

A collection of museum quality that has tremendous practical value for organ building of today and tomorrow:

Carl Frei's collection of compositions and arrangements for the street organ

The cardboard notes archive of the Waldkirch-based street organ manufacturer, Carl Frei

Notes by Monika Wurmdobler-Keller and Dieter Steinmann, 2014

In 1992, the street organ builder, Frederic Keller (1940 – 2013) together with the Kerpen-based musical instrument mechanic, sound apparatus --? and performance artist, Gerhard Kern, acquired the complete archive of compositions and arrangements or the musical scores of the prominent Waldkirch-based organ builders Carl Frei junior and senior.

A unique cultural and musical legacy from Waldkirch

In light of the growing international significance of mechanically-produced music, as in the case of Conlon Nancarrow, particularly for serious contemporary and avant-garde music as well as in experimentally inclined circles of popular music, the extensive and internationally unparalleled music collection of the Freis manifests itself as a significant historico-cultural collection of certain distinction and value from several vantage points, especially for the future of this type of music and when it comes to presenting this *métier* in the field of musicology.

There are two main topics in this collection which can be associated with the names Carl Frei and Gustav Bruder. Both names stand for internationally renowned quality but also for a disparity, which has always triggered staunch debates among the fans of street organ music. Composers and musicians might be very interested to know that Carl Frei composed expressly for the street organ seeing as he viewed it very much as an independent musical instrument. This was a marked departure from earlier styles whereby the street organ was used merely to imitate the sound of an orchestra, for instance. Carl Frei's music exhausted all possibilities of cleverly built organs in an aesthetically sophisticated way thereby achieving lasting results which many experts maintain are to date unsurpassed when it comes to the enhancement and refinement of the genre's sound.

And so the status of the Frei collection extends far beyond its significance as a prominent museum-like collection from a specific era. The extensiveness of the collection gives valuable impetus in vastly different cultural directions and trends. In his work, Carl Frei, an internationally

successful composer, frequently drew on musical motives and ways of playing from various European musical traditions and by reinterpreting their musical form made them suitable for the unique splendor of his magnificently built street organs. And that is another reason why his collection of musical creations for street organs will no doubt remain a fountain of ideas, methods and beauty beyond German-speaking countries.

Frederic Keller on the skills of the Frei junior and senior

The street organ builder, Frederic Keller, the only student, longstanding employee and chosen successor of Carl Frei junior, commented on some major points of the intrinsic magic of the Frei's compositions, arrangements and organs:

"Because the greatest organ builder of his time literally breathed life into every pipe, the emotion of Frei's organs transports listeners into a different dimension. These organs not only impart a melody with adornment and accompaniment; that happens rather incidentally. What also happens is that a sound pattern emerges that unfolds on its own from the momentum of the tunes and not based on rules by which music is normally made.

Carl Frei once asked me while he was working on an organ: "Did you notice that? It'll be nicer that way - that means louder." What sounds like a joke whereby the beauty and loudness are said to be the same, is in an overly simplified way, typical for him, a key to his secret. Like a sculptor who already sees the figure in the block of stone he is working on, Carl Frei anticipates the sound in advance in order to let it resonate freely. If the loudness were not appealing, it would be pure physical energy; the sound would be forced, pressed and strained. The opposite is what creates the magic of Frei organs; powers are tamed which are pushing to be heard.

The success of his organs is based on the colorfulness of the sound pattern. Although the organ has inspired many imitators, Frei organs can be distinguished right away from the others. Yet, it is wonderful that they cannot be mistaken among each other. That is one testament to Frei's great style. His prominence extends well beyond the organ world. He created his own new and independent music whose style elements correspond with Expressionism. The music is accessible to everyone, but it is difficult to capture its essence in words. Carl Frei was far too engrossed in the sound to have been able to develop a romantic rapport to it."

From these few lines some of the main reasons emerge as to why Frederic Keller and Gerhard Kern decided to oversee the huge collection of the Freis. It was not the regional historical or the museum-quality significance of the

collection or merely the pragmatic potential of this treasure, but, notably the aesthetic status, the inherent innovation and refinement of the work, its outstanding artistic originality and, ultimately, the overriding beauty of the whole that prompted Frederic Keller and Gerhard Kern to voluntarily commit themselves to looking after this body of musical and cultural work in its entirety and, moreover, to make it available to new uses, also and especially through their own artistic work.

In addition to Carl Frei's own musical creations and arrangements, this collection also contains exceptional aesthetic arrangements from Gustav and Eugen Bruder and Walter Rambach to name a few as well as other examples of street organ music, -"*... in short, everything Mr. Frei was able to find after the war in Waldkirch,*" writes Frederic Keller in an essay on the history of the collection.

Carl Frei junior and senior are to be credited with compiling that which was still accessible of the Waldkirch-based organ templates or the remainder of the musical tribute of the Waldkirch street music industry, and merging this with the rest of their own arrangements after imprisonment from the Netherlands in the post-war period into this extensive collection.

According to notes from Gerhard Kern, who, after assuming responsibility for the collection, reentered all of the data associated with the collection and made it "viable" again, the origin of the roughly 4,000 titles can now be exactly determined.

The region around the organ building business in Waldkirch (Bruder, Ruth) accounts for roughly 65%, Carl Frei another 17% and the remaining 18% is spread among other well-known manufacturers like Gavioli, Limonaire, Wellershaus and others.

More detailed information as to just how many and which titles can be associated with Carl Frei and Gustav Bruder can only be determined through more in-depth research. Titles which originally came about for their own manufactured brand were adapted in interesting ways for other manufacturers, especially in the period after 1945. As an example, Frei's arrangements appear on Ruth organs. This is because after the war, Frei restored and modified many still playable instruments regardless of the manufacturer.

Depending on the observer's vantage point, this collection offers tremendous insight into the progression of street organ building and its music, as seen from a historico-cultural perspective, in terms of the history of the industry and in terms of musicology. There are many approaches and much can be said for pursuing this unique project.

Overview 1

Organ types, manufacturers and related number of titles in the collection

Overview 2

Manufacturers and related number of titles in the collection