



## The Oratory of Saint Philip Neri



Credit: Len Levasseur and the  
Organ Historical Society

### Music at the Oratory—Dr Aaron James and Bach Recitals

The Oratory has always seen the importance of fine music for elevating worship and inspiring souls. Saint Philip himself was personally connected to some of the great composers of his day, people like Italians Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina and Giovanni Animuccia, and the Spaniard Tomás Luis de Victoria. The Toronto Oratory has always tried to imitate Philip's dedication to musical beauty—by the types

of music we choose for our liturgies, by the first-class musicians we employ, and by the excellence of the organ we have provided for Holy Family Church.

We have had a series of wonderful musicians here at the Oratory. The Oratory's current Director of Music, and the Organist at Holy Family, is Dr Aaron James, who came to us in 2017. He plays the organ and directs three choirs for Masses and Vespers on Sundays and feast days, as well as teaching music to students at St Philip's Seminary. An alumnus of the Eastman School of Music, he holds both a PhD degree

in musicology and a DMA degree in organ, along with the Performer's Certificate in organ. He was the 2011 winner of the National Organ Playing Competition of the Royal Canadian College of Organists, and has won numerous other prizes, as well as giving recitals regularly in both Canada and the United States. As a Sessional Lecturer in organ at the University of Toronto, Aaron teaches studio organ lessons and classes in organ literature for students in the Faculty of Music as well as in the Master of Sacred Music program at Emmanuel College. He has previously taught at Eastman and at the University of Rochester.

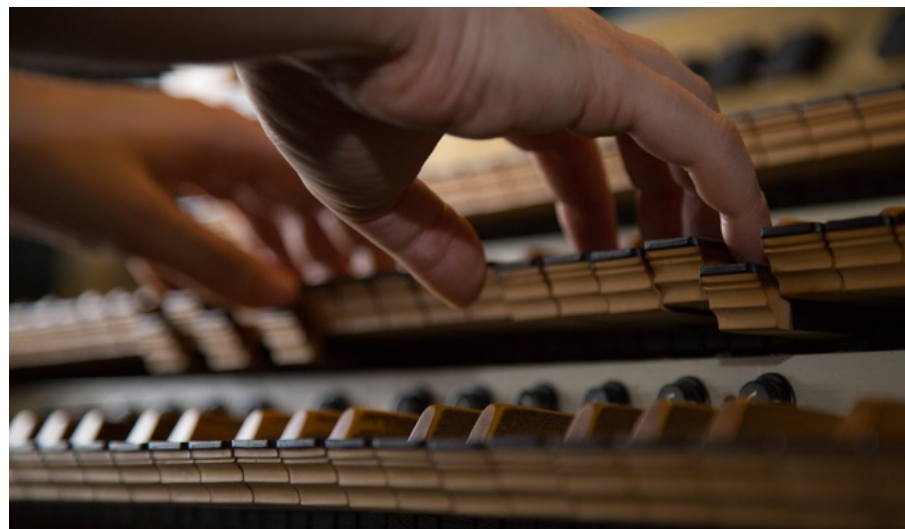
The instrument on which Aaron performs at Holy Family has an interesting history. It was built around 1980 for Gordon Jeffery in London, Ontario by Canadian organ builder Gabriel Kney, who was also responsible for the organ in Roy Thompson Hall. After Holy Family Church and its organ were destroyed in the 1997 fire, we purchased

the Kney organ and employed Hal Gober, in consultation with our architect and an acoustics expert, to rebuild it in the new Holy Family Church. The organ is of baroque design and has been recognized as a premier instrument in the area.

This year, leading up to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the Toronto Oratory, Aaron James will be giving a series of sixteen recitals in which he will perform the complete organ works of Johann Sebastian Bach. The recitals will run from September 2024 to May 2025. They are a wonderful showcase of the brilliance of Bach the composer, of the talent of James the performer, and of the splendour of the Kney/Gober organ. Please see our website [oratory-toronto.org/bach](http://oratory-toronto.org/bach) for details.

#### The Clothing of Brother Giles Constantin

On Sunday, the 11<sup>th</sup> of August, we had the joy of celebrating the clothing of Cassidy Constantin in the habit of Saint Philip, thereby beginning his novitiate. Cassidy took the name of Giles, after one of the first companions of Saint Francis of Assisi. Brother Giles comes to the community as a Lay Brother, following in the footsteps of Brother Ted Rys. He is from Massey, Ontario, outside of Sudbury. After graduating from Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom College, he worked as its facilities officer, managing the upkeep of



the College properties. Please pray for Brother Giles as he begins his life with us—and pray that he will be joined by other vocations, too.

#### General Congress

As explained in the last newsletter, for the first 10 days of October, five members of the Toronto Oratory will be away in Rome (actually about 25 kilometres outside of Rome in Ariccia), in order to represent the community at the Oratorian General Congress. Please keep the five of us, and Oratorians throughout the world, in your prayers.

#### 1366 Construction

The foundation work and waterproofing of 1366 King Street was immediately put to the test by a series of record-breaking rainfalls and extensive flooding, but the basement passed its final exams admirably.

There is now a new entrance with a door and ramp designed for deliveries and for a wheelchair access to our refectory (the community's dining room). Trees and landscaping are in the works and should be complete before you receive this newsletter.

#### 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Oratory Summer School

This year's Summer School was a resounding success. More than ninety people attended the second session on *Evangelizing the Modern World*—a record. The



new Seminary Residence was also a great hit with those who chose to be in residence for the week. The talks make the week intellectually stimulating, but the company makes it joyful. Make sure to plan early for 2025! The first week (on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*) will run from July 7-11, and the second from 14-18.

#### Saint Philip's Seminary Update

Each year the student body of the Seminary subtly shifts. This past year we had graduates from the Dioceses of Toronto, St Catharines, and Kingston, as well as Norbertines from St Michael's Abbey, various religious congregations, and a seminarian from the Syro-Malankara rite. Four of our alumni were ordained priests in 2024. The fall looks very promising, with seven Norbertines from St Michael's Abbey, seven Oratorians from other Oratories, and four seminarians from eastern rites, among others. The diversity of the seminarians studying with us is



a wonderful representation of the breadth of the Church and the unity possible across very different traditions. The growth in the number of Oratorian students attending our Seminary from around the world is very encouraging for many different reasons. We look forward to welcoming students from Oratories in the US (Cincinnati and Pharr (Texas)) and England (Manchester and York) as well as from Oratories-in-formation in Wales (Cardiff) and Australia (Brisbane). ∞



*Requiescat in pace*

Since our last newsletter, we received news that an alumnus of Saint Philip's Seminary, Father Ferdinand (Ferd) Boehme, died of cancer. He was ordained for the Diocese of Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1997, and has faithfully served as a priest of the diocese for the past 27 years. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family, his brother priests, and his parishioners. May he rest in peace.