

Günter Lade

The Choir ("Mariazeller") Organ of the Pilgrimage Basilica in Mariazell (AT)

The pilgrimage basilica of Mariazell dates back to a Gothic church which was remodeled in Baroque style beginning in 1640. During the second half of the 17th century building master Domenico Sciassia from the mother convent in St. Lambrecht substantially expanded the church to the east. On this occasion the Grace Chapel, the centerpiece of a jube until then separating the chancel from the nave, remained in its original position consequently dividing the new ca. 260ft. long church architecturally into two roughly equal parts. The western area still shows traces of the former Gothic hall church (the side-aisles are as high as the central nave), while the eastern area, for which Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach designed an imposing high altar, is dominated by a huge dome.

The architectural separation was of great significance for the history of Mariazell organs. From 1737 to 1739 Gottfried Sonnholz built a three manual instrument with 36 stops on the west choir loft and in 1752 Joseph Georg Schnepfleithner, the local "organarius cellensis", was commissioned to build two one-manual side organs that face each other across the church next to the Grace Chapel in the same bay at gallery height. In 1929 the Salzburg company Cäcilia attempted to incorporate the dome area into a unified organ concept. As third manual of an electro-pneumatic main organ enclosed in the historic Sonnholz case they added a Swell Organ (10 manual and 1 pedal stop) behind the Glory of the high altar. But because of its rasping sound it never satisfied the needs of a "choir organ" and was therefore completely removed in the course of the renovation of the high altar in the years 1997 to 2000.

As stipulated in the call for bids in 1997, modern liturgical practice made it necessary to build a larger organ for the eastern part of the church: "The basilica is divided by the Grace Chapel into two liturgical zones. The western part is the area for pilgrimage church services while in the eastern part with its newly designed liturgical area of presbytery, dome space and crossing, pastoral church services and sometimes very large liturgical ceremonies are celebrated. Since for a number of reasons it is not possible to use the west organ for celebrations in the eastern part of the church, this area will receive its own instrument." (Superior P. Karl Schauer, OSB)

The deliberations of the commission summoned by Superior P. Karl Schauer, OSB first dealt with possible locations such as a center axis position at the eastern side of the Grace Chapel or an historic two-sided concept such as realized in the Benedictine Monastery Church in Einsiedeln (Switzerland). Finally a decision was made for an organ on the north wall of the dome area where the instrument would be placed in the narrow space between the entrances to the two staircases leading to the lofts (round gable) and the north vestry (triangular gable). In order not to hinder the path of processions within the church a maximum depth of ca. 3ft. was imposed for the lower and the upper case of the new organ case including console, pipework and walkboards. Above the cornices of the doors a maximum width of ca. 15ft for the projected instrument was granted. The call for bids also explicitly stipulated a modern design for the front rather than an historicized one.

On the basis of convincing bids and design the Mariazell commission awarded Mathis Orgelbau the contract for the construction of the new Choir Organ in March, 1998.

Conception

The work on the physical aspect of the organ began by accommodating the stipulations of the commission: The pipes and chests had to heed the required external limitations and assumed a quasi cross form. The second manual (Präludiermanual) is situated above the console with swell shutters hidden by front pipes, the Great is centered above and flanked on either side by the pedal chests. The flat arrangement of the pipework and the resulting location of the wind chests enables an optimal distribution of sound and, because of very short mechanical connections a responsive and pleasant mechanical key action to perform upon: "As we sketched a wide range of possible front designs it became apparent that because of the location on only one side the organ front had to be as simple and flat as possible. To optically accommodate the required volume of the instrument we opted for a concave front display with ca. 3ft. depth on both sides. The layout of our final draft was simple and reflected contemporary trends without any embellishments. The harmonious shapes and details of the organ case should be decoration of themselves."

At the behest of the Liturgical and Cultural Commission of the diocese as well as the Austrian Heritage Body, protracted deliberations began with the basilica architect Wolfgang Feyferlik to determine the final form of the organ case. Using Feyferliks draft model a completely new design for the organ case was finally agreed upon and attained.

Due to the window opening to the west and the differing shapes of the gables above the doors Feyferlik was strictly opposed to a symmetrical organ case. He therefore designed a vertically positioned, slender quadratic column approximately 38ft. in height, into which he incorporated a horizontal asymmetrical element transversing the vertical organ case above the gables of the first level.

For the exterior structuring of the column of solid oak the architect chose a bar-code pattern with vertical wooden bars allowing best possible acoustical permeability. The sound of the integrated invisible Präludiermanual in a swell box is able to flow unhindered. Starting from a classically symmetrical five section model for the horizontal central body Feyferlik "folded" the flats at varying depths while at the same time shifting the centerline. The elements of the bar code pattern are finished in their natural wood color whereby the horizontal assembly is discreetly tinted in order to avoid "competing" with Fischer von Erlach's high altar.

The Choir Organ in the Mathis Orgelbau Studios

In the horizontal main case both wind chests of the Great are located behind the central front pipes of the 16' Principalbass of the pedal (as of F). The wind chests of the pedal (C and C-sharp respectively) are located in either of the sides with 8' Octavbass in the front. Easy access to the pipework with optimal sound emission is guaranteed: A side door enables access to the Great and Pedal where there is a convenient walkboard over the entire width of the organ between the folded front display and the conventionally situated wind chests. The largest pipes of the Great and Pedal lead into the upper section of the vertical column. The wind supply with main bellow and blower as well as the switches for the setter combination are located in a special room under the stairs leading to the north choir loft. To provide air for the organ wind this room is connected to the interior of the church by two drilled shafts.

"The specification is patterned on southern German and Austrian organs of the end of the 18th century and is best suited for the many demands placed on an instrument in a pilgrimage church. The large number of foundation stops characterized by a wide range of colors, dynamics and mutations, ideally equip the instrument for improvisation during liturgical services. Moreover the voicing is relatively soft due to the very narrow case. The Präluiermanual serves both as an alternative division to the Great and as accompaniment for soloists and therefore has swell capacity". (Markus Zepp)

Specification

I. Hauptmanual / C - g'''

Bourdon	16'
Principal	8'
Hohlflöte	8'
Gemshorn	8'
Octav	4'
Spitzflöte	4'
Quint	2 2/3'
Superoctav	2'
Mixtur IV-VI	1 1/3'
Cornet V	8'
Trompete	8'

II. Präluiermanual / C – g'''

Gedeckt	8'
Salicional	8'
Unda maris	8'
Principal	4'
Rohrflöte	4'
Dolce	4'
Waldflöte	2'
Quint	1 1/3'
Sesquialtera II	2 2/3'
Mixtur IV	1'
Oboe	8'
- Tremulant	

Pedal / C – f'

Principalbass	16'
Subbass	16'
Octavbass	8'
Gedecktbass	8'
Choralbass	4'
Posaune	16'
Trompete	8'

PM - HW, PM - PED, HW - PED

mechanical key and stop action with dual registration facility (electronic setter combination).