Swedish impressions of Eastman’s EROI Festival 2008

Jerker Sjöqvist, translated by Fredrik Tobin

The Swedish Organ Society (Svenska Orgelbibeln) came to the United States October 16–22 to attend concert highlights of the Eastman-Rochester Organ Initiative, which focused on the new Craighead-Saunders Organ built by GOArt of Sweden. They then traveled to New York and Philadelphia for an additional taste of American organbuilding.

In March 1771, Adam Gottlob Casparini (1715–1786) delivered a magnificent organ to the Polish Dominican Holy Ghost Church in Vilna, Lithuania. The organ, the only surviving example of this productive Prussian organbuilder’s larger instruments, has miraculously been preserved intact in a world of war and political conflict. World War II and the political situation during the Soviet era undoubtedly played a part in the organ’s preservation from major renovations during the 20th century.

In 1962, Swedish organist Goran Grahn (well-known organ consultant and Secretary of the International Society of Organbuilders, ISO) made this major discovery during one of his many journeys in the Baltic countries. He came into contact with a local organ expert, Rimantas Guica, who had been taking care of the organ, which by that point was a more or less unusable treasure. Money was in short supply, and there were many bureaucratic obstacles that slowed the progress of the restoration project. After being tipped off about the instrument, Göteborg Organ Art Center (GOArt), Sweden, became involved and made a deal with the Lithuanian Department of Culture in 1996 to document the organ. This technical documentation during the next three years was done by Nicklas Fredhedin of the Swedish National Heritage Board, in cooperation with local scholars and organbuilders.

The project thereafter ran on two distinct tracks. One track was the restoration of the original organ by Lithuanian conservators, but to date they have only restored the organ case, with the rebuilding of the bellows, windchests, and action to be done under the supervision of an organ consultant. There is still insufficient money to restore the pipework, but many are hard at work to realize the goal of a completely restored organ.

The second track is based on the new documentation more recently done by a team of American organbuilders and the Eastman School of Music, whose Hans Davidson, professor of organ, was a driving force behind this project. The school runs an ambitious program called the Eastman-Rochester Organ Initiative (EROI), which with GOArt has built a school runs an ambitious program called a driving force behind this project. The Hans Davidsson, professor of organ, was the Eastman School of Music, whose documentation more recently done by are hard at work to realize the goal of a money to restore the pipework, but many schools and organbuilders.

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The console makes clear that this organ’s origin is from the Lithuanian region of mines and smithies.

Swedish visitors together with Hans Davidson at the console

Hans Davidson and Harald Vogel in front of the façade

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Born in 1940, Jerker Sjöqvist is a former teacher, organist and choirmaster, cells and recorder player. He visited the UK for the first time in 1977, and started his own Kusnitz group, which appeared on 206 titles in Sweden, Italy, Austria, Germany, and the UK. He brought about 200 Swedish chamber choirs to Cambridge in the 1990s for choir training, and arranged tours in Sweden and Norway for St. John’s College Choir, Cambridge. He has written reviews on organ and choral music, and has arranged tours across Europe, including three organ tours with American organists’ Matthews, Prettin to Ostfiedersil and Bach organists in Sachsen (Germany) and Alkmaar, a Dutch organ tour with Jacques van Oortmerssen, a 2007 tour to Paris, and last fall a USA tour in cooperation with the late Joel Kastin. He was a number of the board and treasurer of the Swedish Union of Organists 1990–2005, and since 2004 has been treasurer of the Swedish Society of Organ Friends.