

Omaha installation featured rare pipe organ

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 23, 2009 NCR Today

I hope some readers got to watch the video of the installation Mass for Archbishop George Lucas as the new archbishop of Omaha. (So far, I have not found it on-demand.) The ceremony was lovely but St. Cecilia's Cathedral is spectacular. There, smack-dab in the very middle of Middle America is a structure of Spanish colonial revival architecture that took my breath away.

And, appropriate to its patroness, who is the patron saint of music, St. Cecilia's has a pipe organ that is virtually unique. It is one of the few instruments in the world that has both meantone and well-tempered pipes. Stanford University and a church in Dresden also have organs with both temperaments, but with a narrower range than the organ in Omaha. Indeed, the organ in St. Cecilia's is really two organs inside one case.

Meantone temperament is akin to that used in Bach's time. It is livelier and when you hear Bach's or Butchude's music played on a meantone instrument for the first time, you really hear it anew. Well-tempered tuning is more common and is characteristic of organs built in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Don't try playing Widor or Franck on a meantone instrument. The St. Cecilia's organ combines the best of both. You can learn more about both St. Cecilia's and its organ by clicking [here](#) [1]. Either practice your French or scroll down for the English translation.

Why is this important? It has become common for churches these days to purchase much less expensive electronic organs. But, that doesn't sit right. Especially in our liturgy, we should use real things. The vestments should be made of natural not synthetic materials. The candles should be wax, not those horrible electric candle lights that flip on when you drop your coin in the box. Our organs too should be real, with pipes, not computer simulations. And, pipe organs need not always break the bank. There is a [website](#) [2] that sells older instruments taken from churches which are purchasing new ones and many of these are both fine and affordable instruments.

The liturgy is the most real thing we do as Catholics, it expresses who we most truly are as human beings and as Christians. It is not a place for fakery. Kudos to the benefactors and pastors of St. Cecilia's Cathedral in Omaha for giving us such a vivid example of the beauty that is made possible when we do it right.

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Links:

[1] <http://infopuq.quebec.ca/~uss1010/orgues/etatsunis/omahascc.html>

[2] <http://www.organclearinghouse.com/>