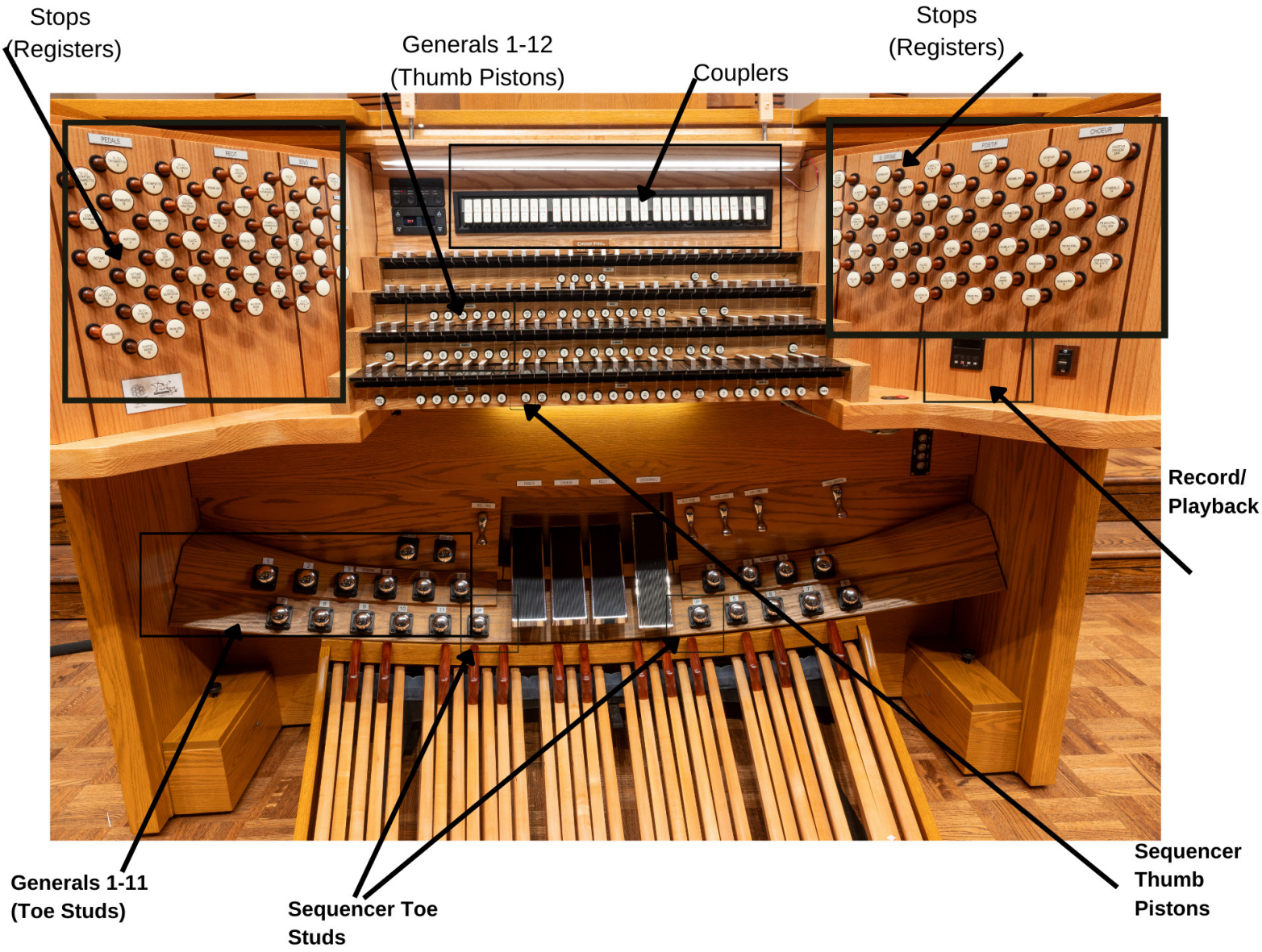
Casavant Organ, Opus 3583 (1984)



BASIC ORGAN TERMINOLOGY

The following definitions will help the reader understand the discussion of the new console components that follows them. A picture of the console at the end of the discussion has labels showing where these components are located.

Stops are groups or sets of pipes that produce particular types of sound, e.g. "flute stop," "trumpet stop," and many others. The stops are controlled by knobs on either side of the keyboards; pulling the knob out allows the stop to sound when the keys are played (as in "pulling out all the stops"), while pushing the knob in silences the stop. Our Casavant organ has 73 stops.

Register is another term for stop, and from it comes the term **registration**, meaning the stops being used for a particular piece of music (or portion of a piece).

Divisions are discrete sections of the organ, consisting of groups of stops which in effect form miniature organs in themselves. Each division is played from its own keyboard; on our organ, the divisions (and the keyboards they are played from) are called - going in order from the bottom keyboard to the top one – *Positif/Choeur*, *Grand Orgue*, *Récit*, *Solo*, and *Pédale*. The French division names reflect the fact that the builder, Casavant, is French-Canadian, as well as the instrument's tonal orientation, which includes numerous sounds which are derived from French organ building traditions.

Divisions can be combined - that is, they can sound/be played together, in various combinations, and on different keyboards – through the use of **couplers**, which are controlled by the tilting tablets above the top keyboard.

For three of the divisions (the *Positif*, *Choeur* and *Récit*) the pipes are enclosed inside a large, free-standing wooden enclosure called a **swell box**, which has **swell shades** on the front (essentially large, vertical wooden Venetian blinds). The swell shades can be opened or closed using the foot pedals above the middle of the pedalboard (the ones that resemble accelerator pedals!), and this creates increases or decreases in volume (crescendi or diminuendi) as the shades are opened or closed. The pipes of the *Grand Orgue* and *Pédale* are not in swell boxes and therefore speak at only one volume level; they are the visible, freestanding pipes in the organ chamber.

Combination Pistons (or simply **pistons**) are buttons underneath the keyboards and metal toe studs located directly above the pedal board. Stops can be saved (or "set") onto these buttons or toe studs; when the player depresses the button or toe stud, the stop or stops saved on it is brought on, and any stops currently drawn that are not saved on that piston are taken off. Pistons and toe studs allow the player to change stops while they are playing, without having to reach over and pull them on or push them off by hand. They also allow groups of stops (including large groups) to be brought on and/or taken off by pressing them.

General Pistons (or simply **generals**) are pistons which can be set with stops from all of the organ's divisions, as well as the couplers (as opposed to **divisional** pistons, which operate only the stops of a specific division/ keyboard). Both general pistons and divisional pistons are numbered, e.g. there are 12 general pistons on FBG's organ, referred to as "General 1," "General 2," and so forth.

Memory on the console allows the organ's pistons to exist on multiple levels, where they can be set with different combinations of stops. For example: FBG's organ has 12 general pistons; at the time of the organ's installation in 1984, the console had two memory levels ("A" and "B"), meaning that there were actually a total of 24 general pistons available. In the 1998 console upgrade, the number of memory levels was increased to 32, creating a new total of 384 generals on the instrument. This year's console work has increased the number of memory levels to 999, resulting in a current total of 11,988 generals on the organ.

NOTES ON THE 2025 FIRST BAPTIST ORGAN PROJECT
CASAVANT FRERES LTEE., OPUS 3583 (1984)

In Spring 2025, an extensive project involving restoration, renovations, upgrades and addition of new components to our Casavant organ was completed. This work did not involve the pipes, but rather was centered on the console and stop controls of the organ; thus, no changes were made to the sound of the instrument. The centerpiece of the work is a state-of-the-art console control system built by Solid State Organ Systems of Alexandria, VA. The work was carried out by Mr. Phil Parkey of Parkey Organ Builders, Atlanta, GA, in collaboration with Mr. Steve Moore and Mr. Jeff Gray of Foothills Pipe Organ, Greenville, our regular organ tuners and technicians.

A summary of the work done is shown below. At the end of this is a QR code which accesses a more detailed discussion of the new components added to the organ, and the benefits they will bring to organists playing Opus 3583.

-ORIGINAL 1984 COMPONENTS RESTORED TO LIKE-NEW CONDITION:
-Console shell
-Pedalboard

-COMPONENTS FROM *1984 OR +1998 (A PREVIOUS UPGRADING PROJECT)
UPGRADED OR REPLACED BY NEW ONES:

*Manuals (keyboards played by the hands)
*Adjustable music rack (slides forward for easier access)
*Stop knobs, coupler tabs, and piston buttons (with light facing and dark lettering for easier reading)
+Control systems for stops and memory levels
*Interior console wiring (to comply with current codes)
*Console lighting (LCD) with dimmer switch

-NEW COMPONENTS ADDED, SPRING 2025:
-Sequencer, with multiple thumb pistons and toe studs
-Substantial increase in number of memory levels
-Onboard playback/record system

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I am enormously grateful to the donors who made this comprehensive and much-needed restoration/renovation of our Casavant organ possible: Earle Furman, Bobby and Becky Hartness, Sarah Herring, Oz Rogers and Dr. John A. Taylor.

Opus 3583, an instrument that has always been a joy to play, is now even more so!

–Charles Tompkins

IMPORTANCE OF THE SEQUENCER, EXPANDED MEMORY LEVELS, AND ONBOARD RECORD/PLAYBACK FUNCTION

The **sequencer** piston now included on FBG's Casavant organ is an important new tool for the player, one that first began appearing on organ consoles about twenty-five years ago. It works quite differently from conventional pistons; unlike those – which, when pressed, bring on a stop or combination of stops that has been set on them – depressing a sequencer thumb piston or toe stud engages one of the organ's general pistons, beginning with General 1 on the first press and continuing through the generals in ascending numerical order with each successive press (hence, the term "sequencer"). Three sequencer thumb pistons and two sequencer toe studs (the latter being particularly useful) have been added to the organ; four of these (the toe studs and two of the thumb pistons) are located near the center of the console, where they can be most easily reached while playing. As a result, organists are now able to access all twelve of Opus 3583's general pistons by using this small group of easily reachable sequencer thumb pistons and toe studs. This is a great change from before, when one could only access the generals by using their numbered thumb pistons and toe studs; since some of these are a good distance away from the center of the console, using them could (and often did) involve long and/or awkward reaches – a less-than-ideal situation, especially when trying to engage them while playing. This, in turn, created the need to spend time during practice sessions strategizing which general thumb pistons or toe studs to use and in what order (i.e. not ascending numerical order) when performing a piece (the closer ones being reserved for registration changes that needed to be made more quickly and/or were taking place in passages where the playing was more difficult). The sequencer eliminates these issues, and by doing so makes the performance of music with multiple changes of registration (as many anthems and organ pieces have) considerably easier. More generally (pun intended!), it gives those playing our Casavant organ a significantly greater degree of control over and flexibility in using the instrument's tonal resources. (An additional and very useful function allows the sequencer to be engaged by any of the numbered thumb pistons and toe studs, rather than just the five dedicated sequencer thumb pistons and toe studs; this provides even greater flexibility and ease in performance.)

Working hand in hand with the sequencer, the greatly expanded number of **memory levels** on the console will also contribute to greater ease of playing and in using the organ to its fullest potential. Like the sequencer, they too will provide important time savings, since the increase in levels (made feasible by the continuing decrease in the cost of memory in recent years) now makes it possible to permanently store extended and complex registrations on the console. Doing so eliminates the need for two time-consuming tasks: first, writing out such registrations by hand (in order to have a record of them); and second, re-setting them onto the console if they have been removed (which was often necessary in the past, in order to free up space on the more limited number of memory levels). Now, a complex multi-piston, multi-memory level registration – such as that needed for John Rutter's anthem "O Clap Your Hands" – can simply be stored on the console, from where it can quickly and easily be accessed for future performances.

Finally, the addition of a **record/playback system** to the console allows the organist to record themselves playing a piece, then have that performance played back by the organ – exactly as they played it, with the same registrations – while they listen to it from where the congregation (or concert audience) sits. This is an especially important new tool, since the organ sounds significantly different when heard there (in terms of volume and balances between divisions) compared to how it sounds from the left side of the chancel, where the console is normally located for service playing.

The sequencer, expanded memory levels, and record/playback functions are true "game changers" for all who play Opus 3583, bringing the best of new organ console technology to this magnificent instrument.

– Charles Tompkins