

THE HAMMOND MUSEUM

One of the most romantic settings for an organ is surely the castle in Gloucester, Massachusetts, built by the inventor John Hays Hammond Jr. (1888–1965). The son of a mining engineer who amassed a fortune in South Africa, Hammond Jr. earned a similar fortune from his patents for high-technology inventions such as submarine sound transmitters and radio-guided torpedoes, missiles, yachts, and battleships—precursors of today's television remote controls, programmed car radios, and cell phones. Indeed, Hammond was known as the "Father of Radio Control."

Between 1926 and 1929, he built a Gothic-inspired castle on eight acres of rocky coastline overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. The architects were the same who later designed the Cloisters in New York City. The design was that of a medieval church, and many elements were actually imported from war-torn Europe. To avoid paying taxes, Hammond developed the castle as a non-profit museum to exhibit his collection of medieval artifacts.

Among his interests was the organ and, over some 20 years, he amassed pipework from numerous companies: much of the Great is from Welte; E.M. Skinner built the Solo reeds; W.S. Dennison of Reading built the high-pressure Reed Chorus; G. Donald Harrison designed much of the mixture work and

the Baroque stops; there also appears to be a 17-rank Aeolian organ included. The organ chambers are in an 85-foot stone tower, and a four-manual console, built with parts supplied by Austin, was placed in a side balcony surrounded by a gold organ screen allegedly from the Marienkirche in Lübeck. When completed, the organ was around 120 ranks. It speaks into the Great Hall (100 feet long, 25 feet wide, and 58 feet high), which seats about 200.

The organ gained prominence when RCA Victor began issuing records of famous artists. The great French organist Joseph Bonnet, who fled France at the outbreak of the Second World War and arrived in New York in September 1940, was for a time a house guest of "Jack" Hammond. Hammond was on the board of directors of the Radio Corporation of America and used his influence to have Bonnet record on the organ. Bonnet played eight sides of *Organ Music of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Unfortunately, the title suggested music of greater merit than was the case: transcriptions by Bossi and Karg-Elert; two American works, Harry Rowe Shelley's *Spring Song* and Seth Bingham's *Chorale*; and three of Bonnet's own

uninspired pieces. *The New York Times* noted that "his choice of compositions does not always canvas the best possibilities. There are some agreeable works in the collection, but few of them are memorable." Of historic interest were two further discs released in March 1942, the Bach "St. Anne" Fugue in E-flat and four French Classic works, timed to appear with the publication by H.W. Gray of Bonnet's *Anthology of Early French Organ Music*. These were Bonnet's last recordings; he died two years later.

Virgil Fox recorded an album released in May 1947 that included major works: Mozart, *Fantasy in F Minor*, K. 608, Mendelssohn's *First Sonata*, Dupré's *Prelude and Fugue in G Minor*, and Bach's *Fugue à la Gigue* to round out a side. The *American Record Guide* deemed it "one of the finest organ sets Victor has issued in recent

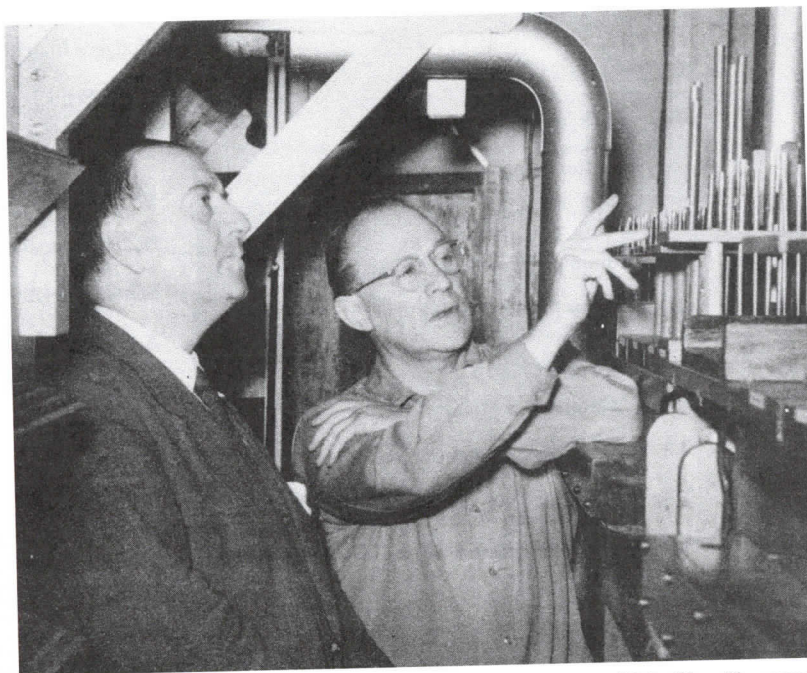
years." He returned to the Hammond Museum in 1955 and recorded two LPs: Brahms's *Eleven Chorale Preludes* and Reubke's *94th Psalm* coupled with Franck's *Grande Pièce symphonique*.

By 1951, Hammond had developed what he called a "Dynamic Accentor." He theorized that organ pipes' delicate overtones lost most of their character by the time they reached the listener. To rectify this he placed microphones in each chamber and connected them to speakers in the auditorium. Thus, he wrote, "the electronic sound system

regains the original lost harmonic intensities and the instrument acquires a new brilliance of character." He even took out patents coordinating the amplification with the swell pedals of each division, allowing the tone of each stop to be magnified up to ten times without distortion. Unprecedented flexibility was possible by strengthening soft, delicate tones and, in effect, making solo stops out of the softest ranks. In addition, it was possible to create a previously undreamed-of crescendo as the swell shades open, faster staccato effects, and amplification of the bass. What remained unmentioned was that the copious wind leaks in the chambers were amplified as well, and it was necessary to make sure that the volume of stops drawn was greater than the rush of air.

The organist who made the most use of the organ was Richard Ellsasser, beginning a series of recordings for MGM in September 1952. In all, he made over 22 long-playing recordings on the organ, including the complete organ works of Liszt.

Thanks are due to David Porper for his help in preparing this material.



Joseph Bonnet and John Hays Hammond