

The Mariana Organ

The Organ of the See of Mariana The Cathedral of Mariana houses a precious musical treasure – an organ built in the first decade of the 18th century in Hamburg, Germany by Arp Schnitger (1648-1719), one of the main organ builders of all times. Initially sent to a Franciscan church in Portugal, the organ arrived in Brazil in 1753 as a present of the Portuguese crown to the first bishop of Mariana.

It is an instrument of great importance, both because of its antiquity and established authorship and because it was subjected to a comprehensive restoration. Among the extant Schnitger organs, this is one of the best preserved and the only one outside Europe. The instrument is being considered for inclusion in UNESCO's World Heritage list of Arp Schnitger organs.

History

Built in Germany in the first decade of the 18th century, the organ stayed in Portugal for a while and was sold in 1747. The Portuguese king João V bought it from João da Cunha, the Court's organ builder, to send it to Mariana, but died before he could do that. His son, D. José I, presented it to the newly created Diocese of Mariana, the seat of a bishopric that had an organ player, Father Manuel da Costa Dantas, and a chapel master, Father Gregório dos Reis Melo, as early as 1748.

The organ traveled by ship and mule, and its conditions of arrival were precisely described: "... a large organ with its case and the carvings belonging to it that arrived in 18 large numbered crates with specific instructions for assembling it, and 10 large and small numbered parcels"

Since its installation in 1753, the Schnitger organ was the center of an intense musical activity in the See of Mariana, whose written memory is the collection of scores belonging to the Museum of Music, which holds works of composers from the colonial period. The composers come from various cities in the state and the country. After many years working uninterruptedly, in which it was modified to follow the taste of the times, around the 1930s the organ stopped working. In the 1970s, after research was done to establish its origin, and its importance was recognized in Brazil and abroad, efforts were orchestrated to restore the instrument.

Restoration

In the 1970s, the archbishop D. Oscar de Oliveira and the CEO of CEMIG, Francisco Afonso Noronha, invited the German organist Karl Richter to come to Mariana in order to evaluate the instrument, which had a large number of original pieces. Richter considered the organ an important instrument probably manufactured by Arp Schnitger. After his visit and thanks to a considerable effort, the musical elements of the organ were sent to Hamburg, where the Beckerath Company restored them.

Meanwhile, a Brazilian team from the Federal University of Minas Gerais, directed by Beatriz Coelho, restored the internal and external structures of the case and the instrument's decoration. The major result of this first stage was to bring the instrument back to life using modern technology without destroying the signs of the previous phases, highly valuable for a later restoration with a historical focus.

In 1984, the Schnitger organ was again the center around which the musical life of Mariana spun, following masses and liturgical celebrations, besides being presented in national and international concerts that brought world-renowned organists. Although the organ was playing and functioning well, some important characteristics that couldn't be restored were left to a second stage. An initiative of the Archdiocese of Mariana's Cultural and Educational Foundation, further restoration began in 1997 with the visit of Bernhard Edskes to Mariana and ended in February 2002.

The tuning was changed to a system more in step with the times when the instrument was built and some registers were rebuilt. Together with the restoration, research was done to gather more data about its building and its arrival in Minas Gerais, as well as its various functions along its history. This restoration was done by the Edskes Orgelbau Company, of Wohlen, Switzerland and was sponsored by Petrobras, with support by Varig, Tam, and Vitae.

The result of the research can be found in the booklet *Órgão Arp Schnitger Sé de Mariana Minas Gerais – Aspectos Históricos e Técnicos*.

Arp Schnitger

Arp Schnitger was one of the most celebrated organ builders of his time. His production was excellent and copious: he built, restored, or enlarged 169 instruments. He exported instruments to many European countries, among them Holland, England, Spain, Portugal, and Russia. Of these organs, thirty still exist, whole or in part, and the one in Mariana is the only instrument outside Europe.

Arp Schnitger Chronology

- Born into a family of woodworkers from Golzwarden, Oldenburg. First family records appear in 1600. The name probably comes from his craft: carver, "Schnitzer," "Schnitker," "Schnitger."
- Son of Master Arp Schnitger and Katharine Schnitger. The father, a master woodworker, worked at least in the building of some organ cases (records from 1650).
- In 1662, when he was 14 years old, he began to learn his father's trade. He attended school; for he knew some Latin (a book in Latin was found in his library).
- In 1666, he moved to Glückstadt, Holstein (then belonging to Denmark) as an apprentice to his cousin Berendt Huss, an organ builder. Glückstadt was a large cultural center comparable to Hamburg at the time. Schnitger spent five years as an apprentice and then ran the workshop until Huss's death in 1676.
- As an apprentice to Huss, he helped to build the organs of St. Cosmae and St. Wilhaldi in Stade and finished the instrument in St. Wilhaldi after his master's death, on request of his widow. Lightning destroyed the St. Wilhaldi organ in 1727.
- At age 29, he opened a workshop in Stade as an independent master.
- In 1665, he married Gertrud Otte and bought a house in Neuenfelde, near Hamburg.
- He found much work around Stade. Following the tradition, whenever an organ was built, the whole workshop moved to the place, because the organ was practically built inside the church, from the box to the stops to the pipes.
- In 1682, he moved to Hamburg, where, after paying a fee, he made a pledge and became a citizen. Probably the building of the St. Nikolai organ motivated this relocation.
- Of the five children of his first marriage (three men and two women), three became organ builders. Two of them settled in Zwolle in 1720 and built many instruments in Holland, among them the St. Laurenskerk organ in Alkmaar.
- In 24 or 25 July 1719, Arp Schnitger died in Neuenfelde.
- In 1729, Franz Caspar Schnitger died, and in 1734, Hans Jürgen Schnitger.
- Albert Hinsch in Holland, who married Franz Caspar's widow and kept the workshop running, carried on the Schnitger tradition.
- In 1796, Franz Caspar the Young (Arp's grandson) made a society with Freytag, an organ builder, and their company lasted until 1860.

The Cathedral of Mariana

The Basilica Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption or the Cathedral of Mariana. The present parish dates from 1704 and the Chapel of the Beatific Virgin Mary of the Mount Carmel was the only temple in the hamlet until 1711, when it gained the status of village. The chapel was then elevated to main church and was dedicated to Our Lady of the Conception.

The temple was built during the term of Governor Antônio Francisco de Albuquerque (1710-13), and in 1734, more work was done on the façade and the towers.

A papal bull created the Diocese of Mariana in 1745, elevating the village to the category of city, and the church became a cathedral dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption. The changes of patron saint follow a Portuguese-Brazilian tradition that assigns most main churches to Our Lady of the Conception and, in bishoprics, the cathedral to Our Lady of the Assumption.

In 1748, the first bishop, Friar Manuel da Cruz, became aware of the need to finish the cathedral, especially the ceiling and the interior painting. Between 1751 and 1760 much work was done, including the construction of the Most Blessed Sacrament Chapel and the application of mortar on the exterior. In 1753, the Schnitger organ arrived in Mariana. Manuel Francisco Lisboa, who built a tribune near the choir to receive it, directed its installation.

The Mariana Cathedral presents a very modest design, similar to some Jesuit constructions on the Brazilian shoreline. The floor plan is rectangular, and so are its walls, denoting a strong classic taste, which its façade, crowned with a triangular pediment and two belfries, accentuates. The baroque exuberance is kept to its interior, richly gilded and polychromic.

Although it was subjected to constant work in the following 30 years, in 1798 the Cathedral fell in disrepair, making it necessary to rebuild the external walls and the roof. This was done according to the original design, but substituting stone and lime for mud.

Between 1978 and 1984 restoration was done, including the ceiling of the main chapel, the roof, chancel arch and towers, inspection of electrical installations, restoration of column covering, the ceiling of the main nave, replacement of floor ceramics for wood planks, and internal and external painting.

In his Baroque Religious Architecture in Brazil, Germain Bazin describes the cathedral's interior thus:

"The Cathedral of Mariana presents an exceptional floor plan, with the main nave limited by two lateral naves, surmounted by tribunes, while the main chapel is surrounded by corridors without tribunes. The sacristy is at the back. Two arms of the cross, inscribed, deep, and at the same level of the main chapel, form the transept. The church's architectonic decoration presents distinct stages. In the first stage, the columns and the arches were covered with wood panels, creating a beautiful Tuscan order with salient cornices. This noble décor remains in its entirety in the main nave, a remnant of the 1734 works. The richer ornamentation of the transept is a composite of Ionian and Corinthian capitals and belongs to a later period. Of course, as the church became a cathedral to house the bishop's seat, the

temple had to be richer. Thus, the main chapel was divided into two parts by two consoles of a composite order that support the pendants from two cupolas of slight relief, in wood. On these two cupolas, an architectonic decoration was painted that houses two times four saintly priests. The date when the work was concluded is provided by the contract for the painting of the two cupolas, as well as that of the main nave's ceiling, which was given to Manuel Rabelo de Sousa ... in 1760. In the same year, Manuel Rabelo de Sousa had signed a contract to paint the interior and gild the lateral altars."

Highlights of the cathedral's decoration are the two fake cupolas of the main chapel, the two huge altarpieces of the transept, one dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary and the other to Saint Michael and Souls, both attributed to the Portuguese carver Francisco Xavier de Brito. Also worth mentioning are the windscreen at the entrance, by Francisco Vieira Servas, and the works in the baptistery: the font in stone, by José Pereira Arouca, the lid of which was carved also by Francisco Vieira Servas, and the painting of the Baptism of Christ, by Manoel da Costa Athaide.

Text by Josinéia Godinho, directed by José Arnaldo Coelho.

Organists

Elisa Freixo has one of the most important careers in the country at present. After finishing her studies in Brazil, she lived in Europe for four years, where she studied organ and harpsichord. She attended the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hamburg, the Schola Cantorum in Paris, and the Conservatoire de Musique in Rueil Malmaison, France.

Back in Brazil since 1982, she has presented herself here and abroad in organ, harpsichord, and pianoforte concerts, while developing a parallel career as a chamber musician. Living in Mariana, she is responsible for the series of concerts played on the Arp Schnitger organ, installed in the city's Cathedral. Since 1985, she has recorded 12 LPs and CDs, of which six are independent production, dedicated to the work of J. S. Bach, Mendelssohn, romantic authors, and a series of 3 volumes dedicated to the Mariana organ.

Her first CD, for the French label Auvidis-Valois, dedicated to the 18th century Spanish repertoire, received the Grand Prix du Disque of the Nouvelle Academie Française, one of the highest honors of the music market. Freixo was the first Brazilian artist to receive the Grand Prix.

Josinéia Godinho Organist and harpsichord player, she graduated from the Escola Superior de Música Santa Marcelina, São Paulo. She studied religious music in Herford and at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hamburg, under Wolfgang Zerer, becoming an expert in organ playing. At the same time, she studied harpsichord under Isolde Kittel and Gisela Gumz. She took many courses on organ and harpsichord playing.

As a soloist and a chamber musician, she has been in concert in Germany, Holland, Argentina, and Japan. She has played various duos: organ and trumpet with Sabine Braun (since 1996), harpsichord and flute with Barbara Witter (between 2000 and 2002), and two harpsichords with Elisa Freixo (since 2000). In 2002, she played in the recording of a CD for the Mariana Museum of Music, with the Coral Ars Nova and an orchestra.

She lives in Mariana, where she helps with organ presentations and works in a project to popularize Brazilian instruments.