

PERFORMER'S NOTES: AUSTRIA / CZECH REPUBLIC

- Christopher Dawes



Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, Wiener Männergesang, Wiener Sängerknaben in the Größter Musikvereinsaal, Vienna, Austria

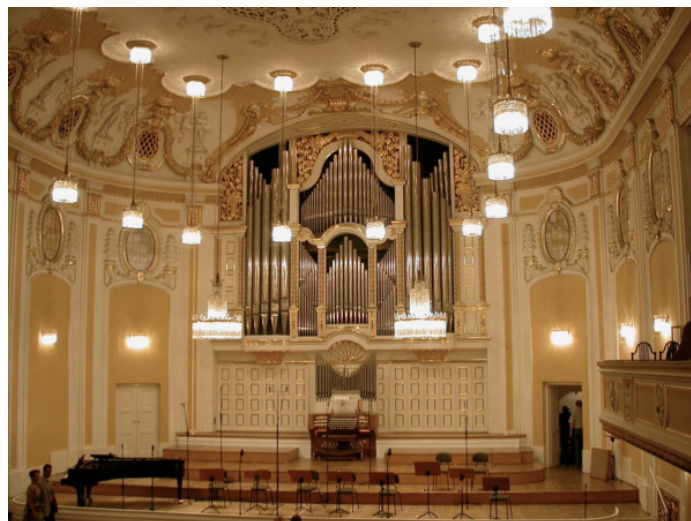
A summer 2003 tour as accompanist to the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir under Noel Edison led me on an unusual musical and cultural tour of famous spots of this region of Europe. It should be said from the outset that choral accompanying tours differ from solo organ recital tours in two significant ways: schedules and instruments, and I'm afraid choral tours are rarely conducive either to encountering good organs or having enough access to get to know them. However the organ culture is ever in evidence, and as in an earlier instance in the Netherlands in 2000, I have answered OrgAlt reader requests to provide a short travelogue.

Our tour began in Salzburg, in the fabled recital hall of the *Mozarteum* (below, right). The reputation of the music school housing this hall does full homage by its own achievements to the Salzburg native-son for whom it was named. There, the TMC appeared in the 3rd Vienna World Choral Festival, appearing with the *Wiener Männergesang* (Vienna Men's Choir) and members of the *Wiener Sängerknaben* (Vienna Boys' Choir).

Another major stop on the tour was the *Größter Konzertsaal* of the Musikverein in Vienna (above). This venerable institution, yet another of the major musical landmarks of Europe, is a key location in one of my favourite works of fiction, Vickram Seth's *An Equal Music*, chronicling the story of a British string quartet, and in particular its second violinist's journey from studenthood into life as a

performing musician. The work is entertaining and touching, and though written by a non-musician it captures the life of a professional performer, and in particular the familiar dynamics of a small ensemble seeking to be the best it can be, and the romantic but ruthlessly practical private lives their members must lead.

But I digress. Across a hall from the *Brahms Saal* featured in *An Equal Music* lies the more famous Dumba concert hall, in which the TMC appeared once again with Vienna Men's and Boys' Choirs (the groups are shown above in rehearsal). A very neat, polite organ façade concealed an organ that had not been useable in many years, the identity of the builder thoughtfully removed. A Roland synthesizer in the loft served instead!



Indeed, the organ at the Mozarteum in Salzburg had also been beautiful to behold but more functional than distinguished for so auspicious a setting. At the musical flowering of the land of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven, the organ was *instrumenta non grata*. Perhaps Bach and his predecessors silenced a generation or two of European composers from sheer awe ... perhaps the emerging humanism and simplicity of what we now call the Classical era, and the establishment of austere Protestantism eclipsed the richly decorated glories of baroque Catholic and Lutheran music, and the organ with them. For the most part, it seems the organ never regained its foothold.



sept organ whose installation Planeyevsky oversaw in the 1980s. It was a musical highlight of the tour for me to play the postlude after high mass on the Sunday June 29th, the Feast of St. Peter and Paul (left).

The secular Vienna World Choral Festival lived in the concert halls of Austria: predictably our venue festival in Prague, *Musica Sacra Praha*, lived in the churches of the “City of a thousand spires”. The ancient city of Prague is a fine, if not the finest example of many of the glories of Europe: history, architecture and beauty among them: but it is also the finest example of long term significance and wealth failing to equate to power. The Hapsburgs’ Austro-Hungarian empire that had built many of the glories we had admired in Austria was just one (and as we would learn later, neither the last, nor the most oppressive) in a long line of occupying external powers that have dominated the lives of the Czech people. For this reason, and for one of the most formidably unique languages to be found anywhere on the continent, the musical riches of this extraordinary city and country remain largely within its routinely shifting borders.

ALTERNATIVE ORGANNEWS

LAGACÉ ‘PROMOTED’ TO OFFICER

Concordia University Professor Emeritus Bernard Lagacé was promoted from the rank of Member of the Order of Canada (to which he was appointed in 1985) to that of Officer. The investiture by Governor General Adrienne Clarkson took place at Rideau Hall on May 9th, 2003.

ORGAN COMPETITIONS IN CANADA 2004

(see also the *Concours de Imrpovisation, Orgue et Couleurs*, p.5)

- Florence and Stanley Osborne Organ Competition: Students under the age of 30 may apply to compete for the \$1500 and \$750 awards in support of advanced studies in Organ or Church Music. The Summer Institute of Church Music sponsors the annual competition: the final round is in Oshawa, Ontario on Tuesday 29 June, 2004.
- Concours d’orgue de Québec, presented annually by la Fondation Claude Lavoie. Applicants must be Canadian citizens who have resided in the province of Québec for two months or longer on the date of application, and who are not more than 36 years of age on the first of July 2004. The first prize (Prix Claude Lavoie) is \$15,000 CDN; the second \$7,500, and the special prize, for the best interpretation of the new work commissioned specially for the competition. A bursary of \$300 is provided for all finalists. For more detailed information (French only) visit the website for the Concours, hosted by Robert Poliquin at the Université du Québec at <http://infolpuq.quebec.ca/~uss1010/orgues/concours.html>

JOHN ROBB COMPETITION 2003

On Wednesday November 26 the RCCO’s Montréal Centre presented the final round of John Robb Competition at l’Oratoire St-Joseph. 1st prize was awarded to Nicolas-Alexandre Marcotte (student of Bernad Lagacé), and 2nd to Ryan Enright (student of John Grew). Congratulations and best wishes are also extended to Mylène Belanger (student of Mireille Lagacé) and François Grenier (student of Noëlla Genest), who were runners-up. The judges: Scott Bradford, Régis Rousseau and David Szanto.

However in Vienna’s beloved St. Stephen’s Cathedral the city of music’s neglect for the King of Instruments met with recent restitution, between the massive, silent, unplayed and unplayable organ in the west gallery and the great new transept organ by Rieger (IV manuals/68 ranks). Organist Peter Planeyevsky told me a hauntingly familiar story a cost-cutting organ project of the 1960s by a little-known local firm resulting in a gallery organ that was unusable within twenty years. The good news was the magnificent mechanical action transept

One of the most historically fascinating of our stops in Prague was the St. Nicholas Church on the Old town square (right). The cradle of the Hussite movement, an unusually conciliatory 16th century branch of Bohemian Protestantism which advocated full retention of Catholic art, decoration and ceremony while steadfastly translating the bible and the mass into the vernacular language. This very high and richly decorated baroque church clearly demonstrates the Hussian loyalty to the beauty of the Catholic traditions, and the little organ far up in the rafters (above), while modest in its resources does as well.



Prague boasts a spectacular concert life, into which the organ figures prominently. The Martinů-Saal (named for Bohuslav Martinu, one of the country’s greatest composers this century), Lichtenstein Palace is one of the most recent (Rieger-Kloss, 1993) and most-admired of the country’s concert hall instruments. Our two performances in the beautiful city were well-attended and well-appreciated, and beyond the usual rewards of touring and performing, this author was able to go home with his organ world-view having grown still more.

Photographs are by TMC member Alan Ward. The specifications of most of the organs mentioned in this article, and links to other websites of interest are available to those interested in the Newsletter section of the OrgAlt web site, www.OrgAlt.com.

RCCO COMPETITION 2003

On Tuesday July 22 the final round of the RCCO National Organ Playing Competition was held at St. Anne’s Catholic Church in Ottawa, Ontario. The finalists were Geoffrey Ward of Brampton, Ontario (doctoral student at the University of Kansas, Lawrence); Andrew Henderson of Thorold, Ontario (doctoral student at the Julliard School of Music in New York, NY), and Gary Tong, a Calgary native pursuing Masters studies at the University of Alberta, Edmonton. 1st Prize eventually went to Henderson, 2nd to Tong and 3rd to Ward. The jurors were Patricia Phillips Wright, Frederick Swann and Rachel Laurin.

LILIAN FORSYTH SCHOLARSHIP for CHURCH MUSIC

Applications are now being accepted for the 2004 award, up to \$2000 to be used for advanced summer, regular diploma/degree programs or private tuition. **The application deadline is 28 February, 2004.** Contact: The Registrar, Lilian Forsyth Scholarship, Knox Presbyterian Church, 120 Lisgar Street, Ottawa, ON K2P 0C2, Fax (613) 238-4775, or e-mail knoxottawa@sympatico.ca.

U.S. ORGAN INAUGURATED IN SWISS CATHEDRAL

In late November 2003 the New York Times reported the inauguration of the new C.B. Fisk organ in the 13th century Cathedral of Lausanne, Switzerland, and equally, the consternation of the Swiss organ community that “a sacred task had gone to Massachusetts”: the provision of a new organ for one of the country’s most important Gothic Churches at a cost of \$2.4 million U.S.. Since the late 1950s North America has imported hundreds of early-style instruments from Europe – many firms in Canada and the U.S. have been reversing this trend in more recent years. A local Swiss newspaper, straining for metaphors, predicted that the organ would sound “like a hamburger sizzling on the grill” – reports following the inaugural concert by titular organist Jean-Christophe Geiser have been more kind.