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Twenty Itineraries
Designed to Help
You Explore the
Cultural Heritage
of Palermo and
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Soprintendenza per i Beni culturali
e ambientali di Palermo

THE VOICE OF ANGELS

ANCIENT ORGANS

by **Sergio Ingoglia** and **Anna Tschinke**

REGIONE SICILIANA
Assessorato dei Beni culturali
e dell'Identità siciliana



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Ancient organs

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What is a world without music? We are a fortunate generation, as we cannot even begin to imagine what it would be like. Our life is full of music, always available, everywhere, in any form: at home, in public places, at work, while we drive a car, play, travel or are engaged in some kind of sporting activity.

It is one of the great achievements of the 20th century, made possible by instruments for the reproduction and transmission of music that have become steadily more sophisticated. Before the start of the 20th century music was not so readily available. It was limited to live performances and to special occasions. Music was a privilege reserved to the nobility and the rich, that could afford the incredible luxury of a ‘*cappella*’, a small vocal and instrumental group that would perform during meals, at mass and for ceremonies. Or else they were part of the more solemn liturgical celebrations, originally sung and then, from the early Middle Ages, accompanied by an organ.

All mankind has loved music, to the extent that it became a symbol of cosmic harmony. In representations of Paradise, there are frequent figures of angels playing musical instruments (just as Hell is principally depicted by strident notes of dissonance). Luxury, amazement, glory, power and above all sheer pleasure: music has represented for generations all of the above.

This short introduction helps one imagine the effect on a small community, during the 16th, 17th or even 18th century, of the large, majestic organs still to be found in

many of the small towns of the Province of Palermo, as well as in many of the city churches.

Certainly, there was the singing that accompanied the toils of labour; there was the music for dancing, performed by small groups and only a few instruments; but neither could compete with the solemnity of the organ that would ring out in church at all the principal festivities, almost as if it were an advance, on this Earth, of the voice of the Almighty, which one would hear in the Afterworld. This voice admonished, intimidated, exulted, filled with enthusiasm; it transported, for a while, into another, higher, sphere a population that for the most part, lived a life consisting solely of hard work and poverty.

Organs, delicate and precious machines, do not always survive the passage of time. Most of those preserved in Sicily, and more particularly in the Province of Palermo, are no older than early 17th century. And, in fact, it is difficult not to consider them as an intrinsic part of the great Baroque Churches built thanks to the patronage of the nobility and the devotion of the population, not merely in the boroughs of the great city, but also in the smaller towns and villages.

The organs that we can still admire nowadays, are a part of that grandiose Baroque ‘*discourse*’ on the importance of the Faith, attested by the architecture, the paintings and the sculpture of that time. Music, and the organ that gave *voice* to it, were not only prestigious elements of the interior decoration of the churches, but above all a powerful element in the

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entire building process, exemplified by the religious monument itself. In this artistic flowering, rivalry between parishes came into play; a competition between who had the finest instrument and the best organist. Organs, like the architectural works of art in which they are housed, are now experiencing a period of desolation and decay.

The towns are losing inhabitants, the church is losing its church-goers, the buildings crumble, organ music is played less and less.

However, due to some excellent restoration work, many of these prodigious machines are acquiring a new lease of life, and small isolated villages are becoming sought after sites (oases of *charm*) by people moving away from the frenetic pace of the big

city. It is, therefore, neither utopistic nor arbitrary to think of creating an itinerary for the discovery of places, often of minor importance but always fascinating, that have, as their major attraction, an organ; an itinerary, which casts new light on a territory full of history, as one follows the trail of forgotten works of art.

I.R.

1

Isnello, Church of the Annunziata. Detail of the Nativity by Zoppo of Gangi



A BRIEF HISTORY OF ORGANS

The pipe organ has probably one of the most complicated mechanisms in the entire range of musical instruments. The invention of the *Hydraulis*, [aúlòs, water organ], a machine in which the air pressure—necessary to make the pipes vibrate and produce their sound—was created by the flow of water, was most likely due to Ctesibius of Alexandria of Egypt (285-222 BC); engineer and inventor of the hydraulic organ pump, of the water clock, inventor of the science of pneumatics and founder of the Alexandrian school of mechanics.

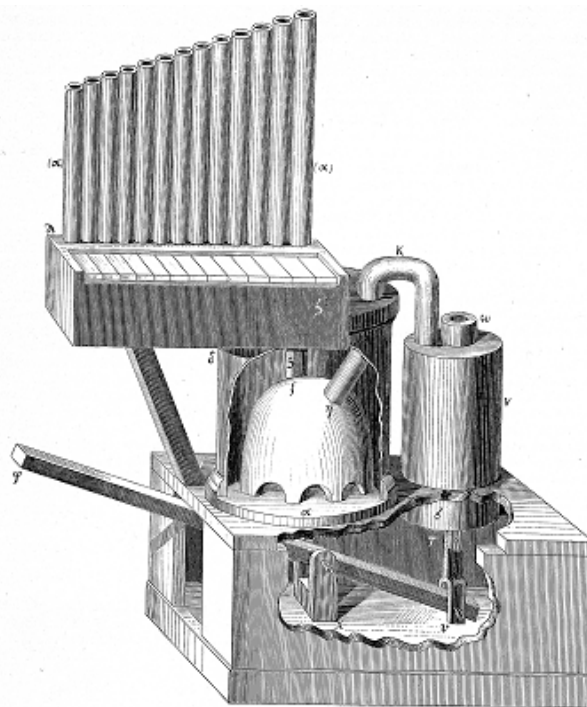
This instrument has been described by Philo of Byzantium (3rd century BC), in the 'Pneumatika' by Hero of Alexandria (1st century AC?) and in the 'De architectura' by Vitruvius' (1st century BC).

The air, compressed by one or even two pumps, lowered the level of water contained in a bronze or copper bell immersed in a vat. In turn, the water compressed the air, sending it into the pipes that created a different pitch in height, but not in timbre. There was a keyboard [manual] connected to a valves that allowed each pipe to be played. In the organ described by Vitruvius, there was also a device for selecting one or more ranks of pipes (registers). However, bellows soon replaced this complicated hydraulic system of supplying the pipes with air. These early instruments, besides playing music, were also used to simulate bird song or to reproduce other sounds present in nature. There are also traces of the presence of water organs in Imperial Roman times, and in 67AD Nero, a music-lover, wanted one to gladden banquets and moments of pleasure. From archaeological finds in Pompeii and Aquinum (in the vicinity of what is nowadays Budapest) it is possible to establish that these instruments were mostly small and with not more than a

couple of dozen pipes [positive organs]. It was in the first centuries after the birth of Christ that the original *hydraulis* organ was first paired with, and then replaced by, the organ operated by bellows, in which the air current [wind] is produced by a large pair of bellows. Between the 5th and 6th century, after the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, the spread of organs came to a halt. In the Roman Empire of the East, however, the pipe organ was used for secular purposes, to enliven banquets, accompany dances or to celebrate the public appearances of the Emperor, thereby eliciting astonishment. It did not play the role in religious liturgies that it would come to have in the Western Empire. In oriental Byzantium it became so popular that it was almost a forerunner of the vertical pianoforte, entering into every house that was able to afford one and was reproduced in bas-reliefs, on marble slabs [stelae], coins, mosaics, frescoes and even as oil lamps made to represent an organ (**fig. 3**). Stories are told about two organs, with solid gold and silver pipes, one made for

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2
*The water organ
invented by Ctesibius,
from the description by
Hero of Alexandria*

the Emperor of Byzantium, the other for his courtiers, that were melted down for coinage during a financial crisis. In 757, the Emperor of Byzantium, Constantine V, presented an organ to Pippin the Younger [often incorrectly known as Pepin the Short], king of the Franks, who placed it in the Abbey of St. Cornelius at Compiègne. Thus the organ returned once more to Western Europe. At first it was only present in Court Circles, but then in 826 a Venetian priest named George, who came from the Orient, was charged with making one for the Emperor Louis the Pious [also the Fair]. From here onwards there are multiple proofs of the spread of the Organ. It is to be found principally in the monasteries, as an instrument for the study of harmonies and

the nascent polyphony. Its total acceptance in churches comes about gradually, through the mediation of illustrious personae. In 827, for example, Pope John VIII requested that an organ built in Bavaria, together with an organist who knew how to play it, be sent to Rome, in order that the Roman seminarists could learn the art of music. Thus the organ came to be utilised, with increasing frequency and with great solemnity, for the Divine Liturgies, both during the more important Religious Festivals and in the monastic communities as a 'basso continuo' or musical foundation during their chants (**fig. 4**). In the Late Middle Ages, together with the organs in the important churches, with large pipes and bellows that often needed to be powered by up to ten people, there were

also portable organs [*portative*], which could be played by one person operating the bellows with the left hand and the keyboard with the right, as well as larger *positive* organs, in which one person operated the bellows and a second person operated the keyboard with both hands. After the year 1000 these instruments, which had become larger and louder, generated opposition by some of the clergy, such as one of the disciples of St. Bernard [T/n Aelred of Rievaulx in *The Mirror of Charity*], who affirmed that “si gabella per religione questa ridicola sfrenatezza” [And this ridiculous dissipation is called religious observance].

Up until the 17th century, Italian organs remained relatively small; but in the northern countries the newer organs had multiple keyboards [manuals], a separate windchest, and the pedalboard played an increasingly important role. Italy did not adopt this innovation until the 18th century.

The 19th century, with its passion for all things mechanical, saw a great many innovations in the production of musical instruments. A characteristic of this century was the demand to turn the organ into a complete orchestra. Technical improvements aside, new *registers* were introduced (a range of new sounds) as well as the *expression swell box*, which allowed the graduation of the sound both in crescendo and in diminuendo.

In the second half of the 19th century, with the spread of electricity, the transmission from the keyboard to the stops was electrified and mechanised ventilators produced the wind.



The 20th century saw the end of the desire, of the previous century, to turn the organ into a symphony orchestra and endeavoured to return—especially for the execution of masterpieces by classical organists—to the richness of sound of the older instruments. This did not mean that organs were not used both as ‘*theatre organs*’, as an accompaniment to silent movies, or as an attraction, like some of the colossal American organs.

Notwithstanding the fact that the use of the instrument in the Middle Ages can be

3
A terracotta Roman oil lamp, in the shape of an organ

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dated before the year 1000, the musical scores that have survived can be only be dated several centuries later. Until the 4th century the most significant Italian music was composed for voice, and instruments such as the lute. Not even the Florentine Francesco Landini (1325-1397), known as Francesco degli Organi or Francesco *il Cieco* [Francesco of the Organs' or 'Francesco the Blind'], left musical scores for the organ. Despite his disability, he was one of the greatest organists of his period, but nonetheless utilised music written for other instruments.

The voice remained dominant, but it became increasingly difficult, for private and secular meetings, to find four voices necessary for the execution of madrigals and so it became customary to leave the missing part to an instrument, either the organ or the lute, in order to play more sounds of the same timbre, and thus the first harmonies.

From the start of the 16th century, organ music gradually freed itself from vocal music, a process completed by the end of the following century, and it was in Italy that this new fashion flourished, especially in the Venetian school.

The earliest transcripts for organ, however, coming as they did from religious compositions for voice, full of embellishments, still possessed a fastidious virtuosity. Girolamo Cavazzoni, from Urbino, wrote in 1542, scores with a certain religious solemnity, but it was Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-1594) who managed to combine traditional with modern music. A really artistic level





of composition of religious music was not reached until the Venetians Andrea (1510-1586) and Giovanni (1557-1612) Gabrieli composed the *Salmi davidici*, the former and the *Sacrae Symphoniae*, the latter.

The passage from the virtuosity of the 16th century to real religious sentiment is obtained by Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643), who reaches the levels of perfection that were implicit in vocal polyphony. Thus Frescobaldi and the Gabrielis move out from strict musical limits and create compositions that search for *Transcendence* in a strictly religious sense. This tension, coupled with the constructive complexity of the organ, results in the sound seeming to be wrapped in a cloud of mystery, which the faithful perceive more as issuing from a choir of angels, rather than as the result of human action.

Although after Frescobaldi there were no further great compositions written for the organ in Italy, in Europe there were several important composers during the 17th and 18th century: the Frenchman François Couperin (1668-1733) and the German Georg Friedrich Händel (1685-1759) and above all, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), the most famous composer of organ music. During the 19th century the major exponent of the romantic 'orchestral' style of music was the Belgian César-Auguste Franck (1822-1890).

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963), Arnold Schönberg (1874-1951) and Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) all contributed important (post) tonal organ music during the 20th century.

4

Positive organ in a painting by Hugo van der Goes (1440 circa-1482)

THE PARTS OF THE ORGAN AND THEIR FUNCTION

The pipe organ is a wind instrument, in which the passage of air makes the pipes of differing height and diameter vibrate and resound. Mechanically it strives to produce and regulate a strong current of air and direct it towards the pipes or the group of pipes that the organist wishes to sound..

A pipe organ is essentially formed from the following parts:

- **a keyboard**, which is manually activated and commands the aperture of the pallet inside the windchest, allowing the wind to enter into the pipes
- **a pedalboard**, which has the same functions as the keyboard, but is activated by the feet
- **tracker action**, which transfers the impulse of the keyboard or pedalboard to the pallets in the windchest
- **the windchest**, the large case in which the air collects before being distributed to the pipes
- **the pipes**, which produce the sound
- **the registers or ranks**, a series of pipes with a homogeneous timbre
- **the bellows**, which produces the wind that enters the instrument
- **the casing**, which contains and protects the instrument, and acts as a soundboard.

Workings of the organ

Before delving into the various components of the organ it would seem logical to examine the dynamics of wind and the various applications that are carried on inside. Let us take a virtual trip together with the wind that allows it to sound, from

its loading up and compression inside the bellows, until the emission of sound through the pipes. Originally the air was compressed inside the windchest with the aid of bellows, or pumps, operated by the *calcant*.

Nowadays, almost without exception, air is supplied to the windchest by electric ventilators and maintained at a constant pressure by means of a system of weights and valves. The wind [compressed air] reaches the windchest through the *wind channels*, square sectioned wooden tubes. When the organist depresses a key, a complex system of levers and pulleys [the tracker action], opens a valve, known as the *pallet*. The pallet opens and allows wind to enter the *foot* of the pipe corresponding to the depressed key, making it 'speak'.

The keyboard or manual

The keyboard consists of a set of levers, known as *keys*, which like switches, open valves set at a certain distance. When a key is depressed, in fact, it opens a valve, which allows the passage of air in the direction of the pipes, which then 'speak'. Originally the number of keys was limited to one or two octaves and the keys themselves were extremely stiff and usually operated by punching with the fist.

Most Sicilian instruments of the 16th and 17th century have only one manual of 45 keys, with a 'short' first octave composed of eight notes, arranged as in fig. 6
 At the end of the 19th century the design of the Italian organ undergoes fairly radical changes, following trends being introduced elsewhere. This trend was further accentuated as a result of the uproar created by Camille Saint Saëns,

5

Detail of a manual

6

Manual with a 'short' first octave



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One of the two consoles of the largest organ in the world (Atlantic City Convention Hall, New Jersey)



called by Liszt “the greatest organist in the world”. Saint Saëns refused to hold a concert in the Milan Academy of Music in 1879, because the organ had only one manual and the pedalboard was too small. The news spread like wildfire and progressively, Italian organs began to have at least two keyboards, the extensions were increased, the pedalboards were lengthened in order to allow an ever increasing show of virtuosity as well as performances of music written solely for the pedalboard [“pedaliera sola”].

From then on, and above all in the first half of the 20th century, the organ

is continuously altered and enlarged, becoming really ‘eclectic’. Over a period of time the number of keys and keyboards, or manuals, increased exponentially, until the instruments became gigantic, like the organ built for the Convention Hall in Atlantic City, New Jersey (USA) between 1929 and 1932. This had two *consoles* (a *console* is the command centre of the instrument, where manuals, pedalboards, and registers are all collected together in an organ casing), one of the consoles had 7 manuals, whilst the other had 5 (**fig. 7**), for a total of 780 keys.



8
Nicosia (EN), Church of San Biagio. Manual and pedalboard

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Pedalboard 'alla Siciliana' before its restoration

The pedalboard

The function of the pedalboard is exactly the same as that of the keyboard, it controls the opening of the valves from a distance, allowing wind into the pipes. It is, however, controlled by pressure from the feet and it is used to control the pipes that 'speak' in a lower pitch, known as the 'bass-line'.

The pedalboard described in this booklet, does not usually protrude out far from the case, is hinged inside the case and is known as *alla Siciliana*.

Methods of Transmission or Action

The depression of keys or the pedalboard operates the valves made of wood or leather called *pallets*, which can be some distance away. In the early organs the opening mechanism was operated by *pegs*, small cylinders directly connected to the levers depressed by the keys. This type of action meant that the instrument had to be relatively small.

With the passage of time the tracker action was realised and introduced, a tracker

system of levers and pulleys or roller board, either of metal or wood, with which it was possible to open valves that were further away than the possible reach of the keyboard. This invention contributed greatly to the increase in size of the instruments (**fig. 10**).



10
*Detail of the tracker
with the metal tracker
action*



11
*From the bottom:
manual, key lever,
backfall, rod with
metal tracker action,
windchest with its
doors open, spring and
pallets*



12
Windchest

13
Sliders under restoration

Windchest

The windchest is a large wooden case, hermetically sealed so as to receive the wind [compressed air] from the bellows and, through the pallets, distributes the wind to the pipes, inserted vertically above the wind chest (fig. 12).

Inside the windchest, besides the pallets are the wooden *sliders* with small holes. The passage of wind into the pipes of a particular register is controlled by the movement of these *rods* (fig. 13-14).

Registers

A register is composed of a line [rank] of pipes, with the same timbre, situated over the wind chest. More than one rank can be placed on the windchest, creating multiple registers (fig. 15).

By means of levers and knobs (fig. 16) placed either on the side-jamb or above the keyboard, as well as levers known as *draw stop knobs*, first used during the Middle



15

Pipes inserted into the chest and held upright by the rack board

16

Stop knobs. The names of the ranks are engraved on the knobs



Ages, the *sliders* are moved, inside the slider chest. The slider has small holes drilled in it, one for each pipe in the rank. When the stop is on, the holes are misaligned with the pipes, preventing the air from flowing up into the pipes above. When the stop is off, the slider moves over, aligning the holes with the pipes, allowing air to reach them. Thus, using the tracking action and the stops it is possible to play a single pipe or several pipes of diverse timbre, by depressing a single key.

The *sliders*, (**fig. 17-18**) are long metal bars, which are hinged about $1/3$ of their length, descend vertically into the organ and are held in the top-board by a large rectangular hole, to the right of the manual. The keys

17

Extremities of the sliders used to activate the ranks, seen from the hole to the right of the manual



depressed by the organist allow the sliders to activate the ranks.

In Sicily the *sliders* are present and still in use only in the organs of the Churches of: San Francesco d'Assisi in Castelbuono, San Cataldo in Gagliano Castelferrato [Enna], San Pantaleone in Alcara Li Fusi [Messina], San Sebastiano in Chiusa Sclafani, the Salvatore in Ciminna. At least a further ten still have windchests with this particular type of insertion of the registers, but the sliders have been replaced at some point in the 18th century with a track action system of levers and pulleys.

The stops are used by the organists as indicated by the music score, in relation to specific circumstances or as a matter of personal choice. The so-called *Ripieno* stop is fundamental in Italian organ building and can be composed of several ranks of pipes, up to fifteen, of different timbres and regulated at differing intervals. Some special stops imitate the sound of orchestral strings, others, known as the '*tremulanti*', such as the *Vox Humana*, the *Vox Céleste* or the *Unda Maris* (sound of the sea), which simultaneously play a complete rank of well-regulated pipes, together with one that crescendos or diminuendos produce a vibrato sound that generates the idea of a choir.

Another particular register is known as the *Zimbelstern*, little bells (**fig. 19**) that are rung by hammers actioned from the keyboard.

Some organs also have '*accessories*', particular stops that create special sound effects such as: the *nightingale*, or *bird song* (**fig. 20**), created by submerging the

18
*Extremity of the slider
seen from the inside*



19
Bells stop





ends of three or four pipes into a water bowl made of an alloy of tin and lead. The air that passes through the pipes makes a gurgling sound in the basin, creating a lifelike ‘*chirping of birds*’. Another type of bird song can be created by regulating pairs of pipes at a distance of a quarter of a tone or semitone.

There is also a system known as ‘*tremolo*’ or *tremulant*, which allows the air compressed by the bellows to be varied in intensity. This creates a vibration in the sounds produced by the various registers. It dates back to the 17th century. The device placed inside the windpipe, (which carries the air from the bellows to the windchest), is a small board that oscillates under the combined pressure of the air and a spring: In the *tremblant fort* (strong tremulant), the small wooden board rhythmically opens and closes a few small holes bored into the wind channel, provoking an escape of wind



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The Bird Song stop

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Banda Turca stop



22

The base drum and the sistro stop



each time it is opened with a consequent loss of pressure; in the *tremblant doux* (sweet tremulant), on the other hand, the small wooden board oscillates inside the wind channel, producing a lesser drop in pressure.

In the second half of the 17th century, the organ continually endeavoured to imitate an orchestra, or a band and therefore stops appeared, which sounded like the English horn, the flute octaviante, the trombone, the hunting horn or the violin. Percussion instruments also appeared such as the bass drum, the cymbals, the sistro (**fig. 21-22**) that together with the bells, create what is known as the *banda turca*.

The desire to create organs with ever increasing numbers of stops led, between 1929 and 1932, to the creation of the organ of the Atlantic City Convention Hall, in New Jersey, which with its 33,000 pipes and 1439 stops is actually the world's largest organ.



Pipes

The materials mostly used to fabricate the pipes were, and still are, metal (a tin and lead alloy), wood or reed. In the past, they were also made of silver, cardboard, bone, glass, gold, alabaster and copper.

The variation in the length of the pipes creates sounds with more or lower base tones: a deep sound corresponds to a long pipe producing low pitch and low frequency, a short pipe producing high frequency and high pitch. They are placed over the windchest and are supported vertically by the *rack board*, a thin perforated board, of wood, cardboard or leather (**fig. 24**).

There are different types of pipes: flue pipes (*ad anima*) and reed pipes (*ad ancia*).



23

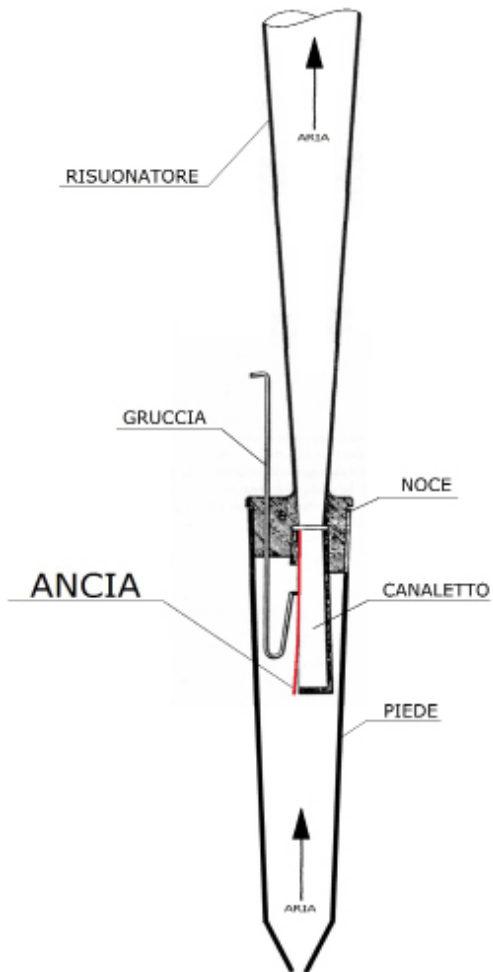
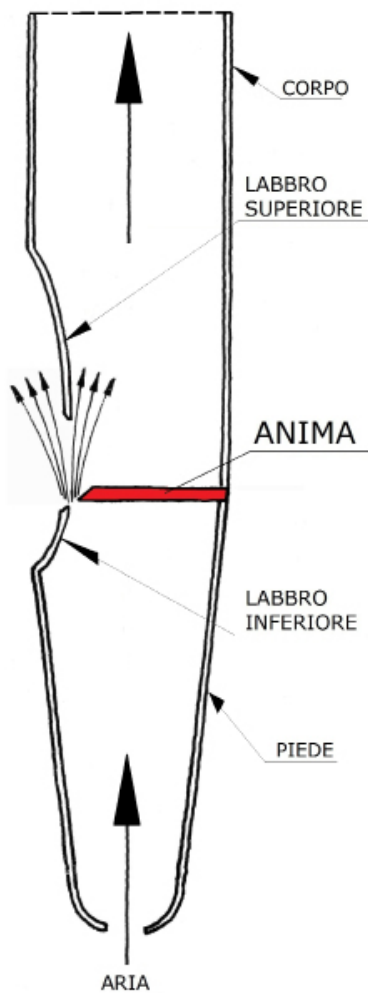
The rack board, with no pipes inserted, seen from inside

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Pipes inserted in the windchest

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*Left a flue pipe and
right a reed pipe*

Flue Pipes – ad anima

Also called labial, they function rather like a recorder: the air, crossing the labium, makes the column of air vibrate in a very similar fashion to that of instruments such as the flute, the whistle or the ocarina. They are composed of:

- the *body*, the upper part of the pipe,
- the *boot*, the lower part of the pipe,
- the *core*, the diaphragm between the body and the foot,
- the *mouth*, the lateral opening of the pipe between the upper part of the pipe and the lower part of the body. They appear to be just simple tubes, but the pipes are in fact 'fluid-dynamic machines' (fig. 25) that obey specific laws of physics. In fact, the *labium*, the thin metal diaphragm situated between the foot and the body of the pipe, forces the wind out of the *mouth*, the wind which divides into two streams, one which comes out of the mouth, in a laminar flow and, beating on the upper lip, vibrates with a turbulent movement; the other instead, passes through the pipe, comes out at the top vibrating with a specific *frequency* (number of wave oscillations per second, expressed in Hertz) known as the diapason chorus, which is determined principally by the length of the pipe. The human ear perceives these two perturbations as a sound. There are many elements that determine and influence the sound of the pipe for example: length and diameter of the body, the constructional material and the gauge of the metal utilised, the shape of the exit hole at the top, the presence of holes in the lower lip (*teeth*), the possible presence of a stopper on the top, its shape, dimension...



Reed Pipes – ad ancia

This pipe has a lamina inside the foot, known as ancia or reed that vibrates with the passage of air and produces a sound that will be amplified by the body of the pipe, known as the resonator.

The same principle is found in clarinets and saxophones.

A reed pipe is composed of:

- the *resonator*, the upper part of the pipe that determines the colour and the timbre of the sound produced;
- the *nut*, a casting of tin with a longitudinal hole, welded at the bottom of the resonator;
- the *shallot* (fig. 26), inserted and soldered inside the nut and acting as support of the reed. Its dimensions, equal to the reed, determine the height of the sound, which is the note produced;
- the *reed*, a copper tongue, in contact with a metal shallot. The flow of air makes it vibrate inside the boot of the pipe, generating an acoustic vibration amplified by the resonator;
- the *tuning wire*, a bent metal wire that passes through the block and holds the reed on a variable pitch.

This allows the vibration in larger or smaller portions of the reed, thus changing

26

Nut with resonator, reed and tuning wire for tuning

THE VOICE OF ANGELS

Ancient organs

27

*Traces of old olive oil
(highlighted in green)
used to protect the
pipes from oxidation*

the sound. The tuning wire is moved by the tuning knife, which allows the organist to regulate the pipes without dismantling them.

- the *boot*, holds the shallot and the reed

inside. The reed pipes, as well as being very expensive are also very subject to changes of temperature and humidity and therefore need more maintenance and frequent tuning.





28
Wedge shaped bellows

29
Lantern shaped bellows

The Bellows

The bellows supply the air needed to produce the sound [make the pipes 'speak']. They are generally one of two shapes: 'wedge shaped' (fig. 28) or 'lantern shaped' (fig. 29). It was operated by a person known as the calcant, a specialist who was responsible for a constant supply of air to the windchest by stepping on the bellows. A hesitation, or too much force created undesired false notes, and for this reason the good calcitrants were often paid as much as the organist. From the 19th century onwards the calcitrant was gradually replaced by the wind turbine.



THE VOICE OF ANGELS

Ancient organs

Casings

The function of the organ casing is principally to protect and support the instrument. It also aids to project the sounds of the pipes, except for the great pipes of the *bass line*, that are often placed outside the casing by reason of their size and in order not to limit the strength of their sound.

Inside this great wooden casing, the instrument is almost totally hidden.

Looking at it from the bottom upwards, it is possible to name what remains outside and not covered by the casing:

- the pedalboard, when present;
- the keyboard or manual;
- the stops used to change the registers located near the keyboard (sometimes there are no stops and the organist inserts the stop action using the *sliders*, through specific openings to open or shut ranks of pipes);
- the façade pipes, that are the only ones visible; all the others are protected and closed in, from the sides from the back and overhead. In some instruments the casing is furnished with an organ screen, which also encloses the pipes from the front and which are open only when the instrument is played. The bellows, and the levers to operate them, if there is no room for them in the casing, are normally behind it or in a chamber nearby, out of sight of those listening. Conservation, support, containment certainly but another essential function of the casing is its aesthetic function. This aspect, together with its dimensions, can vary depending on the location of the instrument as well as its purpose. There are small casings the height of a human person, and there are others of





enormous dimensions. There may be no decoration: a linear natural wood frame (**fig. 30**) or else so richly decorated that every inch is covered. These can be simple moldings or carvings, friezes, bas- and high reliefs, sculptures 'a tutto tondo'. The gilding can be in pure gold leaf, silver or silver gilded with *mecca* (varnished with mecca: a yellow reddish transparent paint that confers on silver the aspect of pure gold).

The painting can consist of a simple monochromatic base or it can imitate marble or take on a more elaborate form, with painted landscapes, floral decorations, religious or secular scenes, drawings of musical instruments or a selection of all this kind of painting.

On some casings there is a mixture of all kinds of decoration (carving, gilding, painting) (**fig. 31**). The casing, therefore, being constrained in shape and size for technical reasons, provides a fertile and versatile breeding ground for artistic expressions of the various periods and places in which these magnificent instruments are to be found.

30

Organ in the Museum 'Fra Giammaria of Tusa', in Gibilmanna

31

Palermo, Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, known as 'La Gancia'



32

*Palermo, Church of
Santa Maria della
Pietà. Large cantoria
with matroneo
(women's gallery)*

Cantoria or Organ-loft

There is almost always a cantoria inside a church. Often it is above the entrance portal, opposite the altar (fig. 32), or even behind the altar, in the presbytery, or parallel to the nave, protruding from the sidewalls. If there are several aisles, it can even be suspended between columns (intercolumnnio). It is built of masonry or wood or a combination of both and can look like a simple gallery or be decorated in a variety of ways.

It takes its name from the choristers who originally used this elevated space. Occasionally the organ, or one of the church organs, is located here. Some of the masonry organ-lofts are so spacious that there is room for the *coro ligneo* (wooden stalls, seats for the priests), the choristers remained standing, the organ and the organist etc. But sometimes the space was so restricted that there was only room for the organ and the organist.

Occasionally, in front of the organ-loft with its organ, a second organ-loft would be created, on which an identical organ casing would be placed, but without the instrumental part, or even a *trompe-l'oeil* of the organ casing (fig. 33).

The decoration of the cantoria (when this was decorated) could be of the same style as the organ casing or totally different. Some of the time the decorated spaces are utilised for devotional scenes: apostles and saints, with Christ or the Virgin Mary, or else evangelistic and biblical scenes or scenes from the life of Mary. The décor can also be profane, purely floral or geometric. The variety of the decorations matches that of the organ casings, i.e. carvings,

paintings and gilding. Supporting the organ loft, there are often spectacular Telamons sculptured underneath, which hold on their shoulders, with a great show of muscles and strength, the entire weight of the loft and whatever is on it (fig. 34).



33
Palermo, Church of Santa Maria della Pietà. Cantoria or Organ Loft

34
Palermo, Church of Santa Maria della Pietà. Organ painted as a trompe-l'oeil

ORGAN MAKERS IN SICILY

The master artisans who designed and built the organs have always been, and continue to be, called 'organaro', organ-makers. There is already evidence of the presence of organs in Sicily in the 14th century. In fact in 1317 the 'new' organ was built for the Cathedral of Palermo and the seminarist Enrico de Cantore appointed as the organist with an annual wage of two ounces of gold.

Archival sources state that in 1411 Francesco de Sena built an organ for the Carmelite Fathers; that Nicola de Yskisano, a Palermitan, built an instrument in 1427 for the Order of the Frati Minori; that Tommaso de Giliberto built, in 1428, an organ with wooden pipes for the Royal Chapel in Trapani.

Other organ-makers active in Sicily in the 15th century were: Antonio de Chanina, who in 1453, consigned the organ for the Mother Church of Sciacca; Prestianni Funtini, who built the organ for the Messina Cathedral; Giovanni of Messina, who in 1501 would repair the large organ in the Palermo Cathedral, from which one can presume that there was a smaller organ as well; Bartolomeo Schillaci, who repaired, in 1494, the bellows of the organ of the Church of San Martino delle Scale in Palermo. But it is only after the second half of the 16th century that it becomes possible to establish the presence of the art of organ-making in Sicily. The oldest organs in existence date from this era. Amongst the Grand Master organ-makers active in Sicily there were:

- in the 15th century Nicolò Graffeo, Antonio Di Maria, Vincenzo de Intendi (builders and decorators of organ casings);
- in the 16th century, Giovanni de Blundo, Raffaele La Valle;

- in the 17th century, Antonino La Valle, Santo Romano, Francesco e Giuseppe Speradeo, Carlo Grimaldi;
- in the 18th century, Donato Del Piano, Mariano Cinquemani, Ignazio Faraci, Baldassarre di Paola, Pasquale Pergola, Michele, Stefano, Francesco e Giacomo Andronico, Nicolò Ayta, Antonino, Giuseppe e Francesco La Manna, Annibale Lo Bianco;
- in the 19th century, Francesco La Grassa becomes famous together with families of organ-makers such as the Platania of Acireale, the Laudani of Palermo associated with the Giudici of Bergamo, the Polizzi of Modica and Pasquale Gueli of Caltanissetta, Giuseppe Lugaro Andronico. The Master organ-maker was an extremely important figure, capable of transforming wood and metal into 'the art of sound'. Once he had become famous, he could afford to treat his patrons brusquely and at times almost arrogantly. Antonino La Valle, for example, requested board and

lodging for the time it would take to finish work on the organ destined for the Church of the Assunta in Sclafani Bagni. He also demanded a horse for the journey from Palermo to Sclafani and back, as was fitting for an artist of great repute. The art of organ building, given its complexity, created what was almost a secret sect for initiates.

The famous Master from Campania, don Donato Del Piano (1704-1785), obtained for the realisation of his masterpiece, the organ for the Benedictine Monastery of San Nicolò l’Arena in Catania, a contract granting him board and lodging inside the Monastery for his entire life, an annuity of 24 ounces a year and burial amongst the Monastery Monks. Everything, however, on condition that the instrument it could

be used and regulated by other good master artisans or their helpers. “The Reverend Del Piano ... hereby agrees to formulate a plan (of construction) that will allow all the registers to be tuned ... by any good organ-maker ... so that (God forbid) in case of death it will be possibile ... for the registers to be tuned by any good organ-maker or even by one of his helpers...”.

The instrument is still functioning perfectly today.

ORGANS IN THE CITY OF PALERMO

35

*Palermo, Church of
Santa Maria degli
Angeli. Organ*

CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA DEGLI ANGELI KNOWN AS LA GANCIA

Via Alloro Palermo
Raffaele La Valle, 1615

Built by Raffaele La Valle (born in Palermo around 1543), the organ in the Church of La Gancia was paid for by the Senate of Palermo in 1615, as evidenced by a sculpted and gilded wooden eagle, placed over the central tower of the façade.

The instrument is placed on an organ-loft, supported by two grandiose gilded *Telamons* (the Telamon is a male figure, 'a tutto tondo' or in high relief, used as a support, either structural or decorative, often instead of columns).

The organ pipes are interspersed by two columns and two pilasters, topped by a composite capital that is there to support the upper part which is richly decorated with volutes (spirals) and floral elements. The central arch appears to lift even higher the majestic structure of carved, painted



and gilded wood. Two sculpted putti above the arch hold a shield with the arms of the Franciscan Order, which culminates with the monogram 'IHS' inside a blazing sun, symbolising Christ.

Rebuilt in 1772 by Giacomo Andronico, utilizing the existing phonic materials, the organ has lost its original configuration. Above the principal windchest, towards the centre, it is still possible to read the inscription "JACOBUS ANDRONICO FECIT ANNO 1772".

36

*Palermo, Church of
Santa Maria degli
Angeli. Detail of the
casing*



CHURCH OF THE IMMACOLATA CONCEZIONE AL CAPO

Via Porta Carini Palermo
Stefano Andronico, 1686

The instrument is protected by a wooden casing painted and sculpted to imitate the multi-coloured marble decoration of the church. The gilding of the grilles, embellishments and statues is in pure gold. The 33 pipes are divided into 5 towers. On the opposite wall there is an exact wooden copy of the casing, which is purely aesthetic. The manual, probably not original, is what is known as windowed, that is, it does not protrude but is inserted into a rectangular niche and the first octave is 'short' (8 notes instead of 12, as the Do# or C#, the Mi♭ or Eb, the Fa# or F# and the Sol# or G# are not present), the diatonic keys are in ebony while the chromatic keys are covered with a thin layer of bone. The pedalboard is *'alla Siciliana'* and the 8 pedal-keys, in chestnut wood, are always connected to the manual. On the right jamb there are 5 copper stops in a vertical line that activate the tracker action. The transmission comprises wooden roller-boards, mounted on pine wood boards with levers facing inwards. No bellows were found, but presumably there were two, wedge shaped. The main windchest is made of walnut, with 8 levers and 8 stops. The stops over the windchest are as follows: Principal 1, Principal II, Octave, (Italian mixtures) Decimaquinta (super Octave or Fifteenth), Decimanona (Octave Twelfth or Nineteenth),

Vigesimaseconda (Super super Octave, Octave Fifteenth or Twenty-Second), Vigesimasesta (Twenty-Sixth), and the Octavin or Flûte Octavante.

37
*Palermo, Church
of the Immacolata
Concezione al Capo.
Organ*





CHURCH OF SAN DOMENICO

Piazza S. Domenico Palermo

Donato del Piano, 1779

Giacomo Andronico, 1781

The sumptuous sculpted wooden façade of the two organs and their organ-lofts decorate the spans of the minor arches either side of the apse.

There is evidence of an original organ, made for the 15th century Church of San Domenico, being *repaired* by Giuseppe Speradeo in 1669. Later on, in 1779, don Donato Del Piano, utilising parts of the original organ, builds the actual organ located in the left hand organ-loft.

It is contained in a showy gilded wooden casing and grills and carvings top the three ranks, with 25 pipes on the façade.

A second organ, placed opposite the first one, was built by Giacomo Andronico in 1781, probably utilising a pre-existing organ. In the records we find in fact that the prior at that time, Brother Vincenzo Gazano, mentions the '*difference*' between the two organs, the old one and the 'new' one of 1779.

However, this organ also no longer exists. It will be replaced, once its restoration is finished, by an instrument built by the Pacifico Inzoli Company of Crema in 1891.

CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA DELLA PIETÀ

Via Torremuzza Palermo
Antonio La Manna, 1756

The organ, placed on the second organ-loft to the left of the nave, has a casing painted Sicilian green, and embellished with gilded

decorations; the organ-loft is supported by spectacular gilded Telamons; the 33 pipes of the façade, of almost pure tin, are divided into three towers of 11 pipes each. In the opposite loft there is a similar but empty casing and with fake pipes on the façade (**fig. 40**). The first two organ-screens, to the left and right of the nave,



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*Palermo, Church of
Santa Maria della
Pietà. Organ*

THE VOICE OF ANGELS

Ancient organs



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*Palermo, Church of
Santa Maria della
Pietà. Organ casing
with fake pipes.*

are instead decorated with a trompe-l'œil, rendition of two organ façades. On a handwritten piece of paper, found under the windchest, is written “Antoninus La Manna Panormite Fecit Anno Domini 1756”, [Antonio La Manna from Palermo made it in the year of our Lord 1756].

A second inscription indicates the organ's patron “Nel Glorioso Governo di Donna Stefania Aragona Priora di questo Ven. le Monastero – 1756”. [In the year 1756, during the Glorious Government of Donna Stefania of Aragon, Prioress of this venerable Monastery].

Around 1950 an organ-maker added the first four semi-tones, the instrument is transferred to the organ-loft over the atrium and an electro ventilator is added; new bellows are added, the manuals are changed and the mechanical pedalboard shut off. After the restoration work carried out in 1993-1994, the organ returns to its original location. The philological methodology adopted enabled the return of the instrument to the original setup by La Manna with the following ranks: Principal I, Principal II, Vox Humana, Octave, Mixtures XV, XIX, XXII, XXVI, XXIX, Flute Octaviante, 3 rank cornet from Do_3 or C_3 . The stop knobs are in copper, set out in two columns on the right jamb of the keyboard, and function as pressure knobs.

ORATORY OF THE IMMACOLATELLA

Via Immacolatella, 3 Palermo
Pietro Lugaro, 1850

The organ is placed on a organ-loft richly carved and decorated in white and pure gold tempera, enclosed in an elegant casing painted with ochre tempera, with gilded wooden floral decorations topping the single tower. The 19 pipes on the façade are organised in a pinnacle with the mouths aligned.

The windowed keyboard has an extension from Do_1 or C_1 to Re_5 or D_5 with the first octave chromatic; the diatonic keys are covered in bone, the diesis in ebony. The pedalboard is *'a leggio'* ('music stand') with an extension from Do_1 or C_1 to Si_1 or B_1 and constantly connected to the manual.

The stop channel chest activates the following ranks: Principal, Vox Humana, Flute, Octave, Ottavino and three divisions of Mixtures (XV, XIX, XII).

The stops are activated by metal trackers with copper knobs. The transmission is mechanical, suspended and faces externally. The rack board is made of wood with the pipes-mouths underneath. The two wedge-shaped bellows are inside the casing.



41
*Palermo, Oratory of
the Immacolatella.
Organ*

THE VOICE OF ANGELS

Ancient organs

CHURCH OF SANT'ANNA LA MISERICORDIA

.....
Piazza S. Anna Palermo
Raffaele La Valle, 1625 (?)
.....

Only the casing of the original instrument intricately carved and completely covered in pure gold, remains. Raffaele La Valle

probably built it at the beginning of the 17th century. However, in 1654 the instrument was '*repaired*' by Giuseppe Speradeo and in 1834 Pasquale Pergola '*tunes and regulates*' the instrument and finally, around 1960, it is completely renovated and nowadays there is an electric organ inside the casing.

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Palermo, Church
of Sant'Anna la
Misericordia. Organ



CHURCH OF MONTE OLIVETO KNOWN AS DELLA BADIA NUOVA

Via Incoronazione Palermo
Unknown, 16th-17th century

This relatively rare instrument, originating from the Church of San Nicolò lo Reale, is a *positive organ* (that is an instrument of reduced dimensions, transportable and designed to be placed on the floor), with the pipes placed wing like, and in a simple wooden casing with no façade pipes. Small in size, it used to be transported from church to church, carried with the help of handles and poles. The manual, with 42 keys, has a mechanical action '*a pironi*', small metal cylindrical elements, placed under the keys that open the palettes under direct pressure from the keys; a direct tracker action with no backfall. The stop channel windchest has 4 levers, which are activated directly for the insertion of the registers (**fig. 44**).

A twin of the organ in the Church of San Giacomo in Caltagirone, originating from Melilli (Syracuse), it is very similar to the positive organ in the Church of the Badia Grande in Alcamo (Trapani).



43

Palermo, Church of
Monte Oliveto. Organ

44

Direct action sliders

A FEW ANTIQUE ORGANS IN THE PROVINCE OF PALERMO

CHURCH OF SAN SEBASTIANO IN CHIUSA SCLAFANI

Piazza Castello Chiusa Sclafani

Raffaele La Valle, 1625

The instrument is of classical Late Medieval design with five towers and two 'organetti morti' (fake pipes in façade). After much research it has been possible to re-establish its original technical sound characteristics. The discovery of the original windchest, (used for centuries as a 'passo d'uomo',

manhole utilised for maintenance work), has made it possible to recreate the insertion of the registers in the medioeval manner, by means of the sliders. The philological restoration was concluded in 2015. The church is decorated with stuccos by Giacomo Serpotta.



45

*Sclafani (PA), Church
of San Sebastiano.
Detail of the organ*



46

*Chiusa Sclafani
(PA), Church of San
Sebastiano. Detail of
the stucco*

**MAIN CHURCH (SANTA MARIA
MADDALENA) IN CIMINNA**

Piazza Matrice Ciminna
Raffaele La Valle, 1668
Laudani-Giudici, 1930

The instrument casing, of carved wood covered with pure gold, dates from 1604 and was made by the wood carver Francesco Barberi. Nothing, however, remains of the original instrument, built by Raffaele La Valle in 1668. The present

instrument is built by Laudani-Giudici and was bought by the Music Academy V. Bellini of Palermo. The sound of this instrument has been preserved by Luchino Visconti in 'The Gattopardo', in the scene in which the 'Te Deum' is played in gratitude for the safe return of the Prince to Donna Fugata, after having escaped the attacks of Garibaldi's soldiers along the way home.



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*Ciminna (PA), Main
Church. Organ*

THE VOICE OF ANGELS

Ancient organs

CHURCH OF THE SALVATORE KNOWN AS SAN DOMENICO IN CIMINNA

.....
Raffaele La Valle, 1590
.....

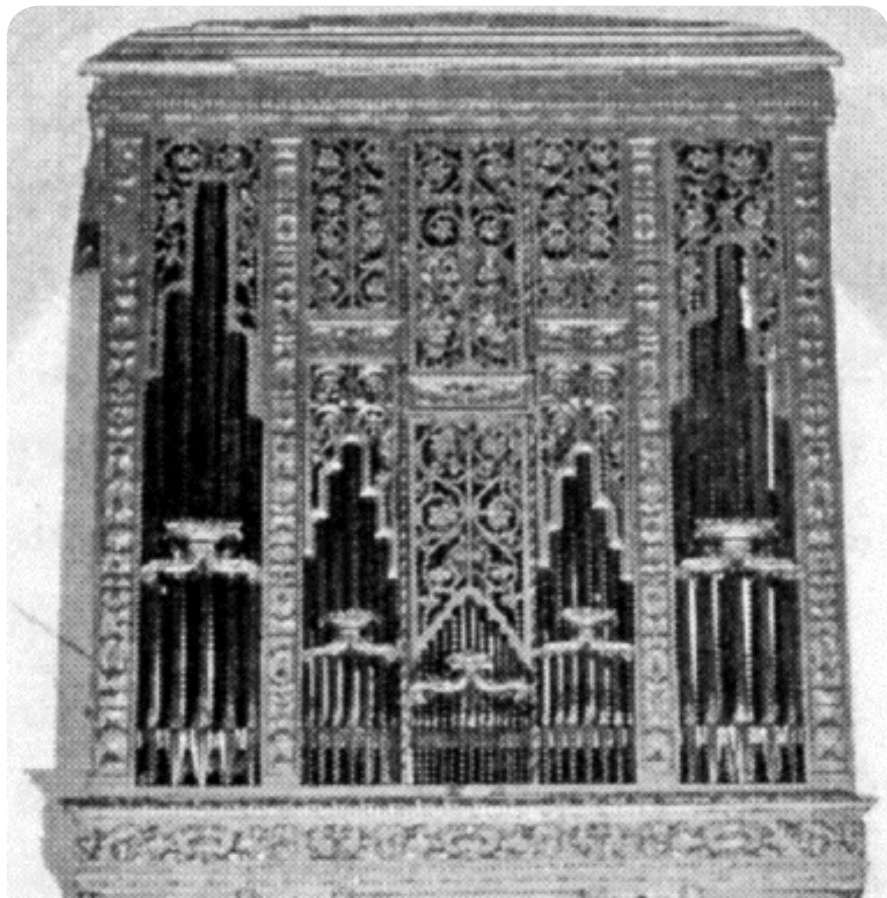
In 1590 the Sodality of the Holy Rosary financed the Monastery of San Domenico with 10 ounces (of gold) so that it could build itself an organ. The presence of certain inscriptions on the body of the

pipes, identical to those found on the organ in the Church of San Pietro in Collesano, leads to it being attributed to Raffaele La Valle.

The system of metal *sliders* is also used in this organ, which when activated through a hole in the wall of the wind chest, allow wind to reach the ranks of pipes, thereby making them 'speak'.

48

*Ciminna (PA),
Church of Our
Saviour (SS.
Salvatore). Organ*





CHURCH OF SANT'ANNA (BASILICA SOLUNTINA) IN SANTA FLAVIA

Via Consolare, 130 Santa Flavia
Giacomo Andronico, 1791

In 1790 Giacomo Andronico promises to construct an organ with a fortepiano or arpone (the fortepiano is a precursor of today's pianoforte) inside, together with a harpsichord built by Carlo Grimaldi more than 70 years earlier. In the contract, in fact, it states that the instrument shall have: four manuals sweet playing and clean, two in the centre and two lateral; the upper

of these plays the great organ, and the lower the echo organ; as for the other two placed laterally. The left hand one plays the harpsichord..., built by the famous Sig. Carlo Grimaldi of Messina, and the right hand one the arpone...a harpsichord resembling a fortepiano with four chords with a keyboard...similar to that made by Grimaldi, with a register of hammers that beat all the four chords that form the harmony of an arpone'. With regard to the organ's two keyboards, the upper one commands the Grand Organ, whilst the lower one the Echo or Antiphony Organ: 'in order to hear the sweet harmony of the

49

*Santa Flavia (PA),
Church of Sant'Anna.
Organ*

THE VOICE OF ANGELS

Ancient organs



Echo it is necessary to play on the organ's manual some brief musical motifs and then reproduce them exactly on the Echo's manual, if however, one plays these first on the Echo manual and then reproduces them on those of the Organ, the resulting effect is that of the famous 'Ear of Dionysius', the limestone cave in ancient Syracuse.'

Of the arpone and the harpsichord, only archival information remains, but it is important to note how in a single instrument: the organ (aerophonic), the harpsichord (plucked strings) and the arpone or fortepiano (cords hit by leather covered hammers), coexisted. Carlo Grimaldi, constructor of the harpsichord, was known as the 'Stradivarius of the harpsichord' but of his harpsichords only two have survived: one is in the National Museum in Nuremberg, the other in the Museum of Musical Instruments in Rome. Opposite, separated by a monumental wooden canopy, is another organ, with twin casings, constructed by La Manna in 1759, and at the moment waiting to be restored.

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*Santa Flavia (PA),
Church of Sant'Anna.
Wooden canopy*

PIPE ORGANS IN THE MADONIE

The instruments found in the Madonie (a mountain range at about 80 km from Palermo) are a living testimony to the moment of maximum cultural splendour that the region attained. They are spread along a route that crosses several important naturalistic and ethno-anthropological realities. The intellectual and commercial vivacity of the period between the 15th and the 18th century helped to develop an extremely high level of workmanship and the construction of an organ represented the synthesis of artisanal workmanship. In fact the carpenter, the woodcarver, the wood gilder, the blacksmith, the tanner all work together with the organ builder, who coordinates everything.

CHURCH OF SAN FRANCESCO IN CASTELBUONO

Piazza S. Francesco Castelbuono
Anonymus, 1547

The organ present in this church is one of the oldest in Sicily. Dating from 1547, the year in which John II Ventimiglia, Prince of Castelbuono, married his daughter Margaret to Charles of Aragon, Duke of Avola. This date places the organ in Castelbuono amongst the oldest in Europe, second only to the one “*in cornu Epistolae*”, constructed in 1475 by Lorenzo of Prato for the Basilica of San Petronio in Bologna. The casing is gilt with silver mecca and has a decorated background in a dark turquoise lacquer. It has 4 painted doors by an unknown 16th century painter, depicting ‘The Nativity’ and ‘The Adoration of the Magi’ when the doors are closed, ‘The Presentation in the Temple’ and ‘The Circumcision’ when the doors are open. The instrument has one manual with 45 keys (Do₁ or C₁–Do₅ or C₅) with a

‘short’ first octave; a suspended mechanical transmission with tracker action and wooden roller boards. There are seven ranks (Principal I, VIII, XV, XIX, XXII, XXVI, Principal II), which are activated via metal *sliders*. It has no base-note pipes. The rack-board is of leather. There are 2 sets of leather wedge bellows. The air pressure is 39,5mm of water column. The pipes, that were shortened in 18th and 19th century were lengthened during the restoration finished in 2008, and consequently the *pitch-pipe*, that is the frequency with which the column of air vibrates inside the pipes, once 440Hz, was brought back to the original 415Hz, restoring the original characteristic rarefied sound.

The tuning method for the regulation of the instrument, called *temperament*, which is the approximate equalization of the twelve semi-tones, is also worthy of note. The organ in the Church of San Francesco was built under the patronage of the Ventimiglia family, who traded with the rest of Italy, Flanders and Spain. In fact, it was in Spain that Francisco

THE VOICE OF ANGELS

Ancient organs

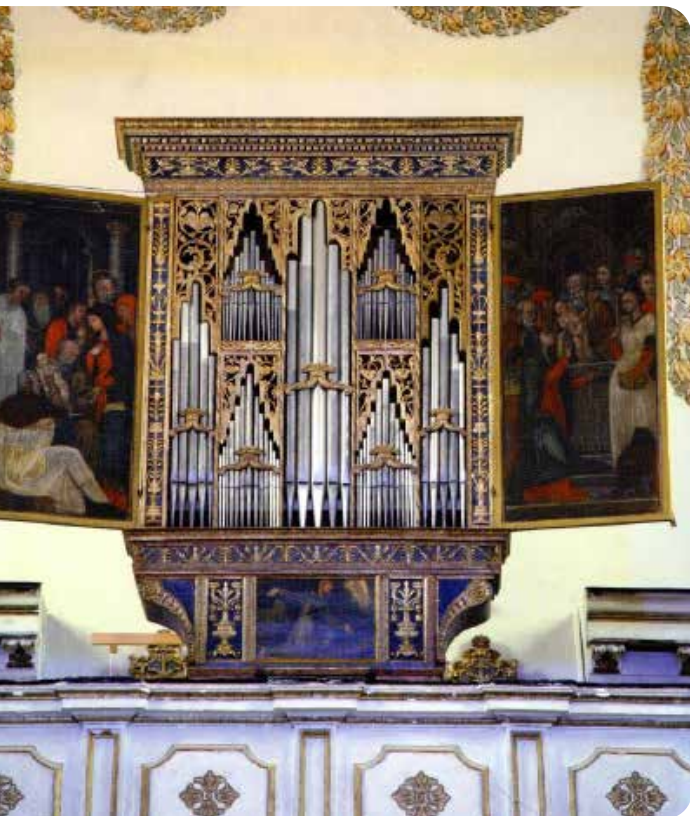
51

Castelbuono (PA),
Church of San
Francesco. Organ
dated 1547

Salinas, musician and theoretician of *temperament* lived and worked. Fortunately the original pipes from the instrument in Castelbuono accepted the particular temperament system studied by Salinas, which, by recognising the harmonic differences between sharp and flat notes in the musical scale, allows the organ to be used to play musical scores from the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The

52

Detail



tuning method adopted, however, may seem heavy handed to a more 'modern' ear, but it makes the organ of the Church of San Francesco one of the rarest examples of the phonic-pitch typical of Renaissance organ-building, to be found in Europe.

CHURCH OF SAN PIETRO IN COLLESANO

Via Vittorio Emanuele Collesano
Antonino La Valle, 1627

The organ is placed in an organ-loft on the left of the central nave, suspended in an intercolumniation and decorated with images of the Apostles and our Lord, the Redeemer. Opposite there is a choir-loft decorated with paintings depicting 'the life of Maria'.

The wooden façade is richly carved, gilt and lacquered; the 41 pipes are subdivided into five towers forming a pinnacle. There are also two '*organetti morti*' (that is fake), with 11 pipes each. The manual has 45 keys, from Do_1 or C_1 to Do_5 or C_5 , with a 'short' first octave; the pedalboard is *alla Siciliana* with 8 pedals from Do_1 or C_1 to Si_1 or B_1 , with a fixed connection to the manual. There are five stops and there is a stop that activates the triple chantered pipe. Originally the instrument had sliders that activated the registers, but due to the restoration and enlargement in the 18th century, these are no longer used, although they are still present. The stops are now activated by wooden pallets. In the same church, supported by an imposing wooden structure and suspended over the centre of the nave, is an awe-inspiring wooden cross painted and gilded.



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Collesano (PA),
Church of San Pietro.
Organ

54
Collesano (PA), Church
of San Pietro. The
monumental wooden
structure hanging above
the nave

THE ETNO-ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND RELIGIOUS ART MUSEUM "FRA' GIAMMARIA OF TUSA" IN GIBILMANNA

Annexed to the Monastery of the Sanctuary of Gibilmanna

Padre Francesco Lo Pinto da Castel di Lucio, 1862

The organ was originally installed in the former Monastery of Pettineo, a small mountain town in the province of Messina, where it was built, in 1862, by Padre Francesco Lo Pinto. An archival document states that: "...in this our church there is an organ made with simple giant cane and wooden pipes, built by me and at my expense in 1862 and since that date it has normally been played on feast days and during the Benedictions ... a help during the chants for the lack of voices, which in reality is only myself...". Following the closure of the

Monastery of Pettineo, in 1948, the organ was transferred to the Monastery of the Capuchin Friars of the Sanctuary of Maria Santissima in Gibilmanna, situated above Cefalù, and remained there until all traces of the instrument were lost, but on the 14th October, 1989 it was finally found in a small room in the monastic complex. Extremely essential, the instrument is a real gem, built out of giant reeds (*arundo donax*), and is the only example of its kind in the world.

The wooden casing is very simple, in natural wood, plain, with moulding; the façade pipes are aligned *wing-shaped*, that is following the succession of notes on the manual, from left to right, starting from the lowest note.

The pipes have been tuned to resemble the fipple flute or zuffolo (**fig. 55**), typical of Sicilian pastoral culture, and in fact both the boot and the mouth of every pipe have

55

Gibilmanna. Rank of reed pipes. Note the tuning slides.

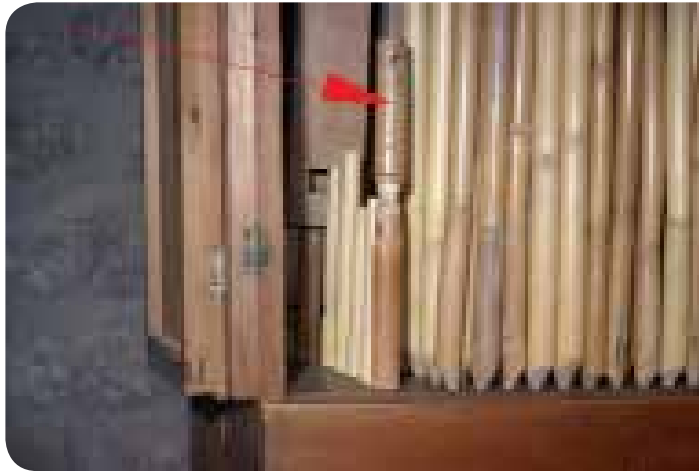


been carved to resemble the flute, and the labia is obtained from the dried stem of the '*Ferula communis*', commonly known as the *giant fennel*, a typical Mediterranean wild plant.

There is a 'zampogna' stop that the organist can play with the left hand, whilst using the right hand to play the manual; at the same time the right foot alternately activates two levers in order to move two small bellows whilst hitting the pedalboard with the left foot. It goes without saying that this organ can be considered rather complicated to play...!

The manual is composed of 50 keys with a 'short' first octave. The keys are of *rosewood*. The pedalboard is *alla Siciliana* with 8 keys. The stops are: Principal, Bourdon, Octave, Octavin, Mixture, Base. The zampogna stop is composed of a reed pipe with 5 holes, (4 in line and one at the opposite end in correspondence with the first one), and by four bourdon pipes (fixed note). Thus the organist could harmonise with the left hand, as if the stop were that of a '*chanter*' (accompanying) pipe imitating the Sicilian zampogna (**fig. 57**).

The rack board is absent because the pipes are inserted directly onto the top-board of the chest.



56

Gibilmanna. Detail of the manual during its restoration.

On the right, after being cleaned, it is possible to see how the keys are worn down by constant use.

57

'Chanter' pipe in the zampogna rank

THE VOICE OF ANGELS

Ancient organs

58

Isnello (PA), Church of the Annunziata. Organ

59

Left linenfold door depicting the Angel of the Annunciation

60

Right linenfold door depicting the Madonna



CHURCH OF THE ANNUNZIATA IN ISNELLO

Antonino La Valle, 1625

Giacomo Andronico, 1765

The organ has a late Renaissance façade. The 37 pipes are divided into five towers and there are three ‘*organetti morti*’ for purely decorative purposes, situated above the central towers. The background is painted in green and blue tempera and gilded in silver mecca. It is encased by four doors, painted by Paolo Mila in 1661, depicting, when the door are closed, ‘San Pietro’ and ‘San Paolo’ and when the doors are open ‘The Annunciation’.

The manual has 45 keys with a ‘short’ first octave. The pedalboard has 8 keys and is *alla Siciliana*. The 6 stops, activated by stop knobs in a column on the right side-jamb are: Principal I, Principal II, Octave, Vox Humana, Wood Flute, Cornet. A stop-knob on the left side-jamb of the manual inserts 4 ranks of Mixture (XV-XIX-XXII-XXVI). Before the intervention of Giacomo Andronico, in 1765, there was an inscription, behind the windchest, with the signature of Antonino La Valle and the year of construction – 1625. Only a note remains of the reconstruction carried out by Andronico in 1765 “the supports with the casing and two stops, one for the first Principal and the other the Flute and all the rest has been renovated”. In the archival documents, moreover, amongst the outlays for 1661, it was recorded that 4 *onze* and 24 *tari* were paid to the painter Paolo Mila for the frames and the painting of the doors.



CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA MAGGIORE IN ISNELLO

Via Santa Maria Isnello
Michele Andronico, 1724

The organ is placed on a wooden organ-loft on the counterfaçade opposite the main altar. Organ and organ-loft are lacquered in blue, decorated with friezes and carvings in silver mecca. The façade of the organ-screen, painted and gilded in pure gold, is broken up by niches, topped by shells, in which sculptures and paintings depicting the Apostles, alternate. In the centre a bas-relief with Our Lady of the Assumption on the Fountain of Life, stands out (**fig. 62**). The manual has 45 keys with a 'short' first octave and the pedalboard has 8 keys and is *alla Siciliana*. The transmission is mechanical. Unfortunately the organ is not operative and is waiting to be restored. The 16th century wooden cross painted both sides and hanging over the nave, is of particular value. On one side the Crucifixion is depicted and on the other Christ Arisen.



61
*Isnello (PA), Church
of Santa Maria
Maggiore. Organ*

62
*Isnello (PA), Church
of Santa Maria
Maggiore. Detail of
the choir loft*

63
*Isnello (PA), Church
of Santa Maria
Maggiore. Front of the
painted cross, depicting
the Crucifixion*

64
*Isnello (PA), Church
of Santa Maria
Maggiore. Back of the
painted cross,
depicting
Christ Arisen*

THE VOICE OF ANGELS

Ancient organs



MAIN CHURCH KNOWN AS THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY APOSTLES PIETRO AND PAOLO IN PETRALIA SOPRANA

.....
Via Errante, 5 Petralia Soprana
Giacomo Andronico, 1780
.....

A rare two manual organ. Because of its large size it was necessary to enlarge the supporting organ-loft. The casing is elegant and imposing in a typical late baroque style. The green Sicilian lacquer complements the silver mecca gilding of the carved surfaces.

65

*Petralia Soprana (PA),
Main Church . Organ*

**CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA OF LORETO
IN PETRALIA SOPRANA**

.....
Donato Del Piano, 1774
.....

The organ is located in the organ-loft over the entrance portal. The casing is intricately carved, gilded and painted. 28 façade pipes are divided in three towers, pinnacle shaped. The manual has a 'short' first octave and the pedalboard is *alla Siciliana*.

Donato Del Piano, when commissioned to build this organ, had already built the large organ in the Benedictine Monastery of Catania, which made him famous. The appointment of this Grand Master means that the community of Petralia Soprana could afford the high cost of his services.



66

*Petralia Soprana
(PA), Church of Santa
Maria of Loreto.
Organ*

THE VOICE OF ANGELS

Ancient organs

CHURCH OF THE TRINITÀ KNOWN AS LA BADIA IN PETRALIA SOTTANA

Piazza Umberto Petralia Sottana

Baldassarre Di Paola, 1751

The organ is placed on a small organ-loft on the right side of the nave. The casing is painted with floral motifs and enriched with gilded friezes; a painted organ-screen protects the façade pipes. This shows 21 pipes divided into three towers, pinnacle shaped, and with the mouths aligned. The manual has 45 keys and the pedalboard is *alla Siciliana*. A stop-tab, on the right side-jamb, inserts the 'Bird Song'; an amusing device that consist of three pipes with their boots immersed a small tin/lead alloy bowl filled with water.

The wind passes through the pipes and gurgling through the water, produces a very lifelike 'warbling'. A small scroll was found hidden inside the little organ of the Badia during restoration work, terminated in 1995. On it a short religious poem, in Sicilian verse, perhaps a communion hymn, which by its very simplicity exalts the power of salvation of the 'real faith'.

*Stu Diu d'amuri sagramintatu
sempri ci ha amatu e ci amirà:
si lu ricivi cu cori nettu,
tra lu to pettu ci trasirà.*

Questo Dio d'amore nell'ostia consacrata
sempre ci ha amato e ci amerà:
se lo ricevi col cuore puro,
dentro il tuo petto entrerà.

*Ci trasirà comu lu spusu
riccu e pumpusu chi t'amirà.
Iddu è lu focu di lu to pettu:
cu un gran diletto l'abbrugirà.*

Ci entrerà come lo sposo
ricco e splendido che t'amerà
Lui è il fuoco nel tuo petto:
con grande dolcezza lo brucerà.

*L'abbrugirà su cori duru,
di amuri puru l'arricchirà.
Stu duci cibo sarà tua vita
sempri infinita chi 'un finirà (ecc.)*

Brucerà il suo cuore duro,
di puro amore l'arricchirà.
Questo dolce cibo sarà la tua vita
sempre infinita, che non finirà...



67
Petralia Sottana (PA),
Church of the Trinità,
known as 'the Badia'.
Organ

**CHURCH OF THE ASSUNTA, THE MAIN
CHURCH IN PETRALIA SOTTANA**

Piazza Duomo Petralia Sottana
Santo Romano, 1659

The organ, placed in the organ-loft over the entrance portal, is enclosed in an elegant wooden casing, carved and gilded in the fashion adopted by La Valle. The 47 pipes of the facade are divided into 5 pinnacles shaped towers with three purely aesthetic 'organetti morti', over the central towers. The top-board of the windchest, which had been used, since 1851, as scaffolding for maintenance work, was recovered, too badly damaged to be repositioned, during the restoration of the instrument, terminated in 1994. It has been placed in the museum as it is of great interest to music-lovers because it is papered over with the musical score of a baroque melodrama (fig. 69). The main figure in the drama is the Emperor Alexander the Great and his wife Roxana.



68
*Petralia Sottana (PA),
Main Church. Organ*

69
*Detail of the lower
part of the windchest
papered with the music
score*



THE VOICE OF ANGELS

Ancient organs

70

*Polizzi Generosa (PA),
Main Church. Organ*



71

*Polizzi Generosa (PA),
Main Church. Flemish
triptych of uncertain
attribution, late 15th
century*



SANTA MARIA ASSUNTA, THE MAIN CHURCH IN POLIZZI GENEROSA

.....
Via Roma Polizzi Generosa
Anonymous, end of the 18th century.
.....

The organ is suspended on the right side of the nave. Both the casing and the organ-loft are covered with floral decoration and the embellishments and mouldings are gilded with silver mecca. There are 27 pipes, divided into 3 towers, pinnacle shaped. Unfortunately the instrument is not in working order and is waiting to be restored. The Church has an important 15th century Flemish triptych.



**CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA ASSUNTA
IN SCLAFANI BAGNI**

Piazza Madonna di Fatima Sclafani Bagni
Antonino La Valle, 1615

The organ is placed on an immense stonework organ-loft over the main door. The casing, decorated in 1620 by Antonio Salamone from Nicosia, is intricately carved and gilded with pure gold. There are 33 pipes in the façade divided into 5 towers. The manual has 45 keys, with a

‘short’ first octave and the pedalboard is *alla Siciliana*.

During the restoration work it was possible to reactivate the original baroque tuning. The stops on this instrument were once activated by sliders but these were removed after several interventions in the 18th century.

72
*Sclafani Bagni (PA),
Church of Santa
Maria Assunta. Detail
of the organ.*

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