

*In the wind...*  
July, 2017

### **On the road again...**

What do you get when you play a country song backwards?

---You get your dog back, you get your truck back, you get your wife back...

I worked in the shop of Angerstein & Associates in Stoughton, Massachusetts between 1984 and 1987 with an assortment of coworkers. There was a minister from an obscure sect who spent lunch and coffee breaks reading the King James bible, a motorcycle mechanic who had run the service department of a Honda dealership, a carpenter who had worked on large construction projects, two conservatory organ-major grads, and Dan and his sister, Linda, both educated and cultured people.

There were frequent discussions about what would play on the radio. I preferred solid classical music, a couple co-workers were rock-n-roll devotees, and the minister had cassettes of treacly inspirational music. Country-Western music was a frequent compromise. Jack, the motorcycle guy, was exceptionally quick witted – hardly a day passed without some hilarious quip floating across from his workstation, and I was deep in the thrall of puns – a habit that my family still shouts about, but I believe secretly envies.<sup>1</sup> We had a blast making up new lyrics to songs like *All the girls I've loved before* (Willie Nelson and Julio Iglesias), *Better keep your hands off my potential new boyfriend* (Dollie Parton), and *Drop Kick Me, Jesus, Through the Goalposts of Life* (Bobby Bare). Oh boy, those were the days.

Willie Nelson provided another favorite, *"On the road again. Just can't wait to get on the road again. The life I love is making music with my friends, and I can't wait to get on the road again."* That one really resonated for me, because since my first days in an organ shop in the summer of 1975, I've loved the part of organ building that takes you out of town, loading an organ into trucks and setting off for adventure, comradery, mishaps, and triumphs.

There was the delivery of an organ to the chapel of an exclusive island summer community that required three trips on the little ferry to transport the organ across the water.

There was the installation in the chapel of Salvation Army headquarters in Providence, Rhode Island, where the client was providing meals for us. Breakfast and lunch in the headquarters' dining room with the chapter officers, served by ex-con chef Vinnie were fine, but dinner in the line at the Men's Service Center was a lot more colorful.

There was the trip from Oberlin, Ohio to Oakland, California to deliver a new harpsichord, where the client's surgeon husband lectured us about smoking, and brought home a smoker's lung in a glass jar to make his point.<sup>2</sup>

I've driven dozens of rental trucks across the country, one of which wound up on its side. I've been with hundreds of people experiencing the excitement of the delivery of their new organ, squealing with delight as the blower went on for the first time and the first pipes sounded. I've sat in the pews on the first Sunday after the organ case was erected, watching the reactions of the parishioners as they saw it for the first time. One little girl announced at the top of her voice, "I liked the old one better." I've attended the weddings of the daughters of members of the Organ Committee, and I've ridden an elephant in a jungle in Thailand.

But my trips to Madagascar were as good as adventure gets for an organ guy. In these pages last month, I shared the history of the Hook & Hastings Company, the venerable Boston firm that produced more than 2600 organs under several different names over a span of a hundred years, and started the tale of my trips to the land of the lemurs. Take a look back at the June issue of *The Diapason* and reread the last eight (or so) paragraphs.

Zina Andrianarivelo, Madagascar's Ambassador to the United Nations, called me in the spring of 2008. Of course, I thought, you're Madagascar's Ambassador to the United Nations. I get calls like this all the time. The Ambassador attends the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York, and the organist there told him about the Organ Clearing House. He asked if we could meet.

Over a well-oiled lunch in an Italian restaurant near the U.N., he told me that the Church of Jesus Christ of Madagascar, the FJKM (which is associated with the Presbyterian Church of the USA), was in the middle of an important anniversary celebration, and he had just been in Madagascar's capital, Antananarivo, for the opening event. The church's national Vice-President, Marc Ravalomanana, who also served as the President of the Federation of Madagascar, was delivering a sermon to a full congregation in the city's central church. From the pulpit, he pointed to the Ambassador and said, "Mr. Ambassador, I want you to go back to America and find an organ for this church."

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was an evil Malagasy (pronounced *Malagash*) Queen who was cured of a horrible disease by talismen in her palace. In gratitude, she outlawed Christianity, and 150,000 Christians were put to death during her rule. Her successor invited Christian Missionaries back into the country, and four Stone Churches were built in Antananarivo during the 1860's commemorating four early instances of Christian Martyrdom. Each bears the name Tranovato – which means stone house. So for example, FJKM Tranovato Ambonin' Ampararinina is the Stone Church of the Hurling Cliff. Tranovato Faravohitra commemorates a martyr who was burned alive. The two sites are a couple miles apart. Legend has it that on the days of the two martyrdoms, a rainbow connected the two sites.

President Ravalomanana grew up in the rural village of Imerinkasinana, about an hour drive from Antananarivo (colloquially contracted to *Tananriv*, or simply, *Tana*).

As a teenager, he delivered yogurt by bicycle. As a young man, he made a fortune developing a system for delivering dairy products all around the country without refrigeration. And he used that fortune to build a conglomerate of construction companies, television stations, and newspapers – he was one of the wealthiest men in the country. The church had advocated his candidacy, and in turn, he was donating huge sums for the construction of new church buildings, and the repair and renovation of older buildings, and he was interested in importing a fleet of organs.

The Ambassador would be traveling to Madagascar in June to participate in an international conference arranged by the President to increase international trade, aimed at improving the life conditions and styles of the poorest Malagasy people. That would be an ideal time for me to visit the country. All arrangements would be taken care of – all I would have to do was get on an airplane.

I went to Madagascar's Mission at the UN to get a diplomatic visa. At the advice of the State Department, I went to a travel health clinic where I was vaccinated against seven nasty diseases. I was told not to eat raw vegetables if I didn't know how they had been handled. I was given medicine to fight dysentery, and to prevent malaria. And I was told not to drink tap water – including ice cubes.

Madagascar was a French Colony until 1960, so Air France has scheduled departures from Paris to Tana, but they don't schedule return flights until they could fill a plane. Mine would be a one-way ticket. I got on the plane knowing I'd arrive in Tana around 1:00 am, but I didn't know who would meet me, I didn't know where I'd be staying, and I didn't know what I'd be doing once I got there.

We landed at Ivato International Airport. There were three snazzy young men in white shirts with presidential ID's, one was holding a card with my name. They showed me into a VIP lounge and offered me a drink (gin and tonic) – it only took a couple minutes off the plane for me to have my first Malagasy ice cubes. They drove me to the Carlton Hotel in Antananarivo, where the President's name was on my reservation. There was a gift basket and a bottle of wine in my room.

So far, so good. I woke early wondering what the day would bring. I went to the hotel dining room for breakfast. While I was eating, another guy with an ID tag came to my table to tell me that my driver was waiting outside. He took me to Tranovato Faravohitra and there was Zina to greet me, along with a group of church officials he had gathered. They had planned an itinerary that had me visiting fifteen churches, some which needed organs, and some which had organs in need of repair. One of them would be my guide, making the schedule and making contacts with the parishes. Richard, who had picked me up at the hotel, would be my driver, and Adolha Vonialitahina would be my translator – I had an entourage.

That evening, Zina took me to the annual awards banquet of the Rotary Club, held in a rural country club, about an hour away from the city. Small talk continued as we

found our assigned tables, and were ushered to a buffet dinner loaded with things I didn't recognize. Just as I picked up a plate and started surveying the choices, the lights went out.

In the course of a week, I visited twelve churches. One was under construction, the gift of the President, and there were chickens running around the site. One wound up in a pot and became lunch for the workers – no refrigerator, no problem. Several of the churches had organs. One was a terrible junker with no nameplate, but I had to admire the organist who had figured out how to keep it working. I offered to do some tuning. The organist held notes, and it was fun to watch his face light up as each pipe came into tune. I gave Adolha a quick lesson for holding notes, and invited the organist up on the walkboard. I showed him how to use the tuning iron, and he got the knack of it right away.

We arrived at another church where there was a simple organ façade. I opened the fallboard to reveal the classic Cavaillé-Coll logo and burst into tears. I had travelled 8700 miles to find a Cavaillé-Coll organ in an East African Island nation. It didn't look like much, and there were a lot of dead notes, but it had that sound.

As I cavorted around town, Zina was working on getting an appointment for us to talk with President Ravolamanana. A couple times were set and changed, and finally Zina took me to the Presidential Palace. As I sat in a waiting room while Zina met alone with the President, I thought of Alan Laufman, the founder of the Organ Clearing House. "Alan would have loved this!"

It may have seemed surreal, but it was real. I sat with President Ravalomanana for about 45 minutes. I shared some highlights of my studies with him, and promised a report on all the churches I had visited. He asked if we could bring an organ for Tranovato Farovohitra in time for the anniversary celebration in November, and made it clear he would like to follow up with more projects later.

Bringing a pipe organ from the United States to Madagascar with five months notice seemed like a tall order, but we had a four-rank Hook & Hastings organ<sup>3</sup> in Boston that would be easy to move. We would consider it a temporary installation, and move it to a smaller church later. The President's office arranged for a shipping container. There would be plenty of extra space, so a clothing drive was organized, and I lined up donations of surplus pianos to be delivered to churches and an orphanage I had visited.

I rented a truck and gathered the pianos in Maine. Approaching the New Hampshire border, I had to stop in a weigh station. The trooper in the booth asked, "What are you carrying?" "Pianos." "Where are you taking them?" I couldn't resist. "Madagascar." "Pull over." The State Police went over my truck and papers with a fine-tooth comb. Thankfully, Ryder had not omitted any of the required safety equipment.

A few months later, my colleague Amory Atkins and I flew to Tana. Because the streets of Tana are steep and narrow, and festooned with thousands of low-hanging wires, the container could not be trucked directly to the church. Instead, it would be delivered to a Presidential campus on the outskirts of the city. The Malagasy Army would provide a flat-bed truck and the manpower to transfer the load. An Army Colonel would make the arrangements.

There was a snafu with the container. President Ravalomanana had recently implemented some new import restrictions. His container was in violation, and was being held at the dock. The Colonel hinted that the President “had to play by his own rules.” It took a couple days to sort that out. When the container finally arrived, we transferred it to the Army’s truck. Amory was brilliant as a platoon leader!

When we arrived at the church, we learned that steel supports were being added to the structure of the balcony, so there would be further delay. The steel workers were barefooted (a couple were wearing flip-flops), and they were using rechargeable cutting tools. It was obviously going to take a long time. Amory and I tried to help – the cordless tools we had were better than theirs! Finally, we let the Colonel know that we wouldn’t have time to install the organ before the anniversary service if we couldn’t start in 36 hours. A couple hours later, a team of real steel workers arrived, equipped with acetylene torches, welding gear, and steel-toed boots. Problem solved. (They were from one of the President’s construction companies.)

The church was full. The regular organist played on a Hammond. The congregation sang hymns. The President preached from the same pulpit where he directed the ambassador eight months earlier. During the sermon, he introduced me and asked me to play. When I finished, he thanked me and said, “It’s good – but we’re going to do better. We’re bringing a larger organ next year.” I thought having the President announce that in public was a great way to seal the next project.

But I was wrong. The following January, Zina and I planned to meet for lunch to discuss the next step. He called to cancel. He sounded panicky. He told me to visit the website, France 24 (International News Headlines). President Ravalomanana was being ousted in a coup d’etat led by high-ranking army officers (I’ve wondered if it was “my” Colonel) and Andry Rajoelina, a 27 year-old former disc jockey who was Mayor of Antananarivo. So that was that.

I’m sorry that we didn’t get to fulfill the grandiose plans. It would have been fun to help raise the standards of music in the Malagasy Church. I have no idea if the organ we brought is still working or being used. But we sure did have an adventure. The next time an Ambassador calls, I’ll know what to do.

1. I was building tower crowns for a large organ case which included a run of dental moldings – crenelations that ran between a couple rows of ogees. It was a trick to lay them out so the gaps were symmetrical across mitered joints. I stood staring at a joint I was prepared to cut, ruler and pencil in hand, when Dan walked by and asked what I was doing. “I’m in a trance of dental meditation.”
2. I quit smoking cigarettes on New Year’s Eve, 1981, three months before my son Michael was born.
3. Hook & Hastings #2369 (1915). One manual: Open Diapason 8’, Gedeckt 8’, Dolce 8’, Flute Harmonic 4’.