

Gonzalez

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French firm of organ builders. The founder, Victor [Victorino] Gonzalez (*b* Hacinas, Burgos, 2 Dec 1877; *d* Paris, 3 June 1956), trained with Cavaillé-Coll (1894–9) and worked for Gutschenritter, Limonaire and Masure before going into partnership with Victor Ephrème at Malakoff, near Paris, in 1921; from 1929 he and his son Fernand (1904–40) worked together as Etablissements Gonzalez in Châtillon.

The influential support of Norbert Dufourcq and the organist André Marchal gradually led to the creation of the neo-classical or eclectic organ, seeking to fuse elements of the French classical organ with the then dominant late-Romantic style. Rudolf von Beckerath, who worked in the shop until 1936, introduced German influences. Georges Danion, who married Victor's granddaughter, headed the firm after 1956, incorporating workshops in Rambervillers from 1963 and later Lodève, and transferring the headquarters to Brunoy in 1965. From the 1980s the company's operations diminished, and by the end of the 20th century only the Lodève shop remained active.

The Gonzalez firm has used many types of action, including a wire-and-pulley system for mechanical action or Barker levers for coupling mechanisms. Having favoured moderate wind pressures, over the decades the tonal design came to emphasize mixture choruses and mutations.

Significant three- and four-manual Gonzalez instruments include St Eustache, Paris (1932; rebuilt 1967), Reims Cathedral (1938), the chapel at Versailles (1938; reconstitution of pre-Revolution tonal design), Soissons Cathedral (1956; widely considered the firm's pivotal masterpiece), the Oratoire du Louvre, Paris (1962), Chartres Cathedral (1971) and Beauvais Cathedral (1979). Many mid-century French organists ordered house organs from Gonzalez.

The firm has also done extensive, occasionally controversial work on historical organs (some examples are the Prytanée Militaire, La Flèche, Auch Cathedral, and St Nicolas-des-Champs, St Vincent-de-Paul, Ste Marie Madeleine and St Gervais-St Protais in Paris).

As a creative pioneer, Victor Gonzalez was largely responsible for bridging the stylistic gap between the staid emulation of Cavaillé-Coll and the historicism of late 20th-century organ designs. Opinions vary as to the appropriateness of paths taken after his death, but he is without doubt the emblematic figure of French organ building of the mid-20th century.

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