

**Lecture given at the ISO Symposium
“How to win new friends for the pipe organ”
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by Michael Grüber

Ladies and gentlemen! It is both a great pleasure and an honour to speak before you here today. In my organ management function I deal professionally with many aspects of the organ. I myself worked for a little as an organ builder, and I am very conscious of the fact that I am speaking here before an audience of specialists and businessmen. Nevertheless I have chosen for my theme a somewhat philosophical title: The organ – sound of the soul.

It is the organ which has brought us all together this weekend here in Amsterdam. It is our interest in the organ which unites us. The organ is the passion that we all have in common. Aside from all its artistic aspects, its architecture, the technical aspects and the work of the craftsman, the organ is still predominantly a musical instrument; a medium – a link between below and above. That's the reason for my somewhat lofty title – sound of the soul. What is the FUNCTION of art and music? To MOVE people. To appeal to them. To lead them into a higher dimension. This appeal is not made in an intellectual way. It is an emotional one - addressed to the feelings. To our innermost being, using the finest of arts, music. It is for this, ladies and gentlemen, why those of us who are gathered here work together all over the world: organ builders, composers, organists, producers, publishers, managers. We work together on the fine arts so that music becomes sound and reaches out to people. What would life be without the wonderful works of classical music, without J.S. Bach? Would we even sing in the church service if we didn't have the organ? What would a service be, a ceremony without music? Now you see, ladies and gentlemen, the direction I am going in: Organ – sound of the soul.

I am still optimistic, notwithstanding all our current problems for our instrument and for our future! As long as there are people, as long as we live together in a culture, there will be the profound yearning of man for harmony and for beauty. This is where music belongs and this is where the organ belongs also.

Now, I do not want to paint everything in positive colours, as in the end it's not only the soul that needs to sound out, but for those of us for whom the organ is our bread and butter, the cash-register too.

Of course, organ-building has become more difficult in Europe, especially in Germany. Or were we just too spoilt in the past 40 to 50 years? The wondrous thousand-year link between organ and church has become a problem, and we must find a way to coping with it. Globally everything has been displaced. This is a reality we must live with and react to. Today, classical and traditional church music is played not just here in Europe but also in Asia, Africa, Latin America and of course the USA. Organ music flourishes in Japan, in Korea, in China, in Russia, old music and wonderful Bach interpretations on historic instruments with Massaki Suzuki in Japan. There is not a music course at a German University without students from Asia. Hardly any students of church music at all.

That is the reality, ladies and gentlemen. The problems are far-reaching. We cannot change the world. For myself, with our company ORGAN promotion, I have reacted to this global change and taken up the challenge. I can assure you that interest in the organ internationally is really dynamic.

I myself studied church music with organ as my major, then culture management, and for 18 years I have been working independently in organ management. What started off as a small, compact, computer file of German addresses has grown in 18 years into an international distribution list with over 30,000 addresses of all important organists, organ teachers, organbuilders, universities and specialist publications worldwide in an intensive, digital interchange. Our courses and study-tours are well frequented by increasingly and predominantly international participants. These days we set off on Organ Tour Germany with 50 Organists from the USA, New Zealand, Great Britain and Korea. Our CDs are sold increasingly outside the Federal Republic. The stream of organ-lovers enquiring about organ/culture trips from cultural associations' und travel agencies is becoming a river. This year already we have had a Day of the Organ in Cologne and in Strasbourg, and in the fall we are off on an organ tour of the cathedral organs in The Rhineland, starting at Speyer, then going via Mainz to Cologne. The programme for 2008 and 2009 contains at least one event per month. The list of applications for our annual organ tour to Paris in the week after Easter is getting longer and longer. The same applies to our organ trip to Majorca and our Organ Tour Germany 2008 from Dresden to Brandenburg and Berlin.

Ladies and gentlemen, the interest in the organ is still there. It's just that the public, or rather the market – to take a phrase from the economists – has changed. This applies to recitals too. The pure organ recital with a classical church-music programme ranging from prelude and fugue, choral preludes, up and down through all the keys and chorales – has got harder. These days it's the event, the night of the organ, the organ marathon, organ mix and crossover with instruments, or a programme with arrangements for organ from opera, operetta and symphony. Once you get out of the narrow church context, you have a fully-booked concert hall, or a concert with an audience of 500, 1000 or even 2000. Why not? I can confirm this for example from my current projects with the concert halls of Essen and Budapest.

All of a sudden the TV channel Gateway4, Kika Kinderkultur Hamburg, is showing interest in the „Queen of Instruments“, already extensive projects will be running from this fall with great media attention with „Little Amadeus and the Organ“ and we are doing the opening event from 11th of October to the 13th with „P. P. Planyavsky and Little Amadeus“ in Regensburg.

My goal is to open up and publicise the organ. I have been working on this for 30 years as an organist and in organ management with ever greater enthusiasm.

As you see, ladies and gentlemen, numerous positive signals, and absolutely no cause for pessimism. On the contrary! Let's move with the times on the path of our wonderful tradition. We won't stumble on it, if we remain flexible and open to what's new.

Our vocation is art and music, the organ. Vocation is combined with passion. Let us work together in this passion so that in future the sound of the soul can still be heard.



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