

**Lecture given at the ISO Symposium
“How to win new friends for the pipe organ”
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Organs in Museums: Problems and Opportunities for Organbuilders

First, on behalf of the Organ Historical Society I congratulate the International Society of Organbuilders on your jubilee. The OHS recently celebrated its own fiftieth birthday, so our societies can look back together over half a century of progress in promoting pipe organs. But still, we need continually to remind people of the importance of organs, not only as musical instruments but also as cultural symbols and as products of artful design and sophisticated technology, today even involving computers. Because the number of persons who regularly hear pipe organs in churches has declined greatly over the past 50 years, and audiences for organ recitals remain relatively small (despite local successes), we must continually find other ways to introduce organs to the public, and especially to children, who have so many competing interests.

One way is through partnership with museums. Along with tourism and the entire leisure industry, museum attendance has grown very much since the 1950s. Indeed, it could be said that museums have taken the place of churches for some people, providing them with spiritual renewal in a secular setting. Today the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York attracts about five million visitors each year, and the worldwide total of museum visits is many millions. Most significant for us is that many museums of art, history, ethnography, and technology collect musical instruments, sometimes including organs. The Metropolitan Museum, for example, owns at least a dozen organs, from a Nuremberg *Kistorgel* dated 1598, to Thomas Appleton's masterpiece built in Boston in 1830, to a 1950s Holtkamp in the Museum's auditorium.

Organs can also be seen in other important museum collections around the world, including those in Berlin, Boston, Brussels, Den Haag, Halle, Edinburgh, Hamamatsu, Leipzig, London, Munich, Nuremberg, Oxford, Paris, Rome, St. Petersburg, Vienna, and Washington. Many smaller museums and historical sites also display organs, for example at the fine museum of automatic musical instruments in Utrecht, and of course at Amsterdam's Orgelpark (both, incidentally, housed in converted churches). A committee of UNESCO's International Council of Museums coordinates the activities of instrument collections worldwide; information about this International Committee of Musical Instrument Museums and Collections, or CIMCIM, is available on the Web at www.icom.org/cimcim.

Organs in museums generally fall into two categories: those installed in their auditoriums and intended as concert instruments, and those that belong in the collections; these latter might be seldom heard. However, the 1929 Wurlitzer theatre organ in Berlin, the 1830 Appleton in New York, the 1630 Maria Thalkirchen organ in the Deutsches Museum, and the automatic organs in Utrecht (among others) are exceptional because although they belong to the collections, they are regularly

played. Concert organs in American museums include ones by Skinner, Holtkamp, and Flentrop (famously, at Harvard University's Adolphus Busch Hall, formerly the Busch-Reisinger Museum), as well as several Aeolian player organs.

The 1800 Tannenberg at Old Salem in North Carolina, recently restored by Taylor & Boody, is particularly unusual because, although it still owned by its original church, it is now situated in a purpose-built auditorium apart from Old Salem's collections. Also unusual is the Italian baroque organ installed at the University of Rochester (New York) Memorial Art Gallery; this organ belongs to the Eastman School of Music and is regularly used for teaching as well as concerts. These two loans of historical organs, one from a church and one from a conservatory, exemplify valuable partnerships with museums.

Older European museums possibly have fewer concert organs because not many of their buildings have suitable auditoriums. But some palaces, great homes, and churches that have been converted to educational uses still retain their original organs. Not all of these instruments receive the attention they deserve, but the Orgelpark offers a model for presenting them attractively to the public.

Ordinarily in museum collections, we find small organs, or only decorative façades or consoles; some examples are the late fourteenth-century organ case in the State Historical Museum in Stockholm, the famous 1526 Emedensis case in Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, and the Cavallé-Coll console from Ste-Clothilde, now in Antwerp's Vleeshuis Museum. Many chamber organs in museum collections are anonymous and unrestored; therefore they are commonly overlooked by organ historians as well as by organ builders and players. Also worth closer study, particularly for their ingenuity and repertoire, are many interesting large and small barrel organs, and organs in clocks and combined with pianos. These instruments especially offer problems as well as opportunities for ISO members. For example, the splendid organized piano built in 1783 in St. Petersburg by the Danziger Johann Gabrahn, and now displayed in Pavlovsk, contains the oldest known free-reed rank, which (as Niklas Fredriksson's research has shown) certainly deserves detailed examination and reconstruction. But our Russian colleagues are understandably reluctant to have this unique masterpiece taken apart for study.

Unfortunately, few museums, even those specializing in music, employ curators or conservators who are knowledgeable about organs. Therefore their catalogue descriptions are often incomplete or inaccurate. Of course, the best way to learn about organs in museums is to examine them directly, but curators are usually not happy to have organs taken apart, sampled, measured, and photographed by outsiders, especially if they suspect that the information is wanted for commercial purposes, or the examiners are unqualified. But most museums do welcome the advice of organ experts and are grateful for their help with documentation and conservation. At the same time, professional museum conservators are often eager to share their knowledge and scientific facilities, for example for identification and analysis of materials, dendrochronology, and treatment of metal corrosion and leather deterioration.

Here, then, is an opportunity for cooperation between the ISO and the museum community. I suggest that a committee of ISO members who have experience with scientific documentation and conservation, go to CIMCIM with a five-part proposal. First, to make a census of all organs in museums and historical sites worldwide. Existing national and regional surveys may be incomplete in this regard because many small organs in museums are kept in storage or are uncatalogued and so have been overlooked. Second, to identify these organs' makers or establish dates and places of origin if these are unknown, and to determine the organs' condition—whether they are mostly original or have been much altered or are in danger of deterioration. Third, to work together with curators and conservators in documenting historical organs by scientific methods, like those employed by GOArt and Chalmers University, so that accurate data can be collected and made accessible in standard formats. These data can be useful not only to museums but also in informing your own work.

Fourth, the ISO can recommend and assist with restoration of some well-preserved organs for purposes of visual display, audio recording, and live performances. Everyone benefits if interesting organs can be seen and heard by museum visitors, especially in the context of related works of art and craft. Also valuable are interactive educational exhibits that show how organs work. Children especially enjoy full-size working models of tracker actions, slider chests, hand-pumped bellows, and so on. Perhaps, following the example of Gerard Pels, other ISO members would offer to provide some working models to museums for display near the organs; making these models would be a useful exercise for apprentices.

Finally, ISO and CIMCIM together can try to find and preserve organs outside museums that are neglected or are in danger of bad restoration, or of being stolen or thrown away. These risks are common especially in third-world countries and in former Soviet states, where many organs remain in danger of theft, either for sale as antiques or for scrap metal. Your vigilance can help prevent these losses, because organs that are documented and brought to the attention of museum officials are less likely to be targeted by thieves and vandals—at least I hope so.

In offering these suggestions I invite the ISO to look toward the future, to cultivate new audiences for the organ outside of churches, both by making better use of instruments that already exist in museums and by bringing more organs under curatorial supervision. Your advice and cooperation will be greatly appreciated by your museum colleagues, and so I thank you in anticipation of your efforts over the next 50 years. Remember that the organs you build today will someday be historical, so now is the time to encourage the popular appreciation of your craft.

Thank you again.