



Maxine Thévenot at the organ in the Cathedral Church of St. John, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Photo courtesy of cephoto.com.

# Maxine Thévenot

*Pipe Dream ~ Life Dream*

By Kay Bjork

The welling, swelling velvety rich tones of the organ wraps around the audience and percolates deep into their souls as they sit in the grandest of places – churches, cathedrals and concert halls. Three lines of music and thousands of pipes create a sound so commanding and all-encompassing that it is easy to forget that their source is one person, dwarfed by the instrument and the huge sounds that resonate from the organ pipes. Behind the organ they might picture a white-haired man with wire-rimmed spectacles who springs from behind the organ with a sweeping bow.

They might be surprised when Maxine Thévenot steps out from behind the organ. Strikingly beautiful, lively, elegant and emanating musicality that captures everybody, Thévenot has a distinguished international career performing throughout Europe, Great Britain and North America.

As an accomplished concert organist and choral conductor, she serves on the faculty of the University of New Mexico where she is Director of Las Cantantes, the women's vocal ensemble and Founding Director of the professional vocal ensemble POLYPHONY, a group of young professional singers who reside in New Mexico and perform a widely varied repertoire of mostly acapella music. She is also the Associate Organist-Choir Director at the Cathedral Church of St. John in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Music and keyboard instruments have been part of Maxine's life since she was four years old and began taking piano lessons. Her first teacher encouraged her to enter competitions and offered her opportunities to sing on the radio and television with a children's choir, allowing her to experience a well-rounded musical experience throughout her formative years.



*The Professional vocal ensemble POLYPHONY.  
Dr. Thévenot serves as founding director.*

Just before her eleventh birthday she was introduced to the pipe organ. She remembers the day well – as you might remember your first kiss, or graduation day, or your first job. Her mother took her to the organ loft at St. Anthony’s Roman Catholic Church in Lake Lenore, Saskatchewan and Maxine sat down on the smooth, hard bench. When she began to play she became fascinated with the range of sounds, “the beautiful deep dark tones and the high jubilant sounds...it was an epiphany,” Maxine remembers. Shortly afterwards she was asked to serve as the church organist.

Her musical path lay out in a straight line as she continued to grow in education, experience, and accomplishments under the valuable guidance of gifted teachers and parents who helped her grow up with a balanced view of herself in the world. Even

though her talent was exceptional, “I was a pretty normal child – I played sports, did chores and the same things every other child did,” Maxine notes.

The energetic child reached a point when the demands of her music and the risk of injury forced her to choose. Volleyball, figure skating, basketball, badminton, and soccer faded into her childhood as she committed more deeply to her music. Outdoorsy and athletic, Maxine was able to participate in less threatening activities such as track and field, hiking and bicycling in the majestic Rocky Mountains. Even the organ has its own physical element with the energy required to simultaneously operate the foot pedals and multiple manuals.

Attendance at Rivier Academy, a private girl’s school in Prince Albert, taught her the essential



*1868 Cavallé-coll organ.  
Notre Dame Cathedral Paris, France.*

Photo courtesy of La Cathédrale Notre Dame de Paris.

value of self-discipline, reinforced by her teacher Sister Marie-Reine Ricard. She learned quickly that talent requires a strong disciplinary attitude and aptitude to flourish. As her musical education continued and her career developed, she was influenced by numerous inspiring teachers and composers including her principal organ teacher, Professor McNeil Robinson.

She received the Bachelor of Music in Music Education, with distinction, from the University of Saskatchewan. She went on to earn the Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees in organ performance at the Manhattan School of Music where she was twice-awarded the Bronson Ragan award for “most outstanding organist.”

While studying the great composers and their lives she noted that they “did it all” – they directed choral ensembles and orchestras, were teachers, and more often than not, played the organ. Even one of her favorite organ composers J.S. Bach, was more well known as an organist than a composer during his lifetime. Maxine chose this same course as she became involved in the many dimensions of music.

She has served as a conductor of a variety of musical ensembles across North America and was founding conductor of Concentus, an auditioned 30-voice ensemble at the Manhattan School of Music in New York City. Maxine has conducted orchestral ensembles as well, including students from The Juilliard School, Manhattan School of Music and members of the New Mexico Symphony Orchestra.

Her life stays dynamic and flexible with a busy touring schedule. This year’s tour includes week-long residencies in the United Kingdom at both St. George’s Chapel, Windsor and Canterbury Cathedral interjected with solo performances at Westminster Abbey and Salisbury Cathedral, in addition to being invited as the first female organist featured in the Stratford Music Festival in Canada.

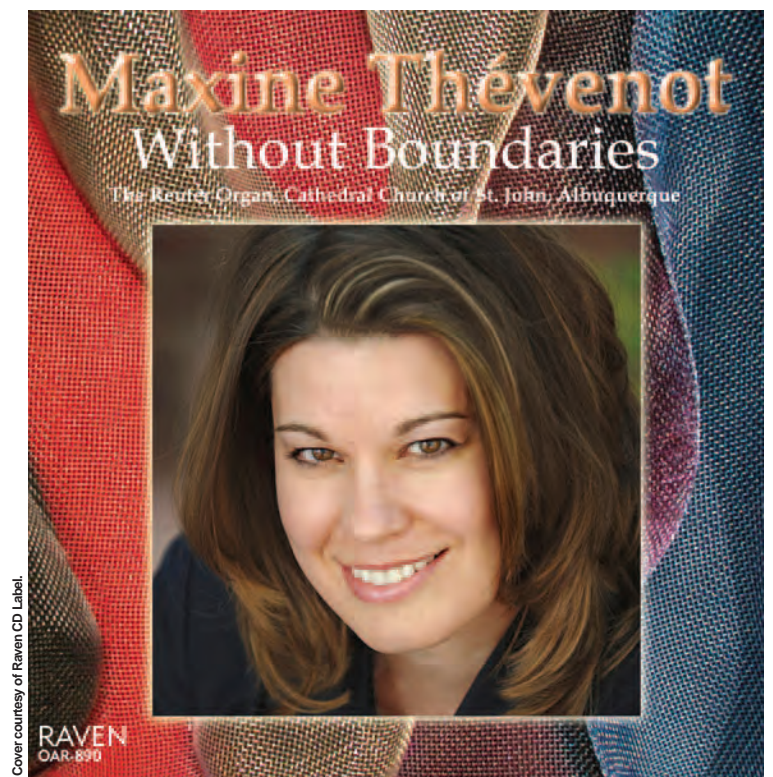
Her performances are marked with interesting and vibrant programmes, varying from Baroque to contemporary and sprinkled with conversational commentary to engage the audience. Thévenot is excited and proud of the works exclusively created for her to showcase her unique style and talent.

Most recently she has been concentrating on recording and has just released her first CD, “Without Boundaries.” (www.ravencd.com)

Thévenot has been received with great enthusiasm and praise; with accolades for her musicality, polish, poise, charm, perfect timing, sensitivity, creativity, and technical virtuosity.

In high demand, doors continue to open for Thévenot. For someone who is true to her art, the success is a bonus, “I am getting wonderful work. My career feels like one big crescendo.”

Maxine finds it particularly exciting to perform in historic places on historic instruments. “I have played in so many wonderful concert halls including Carnegie Hall, NYC



Cover courtesy of Raven CD Label.

*Maxine Thévenot released her first CD in 2006  
on the Raven CD Label.*

Orchestra Hall in Chicago, Avery Fisher Hall, NYC and Jack Singer Concert Hall in Calgary, Alberta.”

While in Europe she has played on organs with pipe-work dating back to the 1700s. “Studying pieces with different teachers, in different geographic locations on the globe indelibly leave their own impression, character, and mark on the piece...each work has some sort of web of memories attached to it. It’s a bit like looking back through one’s photo album.” She remembers explicitly her experience at Notre Dame in Paris where she sat on the same bench where the great French composer, teacher and organist Louis Vierne died at the organ console during his 1750th concert.

The sense of history radiates its own kind of power and magic and Thévenot says, “It affects how you play the music.” As a result, her experiences and passion for life are ultimately expressed in her music.

This passion carries through in all areas of her life, “If you don’t live your life, you won’t be able to express that in your music...life’s experiences help me to delve into the layers and cultivate the depth found in the music.”

When the room fills with the first notes of music and you listen to the inspiring music of Maxine Thévenot you don’t just hear her love for music – you hear her love for life. **PeP**

**For more information and an audio sampler  
of the work of Maxine Thévenot:  
WWW.MAXINETHEVENOT.COM**