A Symphonic Organ in the Cradle of the Symphony
The new Rieger Organ in the Golden Hall of the Music Society in Vienna

Introduction

For centuries, Vienna, the capital of Austria, has been regarded by many as Europe's music capital. It is here that the symphony was developed as a musical form by composers such as Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. So pervasive was the symphony in the development of Western art music that it not only dominated creative music-making until well into the 20th century, but also worldwide became the most common adjective describing orchestras and concert halls. It is also used to denote a style of organbuilding that developed towards the end of the 19th century, when organs were often used as substitutes for orchestras, and organ recitals in secular venues usually included orchestral transcriptions. With the fortunes of fashion being cyclical, the merits of symphonic organs were queried in the mid-20th century, often by their detractors. However, in recent years, one has come to realize that their salient qualities can be combined successfully with more traditional organ elements to create instruments of great versatility, warmth and beauty. Such an organ has just been installed in Vienna, the birthplace of the symphony.

Vienna is also the city in which the performance of music was first democratized. In 1812, as a result of cooperation between citizens and the nobility, the Society of the Friends of Music was founded, through which a platform was created for performing concerts by anyone for everyone. Previously, secular concerts of this nature had primarily been restricted to stately homes, so this was the start of Vienna's world-renowned civic musical life, and of a tradition that continues to flourish.

A major step along this civic cultural road was the building of the Music Society's concert hall in 1870 on ground that had become available following the demolition of the old city walls. The architect of this building, known locally as the *Musikverein*, was Theophil Hansen, who also created other impressive civic buildings along the famous Ring Road that replaced the demolished fortifications.

The Musikverein is an imposing building in neoclassical style that houses a number of facilities, amongst which is the Grand Hall that many regard as Europe's most acoustically perfect concert hall. It is also undoubtedly one of the most beautiful. Its rich decorations and abundant gilding are opulent, yet not overbearing, resulting in the hall being referred to colloquially as the Golden Hall. At the rear of the stage, Hansen designed an organ case that visually forms the hall's focal point, with a design derived from the form of a Greek temple. Behind this historic façade, a completely new organ has been installed by the leading Austrian organbuilding firm, Rieger Orgelbau (www.rieger-orgelbau.com); the festive inaugural concert took place on March 26, 2011 in the presence of leaders of the Austrian state, church, and civil society. This magnificent instrument complements the fame and beauty of its setting and is a fine addition to the musical infrastructure of a city that is already, world-wide, at the apogee of civic music activity.

Mechanical console

Electric console (mobile)

Inaugural concert

The inaugural concert was played by the five leading European organists, who, together with two officials of the Music Society, had formed the committee that had awarded the contract to Rieger and overseen the project.

Given the organ's significant and prominent location, this committee had specified a versatile instrument whose primary focus was for use together with orchestras, both as an instrument within the orchestral ensemble and as orchestral soloist, i.e., a symphonic organ; but also one that would do justice to the 'classical' organ literature. For these reasons, the organ was, among other things, to have two consoles—one mobile that could be placed amongst the members of the orchestra, and a second, with tracker action, on the cantilevered balcony above the orchestra.

Following the formalities by the Society's dignitaries, including a speech by the president of Rieger, Wendelin Eberle, the music-making began. A fanfare by brass players from the Vienna Symphony Orchestra symbolically heralded the King of Instruments into the Golden Hall, there to be enthroned above the stage.

The first recitalist was **Peter Planyavsky**, former organist of St. Stephan's Cathedral in Vienna and professor at the Vienna Music University. Planyavsky presented a brilliant improvisation to illustrate a selection of colors from the organ's vast tonal palette. Being symphonic in character, the organ has a rich variety of possibilities, ranging from the delicately soft to the majestic, and including an array of solo stops—flutes, reeds and mutations.

The second performer was **Ludger Lohmann**, professor of organ and cathedral organist in Stuttgart, who gave an impressive rendering of J. S. Bach's *Toccata, Adagio and Fugue in C Major*, BWV 564, using the attached mechanical-action console. This work demonstrated the beauty of the 'classical' diapason choruses that form the foundation of this organ, and combine effortlessly with its symphonic nature. The principal stops of these choruses blend admirably to form one sound and are crowned by glorious mixtures that add brilliance and clarity to the contrapuntal lines of the music without ever becoming overbearing or harsh. The organ's copious reed stops made it possible for Lohmann to select ones that, in the Germanic tradition, added color while retaining the music's transparency and lightness of texture. The direct action and responsiveness of the mechanical console allowed the organist to articulate his playing in a way that suited the Baroque style admirably.

Martin Haselböck, internationally known as conductor of performances on original instruments with the Wiener Akademie, recitalist and organ professor, led the audience into the Romantic era with Franz Liszt's *Prelude and Fugue on B.A.C.H.* This piece enabled him to demonstrate the organ's symphonic versatility and ability to swell in sound from the softest whisper to the point where it convincingly fills the hall. Playing from the detached console on stage, Haselböck made the audience forget that a few moments earlier they had been listening to a superb Baroque sound, as they were introduced to rich foundation stops, impressive chorus reeds, and convincing string-toned colors. The full organ's sound, based on a foundation of 32' stops, resonated majestically around the hall as the exciting piece came to its conclusion.

The next recitalist, **Gillian Weir**, the doyenne of English organists, who was honored for her contributions to organ music with the title Dame Commander of the British Empire in 1996, illustrated convincingly how the new organ accommodates challenging 20th-century repertoire by playing Olivier Messiaen's "Alleluias sereins d'une âme qui désire le ciel" from *L'Ascension* and "Dieu parmi nous" from *La Nativité du Seigneur*. Her use, amongst others, of the Swell reeds—with their leaning towards the Gallic tradition—lent authenticity to this challenging music, as did her judicious choice of mutations for solo passages.

Olivier Latry, professor at the Paris Conservatoire and titular organist of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, France, played Alexandre-Pierre-François Boëly's *Fantasy and Fugue in B Major* and the first and last movements of Charles-Marie Widor's *Organ Symphony No. 5 in F Minor*. His faultless and seemingly effortless renderings of these demanding works enchanted the audience. The set of variations contained in Widor's first movement gave the capacity audience of more than 2,000 further insights into the kaleidoscopic tonal variety attainable from the new Rieger organ.

The state-of-the-art technology of the playing aids, available on both consoles, of which more is said below, made it easy to accommodate the diverse needs of the five organists, who followed each other at the consoles in quick succession. The listener was also left with a sense of admiration for the way in which the organ's stops have been scaled and voiced. The choice of pipe scales has resulted in the sound having sufficient fundamental tone for what is a very large hall, even when filled to capacity, without becoming turgid; care has also been taken to balance the constituent stops of the various choruses to ensure the seamless blending of their individual components. Furthermore, the voicing has resulted in clean, clear speech and a remarkable purity and evenness in tonal quality.

Tonal design

As mentioned above, the tonal design of the new organ is essentially symphonic. This term implies tonal warmth from a wealth of foundation stops, adequate numbers of which are string toned, a diversity of colors, including imitations of orchestral instruments, a wide volume range, and smooth crescendi and diminuendi. However, this style of organbuilding, stemming from the Romantic period, is also associated with less favorable characteristics, viz. tonal qualities that obscure part-playing in contrapuntal music, inadequate primary organ tone, i.e., insufficient

View from the electric console up to the gallery

Stop tabs

stops of principal or diapason tone, insufficient upperwork and lack of brilliance, sluggish speech that impedes articulation, and thus, overall, the inability to do justice to the compositions of seminal organ composers, such as J. S. Bach.

In designing the Musikverein organ, Rieger was careful to capture the merits of the symphonic style while avoiding the excesses that led to the demise of such instruments in the 20th century. Accordingly, as already alluded to, the tonal core of each division of the Musikverein organ is a finely balanced principal chorus crowned with classical mixtures that impart the silvery brilliance required for playing much of the classical literature. In addition, the organ has three 32′ stops, fifteen stops at 16′ pitch and thirty-six 8′ stops, which in total ensure that its tone has the golden warmth and fullness required of a symphonic organ.

There are 21 reed stops of varying colors and strengths, some—in the Solo division—on high wind pressure; sufficient mutation stops; a mounted Cornet on the Hauptwerk, and the stops necessary for creating a *Cornet Séparé* on each of the Swell and Solo Organs. The 86 speaking stops are divided over four manual divisions and pedal, three of which (Orchesterwerk, Swell, and Solo) are enclosed to give the maximum possible dynamic range.

The imposing Hauptwerk's comprehensive principal chorus is matched by a battery of trumpet-toned reeds at 16′, 8′ and 4′ pitch, whose characters lean towards the Germanic. In contrast, the chorus reeds of the large Swell Organ are modestly French in nature.

An interesting feature of the organ is the large Orchesterwerk division that was conceived to house stops that would blend exceptionally with actual orchestral instruments. The Orchesterwerk division has its own pedal stops contained within its swell box, based on a 32′ Subbass, to ensure that the dynamics of the pedal and manual sections are precisely aligned with each other. Although from the specification it would appear that no provision has been made for the traditional Positive organ that many would regard as important for playing much of the classical literature, compensation for this is made on the fourth manual: the Solo division contains a bright secondary principal chorus, alongside the expected solo reeds and flutes.

The organ's layout

The organ is favorably situated directly behind the orchestra, its close proximity ensuring the maximum possible blending of the sound of these two partners. Physically, the base of the organ is at the level of the conductor's podium, but is concealed by the raked seating of the orchestral musicians, which visually shortens the actual 36-foot height of the instrument. At the 'basement' level, two of the organ's blowers are situated, as also a number of wind reservoirs and trunking. Above this, at the level of the rearmost musicians, one finds the enclosed Orchesterwerk division and its accompanying pedal section—meaning that there is literally no gap between the orchestra and this part of the organ.

The 'lower story' of the organ is hidden behind an elegant white screen, decorated with panels containing pairs of griffons, and is framed by six ornate gilded pillars that lead the eye upwards to the organ balcony and 'upper story' that they appear to support.

The main Pedal stops are placed at the lower level on either side of the Orchesterwerk division, with the longest pipes at the extreme left and right, rising up into the upper story, e.g., those of the full-length Kontraposaune 32′. In contrast, the open wooden pipes of the Kontrabass 32′ are mounted horizontally against the rear wall of the organ, behind the Orchesterwerk swell box, with the longest being mitered to fit them into the 30-foot width of the organ case.

The gallery that visually separates the lower and upper stories of the organ case provides the space for the mechanical action console. In order that organists using this console should not be isolated from the sound of the stops on the level below them, tonal passages have been constructed to link the two levels, those from the Orchesterwerk swell box appropriately being fitted with swell shutters.

The Hauptwerk is to be found in the central position behind the façade pipes that were grouped by Hansen into three classical sections (which always have been, and remain, silent). The prominent position of the Hauptwerk, raised above the stage, allows this important division to speak directly into the body of the hall, as is fitting for the core of the organ. Behind the Hauptwerk and to either side are the Swell Organ and Solo Organ, each in their respective boxes. These, to-

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Vienna Musikverein, Golden Hall 2011

Orchesterwerk (expr.) I. C–c4
16′ Liebl. Gedackt
8′ Geigenprincipal
8′ Viola da Gamba
8′ Salicional
8′ Wienerflöte
8′ Blockflöte
8′ Holzgedackt
4′ Octave
4′ Viola
4′ Gedecktflöte
2′ Octave
2′ Mixtur IV
2⅔′ Harm. aeth. II–V
16′ Fagott
8′ Euphonium
8′ Oboe
Klarinette
Tremulant

Hauptwerk II. C–c4
16′ Principal
16′ Violon
8′ Principal
8′ Flûte Major
8′ Gamba
8′ Gedackt
8′ Gemshorn
4′ Octave
4′ Salicional
4′ Spitzflöte
2⅔′ Quinte
2′ Superoctave
2⅔′ Großmixtur IV–VI
1⅓′ Mixtur IV–V
8′ Cornet V
16′ Trompete
8′ Trompete
4′ Trompete

Swell (expr.) III. C–c4
16′ Salicet
8′ Principalviolon
8′ Gambe
8′ Aeoline
8′ Voix céleste
8′ Flûte harm.
8′ Bourdon
4′ Flûte oct.
4′ Fugara
2⅔′ Nazard harm.
2′ Octavin
1⅗′ Tierce harm.
1′ Sifflet
2′ Fourniture V
16′ Basson
8′ Trompette harm.
8′ Hautbois
8′ Clairon harm.
8′ Voix Humaine
Tremulant

Solo (expr.) IV. C–c4
16′ Quintatön
8′ Diapason
8′ Flauto Amabile
8′ Doppelflöte
4′ Prestant
4′ Traversflöte
2⅔′ Nasard
2′ Flöte
1⅗′ Terz
1⅓′ Larigot
1⅓′ Mixtur IV
8′ Englischhorn
8′ Tromp. Royal
8′ Tuba

Pedal C–g1
32′ Kontrabass
16′ Kontrabass
16′ Violonbass
16′ Salicetbass
8′ Octavbass
8′ Flöte
4′ Flöte
2⅔′ Rauschpfeife III
32′ Kontraposaune
16′ Posaune
16′ Fagott
8′ Trompete
4′ Clairon

Orchesterpedal (expr.)
32′ Subbass
16′ Subbass
8′ Violon
8′ Gedackt
16′ Bassklarinette

Accessories:
Rieger Combination System
• 20 users, with 1,000 combinations with 3 inserts each
• Archive for 250 tracks with 250 combinations each
4 Crescendi, adjustable
Sostenuto
3 free couplers
Sequencer
Copy functions
Repeat functions
Division off
General off
Unisons off

Consoles:
Main console (mechanical)
Mobile console (electric)

Mechanical couplers:
Ow/Hw 8′, Sw/Hw 8′, So/Hw 8′
Sw/Ow 8′, So/Ow 8′, So/Sw 8′,
Ow/P 8′, Hw/P 8′, Sw/P 8′, So/P 8′

Electric couplers:
Ow/Hw 8′, Sw/Hw 8′, So/Hw 8′, Sw/Ow 8′, So/Ow 8′, So/Sw 8′, Ow/Ow 16′, Ow/Ow 4′ Sw/Sw 16′, Sw/Sw 4′, So/So 4′
Sw/Hw 16′, Sw/Hw 4′, Ow/Hw 16′, Ow/Hw 4′, Ow/Ped 4′, Sw/Ped 4′

Special features:
Rieger Tuning System
Rieger Replay System
Divided Pedal (electric console)
Manual Change I–II (electric console)
Transposing Manual
MIDI

Wind pressures:

Pedal	100mm	
Hauptwerk	85mm bass	105mm treble
Swell	80mm bass	90mm treble
Solo	75mm bass	90mm treble
Orchesterwerk	75mm bass	90mm treble
Orchesterpedal	80mm	

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