

INTRODUCTION

The opening years of the twenty-first century have witnessed increasing appreciation of historical pipe organs, yet most of this interest has been focused on instruments in European countries. It is all the more surprising, then, to find a collection of exceptional quality, variety, and breadth halfway across the world in Argentina. (Refer to maps in figures 1 and 2). In Buenos Aires alone one is able to experience the glorious tones of German, Italian, French, and British instruments, all within a quarter-mile radius. This is an experience unique in the world.

Despite the importance of these organs, there is not a great deal of documentation available about them. This study addresses that problem. It is limited to ten of the most historic instruments that together, are a complete representation of the various schools of organ building present in Argentina. The organs selected for study include examples by internationally renowned builders such as Cavallé-Coll (France), Forster and Andrews (Great Britain), Serassi (Italy), and Walcker (Germany). Other examples include organs by unknown builders, dating from the years before Argentina acquired independence in 1816.¹

Most of the organs studied here are from the period 1850-1920. It is regrettable that only two organs survive from the time of the Spanish domination.² The history of the

¹ It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine all instruments worthy of study, but the reader is encouraged to consult Appendix I for a listing of some of these instruments.

² Buenos Aires was established in the late 16th century and Argentina declared its Independence from Spain on July 9, 1816.

Jesuits' missions, recorded from the beginning, reveals that the organ was quite common at that time (1585-1816); some instruments were imported from Europe, whereas others were built in Argentina by indigenous people. The first chapter briefly focuses on instruments from the time of the Colonization. Following independence from Spain in 1816, Argentina went through a period of great upheaval caused by the conflict between *Federales* and *Unitarios*. When peace finally returned to Argentina during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the country began to prosper, owing to the exportation of farm products. As a result, the last three decades of the nineteenth century were a time of great economic and cultural advances in Argentina. In a brief interval Argentina became one of the wealthiest countries in the world.

Widespread interest in music and musical instruments accompanied this new economic prosperity. Orchestras and choirs were established; operas were performed in seven different locations in the capital alone; local composers made the long journey to Europe to study with the great maestros; and superb pipe organs were imported from Italy, France, Germany, and Great Britain. The cultural explosion reached its highest point with the opening of the great opera house, Teatro Colón. One can refer to this period as the "enlightenment."

The Pampas, the farmlands west of Buenos Aires, became world-renowned for their fertility and thus attracted immigrants in great numbers. In Buenos Aires the various ethnic groups settled in remarkably self-contained *barrios* or neighborhoods that, to this day, have strong national identities which keep alive the traditions of their forefathers. In

many cases these ethnic groups built churches, and both the barrios and churches were assigned names that can be traced back to their European roots.

The economic growth of Argentina, supported largely by this influx of immigrants, explains why Argentina is home to so many outstanding European organs. First, the various ethnic groups furnished their churches with imported stained glass windows, statues, and organs from their countries of origin. In this way immigrants felt closer to home and kept their traditions alive for generations to come. Second, several wealthy families (*estancieros*) who owned great tracts of land donated not only pipe organs but entire churches. For the *estancieros*, it was fashionable to cross the Atlantic Ocean to visit expositions in Paris and purchase a Cavallé-Coll as a gift for a church or even for an individual.

The models for Buenos Aires' modernization (the "enlightenment") were largely European, and as a result, the city became one of the most beautiful ones in the Western Hemisphere. A cosmopolitan city, its avenues, churches, palaces, government buildings, and parks transport one to Paris one minute, to Rome or Madrid the next. It is therefore not surprising that its inhabitants became artistically sophisticated, and that they sought to provide artists with the best tools with which to develop a local culture.

This economic prosperity continued until the end of the 1940's when a downturn, yet to be reversed, began. Confusion, corruption, and misinformation attributed to Juan Perón and his wife, Eva, destroyed not only the economy, but also the great social and cultural life of Argentineans. On June 16, 1955, a conflict between Perón and the Roman Catholic Church ended in riots with several churches and the buildings of the

Archdiocese of Buenos Aires being set on fire, causing incalculable loss. One of the burned Churches, *Básilica de San Francisco de Asís*, housed a superb organ by Mutin Cavaillé-Coll, while the key Archdiocesan Building housed not only the records from Colonial times, but also a great number of music manuscripts. Thus, much of the organ's history in Argentina was lost.

This dissertation attempts to restore part of that history. It is hoped that the reader will discover new insights into the organ heritage of Argentina, and that organists, builders, and organ music lovers will forever encourage and support the preservation of these treasures.



Figure 1: **Map of South America.**

Found at <http://images.google.com/images?q=south+American=Map&hl=en&lr=&sa=X&oi=images&ct=title>. April 12, 2006.



Figure 2: Map of Argentina

Found at: <http://images.google.com/images?svnum=10&hl=en&lr=&q=Map+of+Argentina>

April 12, 2006