

The
Music Program
Of the
Cathedral-Basilica of
St. Louis, King of France

The music program of the Cathedral-Basilica of St. Louis, King of France, is one of the oldest continually operating music programs in the United States. Dating from the establishment of the parish in 1720, it has historically fostered great music. Among the earliest musicians was François Saucier, the great-grandson of Charles Saucier who was organist of St. Eustache in Paris a century earlier. When Spain began to rule the colony of Louisiana in 1768, Spanish musical traditions were brought to the Cathedral. It is notable that the first known composer to work in Louisiana, Vicente Llorca (c. 1750-1803), was brought to the cathedral in 1781 to compose music in the “Spanish style” by the Spanish Governor Bernardo de Gálvez (1746-1786).

In the first half of the nineteenth-century a series of distinguished musicians worked in the cathedral. Among these were Emile Johns (c. 1798-1860), who gave the first U.S. performance of a Beethoven piano concerto in New Orleans. In the early 1830s, he published a collection of his songs and piano works known as the *Album Louisianaise*. It, along with several other publications, have earned him the distinction of being the first music publisher in New Orleans. In 1833, Frederic Chopin (1810-1849) dedicated his Opus 7 Mazurkas to “*Monsieur Johns de la Nouvelle-Orléans*.” The Spaniard Guillermo Curto (1805-1887), who had also achieved distinction in France, began his association with the Cathedral in 1834. While his name disappeared from the Cathedral rosters in 1841, he did write a special mass for the inauguration of the extensively renovated cathedral held on December 7, 1785. Georg Schmitt (1821-1900) was associated with the Cathedral from 1848 to 1850. Pianist to the Queen of Spain, he composed music for piano, organ, lieder, masses, operas, operettas and an oratorio. In New Orleans, he published several works for piano. He departed New Orleans in 1850 to assume the post of Titular Organist of St. Sulpice in Paris. In 1857, he published *Le musée de l’organiste* (*The Organists’ Museum*). It included transcriptions and original music by early composers and works by him and his contemporaries (such as César Franck and Camille Saint-Saens).

Also during the 19th-century, Ernest Guiraud and Louis Moreau Gottschalk were baptized in the St. Louis Cathedral and raised in the parish. Guiraud achieved fame in France, not only as a composer, but also as the teacher of composers such as Claude Debussy and Paul Dukas. Gottschalk was the first concert pianist to enjoy a multi-continent career. As a composer, Gottschalk celebrated the tropical origins of New Orleans in his own musical compositions.

In the 20th-century, Elise Cambon, a disciple of the great Bach interpreter Helmut Walcha served as music director for more than 60 years. In 2003, she donated a new organ and upon her death established the Elise M. Cambon Memorial Trust for the benefit of the Cathedral’s music program.

The organ built in 2003 by the Holtkamp Organ Company of Cleveland, Ohio, rises 54 feet above the floor of the choir loft, weighs more than 30 tons, and has more than 4500 pipes, ranging in length from a few inches to 32 ft. In addition to being heard

during church services, world renowned organists are presented in recital every year. In 2009, a Young Artist in Residence program was established in conjunction with the Paris Conservatory. Designed for recent graduates of the famed conservatory, these young organ virtuosos spend 6 months in residence enriching the liturgical celebrations and performing recitals.

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