

Tridentine Community News

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Tridentine Travelogue: St. Paul Church, Cambridge, Massachusetts and the Boston Archdiocesan Choir School

The special music programs that we are hearing this week and last for our Solemn High Masses offer ample proof that appropriate sacred music can elevate one's mind to God.

Today, we will take a diversion from our periodic tour of interesting Tridentine Mass locations, to discuss a church which, while not hosting a Tridentine Mass, offers one of the most impressive sacred music programs in the world.

Built in 1923 and located in Harvard Square near Boston, St. Paul Church boasts virtually perfect acoustics. No carpet or cloth is present to absorb sound; ample use of stone and hard surfaces creates a magnificent reverberation. Early parishioners must have noticed this characteristic, as they continually upgraded the organ in their choir loft, most often with help from the Casavant firm.

Arriving in 1934, Theodore Marier became Music Director at St. Paul's, and set about building a music program to befit the edifice. In 1940, a male schola was formed to accompany the 11:00 AM High Mass. Next, he started a boys' choir in the parish school. Little did he realize that by 1963, this side venture would end up taking over the school entirely. Today, the Boston Archdiocesan Choir School educates boys in grades 5-8, emphasizing musical performance and the singing of the Church's classical repertoire. The choir sings at most weekday 8:00 AM Masses, as well as at the Sunday 11:00 AM Mass.

In 1960, Dr. Marier installed a second Casavant organ where the right (front) side altar used to be. Tridentine architectural purists



take note, this is one of very few instances in which such a decision was defensible. The combined instrument now consists of 107 ranks and 111 stops. A new console was installed so that both organs could be played by one organist. More recently, a digital console

was installed, complete with a CD recorder that allows an entire performance to be captured on disc.

Today, the 11:00 AM Sunday Mass during the school year is accompanied by the boys' choir, the mens' schola, and the two organs played antiphonally.

Arriving at Harvard as a student in 1960, John Dunn would become principal organist and Ted's right hand man. In 1984 Ted went on to great renown as a professor of Gregorian Chant at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. Today, John remains at BACS as Principal and Music Director, the most qualified person to inherit Ted's position and legacy. John has nurtured several other young organ talents but continues to play at

many Masses himself. It takes a certain caliber of musician to make proper use of St. Paul's organs, not to mention to provide accompaniment for multiple choirs.

After Vatican II, Ted embarked upon a project to set the Novus Ordo to English Chant, in the style of Latin Gregorian Chant. The fruit of this work was the creation of a new hymnal for the parish, "Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Canticles", combining numerous Latin and English Mass settings with English Chant Psalms and a diverse, but traditional, selection of hymns. Via "BACS Publishing Co.", a number of parishes purchased this hymnal for use elsewhere. Out of print today, used copies are scarce; if one parish discontinues use of it, others pick up the surplus copies quickly. John Dunn is aware that the book must be reprinted, but he is waiting until the new translations of the Mass are finalized before proceeding.

A typical choir Mass today at St. Paul's is a mixture of Latin and English, all in chant form. The hymns are all downright majestic. All are performed with extensive organ interludes between the verses.

This author lived in Boston for three years and credits St. Paul's extraordinary music program for reviving his dormant faith. The organ preludes and postludes before and after Mass alone were an education in classical organ repertoire, and inspired one to learn more about sacred music. Over three years, there was virtually no repetition of pieces played.



No other parish has a music program quite like this. No other church combines choirs, acoustics, organs, repertoire, and sheer talent like this one. The Sunday 11:00 AM Mass is often standing room only. If you arrive early, you can secure one of the coveted seats near the middle of the church. The choirs process in and out of the church via the main and left aisles.

Seated in the left front seating section, you are surrounded by choristers during the procession. They are masters of descant (antiphonal singing), which along with the dual organ playing, is an otherworldly acoustic experience. And the congregation joins in: Imagine *Credo III* sung by 600 people along with two choirs. This is a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy. We in the Tridentine Mass movement can only be inspired to model our own music programs after such a one as St. Paul's.

Read more about St. Paul's at www.stpaulparish.org and about BACS at www.bostonboychoir.org. If you don't mind the fact that it was recorded on a low-fi pocket dictating machine, you can listen to 25 minutes of a St. Paul's Mass here: www.detroitlatinmass.org/jospht/bacs.mp3. Listen to the end of the recording, and you will hear BACS' unforgettable signature hymn, The Lorica of St. Patrick, sung as the recessional.

Questions? Comments? Ideas for a future column? Please e-mail tridnews@stjosaphatchurch.org with your thoughts.