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Organ restoration showcased through concert series

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St. George's Cathedral, an Anglican church in the heart of downtown Kingston, is home to one of the biggest cathedral organs in the city.

This year, the organ went through a major restoration project, further solidifying it as one of the most spectacular organs in the area.

Michael Capon, director of music at the cathedral, said it was a major restoration project.

"Any old pipe work that needed revitalizing, that was done. Some of the pipe work needed to be replaced, some stops were removed and some new ones put in. So the character of the organ has changed significantly during this restoration," said Capon.

This organ is no stranger to restoration. It dates back to the 1920s, produced by the Warren Organ Company.

"It was expanded significantly in 1963 and given an English flavour. Enlarging the organ and the English character made it darker and more romantic," said Capon. "In the 1980s, it received another restoration from a Montreal company called Caron and they added a French accent to the organ. They put in a few stops that had sort of a French sound."

With more than 4,500 pipes, the current restoration project has taken nearly five years to complete.

"This time, the work was done by Sylvain Brisson, who is basically doing the infrastructure work, and Alain Gagnon, who has been doing the voicing of the pipes and checking their sound, making sure that we get some distinctive sounds, as well as sounds that blend very well together," said Capon. "There was also a completely new console installed, as well as some new pipe work. A cathedral organ has to do a lot of different things and has to do them well, and I think this restoration has really achieved that."

To celebrate the restoration of the organ, St. George's is hosting An Organ Festival, a concert series that will showcase some of the best organists in the country — including Capon himself.

Ed Norman, the director of music when the organ restoration began five years ago, will also lend his talent to the event. Matthew Larkin, who grew up in Kingston, and Montreal organist Patrick Wedd will also take part in the concert series. Capon said Wedd is one of the best organists in the country.

“We are really fortunate that he doesn’t live that far away and was able to come play,” said Capon.

The festival begins Oct. 14 with Capon himself premiering a piece that has never been played in public before.

“The rest of my program will really show off the versatility of the organ with some French, German, Canadian and some British repertoire,” said Capon. “It will show off all the different sounds of the organ. There will be some loud stuff and some quiet stuff to show its range.”

The festival runs for two weeks on Sundays and Wednesdays until Oct. 24. Admission for each concert is \$20. A festival pass can be purchased for \$70. Both can be purchased at the Office of St. George’s Cathedral (129 Wellington St.) and at the Church Bookroom (90 Johnson St.).

More information about the concerts, organ restoration and St George’s Cathedral can be found on their website at www.stgeorgescathedral.ca.