



Mathis Orgelbau AG CH-8752 Näfels

Görlitz/Germany, Sun Organ of the St. Peter and Paul Church



On 12. October, 1997, the Sun Organ was dedicated in the City Church of St. Peter and Paul in Görlitz. On this very day 300 years before, on 12. October, 1697, the city of Görlitz signed a contract with the organ builder Eugenio Casparini to build a new organ for the church of St. Peter and Paul that soon became famous as the «Sun Organ.»

The church of St. Peter and Paul stands on the bank of the Neisse River, today's border with Poland. That makes it the easternmost city church in Germany; it is also the largest house of worship as well as bishop's seat in the Silesian Oberlausitz region.

The Casparini organ was consecrated on 19. August, 1703. It had 57 stops with three manuals and pedal, making it the largest organ of the time in Silesia. It is noteworthy that there was no longer a Rückpositiv, which in this region at the end of the seventeenth century was gradually disappearing due to the interaction of choir and musical instruments in the performance practice of the time.



The beholder of the ca. 45ft. high and ca. 32ft. wide organ front is at first impressed by the two huge pedal towers, festooned with larger-than-life angels, in which the longest pipe of ca. 24ft. is contained. Designed by the Görlitz sculptor Johann Conrad Büchau, this case displays 17 sun faces with organ pipes arranged as rays and is unique in Germany for its integration of German Baroque form with Italian Renaissance. It has withstood completely intact throughout the centuries. Except for the 12-rank Pedal Mixture in the suns from which the organ derives its name and the Onda Maris (ocean waves) nothing remains of the original Casparini instrument.

In 1926 the instrument, which was no longer playable, was removed and, with the exception of the elements mentioned above, destroyed. It was replaced by an electro-pneumatic instrument built by the Sauer Company of Frankfurt on Oder. This Sauer organ with 89 stops, four manuals and pedal was in service less than fifty years. In 1978 as renovation of the church began and which lasted from 1980 to 1992 the nearly unplayable Sauer instrument was completely removed except for a few wooden pipes.

Years were spent deciding how to recreate the Sun Organ. The music director of the church, Reinhard Seeliger, writes in the Festschrift published on the occasion of the organ consecration in 1997: "It was a long way from the first drafts to the final specification. So many questions had to be answered. Should the new organ be a copy of the Casparini organ? Should there be a modern instrument in an old wrapping? How large should the new organ be? What kind of music would be played on it?"

"Only the case with the suns and angels as well as one single stop remained of the original Casparini organ. Appraisals of the instrument from the time ranged from high praise to crushing criticism. Not one of Eugenio Casparini's organs still exists. The extant technical data is so conflicting that it appeared unfeasible to construct an authentic copy of the Casparini Organ. There was also no option to recapture the sound of his organs well enough to enable recreating the original sound of the former instrument.

"The specification proposed by Reinhard Seeliger and Matthias Eisenberg was discussed in several meetings of a committee of specialists. Members of the committee were Dr. Christoph Albrecht (Berlin); Prof. Wolfgang Baumgratz (Bremen); Matthias Eisenberg (Keitum / Sylt); Rolf Lammert (Görlitz); Rev. Peter Lobers (Görlitz); Reinhard Seeliger (Görlitz) and Eberhard Völz, Görlitz.



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“The builder of the legendary precursor to the new organ, Eugenio Casparini, worked mainly in southern Germany, Austria and Italy, which led the church council to consider organ building companies mainly in this region. Around 20 companies in Germany, Austria and Switzerland were invited to refer to their representative instruments.

“On 1. May, 1994, the council decided to award the contract to Mathis Orgelbau in Näfels, Switzerland and on 12. May, the council commissioned the first stage of the construction of the Sun Organ.

“The anticipation was immense. 500 years after the construction of the St. Peter and Paul church and 300 years after Eugenio Casparini was granted his commission, a new organ was to resound that satisfied not only the demands of the liturgy but of an enormous range of concert music repertory. And the sound should reach every corner of the huge church interior.





“Taking all of this into consideration, deliberations were begun to decide what specification would be necessary to incorporate the one Casparini stop and the usable Sauer wooden pipes. It also seemed advisable to retain the inner construction of the former Casparini organ: the Great and the Oberwerk above it in the center, the Brustwerk above the console, and the Large, Small and Lateral Pedals on either side in the case. It was decided however not to copy the original pipework of Casparini for two reasons: There was hardly enough reliable source information or historical substance and the original specification too limiting for the demands placed today on an organ of such a prominent house of worship.



“The Casparini Onda Maris is now in the Oberwerk of the Sun Organ. It has engendered sagas in a manner similar to the Gabler Vox humana in the organ of the Weingarten convent near Lake Constance. This stop of cypress wood in combination with the 8' Principal produces a captivating empyreal timbre.



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“Today’s organists are delighted to find the stop names in the original old orthography. Supplementary special Baroque toy stops are the Nachtigall (imitating the singing of the nightingale), Vogelgesang (a stop which imitates the warbling of birds), Kuckuck (which imitates the call of the cuckoo bird) and Tamburo (funeral drums).”





The Görlitz Sun Organ was fully built, assembled and pre-voiced in the Näfels studios after which it was dismantled into hundreds of individual pieces and shipped to Görlitz. In the space of two months the instrument was installed in the historic case of the St. Peter and Paul church followed by 14 weeks of voicing by Hermann Mathis.

It was an enormous challenge for the entire staff of Mathis Orgelbau to build and install a new instrument in the imposing and legendary case of the Casparini organ, thereby bringing the magnificent case and front back to life. In tonal accord with its stunning exterior the new organ will become an integral part of the cultural and spiritual life of St. Peter and Paul's church and bear testimony to the cosmopolitan spirit of the city of Görlitz.

Günter Lade