



# Catholic NEW WORLD

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## Historic organ finds new life at St. John Cantius

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Editor

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Steve Grigoletti, project manager for JL Weiler, tunes the newly restored and installed organ at St. John Cantius Parish on Sept. 18. The Casavant Organ Opus 1130, nicknamed "Tina Mae," was formally housed at St. James Methodist Church on the South Side of Chicago. The organ is constructed in the Romantic style and has 3,800 wood and metal pipes — the largest being 16 feet high and the smallest just a few inches high. It took staff of JL Weiler three weeks to tune the instrument. Cardinal George will bless the organ on Oct. 20, the feast of St. John Cantius. (Karen Callaway / Catholic New World)



Her nickname is Tina Mae. She weighs 23 tons and stands at least three stories tall. She's a big lady with big pipes. She's the newly restored Casavant organ at St. John Cantius Church, 825 N. Carpenter St. The organ has pride of place at this River West church where Sunday Masses regularly feature Gregorian chant and choirs.

“It’s marvelous,” said Father Scott Haynes, music and choir director of St. John Cantius, of the new organ. “It’s absolutely fun to play.”

Haynes is a member of the Canons Regular of St. John Cantius, who minister at the parish. The organ will be played publicly for the first time after it is blessed on Oct. 20 by Cardinal George. It’s real name is Casavant Organ Opus 1130. The nickname Tina Mae comes from the woman who oversaw the original construction of the organ, Tina Mae Haines.

Before Tina Mae moved in, the parish’s Kilgen pipe organ — made in 1907 and rebuilt 12 times over the years — began to fail. Sometimes when the organist would play a note, the organ wouldn’t stop. Other times, when they turned the instrument on, nothing happened. In the end they weren’t even able to give it away for free, Haynes said. A few parts they sold but the majority went for scrap.

Before he was a priest, Haynes worked for organ companies in Washington, D.C., and was the organ curator for the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. He led the charge in finding a new organ for the parish, which regularly has organ and choral concerts.

A new organ would cost between \$5 million and \$6 million, more than the parish could afford. So they looked around the country and Canada for pipe organs for sale that could be used for church music, Gregorian chant, choral music and concerts.

They enlisted the help of Jeff Weiler, who has a world-recognized organ restoration company in Chicago and is curator of the organ for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and Stephen Schnurr of the Organ Historical Society.

They were led to St. James Methodist Church on Ellis Avenue in the Kenwood neighborhood of the city, where the church was closing and the organ was for sale. St. James was a prominent Methodist church in the 1920s and when the church burned down during that time period, the wife of Gustavus F. Swift — the man who revolutionized the meat-packing industry and was one of the richest men in America at the time of his death in 1903 — commissioned and dedicated the organ in her late husband’s honor in 1926.

Tina Mae Haines was the organist of the church who was trained in Paris by Alexandre Guilmant, a world-famous composer and organist. Tina Mae helped found the Sherwood Conservatory locally, was a conductor, organist, opera

coach at the conservatory and was a lecturer for music history and opera for the Chicago Symphony.

She oversaw the organ's construction by Casavant Organ company in Montreal. She was very specific about the design of the organ based on what she learned from Guilmant.

"Casavant, which is a very fine organ company, went over the top in building this organ," Haynes said.

The organ is constructed in the Romantic style and has 3,800 wood and metal pipes — the largest being 16 feet high and the smallest just a few inches high.

At the time it was first dedicated, this organ and the organ at Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago were the two most important in Chicago, Haynes said.

When it was built it carried a \$20,000 price tag. Today it would cost around \$12 million to build.

The group from St. John Cantius went to see the organ at St. James Methodist the day after Thanksgiving in 2011. Haynes recalled it being a cold and rainy day and water was coming down the wall into the inside of the organ from the roof.

Not everything was working in the organ and the organ was very dirty but they could hear and see the quality.

"It hadn't been touched in 85 years," Haines said, but that was a good thing because "no one tinkered with it at all."

All they would have to do was clean and restore it. They made an offer to the Northern Illinois United Methodist Conference and turned it over to the Blessed Mother.

"We prayed to Our Lady and asked for her help," Haynes said. She came through. On the first Saturday of May 2012 — Mary's month — St. John Cantius' offer was accepted.

The cost of the organ, restoration and installation was \$1.5 million. Only a few pipes had to be remade and Casavant had all of the specs for the organ so

were able to rebuild them. Weiler and his staff conducted the restoration. It took three weeks to tune all of the pipes, a process done by hand.

A major donor underwrote the major cost of the effort and the Patrons of Sacred Music raised the rest. Haynes started the Patrons in 2009 to promote the arts and sacred music at the parish. There are more than 700 members nationwide.

By dedication day on Oct. 20 it should be paid for completely.

“The parish hasn’t paid a dime,” Haynes said. “People from all over the country have been donating to this.”

However, before the instrument could be installed, the organ loft in the back of St. John Cantius had to be rebuilt to hold the weight of Tina Mae. The old Kilgen organ weighed three tons. The new organ weighs 23 tons. That construction cost \$500,000, which was also funded by the Patrons

There’s a little something special in the organ loft’s floor.

“Before we sealed up the floor of the organ loft I blessed miraculous medals, scapulars and rosaries and we filled the floor with several thousand,” Haynes said.

The restored organ will be unveiled on Oct. 20, the feast of St. John Cantius. Several area choirs will join the day’s festivities. Cardinal George will bless the instrument at 4 p.m. and give a short talk about music. There will be Mass with Bishop Joseph Perry following. Dinner is at 6 p.m. in the church hall and a 7 p.m. organ recital. Anyone can come to the Mass.