

Connick Windows

Thoughts, news and comments concerning the art and craft of Connick stained glass, published periodically by....

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Music as Second Sight

Jonathan Ambrosino



J. S. Bach, Great Master of Religious Music
South Choir Window
Heinz Memorial Chapel, Pittsburgh,
Charles J. Connick 1938

Although a newcomer to any connoisseurship of stained glass, I can at least claim a passing acquaintance with it. A career involved with pipe organs takes one into churches, and in my particular sphere, most are of the early 20th-century, in which the same roster of creative personae keeps cropping up: architects Ralph Adams Cram and Bertram Goodhue, woodworkers Irving & Casson-A.H. Davenport, carver Johannes Kirchmayer, ironworker Samuel Yellin, organbuilders Ernest Skinner and Aeolian-Skinner, and, of course, Charles J. Connick.

What comes through the writings of these artisans is each man's innate understanding that visual artistry could be described in musical terms. In a church, if architecture was the theme, the various embellishing elements — artwork, metal, glass, carving — were the voices of a visual fugue, lending credence to the old saw of the sum really being greater than the parts. There is almost something choral about this artistic fusion: in the creation of a distinguished setting, architect and artisan seem to respect intuitively that no one element should surpass any other. In this aesthetic, embellishment is not necessarily subordinate to architecture if integrated and organic to it. It is like a choral selection in which soprano, alto, tenor and bass are all in harmony no solos, only ensemble.

Craft-making at its most artistic leads to a hard paradox: one attempts to harness that which might be governed but can never fully be controlled. With organs, we work across a range of techniques, from architecture and engineering to woodworking, metallurgy, sculpting, carving, painting, and the jeweler's precision of pipe-making and voicing. But we do so, vainly thinking that we have full control over the source of the sound: that invisible wind that drives the whole equation. We never really do, however, and somewhere between the intention and the result lies only the possibility of art, all blowing around in a sheet of air.

For Connick, of course, the thing to harness was the light, in all its prismatic potential and pitfalls. The color may have modulated, the story may have filtered, but always always, first and last, a window conveyed and respected the light. And moreover, he understood that his own obstacles were no greater than any of his fellow artisans' that, perhaps even because of that struggle, the corporate effect of the combined work could be arresting and deeply moving. When in his book *Adventures in Color and Light* he talks of the music of stained glass, Connick describes windows as "caroling" together. This isn't some jingly Christmas image, all children, snow and doorsteps, but rather that an object harmonious in itself can radiate joy to others of its kind, and together outward to its audience, as only light and color can.

Well, more than light and color, actually: music too, for in one sense Connick is talking about fugue or counterpoint. This is the highest and most sophisticated form of musical expression, from the great fugues of Buxtehude and Bach to the thematic relationships in Wagner and Brahms, even the recurrence of tone-rows of the mid-20th-century serialist composers such as Webern and Stockhausen. Connick understood that within each discipline — for him, color and light, for Kirchmayer, the grain and the depth — there were illimitable possibilities for contrapuntal relationships.

As the disciplines came together, building and decoration could combine to express that counterpoint between volume and void, surface and depth, the obvious and the glimpsed. These places exist even for the non-believer, so for the faithful inside their sacred home, the impact could be revelatory: color and light indeed.

Jonathan Ambrosino advises churches and educational institutions nationally on matters related to pipe organs. He writes a regular column for England's Choir & Organ, and maintains instruments in the New England region.

The Connick Foundation directors look forward to welcoming Jonathan Ambrosino as a new director at our upcoming annual meeting.



The Angelic Choir
Crypt Stairway Window
Cathedral of Saint John Evangelist
Spokane
Connick Associates 1958



Truth Window
Robinson Chapel
Daniel L. Marsh Chapel
Boston University

The Connick Foundation's web master, Ian Owens writes the following:

If you haven't visited our website lately, there have been some recent additions:

- * Photos and item descriptions from the BPL Exhibition are now available online as a "virtual exhibition".
- * "Orin E. Skinner Lectures" now has its own page, with slides from the 2005 Lecture available as a (pdf) download.
- * The "Publications" page now lists all publications available through the Foundation.
- * The new "Conservation" page contains photos of cartoons and designs to be conserved by the NDCC.
- * Visit the new "Links" page for an ever-increasing list of links to photos of Connick Windows in churches worldwide.
- * The new "Forum" provides a medium for you to discuss and comment on a range of topics with other stained glass enthusiasts.

By the way, you can save valuable resources by receiving the Connick Windows newsletter electronically! Simply send your e-mail address to The Foundation to start receiving your newsletter via e-mail.

Photographs in this Newsletter are courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library.