

# A historical Spanish organ in Fresnes, Paris.



L'orgue historique espagnol de Fresnes

## In Buenafuente del Sistol

The story begins in the Rio Tajo valley in Spain, halfway between Zaragoza and Madrid. On the hillside over the village of Buenafuente del Sistol stands the large Monasterio de Santa María de Buenafuente del Sistol. It was founded in the 13th century, during the time of the Reconquista - the takeover by Christians of Muslim lands. Initially occupied by a phalanx of monks from Aquitaine, it later became a branch of the Cistercian monastery of Santa María de Huerta, located a little further north, and therefore welcomed Cistercian nuns. The building dates almost

entirely from the 13th century, with several rather imposing buildings, numerous outbuildings and a beautiful church. The visitor can still admire a very beautiful altar in carved and gilded wood in this church.

In 1768, the nuns of Buenafuente del Sistol had an organ built for the church by the organ builder José de Fuentes. The mention in 1768 of a sister Maria

Vincente Saez, organist, shows that the convent already had an older instrument, which the new organ replaced. This beautiful instrument, well decorated and rich in 19 half-stops, could be used for religious celebrations: the nuns can therefore perform sacred music, possibly accompanied by other instruments. But it was not used for very long, because the unrest following the







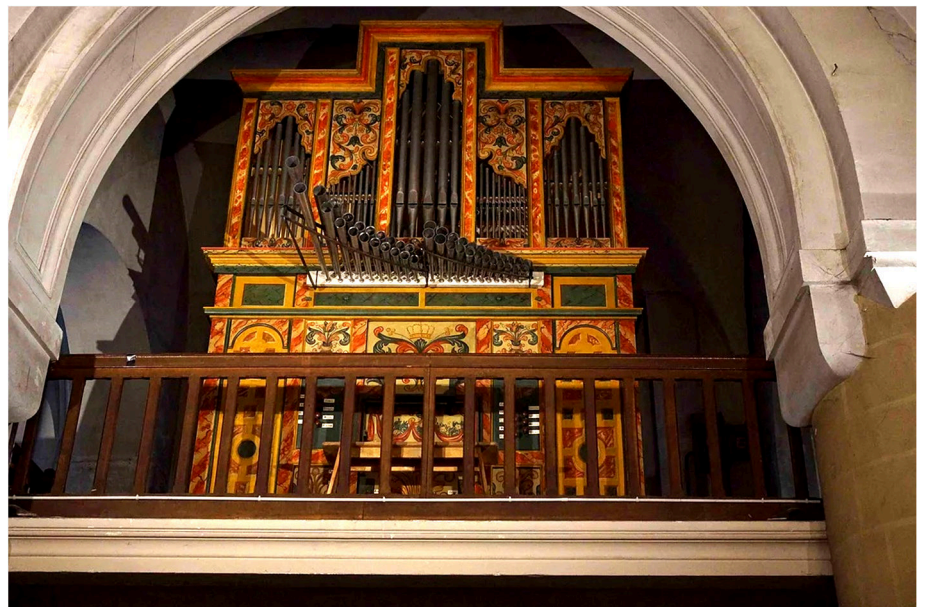
invasion of the Napoleonic armies (1807-1814) and then the public auction of vast Church lands and property caused the departure of the Cistercian community around 1835.

It was not until the 1970s that the monastery regained its original vocation, being restored and converted into a centre of spiritual retreat. The Spanish Department of Historical Monuments recommend restoring the church to its original appearance, which meant clearing the nave and dismantling the organ and the tribune that supports it. The organ was stored for a few years, almost complete, until the Desmottes Brothers, organ builders, noticed it in 1996 and obtained permission to transport it to their workshop in Landete to establish a restoration estimate. The community of Buenafuente del Sistol was initially eager to keep the instrument, but did not have

significant means for an outright restoration project. They asked the Desmottes Brothers to undertake the restoration as and when payments were made to them. Arrangements were made and the work was begun, but could not be completed. The organ was sold in February 2012, at which point only a tenth of the restoration was completed. Ownership was

taken over by the Desmottes Brothers and their workshop took responsibility for the rest of the restoration. At that stage there was no prospective buyer or home for the organ.

During a musical trip to Spain, organists Jean-Luc Ho and Freddy Eichelberger accidentally discovered this instrument in the Desmottes brothers's workshop. It awakened their curiosity with the workmanship evident in the instrument, the design and style of the façade, the beauty of the keyboard, its sound, and pedigree. The idea of moving the organ



to France was born with the idea being that the organ could be brought back to life as a church and concert instrument.

## The organ builder José de Fuentes

Mira is a rich olive growing area in the hill country, inland from Valencia. It is also the place where José de Fuentes had his organ works. His name is known to us from an inscription made on the base of the organ frame, noted by the Desmottes brothers:

*On May 24, 1768, Sister Josepha Chinchón being abbess, Sister María Vicenta Saez organist, Brother Clemente García and Father Luis Quirós confessors, this organ (except the sideboard) was completed by the master Joseph de Fuentes y Ferrer, native from the city of Myra, bishopric of Cuenca, helped by one of his brothers named Jaime de Fuentes, and by Juan Guerrero Menor, native of Huerta de Hernando, inhabitant of the Buena fuente district, for the ironwork and the façade. God keep them and give them grace and glory.*

José de Fuentes is part of a dynasty of organ builders spanning five generations, whose presence in Mira is attested between 1702 and 1796, and whose works cover the same period. It includes in particular Jaime I, active around 1702, Antonio, active around 1730, José, active around 1745-1785, his brothers Manuel and Jaime II, and finally the son of José and Francisco.

Among their works the following organs are specifically notable:

- Albares, San Esteban church

- Villafranca de los Caballeros, parish church
- Requena, Church of Santa Maria
- Requena, San Nicolás church
- Cuenca, Cathedral of Santa Maria y San Julian (a very beautiful double organ)
- Buena fuente del Sistol monastery chapel

José de Fuentes is cited in the land register of Mira of 1749:

*To Joseph de Fuentes como ocupado en componer órganos atendido su poco trabajo solamente the computan de utilidad al día tres reales*

(Joseph de Fuentes, organ builder, taxed at 3 reales only because of his little work)

## The Restorer

Frédéric Desmottes was trained as an organ builder and voicer under the direction of master organ builder Pascal Quoirin from 1980 to 1987. After completing his training at the age of 26, Desmottes founded his own workshop in Cuenca in 1990. In 1994, the workshop moved to Landete (Cuenca), where it grew to its current size.

With a staff of eight, the company is dedicated to the manufacture, reconstruction, restoration and maintenance of organs, and performs all work at its own facilities. This means working with everything from wood planks to metal ingots, transforming them into chests, keyboard actions, soundboards and reservoirs, and all wood and metal pipework.



## Why a Spanish organ in Fresnes?

Organs, like pianos, harpsichords and many other instruments, are not made the same. There are several national - even regional - traditions of specifications, sounds, keyboards, particular decorations, and presentations which vary according to the place and time they were made. There is no reference model, there are only instruments more or less inspired by this or that manufacturing tradition.

Modern organ building, like that of the piano, has tended to standardise its production, processes and materials, while the historical richness of organs is truly incredible. What does a Spanish organ from the 18th century have in common with large romantic organs from the end of the 19th century?

In this context, it is important for the public, just as for the organists and their students, to be able to hear and play instruments from different traditions and times. It presents an opportunity to hear the music composed for these instruments in the best conditions, to create a school of interpretation around the organ where there is a concern for authenticity. It promotes inviting organists



to perform concerts for original music on a period instrument.

### Fresnes

Fresnes is a suburb of 28,000 people, twelve kilometres south of the centre of Paris, in the Val-de-Marne district adjacent to the Aéroport de Paris-Orly. It is known for the 1,200-cell Fresnes Prison, the second largest prison in France. During World War II, Fresnes

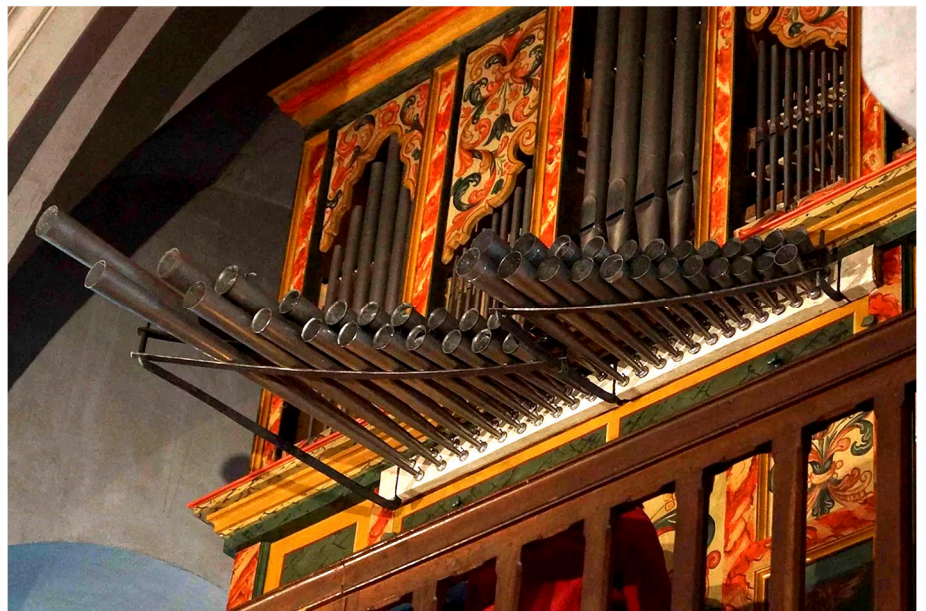


Église Saint-Eloi, Fresnes



prison was used by the Germans to house captured British SOE agents and members of the French Resistance.

Fresnes is also home to the historical church of Église Saint-Eloi. The Saint-Éloi church was built in the 12th century on the site of a very old oratory, located at the edge of the seigneurie of Cottinville, probably on the site of the current chapel of the Virgin. Fresnes was set up as a parish in the 13th century from the transfer of property to the Chapter of Notre-Dame in 1211 and becomes "Sanctus Elipius de Fraxinis" attached to the deanery of Linas. It was at this time that the church dedicated to Saint Eloi, Bishop of Noyon, Minister of Dagobert, was built. The origin of the Saint-Éloi church is therefore very old, but the successive restorations it has undergone no longer allows the building to be assigned a well-defined style.



Spain, for installation in the church of Saint-Éloi de Fresnes, Paris.

The instrument is typically Castilian in construction. It has a 45-key short octave keyboard, bone-decorated ebony feints, and bone-plated keys. The façade, with a central tower and four side panels, is entirely decorated with tempera volutes in shades of red and blue; the impost between the upper and lower bodies of the façade carries two ranks of horizontal pipes corresponding to the Bajoncillo and Clarín half-registers.

All registers are divided in bass and treble between C3 and C # 3. The front

## The organ

The organ was built in 1768 for the convent of Buenafuente del Sistol, Guadalajara, 150 kilometres north east of Madrid, Spain, discovered in 1996 and restored in 2014 by l'Atelier d'Orgues Frédéric Desmottes, Landete (Cuenca)





pipes correspond to the 4' Montre register. All the pipes in the organ are original, the instrument never having undergone any transformation. It is tuned to 392 Hz. The pipes are cut to tone and the metal is made of 52% tin and 48% lead. The bevels of the pipes are hammered lead, without nicking. The instrument has 774 pipes in total, of which only 8 are made of wood (first octave of the Bourdon 8'). While most registers kept a major part of their original pipes 30% of the pipes had to be remade; only the Trumpet and the Cymbal are completely new.

The two wedge-shaped bellows are new and produce a wind pressure of 65mm.

*Bruce Duncan*

Information has been sourced from:  
<http://www.desmottes.org/fr/travaux>  
<https://www.lartdelafugue.org/lorgue>  
<http://www.fresnes94.fr/votre-mairie/patrimoine/eglise-st-eloi/>  
[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fresnes\\_\(Val-de-Marne\)](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fresnes_(Val-de-Marne))  
[https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monasterio\\_de\\_Santa\\_Mar%C3%ADa\\_de\\_Buenafuente\\_del\\_Sistal](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monasterio_de_Santa_Mar%C3%ADa_de_Buenafuente_del_Sistal)



**MAIN GAUCHE**

Left hand	Translation
Violon	Bourdon 8'
Flutado	Montre 4'
Docena	Quinte 2'2/3
Quincena	Doublette 2'
Decinovenay	Petite quinte II
Ventidosena	1'1/3 + 1'
Lleno III	Plein jeu III
Cimbala III	Cymbale III
Trompeta Real	Trompette 8'
Bajoncillo	Chamade 4'
Pajaritos	Rossignol
Gaitas	Musette

**MAIN DROITE**

Right hand	Translation
Violon	Bourdon 8'
Flutado	Montre 4'
Docena	Quinte 2'2/3
Quincena	Doublette 2'
Decinovenay	Petite quinte II
Ventidosena	1'1/3 + 1'
Lleno III	Plein jeu III
Cimbala III	Cymbale III
Corneta Magna VI	Cornet VI
Trompeta Real	Trompette 8'
Clarin	Chamade 8'

**SPECIFICATION OF THE  
1768 JOSÉ DE FUENTES ORGAN IN FRESNES**