

Mastering the Mighty Pipes

THUD. CRASH. HNNN. The notes ripple through the empty church, but it's not quite the sort of glorified prelude that Dietrich Buxtehude, the 17th-century Danish composer, would have intended. Daniel Aune, a second-year master's student at the University of Rochester's Eastman School of Music, is getting his first lesson on a Baroque-style North German organ, and it is not easy. Keys and pedals are in different places than on modern organs, the sharps are better played with the fourth finger than the fifth, and the intensity of the sound—so responsive to every touch of the keyboard—jars his rhythm even more.

"Stretch your fingers. . . Take your time. . . Adjust your weight." Hovering beside the organist's bench, Hans Davidsson pours out encouragement and advice. "Now you need to use more mass—you're engaging more of the heavenly choirs."

Grimacing in mock anguish as he stretches for the pedals, Mr. Aune rattles through several more unruly sequences and comes up smiling. "Good time. It's a little awkward," he reports ruefully to his fellow students, who huddle in the chilly organ loft awaiting their turns.

Making music on a massive, hand-crafted organ whose style dates to around 1700 is nothing like playing on a standard-issue American instrument. That's why Mr. Aune and 30 other Eastman students are spending two weeks packed with lessons and recitals in this placid Swedish city. Famed for its shipyards, Göteborg has also, improbably, blossomed into a center for organ research in recent years. Nearly a dozen historical European pipe organs are here, including several from outside of Sweden. But this North German Baroque is the crowning glory of the city's church-music scene. It is new—painstakingly constructed over six years—but tuned with the pure thirds of 17th-century Baroque music.

"When you play on an instrument like this, you suddenly hear things you wouldn't hear on a more modern instrument," says Dreama Lovitt, another Eastman master's student. She has been lounging in a pew during a break in a master class at the Örgryte New Church, an austere 1890 structure renovated to accommodate the organ. "So you understand how [the music is] written, what the composer had in mind. This is what he would be hearing."

The idea of bringing historical organs to Göteborg originated with Mr. Davidsson, a music professor at Göteborg University until 2001, who is now on Eastman's faculty.

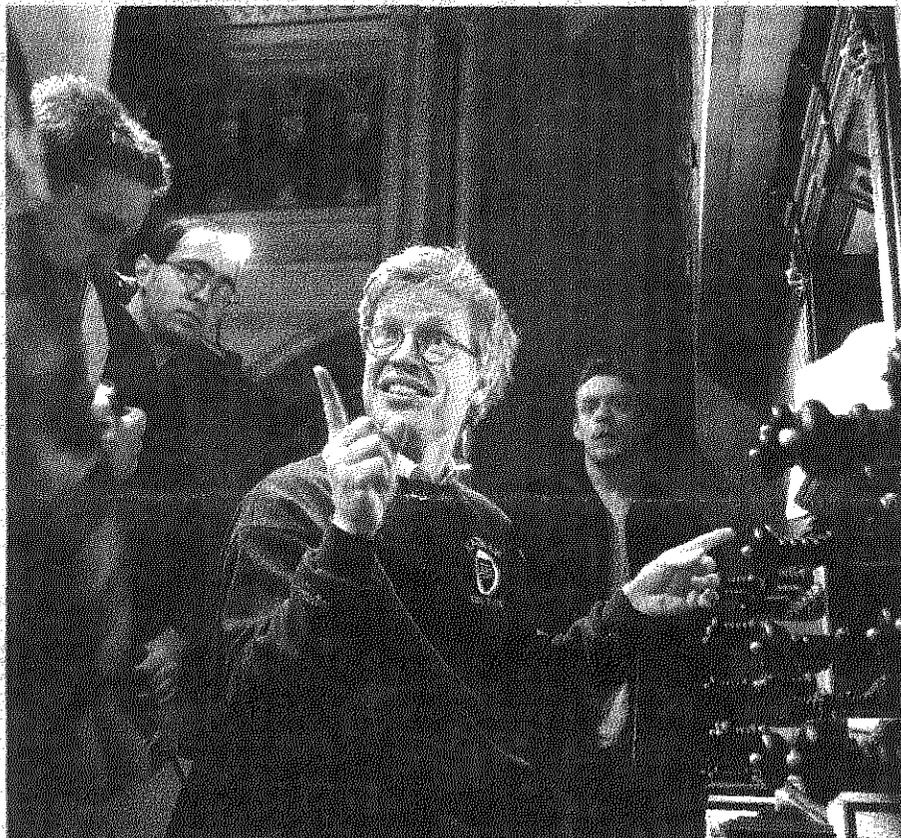
As part of his Ph.D. research on Baroque music, he wanted to integrate performance with musicology theory. "But there was one problem: We didn't have the organs. When I discovered that we had no organ of the kind Bach wanted to play in Lübeck, I thought it was important to reconstruct an instrument of that kind because that would enable us to hear and experience the music that we value so much from the 17th and 18th centuries."

With many historical organs around the Continent, particularly in Eastern Europe, deteriorating for lack of money, the effort to preserve knowledge about them took on additional urgency.

And so, in 1995, was born the Göteborg Organ Art Center (GOArt), a band of Ph.D. students, builders, scientists, and musicians who have set about

determining the precise dimensions of historical organs and other instruments from around Europe—and handcrafting replicas of them. Originally a project within Göteborg University's School of Music, the fast-growing organization soon became an institute within the university's Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts. It is financed externally, with much of its support coming from the Bank of Sweden (which also provides funds for the Nobel in economic science). Mr. Davidsson, who founded GOArt, remains the artistic and research director.

Stroll through the institute's cluttered workshop, in a university building on the outskirts of the city, and you will see an assortment of venerable instruments, some with graying keyboards and broken or missing strings. A 1752 Swedish clavichord lies half-opened in its case; nearby is a larger 19th-century clavichord. In



Hans Davidsson, founder of the Göteborg Organ Art Center and now a professor at the Eastman School of Music, explains the finer points of a North German Baroque organ.

a room carpeted with wood shavings is a nearly finished replica of an organ, bound for Cornell University.

"They were playing Mozart and Beethoven opera at home on these instruments," marvels Joel Speerstra, a senior researcher, pausing beside an 1802 clavichord.

When Eastman students toured GOArt, five historical instruments, all of them clavichords, were scattered about the workshops. Having them on hand helps with the laborious first step in building a replica—documenting every detail of the original. "That's really the ideal, if you can have the historical object for a really long time," Mr. Speerstra explains, steering visitors through a maze of worktables, instruments, and cutting tools. Pipe organs are generally too large to move, so the researchers must visit the original organ, if it still exists, and pore over drawings and church records. Historical accuracy is paramount in the building process: The craftspeople tend to eschew modern machines in favor of methods that were used centuries ago, although they do use computer modeling, with help from the nearby Chalmers University of Technology. One room of the workshop, for instance, holds a long bed of sand, where the tin and lead for organ pipes are cast.

GOArt's masterpiece to date is the North German Baroque, a replica modeled on two organs built by Arp Schnitger (1648-1719). Towering like an ornate, winged creature over the unadorned nave, it features 16-foot-long pipes that were sand-cast by hand; enormous, manually powered wooden bellows for blowing the air into the pipes; and an elaborately carved oak board for dispersing sound through the church. The board is decorated even in places that only the organist can see.

The organ, which was finished in 2000 and cost around \$3.5-million to build, is so specialized to 17th-century music that even many compositions of Bach, just a generation later, sound too harsh, because of the different keys he used. "Several Bach compositions are playable on the Örgryte organ, but not all—maybe even the majority are not playable,"

says Mr. Davidsson, adding that the ones that *are* playable "sound just as exciting as in Bach's time." The organ's historical mean-tone temperament with split keys—in which more intervals are tuned pure, and can be played with more chords, than on modern organs—no longer exists anywhere else in the world.

The organ cluster has been a boon for the local university, Mr. Davidsson's alma mater. Göteborg's music school, which also houses a replica 19th-century French Symphonic organ, has rented the Örgryte church for 40 hours a week to allow students and visitors the chance to rehearse on the North German Baroque. "If they're playing another repertoire, they're moving to another church, to an organ from the 19th century," says Ingemar Henningsson, the head of the music school, who says the applicant pool for the organ program has grown over the years.

BACK IN ROCHESTER, Eastman has begun assembling its own collection of old-style instruments. An organ modeled on a 1776 original from Vilnius, Lithuania, has been commissioned for a church adjacent to the music school. A replica of an 18th-century clavichord, built by GOArt,

is already at Eastman.

And Eastman has purchased an original—a late-18th-century Italian organ, with one pedal board, which will be placed in the university's art gallery by 2004. A master's student is spending this year at GOArt, documenting the organ before it is restored. "We want to learn the language before the restoration starts," explains Mr. Davidsson.

All that is welcome news to Eastman's organ students, for whom the two-week trip to Göteborg is an exhilarating, if exhausting, immersion in the historical context of their instrument. By the end of the trip, each one of them has given a public recital on one of Göteborg's organs (usually easier ones than the North German Baroque), with the Swedish audience scattered through the pews, lost in the strains of Buxtehude or Bach. (To hear their performances, go to <http://www.rochester.edu/eastman/organ/Sweden-trip/Pages/Audio-Index.html>)

"[It's like] you might not play Jimi Hendrix on a balalaika," says Mark Willey, a master's student at Eastman, explaining the appeal of playing classical composers on a historical organ. "We're returning to the source of the inspiration for the music we're supposed to play—and we need to do that. We're detached by 300 years."