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Correo electrónico: musicat.web@gmail.com
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THE JOSEPH NASSARRE ORGANS OF MEXICO CITY CATHEDRAL AND THE ARCHIVAL RECORD: TOWARDS A BROADENED SENSE OF ORGAN RESTORATION IN MEXICO

Edward Charles Pepe

Independent Scholar, Oaxaca, Mexico

The Archive of the Mexico City Cathedral Chapter (*Archivo del Cabildo Catedral Metropolitano de México*, hereafter ACCMM) has been known for many years to constitute an invaluable source of information concerning the music performed in one of Latin America's most important churches. It is thus surprising how infrequently it has been mined for materials relating to the numerous organs that have graced that institution's spaces through the centuries.¹

Organ-related documents can be found principally in two areas—the *Actas de Cabildo* or chapter acts and the *Fábrica material*—as well as in other miscellaneous groups of documents within the archive. In Part 1 of this article, I will concentrate on one group of documents preserved there relating to the pair of historic organs (Epistle and Gospel) that still serve the cathedral. In Part II,

I will shift to an organological perspective (an interdisciplinary ploy reflecting a desire to understand the instruments from various points of view) to consider the organs themselves and to examine the relationship between these two sources of information. In an effort to advance the debate in Mexico concerning the future of its historic organs and, perhaps, to expand its horizons, I will conclude with some thoughts on restoration there today.

BACKGROUND

The reader will have noticed that the title of this article attributes both of the existing organs in Mexico City Cathedral to Joseph Nassarre. To some, this may come as a surprise. Because the Gospel (Archdean's) organ (NB: geographically west in Mexico City Cathedral) was built completely new in 1734-35, there is no disagreement

(1964), pp. 111-35. Unfortunately, his readings were not always accurate. Other studies of the organs in Mexico City Cathedral have relied on documents from other archives or from published sources. In addition to the works cited in this study, recent advances in the study of organ-related documentation from the ACCMM also include Edward Charles Pepe, "Writing a History of Mexico's Early Organs: A Seventeenth-Century Disposition from the Mexico City Cathedral," in Thomas Donahue (ed.), *Music and Its Questions: Essays in Honor of Peter Williams*, Richmond, VA, OHS Press, 2007, pp. 49-74. I would like to acknowledge the gracious assistance of the Lic. Salvador Valdés Ortiz.

about its authorship. The Epistle (Dean's) organ built in 1735-36, by contrast, has often been, and frequently continues to be, considered a mere modification by Nassarre of the Jorge de Sesma organ inaugurated in 1695. Although it is thus sometimes still referred to as the Sesma organ, a growing number of scholars now agrees that the documents lead to the conclusion suggested by Dirk Flentrop in 1986 after the restoration of the organs that both were constructed by Nassarre.²

PART I

LIBRO 5 OF *FÁBRICA MATERIAL* AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NASSARRE ORGANS

In 1737, Mexico City Cathedral authorities ordered a review of recent expenses on suspicion that they were "excessive." Among other projects undertaken at that time, the two magnificent organs that still adorn the cathedral had just been completed. Authorities had paid Joseph Nassarre (d. 1737)³ a total of 50,000 pesos. While this was a great deal of money (Gerónimo de Balbás's spectacular *Altar de los reyes* by comparison had cost less than half of that amount), it should be kept in mind that only 40 years earlier more than 32,000 pesos⁴ had been spent on

the construction and installation of an organ by the peninsular builder Jorge de Sesma, an instrument only two thirds the size of one of Nassarre's organs.⁵ Based on that cost, Nassarre could have charged 48,000 pesos just for the Gospel organ. Nassarre's work, in other words, was relatively economical. The organs were also so well built and so forward looking, and their cases are so beautiful, that they have survived now for 280 years, although not without changes.

The 1737 inquiry into expenses caused, justified or not, a valuable group of documents to be bound together into one volume with the current shelf name *Fábrica material*, libro 5 (hereafter book 5). Entitled "*Año de 1737 / Quenta General*

1 Saldívar, Estrada, and Toussaint each mention a small number of organ-related documents that in some cases were extracted from the ACCMM: Gabriel Saldívar, *Historia de la Música en México*, Mexico City, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1934; Jesús Estrada, *Música y músicos de la época virreinal*, Mexico City, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1973; and Manuel Toussaint, *La Catedral de México y el Sagrario Metropolitano* (3rd. ed.), Mexico City, Porrúa, 1992. Stevenson, by contrast, made extensive use of the chapter acts of the ACCMM in his work and often included information on the organs. See, for example, Robert Stevenson, "Mexico City Cathedral Music: 1600-1750," *The Americas* 21:2

5 For a history of the construction of that organ and for its original disposition, layout, and other technical parameters, see Edward Charles Pepe, "An Organ by Jorge de Sesma for Mexico City Cathedral," *Revista de Musicología* 29:1 (2006), pp. 127-62. For a history of the installation process, see Edward Charles Pepe, "The Installation by Tiburcio Sanz and Félix de Yzaguirre of the Jorge de Sesma Organ for Mexico City Cathedral: 1692-95," *Revista de Musicología* 29:2 (2006), pp. 433-79. The documentary record explored there allows us to enumerate differences from the Nassarre organs. Luckily for Mexico City Cathedral, Nassarre's charge was based on his organs for the cathedrals in Guadalajara and Valladolid (Morelia) and not on the cost of the Sesma organ. Nassarre even gave Mexico City Cathedral authorities a discount, saying that, based on his charges in Morelia, the Mexico City Gospel instrument—due to its greater size—should cost 36,000 pesos but he would charge only 31,000; ACCMM, *Fábrica material*, libro 5, ff. 1v-2. Nassarre never referred to the cost of the Sesma organ, even though he enjoyed a close relationship with the Prebendary Joseph Codallos y Rabal and may have been privy to the information.

2 Dirk Flentrop, *The Organs of Mexico City Cathedral*, Washington D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986, p. 4.

3 Efraín Castro Morales, *Los órganos de la Nueva España y sus artífices*, Puebla, Gobierno del Estado, 1989, pp. 39-40.

4 The figure was given by chapel master Manuel de Sumaya. ACCMM, *Fábrica material*, caja 2, expediente 7, f. w/o number (10 February 1713).

truments at Flentrop's time. As that story now comes to light, any intervention carried out today would involve a very different set of circumstances and decisions. For instance, some schools of thought allow or even encourage changes to instruments if they aim to return the instrument to what is perceived as a more "original" condition. Increasingly, others question the wisdom, even the possibility, of attempting to return an organ to an original state, or indeed to any previous state, particularly if this involves removing historic pipework or other components. Indeed, alterations made today to an instrument in the name of restoration can be as significant and damaging as those that have been made historically and ironically can leave an instrument with a much greater percentage of new material.

Many of the choices faced by organ restorers are directly related to the types of changes that have been made to the particular instrument over the course of its history. First, should additions be removed? Would it be desirable, for instance, to remove the *bombardas* because they are not original? Should the solo division of the Gospel organ be removed because it was not part of Nassarre's conception of the organ? Certainly, no one would think of discarding an organ built in 1801. It would, after all, still be viceregal patrimony. A second category is formed by replacement registers. Should we attempt to determine which register replaced Nassarre's *rochela*, remove that register, and "reconstruct" a *rochela*? Since there exist few if any historic models for the register and it is not built in Spain (at least not under that name), we cannot even be sure of what it was. And even if we had the technical parameters of the *rochela*, we would end up

only with a modern attempt at a reconstruction and would have no certainty it sounded anything like the original. We would also again be removing historic (although not original) pipework. Many restorers nowadays prefer to admit that some of Nassarre's original registers are gone or modified, and that nothing can be done to bring them back. Accretions to the organ would instead be welcomed as a part of the history of the instrument and as a reflection of changing musical tastes over the centuries.

By contrast, the reintroduction of registers to the organ that were removed and never replaced or the filling out of registers that were reduced belong to a different category because they do not require removing any historical pipework. A careful attempt to recreate the missing stops based on appropriate historical models should do no harm, as long as listeners are clearly informed as to which registers are modern recreations so that they do not assume the sound they hearing is historical.³⁵

Restoration choices must also be made concerning the tonal properties of an organ's pipework since these are controlled by components both of the pipes themselves and of the winding system that may have been manipulated over the history of the instrument. Pipes can rather easily be revoiced (to make them brighter, darker, louder, softer, etc.) through the sometimes imperceptible movement of parts of the pipe (closure or opening of toe holes or windways, manipulation of the languid or upper lip, etc.).

³⁵ For instance, concert programs could include the disposition of the organ and indicate the date of each register.

preeminent church. It also leads to the conclusion that some, even much, of Nassarre's just completed work on the Epistle organ may have had to be redone in order to accommodate the organ's new compass. The planned work on the Epistle organ was no longer a question of repairing, or even renovating, the old organ but of building a largely new one incorporating elements of the old.¹⁰ From this point on then, this article will consider both organs to be the work of Nassarre using the standards usually applied for assigning authorship of rebuilt instruments.

It is worth mentioning here that Nassarre specifies that his new organ(s) would contain not only modern registers but also "antique" ones. Whether the Mexico City organists had expressed concerns on the subject or whether Nassarre had encountered problems in Morelia or Guadalajara is unknown. (The organists responsible for the new Sesma organ had had conflicting attitudes to change.) Although judgments concerning the trajectory of organ-building style in New Spain are still necessarily preliminary, it would also seem fair to state that what Nassarre considered modern was

already different from what had been modern about the Sesma organ when designed in 1690, thus attesting to the ongoing evolution of the Spanish, and New Spanish, organ.

Folios 6, 7, 25-35: Nassarre was required to, and did, submit periodic requests for payment all of which were honored without question. A decree of May 22 stipulated that Nassarre keep an ongoing log of expenses in order to alleviate any doubts that might arise should the organ builder die while constructing the instruments. Unfortunately it does not survive. The document could have clarified, for example, who worked on the organ and the manner in which the work progressed, as well as other details of interest.

Folio 6v (2 June 1734): This document is the legend to a sketch of the organ ("*mapa*" in "*dos pliegos de marca y certificado à el reverso*") that may have been inserted as loose sheets into book 5 and has unfortunately disappeared.

It showed the proposed choir façades (i.e. of the *órgano grande* and *cadereta*) and stipulates that they were to be "the same in one and the other organ." Although Nassarre abided by the requirement that his new organ conform to the appearance of the old one in stylistic terms,¹¹ the

¹⁰ Documents elsewhere in the ACCMM also confirm Nassarre as the builder of both organs. First, his name appears on the Great wind-chests of both organs along with the word "feçit". Second, the organists at the time considered both organs to be the work of Nassarre. See Juan Téllez Xirón's evaluation of the Epistle organ, for instance; ACCMM, *Fábrica material*, libro 5, ff. 41-42v. Last, and perhaps most importantly, most of the technical parameters of the organ that emerged from Nassarre's work on the old Epistle organ were so significantly altered and required such extensive new construction that it is difficult to maintain that the organ which emerged can in any way be called a "Jorge de Sesma organ."

¹¹ The case of Nassarre's organ(s) in Morelia survives because it was later moved and reconfigured to house the Walcker organ that replaced it. We thus know that Nassarre utilized the *estípito* style there. (Nothing of Nassarre's organs in Guadalajara survives.) Since the source of this style in Mexico—Gerónimo de Balbás's *Altar de los reyes*—was located only fifty meters away from where Nassarre was working in Mexico City Cathedral, it is hard to imagine, had the restriction not been imposed that the new organ conform visually to the old organ case, that Nassarre would not have also designed the case of the Gospel organ in the fashionable new style.

Gospel organ case—designed with Pedal towers¹² and with carvings that completely filled the arch above the Gospel tribune—was nonetheless considerably larger than Sesma's case.¹³ Once it was decided to "igualar" the organs, the drawing for the Gospel organ also applied to the Epistle organ, and eventually its appearance (and size) was substantially altered to conform to that of the new Gospel organ. Hopefully the missing sketch will one day be rediscovered.

Folios 8-12v: These folios contain two versions of a *nómina*—a list of the registers for the new organ—as well as other construction details.¹⁴ The final version is found at fols. 8-9v (20 May 1734), while that which appears at folios 10-12v is an undated but earlier, lightly annotated version. An even earlier and more heavily annotated version can be found elsewhere in the archive.¹⁵ These three documents trace developments in technical parameters of the organ such as the keyboard compass. The earliest document originally indicated 47 keys, the same compass as that of Nassarre's organs for Guadalajara (completed in 1730) and Morelia (completed 1733).¹⁶ The number "47," however, is overwritten with the number "50." The con-

tract too would be drawn up for 50 keys, and this is how the Gospel organ was built (C, D-d3). Sometime before constructing the Epistle organ, however, Nassarre, with permission of the chapter, decided to build a chromatic bass octave by including the low C# to bring that organ's compass to 51 notes (C-d3). This modification is documented in the evaluation of the organs discussed below. It is interesting to note that the chromatic bass octave of the Epistle organ and even the nearly chromatic one in the Gospel organ in Mexico City Cathedral predate such developments in some rural areas of Mexico by more than 130 years, and is a good marker of the sophistication and modernity of the instruments built by Nassarre. It is also one way in which the Mexico City instruments were intended to "outdo" those in the cathedrals of Guadalajara and Morelia.¹⁷

Folios 13-24 (27 May 1734): This document is the cathedral's copy of the contract for both organs. Several pages of comments precede

the contract proper. The *nómina* was copied in its entirety into the contract. In less formal situations than that which surrounded the construction of the Nassarre organs for Mexico City Cathedral, the list is often merely referred to (and is therefore often not preserved). The notary's copy of the contract was published in 1983.¹⁸

Folios 36-45v (8 October 1736): Nassarre declared the organs finished and asked that a committee of knowledgeable persons be named to evaluate his work. Everyone chosen wrote a report: chapel master Manuel de Sumaya (18 October); cathedral organists Juan Téllez Xirón (undated), Joseph Xuárez (16 October), and Juan Pérez de Samora (18 October); and the organists from the Augustinian and Franciscan convents in Mexico City—fray Juan de Hinojosa (19 October) and fray Diego Mascareñas (11 October), respectively. The opinions expressed were unanimously positive. Those of the friars were brief while those of the cathedral's own organists were much more substantial, with Téllez Xirón's being the most detailed. I have published elsewhere a study of the contents of this report which includes a short treatise on organ building.¹⁹ Folios 46-48 (October 1736): The authorities expressed no doubts or concerns after hearing the experts' opinions, except that

everyone agreed that the new organs would require careful and ongoing maintenance (undoubtedly a reaction to the problems that had been experienced with the Sesma organ).

Unnumbered folio (no date): Nicolas de Yzaguirre, presumably the son of Félix Yzaguirre and nephew of Félix's brother Tiburcio Sanz de Yzaguirre (hired in Spain to accompany Sesma's organ to New Spain and install it in Mexico City Cathedral), applied for the job of *afinador*—"tuner" (and maintenance technician). Yzaguirre offered to demonstrate his abilities "to anyone competent to judge them." He made no mention of his father's service to the cathedral.

Tiburcio (Yzaguirre y) Sanz and his brother Félix Yzaguirre (y Sanz) accompanied the Sesma organ from Spain to Mexico City in order to install it. Tiburcio died on 6 February 1719 and Félix on 30 April 1736 (*Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de México, Fondo Microfilm, caja 28 [Defunciones de españoles, 1671-1821. vol. 7 and vol. 11, respectively]*). Félix thus lived long enough to see Nassarre's Gospel organ completed.

Folio 49 (no date): Joseph Casela's application for the job of organ tuner emphasized his experience taking care of Nassarre's organs in Valladolid Cathedral. Casela gave, as an additional reason why he should get the job, the fact that he had a large family.

Folio 50 (no date): Nassarre recommended Joseph Casela "without any reservations." The document states that Casela was a citizen of Valladolid but does not mention where he was born. According to Nassarre, Casela was a "master organ builder," with experience both building new organs and maintaining those in Valladolid Cathedral. In Valladolid Cathedral, Casela had "worked

12 The Pedal towers only appear to be separate. There are no lateral case walls separating the pipes of the Pedal and Great divisions.

13 Sesma's organ, following the "Instrucción" written by Joseph Ydiáquez in 1688, had been constructed so as to leave space between the case and the pillars and make it possible to circulate freely around the base of the organ. Toussaint, *La catedral*, p. 284.

14 Another common term for *nómina* found in viceregal documents is *memoria*—used, for example, in the contract for the Jorge de Sesma organ.

15 ACCMM, Fábrica material, caja 2, expediente 9, f. w/o number.

16 Excerpts from the contract for Nassarre's organ in Guadalajara were published by Castro Morales in *Los órganos*, pp. 29-31. The contract for the Morelia organ appears as Document 63 in Mina Ramírez Montes, *La escuadra y el cincel. Documentos sobre la construcción de la Catedral de Morelia*, Mexico City, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas-UNAM, 1987, pp. 143-48.

17 It is sometimes forgotten that the filling in of the bass octave implied more than just access to new notes. The negative side of either the partially or fully chromatic bass octave is that it required players to make adjustments when they performed the old short-octave repertoire. Some intervals could no longer be reached and could only be accommodated by octavizing or using Pedal Contrás, or even simply omitting notes. The transition away from the short octave, therefore, constituted a major turning point in the history of the organ.

18 Guillermo Tovar de Teresa, "Los órganos de la Catedral de México," *Música y ángeles. Los órganos de la Catedral de México*, Mexico City, Sociedad de Amigos del Centro Histórico de la Ciudad de México, 1983, pp. 39-45.

19 Edward Charles Pepe, "An Unknown Inspection Report from Mexico City Cathedral by Juan Téllez Xirón 1736," *The Organ Yearbook* 37 (2008), pp. 29-43.

with me and perfected himself." The exact nature of their relationship (master builder and employee or two master builders in collaboration) is unknown.

Folio 51 (29 October 1736): Sumaya stated that he was unfamiliar with Casela's work because the builder had been living and working in Michoacán, wisely concluding that there was no one better to choose a caretaker for the organs than their builder and deferring to Nassarre's opinion.

Folios 52-57 (30 October 1736): The organs were officially accepted and Nassarre was given 1,000 pesos extra for changes to the Epistle organ and another 1,000 pesos as a bonus.

THE SUBSEQUENT HISTORY OF THE ORGANS: MAINTENANCE AND MODIFICATIONS

Documents elsewhere in the archive allow us to track the subsequent history of the two organs, through accretion arising from repairs, overhauls, modifications, and rebuildings, and thus to better understand their current condition. Since only a brief summary of these can be offered here, in-depth studies of these and smaller-scale interventions will be needed.

From 1736 to 1766, the organs were maintained by Joseph Casela (d. 1747) and then by his son Gregorio Casela (d. 1766).²⁰ Both were accomplished builders who worked extensively

in Mexico City and its environs. Surviving documentation leaves no doubt that they took exemplary care of the cathedral organs.²¹ Extensive repairs of the instruments were made by Gregorio, first to the Epistle organ in 1762 and then to the Gospel organ in 1764.²² These interventions involved dismantling most of the organ (except for the case) and repairing pipes, wind-chests, wind trunks, and bellows. In this sense, these repairs were more like what we would call a restoration today. In other important ways, however, they were very different. For instance, seriously damaged elements were replaced without concern for preserving the integrity of the original or the historic. Overall, however, few if any significant changes to the organs seem to have been made while they were in the care of the Caselas.

Domingo Millán repaired both organs in the last decade of the eighteenth century.²³ Domingo Millán's work does not seem to have been of very high quality, for only ten years later the organs were considered to be in a disastrous state.

Around 1800, repairs also began to involve modifications to the instruments. Mariano Antonio Pérez de Lara, contracted to deal with the

unfavorable situation inherited from Millán, repaired the Epistle organ in 1799-1800 and the Gospel organ in 1801. Part of Pérez de Lara's stop-by-stop evaluation of the Epistle organ's condition prior to its repair survives. It gives the number of pipes which no longer functioned in each register. In all, 554 pipes, or roughly one in every six pipes, needed to be replaced in this one repair!²⁴ In addition, at least three changes were made to the organ's disposition—the addition of (or perhaps transformation of an existing stop into) an open wooden *flautado* of sixteen-foot pitch in the right hand,²⁵ the addition of *bombardas* (a Pedal reed stop of three ranks—16', 8' and 4'), and the addition of a *flauta traversa*. Although documentation concerning Mariano Antonio's intervention into the Gospel organ

in the following year has not survived, it is only logical to assume that the *bombardas*, the sixteen-foot *flautado* (here in both hands) and the *flauta traversa* in that organ are also his work. Construction details appear to confirm this hypothesis.²⁶

A report prepared by the cathedral's organ tuner in 1821 states that the third (half) keyboard of the Gospel organ was added "by my deceased father."²⁷ Since José Joaquín was tuner in 1821 (he served as such from the death of his father early in 1816 until at least until March of 1824), the statement just cited must be attributed to him and reveals that Mariano Antonio Pérez de Lara authored the additional manual and division.

²⁵ Later, in the Gospel organ, this register would be added in both hands.

²⁶ I would like to thank the Presbyter Felipe Galicia Reytez and the organ builder Gerhard Grenzing for allowing me access to the instruments during the restoration process.

²⁷ ACCMM, Actas de cabildo, libro 69, f. 316 (16 February 1821).

²³ ACCMM, Fábrica material, caja 3, expedientes 3, 4 and 5.

²⁴ ACCMM, Fábrica material, caja 3, expediente 4, f. 11v (note that the foliation is not sequential). It should be pointed out that the number of pipes replaced in this repair was unusually high. Documents suggest that the pipes in question were from the Sesma organ and were being discarded owing to their "inferior quality". This is information of the highest value since it tells us that at least the equivalent of eleven registers from the Sesma organ had been retained by Nassarre, even if we cannot know who actually built each of the pipes—Jorge de Sesma, Tiburcio Sanz, Félix de Yzaguirre or Francisco Peláez.

²⁰ Both the decree appointing Joseph Casela and that appointing Gregorio Casela as cathedral organ tuner have been preserved (ACCMM, Vacantes, caja 1, expedientes 9 and 11, respectively), but they offer no biographical information concerning either builder.

²¹ Even thirty years after his death, Gregorio was remembered by cathedral personnel as someone who had maintained the organs well.

²² ACCMM, Fábrica material, caja 3, expediente 3, f. w/o number.

PART II

PHYSICAL EXAMINATION OF AN ORGAN AND THE HISTORIC RECORD AS COMPLEMENTARY TOOLS FOR RECONSTRUCTING CHRONOLOGY AND AUTHORSHIP

Clearly, physical examination of an organ remains a vital source of information, particularly of the type that documents are unlikely to include such as information concerning construction methods and perhaps materials. It can also identify certain alterations that may never have been documented. Entirely empty ranks on the wind-chest, for example, especially in mixtures can indicate that the pipes were purposely removed at some point. Pipes that do not fit properly into the pipe-rack or comfortably onto the toeboards also suggest alterations as do awkward incisions in the case or openings that have been filled in. Flentrop did make several observations of this type.

But other than stating that both organs were likely built at the same time, Flentrop had few comments concerning the subsequent chronology of the Mexico City Cathedral organs, making it clear that physical examination of them, indeed even their restoration, was insufficient to establish their history.²⁸

Clearly, the documents have an extraordinary role to play here as they also do with other organs. For reasons of space, I shall address only two of the key points we learn from them. First, the *nómina*, together with the examination reports, reveal that there were originally no reed contras (*bombardas*). And since the frequent inclusion of offset (raised or other) blocks in Spanish organs can

make it difficult, even impossible, to “read” a disposition from the wind-chest and since the space between the pillars in Mexico City Cathedral easily absorbed later additions to the organs, simple observation also failed to clarify that the sixteen-foot manual *flautado* and *flauta traversa* were not original to the organ. The documents, by contrast, tell us not only that these were not planned for in the contract, but also that they were introduced at a much later time. Second, José Joaquín Pérez de Lara’s attribution of the third manual of the Gospel organ to his father is key to understanding the origin of that division which might otherwise be attributed to the son owing to the presence of his label next to Nassarre’s on the main wind-chest. The cited documents confirm that the added division is already approximately two hundred years old (about as old as the David Tannenbergs organ for the Home Moravian Church—the oldest surviving locally-constructed North American organ). And since accretions are often evaluated for their historical and artistic significance before their removal is contemplated, no thought was given to removing the division in the recent restoration.²⁹

Still, some documentation known to have been in the archives (e.g., the “*mapa*”) at one time has subsequently disappeared. Furthermore, some activity may never have been documented in the first place, or only poorly. Thus, the study of the documentary record and physical examination of

an organ—either within or separate from a project of restoration—complement each other. Sadly, many organs in Mexico have been restored without recourse to any documentation whatsoever, as was virtually the case when the Nassarre organs were restored in the 1970s. In some cases, even the builder remains unknown rendering it impossible to consult their other instruments when questions arise. And since organ research here is still at a preliminary stage, regional or period styles are also still inadequately understood. Establishing context for an organ restored under such conditions is difficult indeed³⁰ and ignoring the documentary record exacerbates matters.

THE NASSARRE ORGANS IN MODERN TIMES: CURRENT NOTIONS OF RESTORATION

The idea of updating an organ—making it conform to contemporary taste—was historically commonplace, even normal. Nassarre himself, for example, had no compunction about completely rebuilding and reshaping Sesma’s organ. And the fact that he recycled elements of the Sesma organ in his new Epistle organ was not out of any respect for history but rather the result of a practicality imposed by cathedral authorities. The ideological horizon concerning art and artifacts, particularly historic ones, has shifted significantly and few

today would modernize the keyboard compass of an old organ as Nassarre did, for instance. Still, restoration remains a highly contested term implying quite different things to different people.

In addition to the historic interventions identified above and to those still unidentified, the Nassarre organs underwent a modern restoration by Flentrop Orgelbauw in the years 1975 to 1978.³¹ Afterwards, a monograph on the organs was published based on the physical evidence obtained through examination of the instruments during the restoration.³² Flentrop’s brief study—in spite of offering little in the way of a history of the instruments—is still the best technical documentation of a Mexican organ in print.³³ It provides the modern dispositions, photographs, drawings and, most importantly, pipe measurements which allow for the study of their scalings.³⁴ The restoration was responsible and well-executed for its historic moment—one in which few, if any, actual changes were made to the instruments. Of course, very little was known about the history of the ins-

28 Flentrop, *The Organs*, p. 2.

29 Others would not remove any accretions regardless of their age or value. It would be remiss, I believe, not to mention Gerhard Grenzing’s exemplary interest in the historic documentation during the restoration of the Gospel organ. Presbyter Galicia Reytez is also to be commended for his custodianship of the organs.

30 I have written elsewhere about the ways in which Modernist attitudes have justified a noncontextualized (hermeneutical) approach to organ restoration. Edward Charles Pepe, “Modernism, Mexico and Musical Instrument Restoration,” in Cleveland Johnson (ed.), *Orpheus Organi Antiqui: Essays in Honor of Harald Vogel*, Seattle: Westfield Center, 2006, pp. 351–65.

31 This work was made necessary by a 1967 fire that charred the cases and melted many of the flue pipes and reed resonators of the choir façades, but fortunately, except for the *cadereta* of the Epistle organ, left the interiors of the two organs largely intact.

32 Flentrop, *The Organs*.

33 A recent monograph on the organs, although providing some fine new photographs, is largely a translation into Spanish of the Flentrop study; see Gustavo Delgado, *Los órganos históricos de la Catedral de México*, Mexico City, Escuela Nacional de Música - UNAM, 2005. It unfortunately carries forward an error in the presentation of the disposition of the Gospel organ (see fn. 34, below).

34 The dispositions are not listed as such. Rather, they must be extracted from the charts giving the pipe measurements. There is one mistake in the chart. The title announcing the registers of the Solo Division of the Gospel organ was inadvertently omitted. Flentrop, *The Organs*, 13.

truments at Flentrop's time. As that story now comes to light, any intervention carried out today would involve a very different set of circumstances and decisions. For instance, some schools of thought allow or even encourage changes to instruments if they aim to return the instrument to what is perceived as a more "original" condition. Increasingly, others question the wisdom, even the possibility, of attempting to return an organ to an original state, or indeed to any previous state, particularly if this involves removing historic pipework or other components. Indeed, alterations made today to an instrument in the name of restoration can be as significant and damaging as those that have been made historically and ironically can leave an instrument with a much greater percentage of new material.

Many of the choices faced by organ restorers are directly related to the types of changes that have been made to the particular instrument over the course of its history. First, should additions be removed? Would it be desirable, for instance, to remove the *bombardas* because they are not original? Should the solo division of the Gospel organ be removed because it was not part of Nassarre's conception of the organ? Certainly, no one would think of discarding an organ built in 1801. It would, after all, still be viceregal patrimony. A second category is formed by replacement registers. Should we attempt to determine which register replaced Nassarre's *rochela*, remove that register, and "reconstruct" a *rochela*? Since there exist few if any historic models for the register and it is not built in Spain (at least not under that name), we cannot even be sure of what it was. And even if we had the technical parameters of the *rochela*, we would end up

only with a modern attempt at a reconstruction and would have no certainty it sounded anything like the original. We would also again be removing historic (although not original) pipework. Many restorers nowadays prefer to admit that some of Nassarre's original registers are gone or modified, and that nothing can be done to bring them back. Accretions to the organ would instead be welcomed as a part of the history of the instrument and as a reflection of changing musical tastes over the centuries.

By contrast, the reintroduction of registers to the organ that were removed and never replaced or the filling out of registers that were reduced belong to a different category because they do not require removing any historical pipework. A careful attempt to recreate the missing stops based on appropriate historical models should do no harm, as long as listeners are clearly informed as to which registers are modern recreations so that they do not assume the sound they hearing is historical.³⁵

Restoration choices must also be made concerning the tonal properties of an organ's pipework since these are controlled by components both of the pipes themselves and of the winding system that may have been manipulated over the history of the instrument. Pipes can rather easily be revoiced (to make them brighter, darker, louder, softer, etc.) through the sometimes imperceptible movement of parts of the pipe (closure or opening of toe holes or windways, manipulation of the languid or upper lip, etc.).

³⁵ For instance, concert programs could include the disposition of the organ and indicate the date of each register.

premier church. It also leads to the conclusion that some, even much, of Nassarre's just completed work on the Epistle organ may have had to be redone in order to accommodate the organ's new compass. The planned work on the Epistle organ was no longer a question of repairing, or even renovating, the old organ but of building a largely new one incorporating elements of the old.¹⁰ From this point on then, this article will consider both organs to be the work of Nassarre using the standards usually applied for assigning authorship of rebuilt instruments.

It is worth mentioning here that Nassarre specifies that his new organ(s) would contain not only modern registers but also "antique" ones. Whether the Mexico City organists had expressed concerns on the subject or whether Nassarre had encountered problems in Morelia or Guadalajara is unknown. (The organists responsible for the new Sesma organ had had conflicting attitudes to change.) Although judgments concerning the trajectory of organ-building style in New Spain are still necessarily preliminary, it would also seem fair to state that what Nassarre considered modern was

already different from what had been modern about the Sesma organ when designed in 1690, thus attesting to the ongoing evolution of the Spanish, and New Spanish, organ.

Folios 6, 7, 25-35: Nassarre was required to, and did, submit periodic requests for payment all of which were honored without question. A decree of May 22 stipulated that Nassarre keep an ongoing log of expenses in order to alleviate any doubts that might arise should the organ builder die while constructing the instruments. Unfortunately it does not survive. The document could have clarified, for example, who worked on the organ and the manner in which the work progressed, as well as other details of interest.

Folio 6v (2 June 1734): This document is the legend to a sketch of the organ ("*mapa*" in "*dos pliegos de marca y certificado à el reverso*") that may have been inserted as loose sheets into book 5 and has unfortunately disappeared.

It showed the proposed choir façades (i.e. of the *órgano grande* and *cadereta*) and stipulates that they were to be "the same in one and the other organ." Although Nassarre abided by the requirement that his new organ conform to the appearance of the old one in stylistic terms,¹¹ the

¹⁰ Documents elsewhere in the ACCMM also confirm Nassarre as the builder of both organs. First, his name appears on the Great wind-chests of both organs along with the word "feçit". Second, the organists at the time considered both organs to be the work of Nassarre. See Juan Téllez Xirón's evaluation of the Epistle organ, for instance; ACCMM, *Fábrica material*, libro 5, ff. 41-42v. Last, and perhaps most importantly, most of the technical parameters of the organ that emerged from Nassarre's work on the old Epistle organ were so significantly altered and required such extensive new construction that it is difficult to maintain that the organ which emerged can in any way be called a "Jorge de Sesma organ."

¹¹ The case of Nassarre's organ(s) in Morelia survives because it was later moved and reconfigured to house the Walcker organ that replaced it. We thus know that Nassarre utilized the *estípito* style there. (Nothing of Nassarre's organs in Guadalajara survives.) Since the source of this style in Mexico—Gerónimo de Balbás's *Altar de los reyes*—was located only fifty meters away from where Nassarre was working in Mexico City Cathedral, it is hard to imagine, had the restriction not been imposed that the new organ conform visually to the old organ case, that Nassarre would not have also designed the case of the Gospel organ in the fashionable new style.

“adjusting” intervals in order to avoid harshness, suggesting that he, and probably Nassarre as well, were exploring a modified system that allowed for playing beyond the traditional limitations of meantone.⁴¹ Perhaps Nassarre was here, once again, displaying his sophistication, and—assuming that the same temperament was used in Valladolid and Mexico City that had been used in Guadalajara—anticipating trends that would take decades to reach some rural parts of New Spain if they reached there at all before the twentieth century.

Or perhaps the cathedral organists had their own thoughts on the matter, or maybe there existed some local tradition for tuning organs at the time. No matter how the organs were tuned, however, it is important to point out that the documentary record (contract, etc.) as preserved in the ACCMM provides us with no clues on the subject. The temperament chosen for the recent restoration of the Gospel organ is a sixth-comma meantone. By dividing the syntonic comma into six and narrowing six fifths by this amount (and tuning the rest pure except

the wolf tone) the resulting thirds are somewhat wider than pure and therefore better able to function enharmonically. Such a system makes perfect sense for the early eighteenth century in a venue as sophisticated as Mexico City Cathedral.

MEXICO AND THE RESTORATION OF ORGANS

The general law concerning the restoration of any cultural artifact in Mexico expects that a restoration expert will be in charge of the project.⁴² Requiring the participation of someone versed in the issues and techniques of restoration in an organ project is admirable since organ builders do not necessarily have the skill set necessary for analyzing old materials or restoring wood, paint, etc. (e.g., the organ case). Elsewhere, organ builders can be left to take on all of these issues themselves often with disastrous results. On the other hand, there is no requirement in Mexico that organ restoration projects include an organ builder and organ restorations have been carried out here without the participation of one. In Europe, by contrast (where there is ample awareness of the issues surrounding the restoration of cultural artifacts), organ restoration has been entrusted first and foremost to organ builders with the additional participation of various restoration experts as desired.

The issue is worth examining. The restoration (from the Latin *restorare* meaning “to stand back up”) of an organ has customarily implied not only returning the organ to some

state of physical integrity—returning components to their rightful location, cleaning and, when necessary, renovating or repairing them or replacing missing or unusable ones using appropriate materials and techniques, etc.)—but also making the instrument function again as a musical instrument. Not everyone is always in agreement with this, by the way, since returning the organ to a functioning state implies a level of intervention that can be much greater (the replacement of more parts, for instance) than would otherwise be required in order to simply stabilize and consolidate the artifact. The level of intervention required, in fact, is considered by some in the field to be unacceptably high, especially in the case of particularly important or rare instruments. Instead, some would argue that the primary function of certain historic organs has shifted from musical instrument to bearer of historic record or model to be replicated. By way of comparison one could point out that sixteenth-century hospitals are not usually restored as hospitals. Instead, their function shifts to that of museum or hotel for instance. Others do not allow for this shift, arguing that a musical instrument always remains a musical instrument and should be restored as one.

Assuming an organ is to be returned to a functioning state as a musical instrument, someone involved in the project must understand exactly how an organ and all of its components function. If no one involved is proficient in the intricate arts of pipe construction or voicing, how can an organ have a chance to sound anything like it might once have sounded? Indeed, asking restorers without organ building skills to return an organ to a functioning state (or even

to maintain it in one) is equivalent to asking organ builders without restoration skills to restore case painting or analyze paper, cloth, glue or other materials that they may know nothing about.

Therefore, the ideal person for restoring old organs would be fully trained both in organ building and in restoration since only someone proficient in both languages would be able to fulfill the mandates of both fields and negotiate their sometimes conflicting interests. In the absence of such a person, there would seem to be no choice really but to assemble a team possessing all of the necessary skills and knowledges and where organ builders and restoration experts work together collaboratively and non-hierarchically to bring the instrument to some mutually acceptable (compromise) state of both preservation and function. Even if some see this as impractical for economic or other reasons, it is hard to refute on intellectual, and perhaps even moral, terms.

CONCLUSION

Organ restorations in Mexico had been waning due to an increased awareness of both the damage caused by inadequate work in the past and the potentially troubling implications of interventions in general; but it now seems to be waxing once again. Fortunately, the number of organ-related organizations has also grown and there is increased communication among people in the field making it more difficult for unauthorized interventions to go unnoticed. Unfortunately, there is still no guarantee that established procedures will be followed since projects can still be authorized against the advice of experts. Furthermore, there is still no mechanism through which the opinions of Mexico’s organ community can be taken into account when an instrument is considered for restoration.

Temperaments by Ear: A Manual of Eighty-Nine Methods for Tuning Fifty-One Scales on the Harpsichord, Piano, and Other Keyboard Instruments, Marquette, Northern Michigan University Press, 1977, p. 138. It should be pointed out that Cerone presents both a theoretical version of Zarlino’s temperament and, like most authors presenting tuning methods, a practical version—one tuned by ear. Chaumont also mentions a variation to his tuning. It becomes difficult, therefore, to speak of either “the Cerone temperament” or “the Chaumont temperament,” and even harder to compare them. As already stated, it makes greater sense to speak of classes of tunings and to focus efforts on determining which one a builder was dealing with.

41 In this context, such a remark likely indicates the possibility of utilizing the accidental between D and E, for example, as both D# and Eb. The purity of the interval Eb-G, in other words, would be compromised somewhat in order to make the interval B-D# more tolerable.

42 According to the “Guía para la elaboración y presentación de proyectos de conservación de bienes muebles e inmuebles por destino del patrimonio cultural” of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

Meanwhile, knowledge concerning historic organs has accumulated dramatically in recent years due to increased documentation efforts. And as this date becomes available, so does the possibility of painting the larger picture of Mexican organ building. As a result, individual instruments will no longer need to be conserved, restored, reconstructed or replicated in isolation. Assumptions and theories can increasingly fall by the wayside as they are replaced by verifiable information. And, especially if certain fantasies of restoring historic organs to "authentic" or "original" conditions can be set aside, if all of us involved with the organ willingly recognize the limits of our respective expertises and strive to expand and reinforce our skills, and if we can learn to work cooperatively and not antagonistically, this can only be good news for the organs.

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