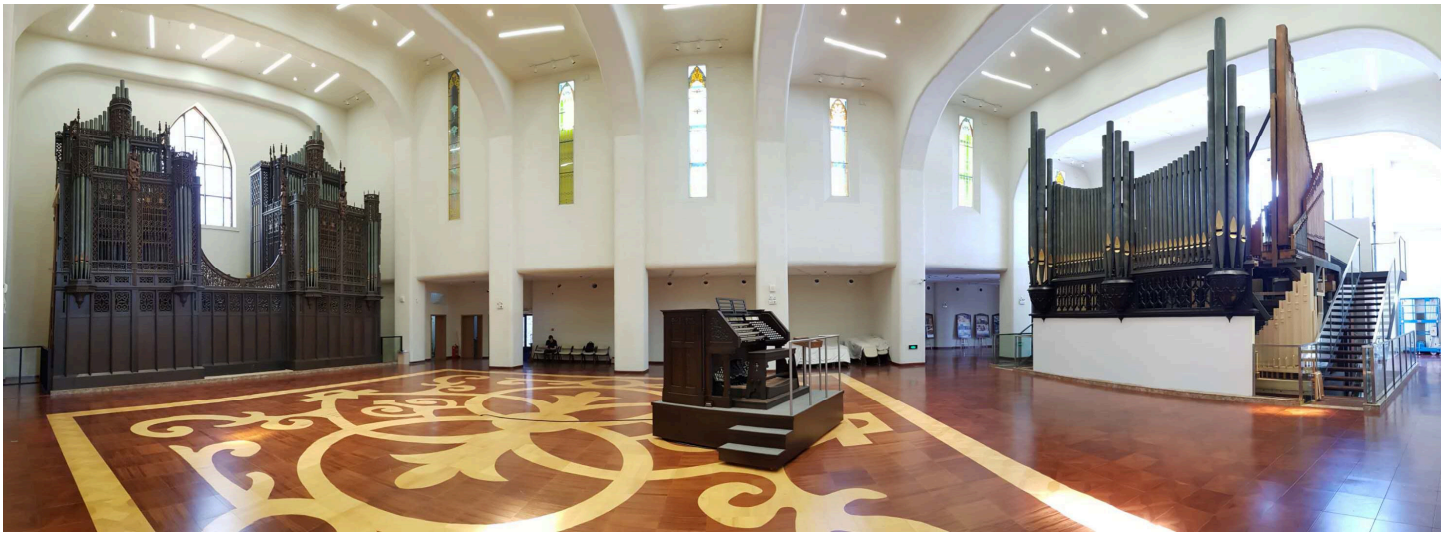


The land, just down the hill from the Organ Museum and connected by a steep pathway, was purchased and preparations were made over the next few years for the construction and fitting out of the remarkable Kulangsu (Gulangyu) Pipe Organ Art Center.



The Kulangsu Pipe Organ Art Center will focus on public education and promotion of the musical arts through high-quality events, such as the world's top-notch organists coming to Kulangsu to play concerts and hold master classes.

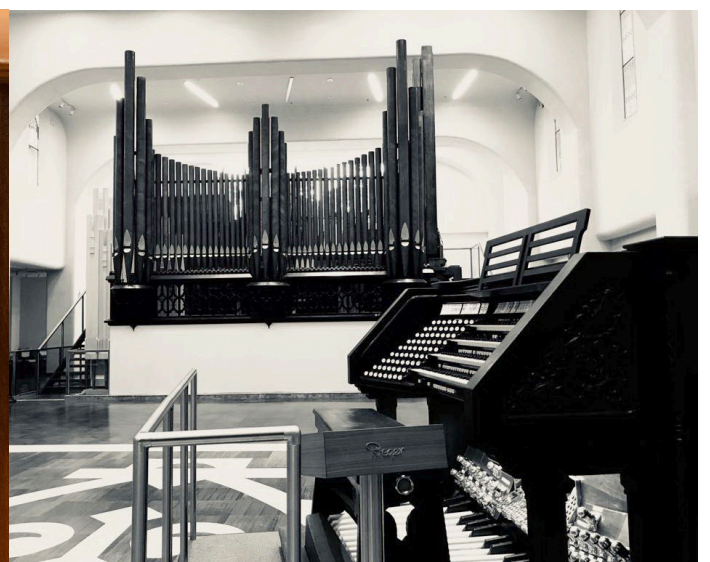
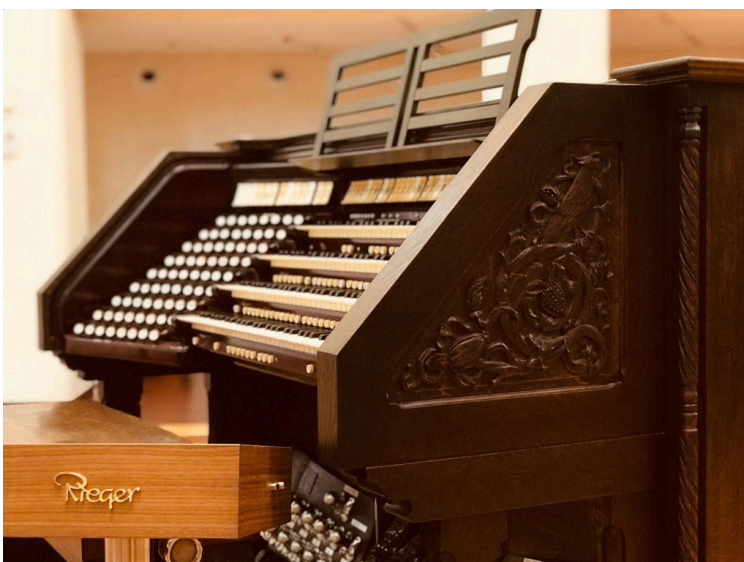




The Boston Casavant Opus 700 organ is considered a single instrument, but it is really two pipe organs, not one. The two sections of the organ (Chancel and Gallery organs) have been positioned at either end of the new custom-made hall which simulates the relationship that existed between the organ's sections in the Emmanuel Church, Boston. Both sections have their original facades which have been fully restored with the rest of the organ, including the re-carving of lost sections of the intricate Gallery organ case. The restored console is now on a mobile platform that can be positioned anywhere between the two cases. All the original (thumb and toe) pistons and the accompanying

pneumatic system of the console have been retained, but can also be operated by the digital combination system, REA, made by Rieger Orgelbau, Schwarzach, tucked in the western fold of the Voralberg Mountains, Austria—just a stone's throw from the Switzerland border. Rieger were commissioned to carry the complete restoration of this mighty instrument and are one of a handful of organ builders in the world where a task of this magnitude could be handled. Their work includes a sequencer and playback facility. A keypad for programming the Rieger system is mounted separately on a pedestal next to the organ bench.

Thirty-two stops come from the







Hutchings instrument; ten stops, that were missing (or replaced with neo-baroque stops in the mid 20th century) have been made anew by Rieger according to the original specification.

The windchests of the organ are original, excluding three off-note chests that were lost when their stops were replaced in the mid 20th century, and which were remade by Rieger. The electrical system and cabling activating the pneumatic chests have been replaced. However, the original electro-pneumatic parts have been retained and will be displayed in the museum.

Following the restoration the organ is once again fully functional as a concert instrument. The restored Gallery organ was inaugurated on 17 December 2017, with Alcee Chriss (USA) as main organist; the complete organ (Chancel

and Gallery) was inaugurated on 23 March 2018 with Olivier Latry (France) as organist.

Standing 13 meters tall, 12.5 meters long and weighing 35 tonnes, this magnificent symphonic organ is the largest organ in China. The new organ in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, described elsewhere in this journal, is the largest organ in Asia.

The rebuilding and restoration of this organ took four years and more than 40 organ builders from more than ten countries including the United States, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland participated. Considering the cost, duration, and complexity of the process, as well as widespread international cooperation, it can be considered one of the most remarkable organ repair projects in world history.

*Bruce Duncan*

