

University of Michigan Historic Organ Tour 55

Jeffrey K. Chase

Professor Marilyn Mason's Historic Organ Tour 55 last July featured visits to Budapest, Vienna, Salzburg and Prague, all enchanting cultural capitals or significant cities of the former Hapsburg Empire. Participants, greeted by our excellent, handsome and witty guide Almar Otjes, assembled July 11 in Budapest, the city of caves, spas and coffeehouses, for the beginning of a musical and historical adventure replete with congenial camaraderie, noteworthy organs, historic sites, and interesting food and wine.

Budapest is also the home of the Aquincum Organ, the oldest known extant pipe organ in the world, dating from circa 228 A.D. and unearthed only in 1931. Its name derives from the ancient Romans' designation of its province (now known as Hungary) containing a plethora of thermal baths. This small organ is considered to be the prototype for all European organs. After this singular early appearance, the organ wasn't to reappear again in Hungarian lands for a millennium and a half—until the final defeat of the Ottoman Turks in 1686—because, under the domination of the Turks, churches were converted to mosques, where organs were forbidden.

Organs in Budapest

Eager to begin our itinerary, we proceeded directly from the airport to the organ at St. Antal, a church built in 1947, with a rather plain interior except for its ceiling of interestingly painted decoration. We were impressed by the good acoustics and clarity of organ sound. This organ, restored in the 1990s, lacks subtlety of sound and is, therefore, especially good for loud and bombastic music.

The largest church building in Budapest (and the second largest in Hungary) is St. Stephen's Basilica, built between 1857 and 1905. It is named to honor Stephen (c. 975–1038), the first King of Hungary, whose mummified fist is housed in its reliquary. Prior to playing this four-manual Angster/Rieger/Váradí and Son organ, we were introduced to its resident organist István Koloss (among whose teachers was Marcel Dupré), who demonstrated the organ. (It was also there that we were introduced to the young organist Norbert Balog, who assisted us on our visits to the other organs in Hungary on the itinerary.) Of special interest are this organ's horizontal copper trumpet pipes.

Other organs visited in Budapest were those in the churches of St. Anthony of Padua and of St. Anthony at Bosnyak Square; the four-manual Rieger organ (1902) in St. Peter's Franciscan Church; the neo-classic Empire-style Great Lutheran Church on Deák Square (the oldest Lutheran church in Budapest), which houses the first mechanical organ in Budapest; and St. Matthias Church, with its four-manual Rieger-Kloss organ.

Of particular interest was the new five-manual mechanical/electric action organ in the Bartók National Concert Hall. This fine organ, inaugurated in 2006, has 92 stops, 470 wooden pipes, 5,028 tin pipes, 1,214 reed pipes, and is one of the



Jerry Jelsema, Mary Morse, Marilyn Mason, Dana Hull, Ronald DeBlaney, Marian Archibald, Gale Kramer and Katharine Babcock happily ascending the steps to St. Florian Abbey on a rainy day (photo by Béla Fehér)

largest organs in Europe. A special feature is a *sostenuto* for all divisions. (See "A Concert Organ for the Béla Bartók Hall in Budapest," by Burkhard Goethe, *THE DIAPASON*, October 2008.)

Synagogues are rarely known for their organs because, unlike churches, synagogues rarely house an organ. But the very beautiful Great Synagogue in Budapest (also known as the Dohány Street Synagogue), with the largest seating capacity of any synagogue in Europe (1,492 seats for men and 1,472 seats for women), contains a 1996 Jehmlich of Dresden organ (Op. 1121) with two separate consoles. Both Franz Liszt (a Catholic) and Camille Saint-Saëns (a Jew) performed on the original organ in this synagogue.

Esztergom Basilica

Esztergom is one of the oldest towns in Hungary and was its capital from the 10th century until the mid-13th century. The red marble Basilica of the Blessed Virgin Mary Taken into Heaven and St. Adalbert, built from 1822 to 1869, is the main church of the Archdiocese of Esztergom-Budapest, the largest church building in Hungary, the third largest in Europe, and the seat of the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary. It is also the tallest building in Hungary, and its altarpiece depicting the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, by Michelangelo Grigoletti, is the largest painting in the world painted on a single piece of canvas.

This basilica's organ is an 1856 Mooser, currently undergoing renovation and enlargement. It has five manuals and (only) 85 of the planned 146 stops, and contains the largest organ pipes in Hungary (about 35 feet long). If completed as planned, it will be the largest organ in Hungary and the third largest organ in Europe. At the time of its construction in 1856, this organ was the largest in Hungary with 49 stops, 3,530 pipes and three manuals. The present instrument preserves several stops from the organ Liszt had played.

During some free time many attendees visited the house on Csalán Road, on

the Buda side of the Danube, which was Béla Bartók's last residence in Hungary. It is now a museum honoring Bartók's memory and displaying many of his collections and personal possessions.

Leaving Budapest on the way to Vienna, we visited the attractive Baroque Tihany Abbey and its two-manual organ in a nearly 250-year-old case. This monastery's deed of foundation is the oldest Hungarian document preserved in its original form. Although mainly written in Latin, it does contain some Hungarian words and expressions and is considered to be the oldest written linguistic record of the Hungarian language. Joined there by Prof. István Ruppert, we journeyed not far from Lake Balaton to a nearby winery owned by Prof. Ruppert's cousin, where we participated in a wine tasting and lunch. Satiated with good food and drink, we continued on to visit the three-manual organ at Zirc and then the 1989 Aquincum, Ltd., three-manual organ at the Holy Ghost Church in Győr, built during the Communist occupation.

Vienna

The twin-spired Votive Church in Vienna was built near the site of a failed assassination attempt on the life of young Emperor Franz Joseph in 1853. This church was constructed over 23 years (from 1856 to 1879) and, in commemoration and gratitude for the fact that Franz Joseph survived that attempt without even a scratch, his brother Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian (who later became Emperor Maximilian of Mexico) dedicated this church, whose name "Votive" means an offering given in thanks for deliverance from a hardship or difficult circumstances, as thanks for the survival of his brother.

The organ in the Votive Church is an 1878 Walcker with three manuals, 61 stops, and 3,762 pipes, mechanical action and cone valve chests. Damage during World War II necessitated restoration, and by 1952 Molzer had, with the exception of the wind supply, restored it to its original condition. Today it is regarded as one of the most distinguished historic landmarks of the art of European organ building. Our attendees had the good fortune of presenting a noontime concert on this organ.

That afternoon we took a side trip to Eisenstadt to visit the Esterhazy Palace, where Haydn had worked and which today houses the acoustically near perfect Haydn Saal; and, just up the street, we visited Haydn's house, which is now a museum containing Haydn memorabilia.

The next day contained a very full itinerary, with visits to organs in five churches and one concert hall. The first stop was Vienna's St. Stephen's Cathedral,



Interior of the impressive Bartók National Concert Hall in Budapest (photo by Béla Fehér)



A model of the 1996 restoration of the 228 A.D. Aquincum water organ on display in the Bartók National Concert Hall in Budapest (photo by Béla Fehér)

which houses two organs—a 1991 mechanical key and stop action four-manual Rieger organ, which is one of the largest instruments of its kind in Austria, and a 1960 Michael Kauffmann four-manual, 125-stop electric action organ with more than 9,000 pipes and which was financed by public donations (could this have been done today?!).

The Vienna Konzerthaus was opened in 1913 with a five-manual Rieger organ of 116 stops and electro-pneumatic action, which was restored in 1982. The lavishly decorated St. Charles Church (Karlskirche), begun in 1715 and completed in 1737, was commissioned by the Emperor Charles VI to thank God for answering his prayer to end the 1713 Black Plague. It is a splendid Baroque edifice designed to glorify the power and rights of the Habsburg Empire and contains an 1847 Seyberth organ that was restored by Hradetzky in 1989.

St. Michael's Church contains a three-manual, 40-stop gilded pipe organ (1714) by Johann David Sieber; the largest Baroque organ in Vienna, it was played by the 17-year-old Haydn in 1749. It was in this church that Mozart's *Requiem* was first performed as a memorial to its composer on 10 December 1791. In 1986–87 Jürgen Ahrend undertook a large-scale restoration of this instrument.

The Gustav-Adolph Kirche, named to honor a Swedish general who, in 1643,

Le Chemin de la Croix – Marcel Dupré Marilyn Mason, Organist

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Poetry of Paul Claudel

February 8, Baylor University, Waco, Texas
(Midwinter Organ Conference February 8–10)

February 15, Rosary Cathedral, Toledo, Ohio

March 9, Hill Auditorium, Ann Arbor, Michigan (8 pm)

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Bartók's desk, on which is displayed his typewriter and cylinder player, in the Bartók house in Budapest (photo by Béla Fehér)



Mary Morse, of Ann Arbor, Michigan, singing, and Steven Hoffman, of Cheyenne, Wyoming, accompanying on the organ in the Tyn Church in Prague (photo by Béla Fehér)

marched with his army to Vienna in the war of religions (the Thirty Years War), was built about 1835 and, seating 1,500 people with its double balconies (as has the Great Synagogue in Budapest), was the largest non-Catholic church in Austria. When it was built, Protestant churches were not permitted to have an entrance from the street, so the main entrance was off the yard (now it is on the street side). It contains a Carl Hesse two-manual, 32-stop tracker organ from 1848.

The Schottenkirche (The Scots Church) was originally built for the Irish Benedictines. (In the 12th century, when Ireland was known as "New Scotland," Irish monks were invited to come to Vienna from Regensburg.) Since that time the building has suffered many casualties, and the structure extant today is not the original church on this site, but a Baroque-style edifice built from 1638–1648. The altarpiece in the Lady Chapel contains Vienna's oldest votive painting of the Virgin. The great Baroque organist Johann Fux worked here about 1690. In this church on June 15, 1809, a memorial service, at which Mozart's *Requiem* was performed, was held for Joseph Haydn, who had recently died in Vienna. The Schottenkirche choir organ is a two-manual, 20-rank Mathis instrument from 1994. The main organ is now a three-manual, 49-rank Mathis instrument from 1995.

Salzburg

The next day was our abbey day as we drove from Vienna to the charming town of Salzburg, birth city of Mozart. Our first stop was at the twin-towered Augustinian Abbey of St. Florian, the largest abbey in Upper Austria, where the young Bruckner had been organist, where he had written many of his compositions, and where, at his request, he is buried under the organ he loved so dearly. There are three organs in the abbey. The great organ, an instrument built by the famous Slovenian organ builder Franz Xavier Kristmann in 1771, was one



Interior of the Great Synagogue in Budapest showing the double balconies (photo by Béla Fehér)

of the most monumental organs in the Central European region and, until 1886, was the largest organ in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. At Bruckner's instigation, in 1873 Matthäus Mauracher, Sr., rebuilt the organ to four manuals and 78 stops. Today, after two subsequent renovations, it has 7,386 pipes. An unusual feature of this instrument is that the reeds are not under expression.

The last abbey visited is the yellow Benedictine Baroque fortress Abbey Melk, constructed in the early 1700s. Of the great organ built by the Viennese builder Gottfried Sonnholz in 1731, only the case remains. In 1929 this organ was subject to "modernization." In 1970 a new instrument by Gregor Hradetzky of Krems with three manuals, 45 stops, and 3,553 pipes on slider chests was installed in the old case. The organ in the vestry was built in 1986 by the Reil Brothers of the Netherlands and placed in the existing baroque vestry cupboards.

A visit to old Salzburg is like a time warp into history. Nestled picturesquely in the Austrian Alps, Salzburg was a principality under the rule of its Archbishop until joining Austria in 1816. The Kajentanerkirche, constructed between 1685 and 1697 and incorporating an abbey and a hospital, was built for the Cajetan Order, whose purpose was to recall the clergy to an edifying life and the laity to the practice of virtue, and to combat the teachings of Martin Luther. This church contains a one-manual Christoph Egedacher organ from 1672 that was restored by Rieger in 1982.

Salzburg's Franciscan Church, the "people's church," experienced its last major renovation by the noted Salzburg architect Hans von Burghausen at the beginning of the 15th century. It is noted for its magnificent hall choir, which effectively reflects the fusion of light and darkness, one of this church's special features. The tower houses one of the oldest preserved bells made by the master bell-founder Jörg Glöppischer in 1468. The organ is a three-manual Metzler from 1989.

From there we walked the short distance to the Salzburg Cathedral, where we played the three-manual west gallery 1988 Metzler organ, and also the two-manual Pirchner pillar organ from 1991. That afternoon we took a side trip to the Shrine of Our Lady of Maria Plain, a place of pilgrimage for more than 300 years that is situated on a hilltop with a spectacular view overlooking Salzburg. Originally the home of a 1682 Egedacher instrument in its choir gallery, today it houses a 1955 two-manual organ built by Georg Westenfelder of Luxembourg based on the presumed disposition of the Egedacher organ. The existence of the original Egedacher pipes of the Copel 8' helped with the reconstruction. The hallmarks of the current organ are its marvelous sound and its sensitive action.

Organs in Prague

Surprisingly, with two exceptions, the organs we experienced in Prague were disappointingly undistinguished. When we arrived at St. Aegidius Church at about 4:20 on a Sunday afternoon, we

were informed that our recital was to begin in about 10 minutes, so, with no time to acclimate to the organ, we were "on stage" before the public. The recital went off well. That's show business!

St. Vitus Cathedral, a huge gothic church, was begun in the Middle Ages, but for various reasons completed only in 1929. Continuously full of tourists and the din of their footsteps and conversation, it is the home of a rather undistinguished Josef Meltzer three-manual organ built in 1929–31. From there we visited organs in St. Stephen's Church and in St. Nicholas Church, where we played another recital, but this time with the advantage of rehearsal time.

Our Lady of the Snow, founded by Charles IV in 1347, was intended to be the grandest church in Prague, but only the chancel was ever completed. This church played an important role in the history of the Hussites, who were the followers of Jan Hus, a pre-Luther Protestant reformer.

In contrast, it was a real treat to play the Johann Mundt (1632–90) two-man-

ual, 28-stop organ (1671–73) in a former Hussite church that is now called Church of Our Lady Before Tyn. Mundt, originally from Cologne, was one of the many foreigners who made Prague his home and who helped to shape the vibrant cultural life of this distinctive Bohemian metropolis in the north part of the Habsburg Empire. It is reported that when Mundt signed the contract for the construction of the Tyn Church organ, he claimed that this instrument would have no equal in the kingdom. The consensus is that this, the oldest pipe organ in Prague and one of the most representative 17th-century organs in Europe, was the organ jewel on the tour.

St. Ignatius, built from 1665–87, is a typical Baroque Jesuit church. Its stuccowork and statues of Jesuit and Czech saints are intended to awe people with the power of the Jesuit order.

The historic organ in SS. Simon and Judas, formerly a church and now a concert hall, was the last organ visited and the other Prague exception to organ mediocrity. It is reported that both Haydn and Mozart played this instrument. Not relative to organs but noteworthy was a Bentley with a boot on its tire parked outside the building. That was indeed a sight to behold! One would think that anyone who could afford a Bentley could afford to pay a ticket.

Like a meal with great food, with second and third helpings, the visits to the organ buffet in Budapest, Vienna, Salzburg and Prague, and the generosity of the respective resident organists, provided plenty of time to sample and savor the varieties and flavors of the various organs. ■

Jeffrey K. Chase is a practicing attorney in Ann Arbor, Michigan, with a concentration in the area of estate planning. He is a member of the bar of the United States Supreme Court. Prior to becoming an attorney, he earned a bachelor's degree in music literature and a master's degree in musicology. He has been a published feature writer and music critic for The Michigan Daily and The Detroit Free Press and has also written for High Fidelity, THE DIAPASON and The American Organist.

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