

# CENTENNIAL GAZETTE

St. James Cathedral, Seattle

Issue #24

December 2, 2007

## HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

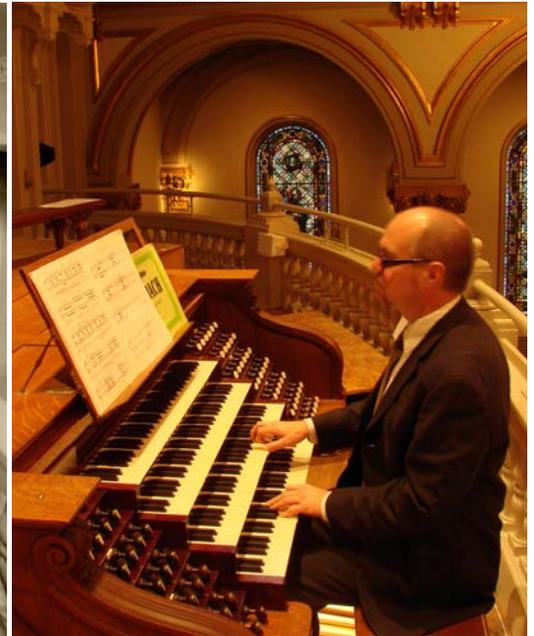
Next Sunday evening, history repeats itself at St. James Cathedral.

The very first public event at St. James Cathedral, a week before its dedication, was an organ recital by Dr. Franklin Sawyer Palmer, the Cathedral's first music director and organist. Palmer had lived briefly in Seattle in the 1890s, but had then left to study organ in Paris under some of the greatest organist-composers of his day. It is said that the Baillargeon family, who donated the Hutchings-Votey organ in the Cathedral's west gallery, renewed their acquaintance with Palmer not in Seattle but in Paris, at the church of St. Sulpice, where Palmer was studying under the great Charles-Marie Widor. It was partly the Baillargeon influence that brought Palmer back to Seattle, where he was promptly hired by Bishop O'Dea to oversee the installation of the new organ.

When the doors of the Cathedral were thrown open for that first organ recital on December 15, 1907, the capacity audience was treated to an ambitious program, unusual in some of its choices. For one thing, Palmer did not play the popular organ music of his American contemporaries. Instead, he played the works of the living French composers he had come to know in Paris—Widor, Guilmant, Dethier. And he played Bach—a surprising choice for 1907, since the organ works of Bach were only just being rediscovered. (It was organists like Widor—and his students—who helped make Bach's organ works widely performed again.)

That first organ recital was a triumph for Dr. Palmer; but for him, the Hutchings-Votey organ was always an unfinished project. From the beginning he had dreamed of a fifth, Echo Division, designed to speak into the dome of the Cathedral (room was even left for the stops on the console!). But between the shortage of funds and the collapse of the dome, the Echo Division was never built.

It would be almost one hundred years before Dr. Palmer's dream for the organs of St. James Cathedral would be realized. And it was Joseph Adam, in overseeing the installation of the Rosales organ (Archbishop Murphy Millennium Organ) in the East



The parallels between Franklin Sawyer Palmer and Joseph Adam are even more striking than these photos suggest! Both men not only served as the principal organist of the Cathedral, but also, at various points in their careers, held the position of organist at Temple de Hirsch Sinai. And both performed regularly with the Seattle Symphony—Dr. Palmer played viola, and Joseph Adam the new Waljen concert organ.

Apse, who would bring the seeds planted by Dr. Palmer a century ago to fruition.

At the Centennial concert next Sunday (December 9), Adam will perform many of the works heard at that first recital, one hundred years ago. He will perform Palmer's own transcription of Handel's Largo, and he will play several of the pieces from Palmer's annotated scores, complete with jotted notes on registrations! In the restored acoustic of St. James Cathedral, the sound of the Hutchings-Votey organ—the largest unaltered organ in the Pacific Northwest—will be virtually the same as what Dr. Palmer's audience heard 100 years ago.

But in the second part of the program, Adam will take us to places Dr. Palmer could only have dreamed of, playing works by contemporary composers like Naji Hakim on the combined organs. But as Dr. James Savage, Director of Music, observes, "in a sense what you'll hear is exactly what people heard one hundred years ago: the area's leading organist playing the best music of the past, and of contemporary composers."

—Corinna Laughlin

### CENTENNIAL ORGAN CONCERT

*Joseph Adam, Cathedral Organist*

*Sunday, December 9, 7:30 pm*

*Suggested donation \$15, students and seniors pay as able.*

*Passes available online at*

*[www.stjames-cathedral.org/music](http://www.stjames-cathedral.org/music).*