Known around the world as one of the most unique instruments, the world’s one and only Bamboo Organ sits just 10 kilometers to the south of the centre of Manila. This truly amazing instrument can be witnessed in its full glory every February when internationally acclaimed musicians gather at St. Joseph Parish Church in Las Piñas to play a large assortment of compositions on this extraordinary instrument.

The Bamboo Organ is not only appreciated for its uniqueness but also for its history. From 1816-1824 Fr. Diego Cera worked on the Bamboo Organ. He apparently buried the bamboo pipes by the banks of a nearby river for 2 years to cure them before incorporating them into the organ. Sadly, after a typhoon and an earthquake the pipes were damaged and the organ went unnoticed until 1917 when tourists realised how unique the organ was. However, as the organ is one of a kind and the man who built it had died many years before nobody knew how to repair the pipes. Finally in 1972, the entire organ was sent to Bonn, Germany to be restored and in 1975 it returned to St. Joseph Parish Church and a joyous welcome from Filipinos. As the organ is the only 19th century bamboo organ that exists and is still functioning, it was declared to be a National Cultural Treasure of the Philippines in 2003. Since its return Las Piñas has held the annual Bamboo Organ Festival which is now in its 35th year.
For the 35th year of the Bamboo Organ Festival a large number of musicians from the Philippines and around the world came to perform alongside this amazing instrument from February 18-24, 2010. I had the pleasure of seeing the organ played by internationally acclaimed organist, Guy Bovet. He started the concert by explaining that since the organ was built by a Spaniard but came from the Philippines, it has a character and a sound which reflects both cultures and proceeded to play both Spanish and Filipino compositions. Bovet’s knowledge of the Bamboo Organ was reflected in his playing as he created moving and astonishing music while demonstrating the range of the organ. During Bovet’s version of Pakitong Kitong we were able to hear one of the things that makes the Bamboo Organ even more unique as it can make a sound like chirping birds. The sound is so realistic many members of the audience were looking around the church expecting to see birds darting around under the lofty ceiling. MSGR. Albert Venus of St. Joseph Parish Church explained to me after the concert that the sound of chirping birds is the result of air moving past water in the bamboo pipes.

As part of Guy Bovet’s concert we were treated to the sounds of a second metal pipe organ at St. Joseph Parish Church which was made in 1995 by Edgar Montiano and Cealwyn Tagle. This organ is also unique as it is the only one in the world made by Filipinos. The sounds made by this organ were quite different and to see the skill and ease Bovet played it with was truly amazing as the organ has foot pedals for the bass notes as well as two keyboards.
Guy Bovet playing the Auditorium Organ  
*Photo by Ryan Buaron*

To experience this exceptional instrument being played by world renowned musical masters it is only a short drive from the centre of Manila to the St. Joseph Parish Church in Las Piñas. The Festival is held every February and is really a must see cultural event in the Philippines. For more information on the festival be sure to check out the [official Bamboo Organ website](http://bambooorgan.org/) – http://bambooorgan.org/


Look more on [www.aboutphilippines.ph](http://www.aboutphilippines.ph)