

INTRODUCTION

On a warm autumn evening in 2003, the members of Saint Cecilia Cathedral in Omaha, Nebraska, publicly unveiled a new pipe organ, designed and built over a period of five years by Austrian-born organ builder Martin Pasi and his small team of artisans from Roy, Washington. A monument of the organ building art, this instrument is nearly unique in its capability of playing in two distinct temperaments or tuning systems. At the time of its dedication, it was one of only a few organs in the world with this capability, and one of only two in the United States.¹ It was at the time the ninth modern organ in North America to be tuned in quarter-comma meantone temperament,² possessing eight pure major thirds and other intervallic properties indigenous to the music of the late Renaissance and early Baroque.³

The organ is not located, as one might expect, in a teeming academic center of organ culture or in a musical instrument museum, but in a Roman Catholic cathedral in the Midwestern United States, where it serves a Christian denomination not known in recent decades for its awareness and appreciation of its own vast treasury of

¹ The other example is the famous Fisk-Nanney organ at Stanford University. This instrument will be discussed in Chapter Two.

² Five other modern instruments were at the time tuned in a modified fifth-comma meantone tuning.

³ For a description of and data on the two temperaments employed in Pasi Opus 14, see Appendix Four.

liturgical art music. Moreover, the free, widespread access to this instrument in a metropolitan cathedral may seem incongruent with the pipe organ's indisputable place on the fringe of modern cultural life. The medieval "cosmic-conscious" worldview it once represented has been long-supplanted in both secular and ecclesial cultures of European extraction by the Enlightenment worldview of rationale certitude and self-consciousness.⁴ Since great organs continue to be built in both realms, however, they stand as anomalies and as audacious remnants of those places and times where faith and reason have been held in tension, if not joined hand in hand.

Such a place is Omaha, Nebraska; the time, a span of a century-and-a-half even up to the present moment. I will outline in Chapter One the entire history of the previous organs in the Roman Catholic cathedrals of Omaha, Nebraska, along with the musical practices and personages associated with them, in order to convey a sense of the historical and cultural milieu into which Martin Pasi's monumental Opus 14 has been received. Throughout the second and third chapters I will thread a discussion of the cultic (pertaining to worship) and the mythological (pertaining to belief) dimensions of this receptive culture as a basis for determining the disposition of the instrument, interpreting its meaning, and directing its use. I will thereby posit that the authority to determine whether or not a dual-tempered organ is justified rests with the community defined by the receptive cult and culture (i.e. the Roman Catholic Church).

⁴ Quentin Faulkner. *Wiser Than Despair: The Evolution of Ideas in the Relationship of Music and the Christian Church* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996), 215-224.

In Chapter Two, I will trace in great detail the development of Pasi Opus 14 as an idea, from its conception through its commission and design. I will not only recount the succession of events and decisions, but describe the processes by which ideas changed and matured during periods of intensive research and moments of enlightened discourse, both formal and informal.

Among the challenges faced by the organ builder and client during this period was the problem of honing the design so that it would not only exhibit great diversity and flexibility but also bear the marks of unity and economy. The distillation of the concept forced an articulation in both design and description of a distinction between the notions of eclecticism and stylistic synthesis (or “universality”). Moreover, the special feature of dual-temperament would have to be justified in terms that were either pragmatic (i.e. the “authentic” rendering of music intended for those tunings) or philosophical (i.e. the “embodiment” of *harmonia*)—or both. While I will not presume to settle this question, I will nevertheless hint strongly in Chapter Two at a path that might be taken in constructing a metaphysical apology for this or any other Catholic church organ.

The record of the organ’s initial reception in Chapter Three will surely demonstrate the practical success of Pasi Opus 14 and its two temperaments, but I will hold up recent historical research on the relationship between composed music and the properties of musical instruments to point to the ultimate irrelevance of such success. Usefulness will instead be considered in terms of the organ’s function as a purely musical medium.

Chapter Three will also be devoted to the story of the actual building and installation of the organ. This topic would be worthy of a formal study itself, together with a more extensive biography of the artisans and a thorough documentary of the organ's technical specifications. The current scope of this presentation will have to suffice for now.⁵

I will conclude this study by drawing attention to the unfinished elements of this extraordinary organ project and by suggesting avenues and topics for further research and documentation. These propositions, along with every use that will be devised for the organ hereafter, are examples of what might be considered the ethical dimension of an economic triad that includes the aforementioned cultic and mythological aspects. They are thus extensions of the artifact, which itself takes the ethical role in its triadic relationship with religion and culture. Those who will use and study Pasi Opus 14 in the future will thus participate in its creation as a “living” artifact of their religion and culture.⁶

⁵ Stop specifications, technical drawings, along with pipe scale and temperament data are provided here in Appendices One, Two, Three and Four.

⁶ I acknowledge Quentin Faulkner as my source of this understanding of the relationship between religion, culture and art. See Quentin Faulkner, “Gothic Pillars and Blue Notes: Art as a Reflection of the Conflict of Religions.” *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 1998): 18-46. I likewise acknowledge Fr. Michael Gutgsell for his etymological “unpacking” of the word *ars* and its derivatives (such as “articulation”—fitting or joining together).