

JENNY SETCHELL

ORGANS & ORGANISTS:

their

INSIDE STORIES

*All you (n)ever
wanted to know*



WHAT THEY MIGHT HAVE
SAID ABOUT THIS BOOK



“Not nearly long enough.” — Richard Wagner

“Pathetic attempt to explain human anatomy, with only one out-dated sketch of a single relevant organ. Who is this female?” — Royal College of Human Anatomists

“To B, or to B^b, that was my real question; forsooth, this uncomely wench hath penned much of the loathsome huffity-puffity wheezebox and more of the silver tongu-ed musick than I ever dared. How base, how vile is this. I will have no more of it.” — W. Shakespeare (Mr)

“Ban it.” — Donald Trump

“Too many words, my dear Jenny, too many words.” — Emperor Joseph II

“Superficial, banal, et surtout a waste de mon temps.” — Aristide Cavaillé-Coll

“Simply a must-have for all organists; it’s the perfect height for adjusting organ benches.”
— International Association of Organ Grinders

“Thank you. Now we know what he got up to.”— Maria Barbara Bach, Anna Magdalena Bach

“No technical details about the workings of the 64ft Diaphone Dulzian. Shame on you.” — Knobby Ratchety-Scale-Blowerington-Smythe (Mrs)

“No other book, in the history of the organ, has ever explained as effectively the difference between the sound of a 32ft Sordun and an attack of Death Watch Beetle.” — Dr C. Thunderpfeifen

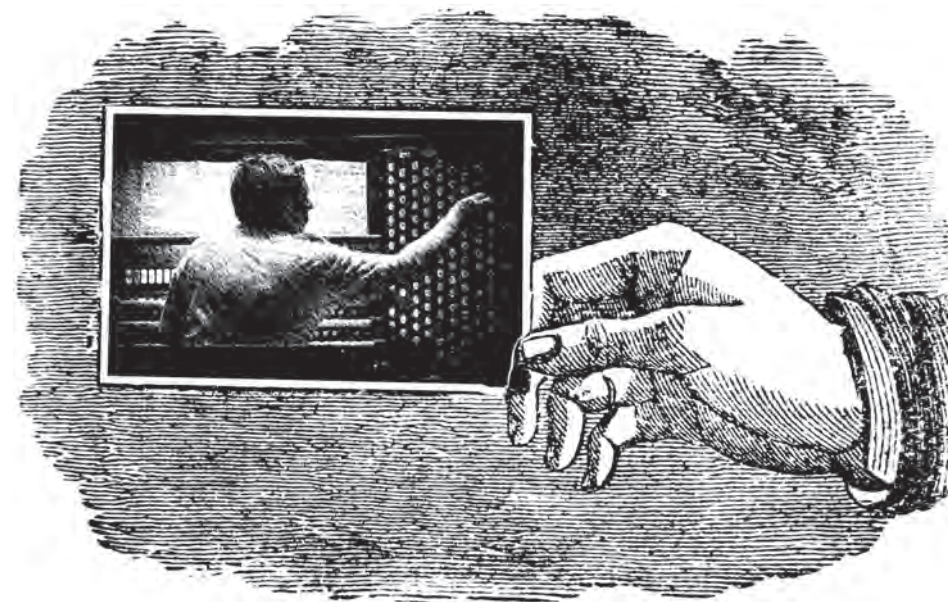
“We could have written many more vivid accounts. Very disappointed.” — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (Saints Inc.)

“I’m not in it! I’m not in it! Why is this?” — L. v. Beethoven

“Very nice, dear. Now tidy your room.” — Jenny’s mum



This book is dedicated to musicians and non-musicians who haven’t got a clue about organs or organists. Long may they continue to discover the magical world inside the outsides.





Grote Kerk, Gouda, Netherlands



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~ Martin Setchell ~ *On the road with a free-range concert organist*

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~ Adrian Marple ~ *Organist at your service*

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of other organists ~ and their helpers*

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Ochsenhausen Abbey, Germany



PREFACE



When I finished writing *Organ-isms: Anecdotes from the World of the King of Instruments* in 2008, I knew one thing for certain: Never, ever again. Never. Not ever. Not for anyone.

Unfortunately, readers apparently enjoyed that book in both the English and German versions, and clamoured for a sequel. I ignored them and instead did a picture book called *Looking Up* which showed organs and ceilings. But they liked it too and asked when that sequel was coming. Sighing, I admitted defeat, and combined the concept to make a marriage of the two styles of book. The result is what you have in your hands now.

However, *Inside Stories* has a more serious (but not solemn) hidden layer. For years I promised myself I would write a book about the organ, which, when distilled into its essence, is aimed at those who don't know, and particularly those who *don't know* they don't know (which includes pretty much 99% of the world population). So I decided to weave the humiliating, excruciating, life-as-she-is-lived yarns from organists into illustrations and information about different organs, how they work, and, of course, with colourful pictures. An educational project, if you like, thinly disguised as a coffee-table book.

Rather than being just another book of funny stories or a further glossy tome of gasp-inducing organ façades for people who know all about the organ world, this is a volume for the families and friends of organists who really have no idea what it is that they do for a living — except that their jobs are slightly peculiar, and a good target for off-jokes. Organists, (others think) are occupational misfits whom normal people avoid at social events because they don't know what to talk to them about. Apart from those inevitable jokes.

The pipe organ is not a joke, and it is not just any old instrument, although old it certainly is. We are dealing with a noisy, mechanical monster that dominates its surroundings as the largest and most complex of all instruments (until the Industrial Revolution and the invention of the steam engine, the organ was arguably the most complicated machine that mankind was able to build). This behemoth is an extraordinary work of art and engineering which has changed little in the centuries since it first became a hit. Yet it is probably the least understood by performers and listeners alike.

The organ makes phenomenal physical and technical demands on its players. Of course, organists are not alone in the struggle to perform under often awkward circumstances.

All musicians can face difficulties with venues, employers, committees, organisers, and the instruments they play, but organists are alone in several unique regards:

- Every pipe organ is different
- Organists can't carry the same instrument around with them
- They have to use most parts of their body when playing
- Organists commonly have to learn new repertoire and practise in public places
- In many instances, players can see only about 5% of the instrument they are playing
- Organists commonly play without seeing (or being seen by) their audience

My first aim is to introduce the awe-inspiring box of whistles known as the 'King of Instruments' to non-musicians who have only a vague idea what it is, and probably know nothing about what is behind the façade. Everyone admires a large organ in a cathedral or concert hall, but few have any idea how it makes such a sound.

It is also the only musical instrument which is frequently played in public by people who range from top-of-the-line, world-class musicians such as Christopher Herrick, to downright incompetents who should never be allowed near it. Pianists are dragooned into reluctant but noble service by necessity; beginner organists, undaunted by their lack of musicianship or training, flounder noisily around, convinced that cavernous acoustics

and playing as loudly as possible will disguise any massacre of the music. Such people do more damage to the reputation of organ music than anyone realises. Consider this: with no flying training and experience, you would not jump into an A380 jet and expect to pilot it safely, hoping the noise of the engines would carry the day. Or would you?

Hence the second target for this book: those who ought to know better. Organists themselves can be shackled by an insular appreciation of 'their' own instrument and never realise how another's experience may be entirely different. If we organists don't understand one another, imagine how the rest of the world sees us. Organists are a weird mob, but all bring their own richness and individuality. Sometimes their gifts are undervalued or scorned by those with whom they work, and these colleagues and employers too, need to know as much as they can about the beast, its driver and how they collaborate to make music.

The third impetus for this undertaking is personal.

I sit for hours (days even) admiring impressive pipe organs while listening to the sublime music they make (most often performed by my husband Martin, who features throughout this book as an unwitting model), and my heart almost bursts with the desire to share this with others. Through my photos I want to entice 'unbelievers' into this sumptuous 'other' world. Access to organ music of the great composers is easier

than ever through CDs, DVDs, downloads from the internet, etc., so my dream is that this chunky tome will act as a catalyst for a blossoming love of a unique, hundreds-of-years-old craft.

Note that although I have most often used the pronoun 'he', 'his', or 'him' in relation to organists, this is a way of keeping things simple. The balance between genders of organists is probably about 50/50, but who knows? Who cares? To me, an organist is an organist, and that is that.

Some of the organs illustrated here have altered since their photos were taken; or they have been upgraded, moved into different venues, sold to other owners or even demolished. This is the fate of anything that lives for a very, very long time, and certainly beyond the life-span of most human beings. I have tried to note where any such changes have happened since their 'photoshoot'.

I offer no apology for the fact that *Inside Stories* is intensely personal. It may be one of the more superficial, nonacademic, least technical tomes ever to (dis)grace the shelves of any literature lover, but hopefully it amuses while it informs.

For organ buffs expecting pages of figures, dates and complex data and details: I have deliberately avoided myriad technical details and data. Recommended reading for those wishing to investigate further is found under 'Thirsting for more?' in the appendix. A few details can be found in endnotes listed on page 407. And before you can ask 'But



what about. . .?' sorry, I couldn't include every conceivable organ design or quirk — after all, it is not intended to be a comprehensive, scholarly organ textbook.

In addition to providing some answers, *Organs & Organists: Their Inside Stories* should stimulate your curiosity and raise many questions. If, after turning these pages, you want to see more organs, listen to the music produced by them, and encourage more organists to master their craft, the book has done its job.

If, however, it inspires you to become an organist, see a psychiatrist.

Jenny Petchell
Christchurch,
New Zealand, 2017

A PIANIST IS AN ORGANIST?
NAH. NOPE. NEIN. NADA.

What pianists play



What organists play



No two pipe organs in the world look alike or sound the same.
A bit like snowflakes. But more expensive.

Introducing the noise makers

RANK: A row of pipes usually controlled by one stop (See page 134 onwards for more about stops)

EIGHT FOOT (8'): Indicates that the middle C will sound the same pitch as middle C on a piano (and all the other notes will be accordingly the same relative pitch). The 8' length is the measure of the lowest open pipe.

FOUR FOOT (4'): Signifies that the middle C will sound an octave higher than on a piano (ditto the other pipes).

SIXTEEN FOOT (16'): Pipes similarly pitched one octave lower than an 8' pipe.

THIRTY-TWO FOOT (32'): Huge pipes that make handy steps for organ tuners.

SIXTY-FOUR FOOT (64'): Only two organs in the world boast a complete rank of such pipes. Use on audiences of nervous disposition at your own risk.

HUNDRED FOOT (100'): A centipede.

FLUES: (1) The sound is produced by wind forced through a narrow windway to strike the sharp upper lip of the pipe; very like a common whistle, and the size varies from a tiny pencil to a tube with the girth of a large tree trunk. (2) Typo for flute.

REEDS: Grunty, rasping, trumpety sounds, a staple particularly of French and Iberian organ literature. Usually the first to go out of tune and always before a crucial trumpet voluntary for a wedding.

STRINGS: Narrow pipes, which have a sharper tone and sound a little like violins, cellos, etc. Only a little.

PRINCIPALS: (diapasons, montre, prestant, etc.). This is what most people recognise as a pipe organ sound.

FOUNDATION STOPS: the basic family of diapason stops, known in French as the Fonds, and Prinzipal in German.

MIXTURES: A composite stop using more than one pipe for each note. Adds brightness and sparkle to the sound if well-tuned, or a ghastly clattering if not.

MUTATIONS: Stops which speak at a different pitch giving higher overtones. These are the ones with fractions after their names, such as $2^{2/3}$, $1^{2/5}$.

TREMULANT: (1) A device which can simulate a shaky vibrato sound of a warbling soprano or nervous violinist. (2) Novice registrant before a concert.

PIPES

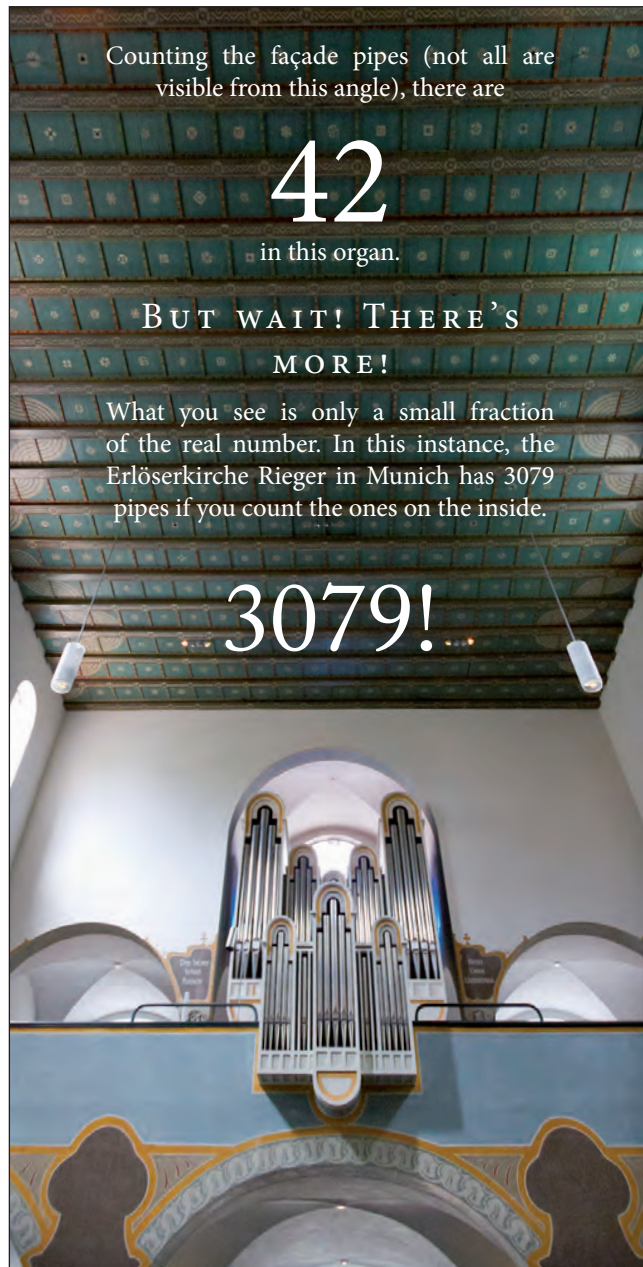


Without the pipes, you have what looks like a 4-storey, million-dollar sewing machine crossed with fire bellows, made from Gruyère cheese.

Pipes make the sound, and it is the length, shape, and material of which they are made that sets one apart from the other, and makes the unique pipe organ 'accent'.

Although it is the keyboards that organs have in common with the piano, the pipes are what relate it to flutes, recorders, clarinets, trumpets and even alpine horns.

CURIOUS VISITOR: *Is that all there are?*



— ❦ —
WYSINWYG
— ❦ —

(WHAT YOU SEE IS NOT WHAT YOU GET)

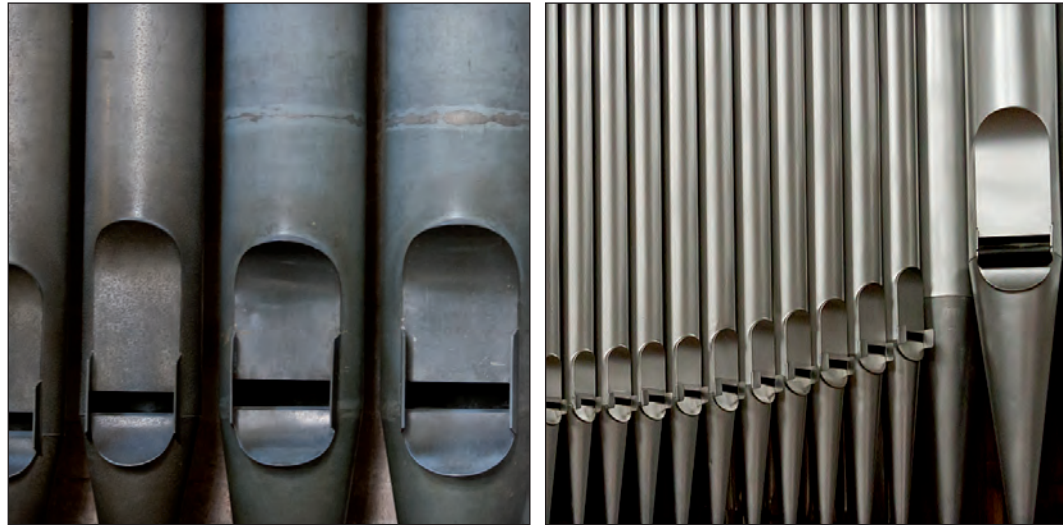
Pipe organs are bigger on the inside than the outside. Think *Dr Who* and the Tardis.



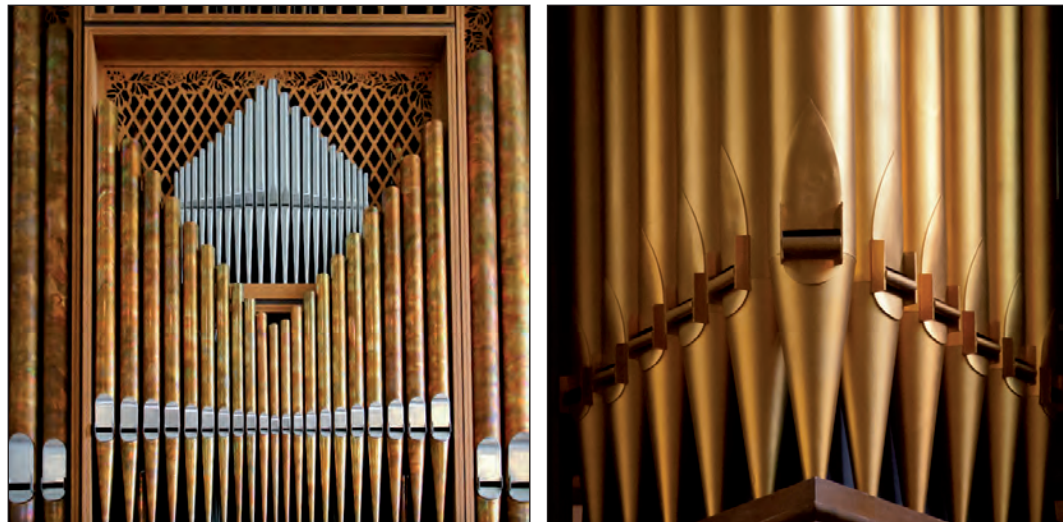
Melbourne Town Hall, Australia

Melbourne Town Hall sports one of the largest organs in the world; but you would never guess it through a cursory count of the façade pipes. A mere 29 are on show, yet the organ boasts a whopping 9568 (or so) in total. Even some of those pipes that are visible may just be there for show, as 'dummy' or 'non-speaking' pipes.

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL



Fat and thin



Key to organs page 402

Textured or plain



Or prettily painted

Key to organs page 402



Weingarten Abbey, Germany



St Katharinen, Oppenheim, Germany



Stiftskirche, Stuttgart, Germany



Schnitger organ, St Nikolai, Flensburg, Germany



Photo: Sean Tucker

Sean Tucker was organist at Saint Aldhelm's, Branksome, UK, when the organ needed a rebuild. Sean and his colleague fancied a stop "Choir to Pub" so included it in the specification.

'We had also planned to connect it to a small trap-door in the side of the console, which formerly housed the piston selector-board, but this has still not been connected. Apparently, the engraver queried it twice before he would produce the stop head.'

A potentially intoxicating stop is the Chivas Regal 4/5 (obviously a close relation to the Chivas Regal 4.5 whisky), in the Noehren organ in St Richard of Chichester Church, Chicago. Pulling it out turns the light on in the Swell. In First Presbyterian Church, Buffalo, New York, the Bombarde division contains a Chivas Regal 4/5 as a nod to the favourite tiple of the organist there, Squire Haskin.

When the late George Bayley was organist-choirmaster at two different churches in the USA, he had a Chivas Regal 4/5 stop knob installed which operated the Tremolo (what else would a bottle of whisky give you, other than the shakes?). George reported that at one of the churches an organist snob sniffily asked him what kind of Baroque stop that was meant to be. When George told him it was a joke, the snob was not amused, turned on his heels, and left in a huff.

Two cats, Felix and Sylvester (owned by the late organist, Stephen Ridgley-Whitehouse), are immortalised as the names on two Solo organ stops at the 1992 organ in St Peter's Eaton Square, London: the Tibia Sylvestris and the Viola Felix. What would they have done if the cats had been dubbed Tiddles or Snugglepussums?



Uh? Well, that's helpful.



"Due to repeated break-ins, the city church remains closed until further notice. The Church Council."
(Well, that's handy. The concert is today.)

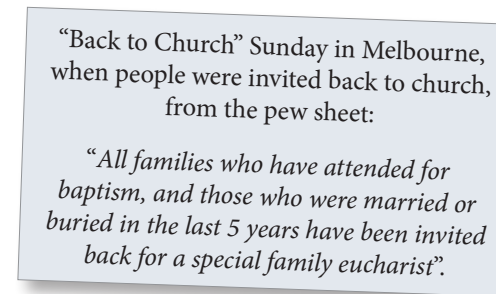
NOTICE THE NOTICES



Today's church staff: clergy, verger, organist, thieves, flower arrangers, welcoming teams. . .



Hmmm. And this was found in the noisiest church in the UK. Correction: World.



Think about it.

Order of Service typo for the First Sunday of Easter:
*O Sons and Daughters,
Let us Sin.*

A member of the congregation said he had been coming to church for years hoping to get such permission.



Lincoln Cathedral, England

There is no-one else.



Exeter Cathedral, England

Just you, history, music . . .

Unlock the secret world of organs and organists ~ you're in for a big surprise



Colossal or tiny. Deafening or barely audible. Centuries-old or built yesterday. Famous or insignificant — and that's only the musicians. Every organ and organist is unique, but they're all fascinating, sometimes exotic, and often shrouded in mystery. Until now . . .

What really goes on behind these beautiful organ façades? Are those the only pipes? Why are there so many keyboards? Why do organists play using their feet? What happens when organs go wrong? What happens if organists get locked in a building overnight? What should they do when their organ catches fire? And why did the Archdeacon of Winchester get stuck in a pipe?

Join Jenny Setchell as she unravels these and many other mysteries of the 'King of Instruments'. Lively cartoons by Al Nisbet and more than 450 exquisite photos help unveil the secrets of this



'wondrous machine' and those who play it. The ups and downs of international concert organist Martin Setchell are mercilessly exposed, while dozens of other musicians worldwide (including popular blogger Adrian Marple) confess their most embarrassing, infuriating, hilarious or uplifting times with anecdotes that will make you howl with laughter or gasp in disbelief at what they get up to behind the scenes.

Whether you are fascinated by the instrument, the music, or are just curious, *Organs & Organists: Their Inside Stories* is a compelling and fascinating peek into a hidden world.



Jenny Setchell is the author of *Organ-isms: Anecdotes from the World of the King of Instruments* and *Looking Up at Organs and Ceilings*.

Foreword by Christopher Herrick



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