

The Organ and the Italian Observance: Discourses Tested by Practices

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Introduction

‘Catholic protesters have impeded the concert of the organ specialist Anna von Hausswolff in the church of Notre-Dame de Bon Port [...]’ This tweet from Tuesday 7 December 2021 illustrates a rather unexpected relevance (one has to recognize it) of managing organ practices in the Latin Church.¹ It is nearly impossible for us not to connect this group of protesters in Nantes (France) – subsequently associated with the integralist Catholic movement – with Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498) and his virulent sermons against the excesses of a softened clergy and of Florence as a whole, igniting the bonfires of vanities in that town at the end of the fifteenth century. The diocese of Nantes had allowed Anna von Hausswolff’s performance in one of its churches in town of ‘a rather sober organ concert lasting one hour, without text, projection or choreography, and in which nothing was counter to the faith or morals’.² Judged as overly lax by a group of believers, ‘some advanced on social media that her concert in a church

1 Translation Bert Roest. See on this episode Kevin Grethen & Anne Augié, ‘À Nantes, des catholiques intégristes empêchent la tenue d’un concert du Lieu unique’, *Ouest-France*, 07/12/2021. URL : <https://www.ouest-france.fr/pays-de-la-loire/nantes-44000/nantes-des-catholiques-empêchent-la-tenue-d-un-concert-2a77173c-57a2-11ec-98d9-226f24a3b94d>.

2 Press release of the diocese of Nantes published on its website on 7 December 2021. URL : <https://diocese44.fr/concernant-un-concert-dorgue/>.

would have been ‘blasphemy’, with the ‘complicity of some erring priests’.³ In a similar vein, Savonarola, overwhelming the clergy with reproaches for its villainy, its concubines and its love of wealth, succeeded in the removal of the bust of famous organist Antonio Squarcialupi from Santa Maria del Fiore – the seat of the bishop – where he had worked for several decades.

The strict observance of a religious rule and the technical innovation constituted by the organ seem *a priori* incompatible and paradoxical. In addition to this, poverty might forbid to commission such an expensive instrument. Hence what kind of attitude should one adopt in the face of a new practice – that of the organ – while respecting religious discipline during a period in which the instrument was not commonly in use in churches? To what extent did the Observance and the mendicant orders in general impact the development of the organ in the Italian Church?

Italian humanists and reformers shared a vocabulary of *renovatio*, *reformatio*, and *reflorere*.⁴ These two movements, if it is allowed to describe them in this way, sought to draw from a bygone age the ingredients of an actualization that was supposed to redress and relaunch the course of contemporary life (intellectual life for the former and religious life for the latter group). The references were taken either from pagan antiquity (in case of the humanists), or from the Church fathers and order founders (in case of the reformers), yet in both instances it concerned seizing exemplary figures who, by means of contrast, allowed for a judgment of contemporary society.⁵ The Observance (of the rule, the evangelical message, vows, etc.) was as much a religious discipline as a societal project that significantly exceeded the convent walls.⁶ Musical practice was not a core issue within Observant normative discourses, but as cement of the liturgical and communal life, it became part of the parameters taken into account by the Observant projects of reform. Singing and organ playing created a communication

3 Adrien Toffolet, ‘Deux concerts d’Anna von Hausswolff annulés à Nantes et Paris, après des pressions d’extrémistes catholiques’, *France inter* (web site), 8 décembre 2021. URL: <https://www.franceinter.fr/societe/deux-concerts-d-anna-von-hausswolff-annules-a-nantes-et-paris-apres-des-pressions-d-extremistes-catholiques>.

4 Ronald Witt, ‘Francesco Petrarca and the Parameters of Historical Research’, *Religions* 3 (2012), 699-709 (at 699).

5 Ibidem, 700.

6 James Mixson, ‘Observant Reform’s Conceptual Frameworks between Principle and Practice’, in: *A Companion to Observant Reform in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond*, ed. James D. Mixson and Bert Roest (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2015), 60-84 (at 78).

between sacred space and public space, constituted by the (clerical) choir and the (lay) assembly of believers, whereas at the same time the Observants tended to re-enforce the separation of the two through architecture and church furniture.⁷ Nevertheless, the Observants did not take efficient control of these ‘instruments of communication’, even when the pedagogical and sensitive scope of music might have served in a meaningful way their reformatory interests. Girolamo Savonarola did try to curb recourse to polyphony in favor of simple and popular monodic tunes, for which he sometimes also wrote the words. Yet he did not manage to have a lasting influence on Florentine musical practices, the development of which resumed almost immediately after his execution in 1498.

Even though, throughout the Middle Ages, the theological nuances were infinite, since Augustine the principal theoretical problem posed by the use of music in the liturgy remained more or less the same: on the one hand, music could be useful to touch the heart of believers and make it compliant with the Holy Spirit, yet on the other hand, it could become an end in itself and transform into harmful entertainment. Augustine formulated this conundrum as follows:

‘So I waver between the danger that lies in gratifying the senses and the benefits which, as I know from experience, can accrue from singing. Without committing myself to an irrevocable opinion, I am inclined to approve of the custom of singing in church, in order that by indulging the ears weaker spirits may be inspired with feelings of devotion. Yet when I find the singing itself more moving than the truth which it conveys, I confess that this is a grievous sin...’⁸

Does liturgical music take part in the salvific plan, or does it mislead the Christian community? The use of the organ can only be studied in connection with polyphonic chant, both because liturgical chant became

7 Haude Morvan, ‘The Built Environment as a Mirror of Community. Some Reflections on Architectural Norms in Observant Settings’, in: *Régler, éduquer et contrôler la société chrétienne. Les réformes de l’Observance en Europe (XIV^e-XVI^e siècles)*, ed. Cristina Andenna, Marina Benedetti, Sylvie Duval, Haude Morvan, and Ludovic Viallet (Rome: École française de Rome, forthcoming).

8 Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), 239 (Book 10, chapter 33).

more complex in tandem with organ music, and because the majority of the rules applied to the use of the organ in cathedrals and convents initially took aim at singing. To the musical preoccupations can be added the issue of the organ's price and the choice of a mendicant community to purchase it while its rule – and *a fortiori* its observance – advocated austerity and poverty. Hence it is first of all necessary to examine the evolution of the discourses surrounding musical conventions produced with a normative and reformatory intent, in order to better contextualize the professional practices linked to the organ. These prescriptions should then be confronted with the concrete engagement of friars as organists, organ builders and sponsors of organs between 1400 and 1550 in Italy, where this instrument enjoyed a particular popularity. The many contradictions between discourse and practice allow for a better understanding of the relationship between the Observance and the society in which it unfolded, while measuring the scale of the development of the organ in Italian churches during the Renaissance.

Norms and reforms

In 1469, the Observant Franciscan chapter of Bolsena forbade the construction of organs in churches of the order, as such an expenditure was considered an insult to poverty. The same chapter required friaries that already had an organ to sell their instrument, with the exception of the four largest Observant churches, namely San Francesco of Mantua, Santa Maria in Aracoeli (Rome) and Santa Croce of Florence.⁹ Regulations like these notwithstanding, the mendicants – and the Franciscans in particular – were very important in the history of medieval Italian organ production, and devoted themselves to this production earlier than monks and canons.¹⁰ Throughout its history, the Franciscan order counted several musical theoreticians,¹¹ as well as renowned composers, such as Costanzo Por-

9 Mario Levri, *Gli organi di Mantova – ricerche d'archivio* (Trent: Biblioteca PP. Francescani, 1976), 36.

10 Oscar Mischiati, 'Vicende di storia organaria', in: *Storia della musica al Santo di Padova*, ed. Pierluigi Petrobelli and Sandro Durante (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1990), 159-179 (at 159).

11 Cf. Peter V. Loewen, *Music in Early Franciscan Thought*, *The Medieval Franciscans*, 9 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013).

ta (1528-1601) and Francesco Maria Delfico (teacher of Zarlino).¹² Moreover, there is no indication that the acquisition of organs was interrupted within Italian Franciscan circles after this edict from 1469. The strictures imposed by the Observants are indicative of the importance of controlling the sound of the organ and, by extension, of the religious community as a whole, constituted by a shared aural musical experience. This type of prohibition also assumes a breach of the chain of social practices connected with the instrument, from the organ builder to the organist, through the organ blowers and all the financial contributors to the project's commissioning. Leaving aside the reformatory ideal, the four basilicas not touched by the 1469 prohibition were also the places most capable of anchoring the Observant friaries into contemporary society, due to their artistic allure. A religious order could not easily pass up such an anchoring opportunity.

In answer to the moral questions of his time, Antonino of Florence (1389-1459), disciple of the Dominican reformer Giovanni Dominici, and subsequently bishop of Florence, condemned in his *Summa confessionalis* (III, 8, *De citharizantibus*) musicians who played ballads on church organs:

‘If a musician has played his instrument (*citharizavit*) during illicit gatherings, or if he has played ballads on church organs, I deem it a mortal [sin] for the player and the person who makes him play.’¹³

Hence the bishop did not condemn the use of the organ in general, but rather a certain type of music performed by Florentine organists. He likewise warned his spiritual sons against listening to songs (*canzoni*), ballads (*ballate*) and *strambotti* when the only goal was sensual pleasure.¹⁴ Thomas de Vio (1469-1534), master general of the order of Preachers in 1508, cardinal in 1517 and subsequently bishop of Gaeta in 1519, composed a com-

12 Jessie Ann Owens, ‘Music and the Friars Minor in Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century Italy’, in: *I Frati minori tra ‘400 e ‘500. Atti del XII Convegno internazionale, Assisi, 18-19-20 ottobre 1984* (Assisi: Università di Perugia- Centro di Studi Francescani, 1986), 169-188 (at 178-179).

13 ‘Si musicus citharizavit ad congregationes illicitas, vel in ecclesia in organis pulsavit ballatas, puto mortale in pulsante, et procurante.’, in: Antonino of Florence, *Summa confessionalis* (Lyon: Benoit Boyer, 1564), 312.

14 ‘Se arai aperte l’orecchie a udire [...] canzone e ballate e strambotti, canti e suoni, per piacere solo della sensualità [...], il tuo talento naturale non sarà moltiplicato in bene esercitarlo, mal per te.’, in: *Lettere di Santi e Beati fiorentini raccolte ed illustrate dal canonico Antommarchia Biscioni* (Milan: Silvestri, 1839), 290-291 (letter XI).

mentary on the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas between 1508 and 1520 that picks up the very same distinction and condemns borrowings from profane music. His commentary later was meant to serve as a foundation for the discussions of liturgical music by the participants of the Council of Trent. In his treatment of the second article of *Quaestio* 92 of the *Secunda secundae*, Thomas de Vio ‘asks if playing frivolous secular melodies on the organ during ecclesiastical offices is a mortal sin (...) for the melody distracts from specific matters, and the sound which by one is applied to a frivolous matter, can be applied by another to a spiritual matter, as is shown’.¹⁵

Thomas here puts his finger on a great difficulty for anyone who wants to distinguish between the sacred or profane nature of a melody deprived of its text. The ballads condemned by Antonino of Florence were undoubtedly identifiable by their dancing quality, a uniquely viable criterium — apart from any text — to exclude a type of music from ‘sacred’ repertoire. Beyond the exclusion of profane repertoire, the commentary on the *Summa theologica* by the bishop of Florence presents several instruments made of metal (including the organ) as good fruits of the earth. He writes in book I, i, 6 chapter VII, par. 1: ‘If she [the Earth] had not contained in its bosom these natural treasures and these hidden powers, how would it have been possible to derive from her the metals, such as gold, silver, tin, bronze, copper, iron and lead, that serve for the fabrication of delicate musical instruments, such as organs, the flute, cymbals and church bells?’¹⁶ It is clear, therefore, that the presence of the organ in churches did no longer really stir up a debate in the early sixteenth century, but that its use could still be challenged.

15 ‘An pulsare in organis inter officia ecclesiastica sonos secularium vanitatum sit peccatum mortale. Quia sonus abstrahit a materia hac vel illa et sonus qui ab uno applicatus est ad materiam vanam, potest ab altero applicari ad materiam spiritualem, ut patet.’, quoted in: Oscar Mischiati, ‘Il Concilio di Trento e la polifonia. Una diversa proposta di lettura e di prospettiva storiografica’, in: *Musica e liturgia nella riforma tridentina (Trento, Castello del Buonconsiglio, 23 settembre – 26 novembre 1995)*, ed. Danilo Curti and Marco Gozzi (Trent: Provincia autonoma di Trento – Servizio Beni Librari e Archivistici, 1995), 19-30 (at 19).

16 Raoul Morçay, *Saint Antonin. Fondateur du couvent de Saint-Marc. Archevêque de Florence. 1389-1459* (Tours: Mame, 1914), 341.

Rather than banning the organ, the general chapter of the order of Preachers held at Naples in 1515 circumscribed its use:

‘That it is not allowed under any pretext to play profane vanities, both because the sound of organs nowadays is part of the solemnity of the divine cult — and mixing in something profane and vain is clearly superstitious — and because, just as according to the sacred canons secular singing is forbidden in church, secular (instrumental) music is likewise illicit, even though both could be applied for a sacred purpose.’¹⁷

This passage brings to mind the condemnations of Antonino of Florence and other authority figures for whom the permeability of so-called sacred music by so-called profane music posed a danger. The ‘vanity’ some musicians exhibited in the liturgy – to listen to the formulated prohibitions – was sometimes counterbalanced by proclaiming the words prior to the organ part, in order to ensure the intelligible and ‘meticulous’ transmission of the text: ‘That each time when something is about to be played on the organ [...] the chanter first recites (*sine nota*) out loud [the text of the prayer] and that he recites it carefully (*morose*).’¹⁸ The stimulation of musical sensibilities did not exclude the faithful’s understanding of important passages, which for the Dominicans was an important issue: ‘Likewise we declare with regard to Easter vespers that the chanters begin by saying ‘Kyrie’, that the organ responds, and that, for the benefit of the devotion of the people, the latter rise while understanding what is intoned.’¹⁹ The same preoccupations resurface during the subsequent two Dominican general chapters:

17 ‘Ut non permittantur ullo modo vanitates saeculares sonari, tum quia sonus in organis est pars hodie solemnitatis divini cultus, cui profanum et vanum aliquid admisceri constat superstitiosum esse, tum quia sicut secundum sacros canones cantus saecularis est inhibitus in ecclesia, ita et saecularis sonus, licet utrumque possit ad sacram applicari materiam.’, in: *Monumenta ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum historica*, IX. *Acta capitulorum generalium*, Vol. IV., ed. Benedictus Maria Reichert (Rome: Typographia Polyglotta, 1901), 136.

18 ‘Ut quandocumque contingerit in organo pulsari aliquid [...], cantor sine nota alta voce et morose dicat illa’, *Ibidem*.

19 ‘Idem dicimus in vesperis paschalibus, quod cantores incipiant iliam dictionem “Kyrie”, organum illud subsequatur, et hoc pro devotione populi, ut intelligens, quod inchoatur, assurgat’, *Ibidem*.

(Bologna, 1523): 'We order, that where it is habitual to play the organ, the symbol of faith, which in mass is chanted with organs, is never played completely or in part on any solemn liturgical feast to avoid that we seem to obfuscate the faith which we are held to profess publicly and preach to the people, due to the modulations of the organ [...] To ensure the efficacy of this order, and that it is inviolably adhered to, we command that, when it happens, priors and the choir of convents are barred from office.'²⁰

(Lyon, 1536): 'Furthermore, we order that nobody is presumed exempt from choir whether by day or by night by reason of any office, degree or dignity, even though it is possible to provide dispensation to prelates, together with lectors, preachers, and students when they are performing their other duties, or because of other reasonable legitimate impediments. Likewise, we order that on feast days, when the organ is played, the friars sing the complete *Credo* and *Gloria in excelsis* either unaccompanied together, or alternating with the organ, and by no means is it permitted that everything is performed by the organ. Instead, the verse of the organ must be spoken by a friar, and heard by the choir in a distinct and understandable manner.'²¹

By superimposing the text on the music of the organ, the Dominicans managed to reconcile the Word with the 'delight' of the music. In fact, the pleasure of hearing the music made the heart more receptive to the Word, and in this way could serve the evangelizing mission of the Friars

20 'Ordinamus, quod ubi est consuetudo pulsandi organa, nunquam symbolum fidei, quod in missa cantatur organis, vel ex toto, vel ex parte pulsetur in quovis etiam solemnī die, ne fidem quam profiteri palam tenemur et populo praedicare, sub modulis organorum videamur occultari. [...] Ut autem ordinatio praedicta efficaciam habeat, mandamus praesidentibus conventuum et choro sub poena absolutionis ab officiis suis ipso facto incurrenda, ut hanc ordinationem inviolabiliter servent.', Ibidem, 184.

21 'Ordinamus praeterea, quod nullus praesumatur exemptus a choro tam die quam nocte ratione cuiuscumque officii, gradus vel dignitatis, poterit nihilominus praelatus cum lectoribus, praedicatoribus et studentibus actu sua officia exercentibus vel aliis legitime impeditis rationabiliter dispensare. Item ordinantes mandamus, quod diebus festivis, dum pulsantur organa, fratres cantent totum credo et gloria in excelsis vel secum vei cum organis aalternatim, et nullatenus permittant totum ab organo decantari. Versiculus vero organi ab uno fratre distincte et intelligibiliter audiente choro dicatur.', Ibidem.

Preachers. Thus, in their liturgy the organ obtained the status of a vital instrument for the salvation of the people of God.

Several reformers reflected on the musical practices of their order, usually to argue for limitations or restrictions. The study of contracts for the acquisition of organs nevertheless clearly shows that the use of these instruments was already too deeply ingrained for such restrictions to be truly observed. As James Mixson underlines in his article 'Observant Reform's conceptual framework', each reform discourse linked to the Observance was in some way 'encapsulated' in its congregation.²² For that reason, it is not appropriate to consider the Observance in a univocal manner. Moreover, the relative disinterest in music by the great Observant figures is striking. They were much more concerned with images. The Observant Franciscan Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444), known to have performed the *laudi* of Jacopone of Todi, often preached on the basis of images known to the Sienese people, from the Maestà of Simone Martini to the fresco cycle painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the Palazzo pubblico.²³ Citing Bonaventura of Bagnoregio, the preacher affirmed the primacy of sight over hearing (here in the context of witch burnings): 'you will remember better what you will see than what you will hear'.²⁴ Much could be said in response to this hierarchization of the senses. Singing occupied an important place in the medieval arts of memory, and the consistent development of the organ in Renaissance Italy speaks for itself. The sound (of organs, church bells, urban trumpets) was not a completely negligible factor in the Observant reform project of Christian society either. In fact, both Ludovico Barbo and Savonarola expressed their opinion with regard to the organ. Although they did not necessarily have anything to do with each other, both men can be considered as the product, as well as the source for an appeal to conversion throughout the Church via different means.

22 Mixson, 'Observant Reform's Conceptual Frameworks', 70.

23 Patrick Boucheron, "Tournez les yeux pour admirer, vous qui exercez le pouvoir, celle qui est peinte ici." La fresque du Bon Gouvernement d'Ambrogio Lorenzetti', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 60 (2005/6), 1137-1199 (at 1197).

24 Bernardino of Siena, *Le prediche volgari. Predicazione del 1425 in Siena*, ed. Ciro Cannarozzi, 2 Vols. (Florence: Rinaldi, 1958) I, 192. Cf. Pietro Delcorno, "Quomodo discet sine docente?" Observant Efforts towards Education and Pastoral Care', in: *A Companion to Observant Reform in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond*, ed. James D. Mixson & Bert Roest (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2015), 147-184 (at 167-168).

The Benedictine monk Ludovico Barbo (1381-1444) initiated from Padua the Congregation of Santa Giustina, and in 1409 launched a reform that persisted until the end of his mandate in 1437. He established strict rules regarding organs. First of all, the abbeys were forbidden to acquire new instruments; secondly, the communities already in the possession of an organ could keep it, on the condition that they only used it during great feasts; finally, it was forbidden for monks to devote themselves to practicing the organ or any other instrument.²⁵ Ludovico Barbo sent Gomezio di Giovanni (1419-1439) — his closest disciple — to the Badia Fiorentina, which at that time had almost fallen into ruin. The new abbot took sixteen monks with him and restored the observance of the rule of Benedict in the Badia Fiorentina as well as in the monastic compound situated in the heart of Florence.²⁶ Yet as early as 1440 — just three years after the mandate of Barbo and one year after the end of Gomezio's abbatiage — the Badia Fiorentina commissioned a new organ. This 'inobservance' of the Benedictine reform explains in part the insistence with which the congregation reiterated the call for austerity in the adornment and the decoration of its churches, notably during the chapters of Praglia (1464) and Polirone (1467).²⁷ It demonstrates equally how difficult it was to implement a genuine reform in the socio-cultural domain, where the organ crystallized simultaneously the culmination of an improvement of techniques and an evolution of esthetic sensibilities.

The return of Savonarola to Florence in 1489 marked a change in the way of life of the Florentine people. The new regime did not persecute musical life with the same force as the visual arts, yet it did come under scrutiny.²⁸ First of all, Savonarola objected to the use of polyphony in religious services, commenting on the entertainment it provided during performance of the liturgy, and the difficulties it caused to understand the text, due to the use of counterpoint, completely in line with the Augustinian paradigm presented in the introduction. He also drew on the (apparently) numerous cases of intoxication and bad behavior of singers during

25 Anne Leader, *The Badia of Florence: Art and Observance in a Renaissance Monastery* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012), 50.

26 Ibidem, 4, 7.

27 Morvan, 'The Built Environment', in press.

28 André Chastel, *Art et humanisme à Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982 (3rd Edition)), 394.

religious offices. Organists were not put in the same category.²⁹ Savonarola loved to recycle profane tunes, for which he composed pious verses, and he considered the simple musical forms of *laudi* suitable.³⁰ Polyphony somehow pertained to modernity, and the return to monodic chant or more basic forms of polyphony reflect the wish to connect with an old tradition. The comprehensibility of liturgical texts wished for by this Dominican reformer became part, a few years later, of the norms promulgated by the general chapter of his order (referred to earlier). In his 1496 Lenten sermons, Savonarola re-affirmed his preference for traditional liturgical chant and for certain well-known hymns and sequences, such as *Ave maris stella*, or *Veni Creator*.³¹ In addition, his sermons on Job state: 'And yet it is said that *canti figurati* in church are more harmful than useful, as for those who need to pray and contemplate God with their mind and intellect, *canti figurati* do nothing else than distract the senses and the ear.'³² Still in an Augustinian spirit, he reproached the people of Florence from his pulpit in the cathedral on 4 March 1495: 'You only want to play the organ, and you only go to church to hear organs.'³³ This condemnation reinforces the idea that the organ was part of the familiar auditory landscape of the Florentines and that its appeal could even surpass that of the liturgy. All the same, as said earlier, Savonarola succeeded in having the bust of the great Medici organist Antonio Squarcialupi moved from the organ gallery to the cathedral's sacristy.³⁴ Outside Florence, the friary of San Domenico of Prato came in 1496 under the control of the reformers of the congrega-

29 Franck A. D'Accone, *Music in Renaissance Florence: Studies and Documents* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2006), 328.

30 Chastel, *Art et humanisme*, 393.

31 D'Accone, *Music in Renaissance Florence*, 313.

32 'E però si dice che li canti figurati sono più presto nocivi nella chiesa, che utili, perché quivi si debbe orare e contemplare Dio colla mente e coll'intelletto e e' canti figurati non fanno altro che dilettere il senso e l'orecchio.', in: Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Giobbe*, 2 Vols. (Rome: Ridolfi, 1957) II, 393. Cited from D'Accone, *Music in Renaissance Florence*, 314.

33 'Voi volete pure sonare organi: voi andate alla chiesa per udire organi...', Sermon from 5 March 1495, held at Santa Maria del Fiore. Cited from Pier Paolo Donati, 'Corpus dei documenti sulla manifattura degli organi in Italia dal XIV al XVII secolo, III: documenti dal 1481 al 1499', *Informazione Organistica: Bollettino della Fondazione Accademia di Musica Italiana per Organo di Pistoia* n.s. 35 (2014), 67-131 (at 86).

34 Gabriele Giacomelli, 'Organi e simboli del potere a Firenze dalla repubblica al principato', in: *Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Musica Sacra: In occasione del centenario di fondazione del PIMS: Roma, 26 maggio – 1 giugno 2011* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), 1061-1073 (at 1066).

tion of San Marco, and its organ was ceased to be used, at least until 1501, that is to say three years after Savonarola's death (1498). This survival of *piagnoni* ideas encountered opposition from the *Otto difensori* of the town of Prato, who asked in a letter to the master general of the Dominicans, Vincenzo of Castronovo di Lombardia, to permit the transfer of the organ from San Domenico to the church of the Augustinians, who did not have such an instrument and wished to use it. The *Ceppo* paid for the transfer and the Augustinians took responsibility for the payment of the organist.³⁵ On the whole, the mendicants were leading actors in the development of the organ in Italy. It was therefore also more expected of them to produce a guideline of some sort, yet its prescriptions were inevitably challenged by the performance, by the friars, of occupations linked to the organ, even though there are not many informative sources concerning the specific case of the Observants.

Professional practices

Fra Andrea dei Servi designed his first organ for the Santissima Annunziata church in Florence in February 1379 under the supervision of Francesco Landini, to replace a first organ dating from 1299.³⁶ The organ designed by fra Andrea was built by another friar, Domenico of Siena, and financed directly by the prior general of the Servites, Andrea of Faenza.³⁷ The contract involved reveals not only an early openness on the part of the Servites to the use of the organ in church, but also a technical and financial investment in its design. Among the organ builders for whom information about their order allegiance is known, the Dominicans are represented most often.³⁸ During the period in which the *piagnoni* still left their mark from San Marco, the other Florentine friary, Santa Maria Novella, shone by its splendor with regard to organs, thanks to fra Bernardo of Argentina (alias

35 Renzo Fantappiè, *Organari, organisti e organi a Prato. XIV-XX secolo* (Prato: Società pratese di Storia patria, 2012), 43.

36 Raffaele Taucci, 'Fra Andrea dei Servi, organista e compositore del trecento', *Rivista di Studi Storici sull'Ordine dei Servi di Maria* 2 (1935), 73-108/1-35 [independent article page numbering], 8, 12.

37 Ibidem, 9.

38 The friars Bernardo of Argentina, Ambrogio of Jacopo Siri, Giovanni of Alemagna, Tommaso of Cortona, Pietro of Lorenzo Nencini, Pietro of Bicola da Siena, Riccardo of Chiavelli da Camerino and Vincenzo of Palermo.

Bernardo of Alemagna), who originated from Strasbourg and entered Santa Maria Novella in 1501, where he died in 1556. His production was concentrated in Florence, but was not limited to mendicant churches, which reveals a great liberty in the face of potential pressures from Observants within fra Bernardo's own order (see the list at the end of this article). In his sermon on the Book of Haggai, performed on the first of November 1494 from the pulpit in the cathedral of Florence, Savonarola, prior to urging his fellow friars to get rid of their paintings, addressed himself to monks and nuns. To the first he launched a call for manual labor, following the example of their predecessors ('lavorate con le mani vostre come facevano gli antichi monaci'), and the second he advised to renounce polyphony ('lasciate i canti figurati') in order to better lament their faults.³⁹ He went after polyphony while encouraging manual labor. While on the one hand, the construction of organs (as a form of labor) could be licit, on the other hand the performance of chants that ordinarily presupposed organ accompaniment was not. It is difficult to gauge how friar organists or organ builders could successfully perform their art with such partially contradicting injunctions. Moreover, the work in question put forward the problem of salaries and, hence, enrichment, of which the commissioning of an organ was a clear expression.

Beyond the particular case of the friars, organ builders in their role as artisans were not struck with infamy by the ecclesiastical authorities. The texts of Antonino of Florence and Savonarola spared them, preferring to go after the choice of repertoire of organists. The surviving statute had as a result, on the one hand, that religious were not forbidden the construction of organs and, on the other hand, that some builders could maintain sufficiently privileged relations with this or that community to obtain burial rights in their church. The participation of friars and secular priests in the professions of organ builder and organist confirms rather well the legitimacy of the craft. The mendicants distinguished themselves both as patrons and as craftsmen. Panayota Volti has demonstrated their role in the building domain, by means of several examples of Franciscan architects who

39 1 November 1494, 'Sopra Aggeo', in: *Scelta di prediche e scritti di fra Girolamo Savonarola. Con nuovi documenti intorno alla sua vita*, ed. Pasquale Villari and Eugenio Casanova (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1898), 61-62.

relied on the exhortation to work found in their rule.⁴⁰ That rule also gave a friar already trained in a craft the possibility to continue working in it. Several Dominicans distinguished themselves in the artisanal domain as well. In Perugia, fra Bartolomeo di Pietro worked as a painter and master glazer between 1366 and 1420, and he received a salary, even when he worked for his community on the *finestrone* of San Domenico. Several other Dominican master glazers were active during the fifteenth century in the Marches, and they were given leeway to travel in the context of their artisanal activities. Joanna Cannon has identified other friar-artisans in Tuscany, yet it is not possible to grasp how much money these Dominicans received for their work, as the payments received included the cost of the primary materials.⁴¹ The Dominicans probably did not escape entanglement between artisan milieus and friaries. On the sociological level, the (Franciscan) Observance attracted from the second half of the fifteenth century sons of noble families, who brought to the communities their culture and artistic sensibilities.⁴² Hence what position to take, when the practice of different crafts seemingly existed since the foundation of the orders, and when the friars themselves came from milieux instructed in the arts?

The organ began to disseminate in Italy predominantly from the end of the fourteenth century onward. The transmission of the profession of organist in the period under consideration relied on a tradition of some hundred years, and the training for and practice of this profession engaged a number of religious from the start. In response to the increasing sophistication of polyphony, the principal singers needed to have capacities of reading and performing that necessitated a proper formation. The art of singing *cantus figuratus* (i.e. polyphony) went hand in hand with the organ, for the keyboard was useful for supporting the singers. The transition to polyphony implied a greater preparation and provided the advantage

40 Panayota Volti, 'Chapitre II. Le projet d'implantation', in: *Les couvents des ordres mendiants et leur environnement à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2003). On line. URL: <http://books.openedition.org/editions-cnrs/5765>; *Bullarii Franciscani epitome et supplementum quatuor voluminum priorum*, ed. Conrad Eubel (Ad Claras Aquas: Quaracchi, 1908), 226 (*Regula fratrum Minorum*, De modo laborandi, V).

41 Joanna Cannon, *Religious Poverty, Visual Riches: Art in the Dominican Churches of Central Italy in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2013), 310-312.

42 Anna Maria Amonaci, *Conventi toscani dell'osservanza francescana* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 1997), 38.

of choice to communities with regard to the 'style' they wanted to give to their liturgical celebrations. As dialogic forms (*alternatim*) developed, organ playing had to be perfected, in order to ascend to the level of complexity of the sung parts. However, the opposition to polyphonic chant by some Observants such as Barbo reduced considerably the need for organ accompaniment. The same reformer also forbade his monks to play the organ themselves, for the reason that this activity was overly profane.⁴³ On the contrary, the Santissima Annunziata in Florence included a musical formation in the novitiate and became a remarkable and early music center (from the fourteenth century onward), in part thanks to the figure of fra Andrea dei Servi, who has been studied in detail by Raffaello Tauci.⁴⁴ Outside Florence, the Servites also provided several organists to churches beyond their community, such as the Carmelite church of San Martino in Bologna.⁴⁵ Starting from the fifteenth century, the Annunziata friary often employed two organists simultaneously, and several of them were recruited from the friars' own ranks.⁴⁶ The majority of organists listed by Franck D'Accone had the title frate. The others could have been lay people, in accordance with the general tendency that the number of lay performers grew along with the professionalization of the art of organ playing. The involvement of clerics and friars nevertheless represented a financial advantage for the various institutions that had to pay organists. In fact, the accumulation of functions like chaplain or canon with that of organist (or chanter) allowed the patron to save on payments, starting with housing costs. In fact, these functions were often taken up simultaneously. That

43 Leader, *The Badia of Florence*, 50.

44 Florence, Archivio di Stato, *Camera del Comune*, 1378; Tauci, 'Fra Andrea dei Servi', 6, 7.

45 Friar Cristofalo da Bologna (1 June-4 September 1484), friar Benedetto da Bologna (1 November 1491-1 June 1492). Bologna, Archivio di Stato, 127/3609, Libro di entrate 1464-1493, ff. 29v, 35v, 37r, 43r.; Bologna, AS, 126/3608, Rendite 1466-1480, f. 69, published in Oscar Mischiati, 'L'organo della basilica di S. Martino di Bologna di G. Cipri', *L'Organo, Rivista di Cultura Organaria e Organistica* 1 (1960), 249.

46 Piero d'Andrea Vaiaio (November 1445-May 1456); friar Biagio d'Alberto da Firenze (mid December 1450-end of December 1471); friar Bernardo di Luca da Firenze, pupil of Biagio (mid June 1471-August 1480, and October 1490-April 1493); Bernardino di Messer Iacopo (January-March 1480); Piero di Giovanni d'Arezzo (November 1485-January 1486); friar Benedetto d'Antonio da Bologna (September 1483, and April 1486-July 1488); Bartolomeo da Pavia (August 1486); the Augustinian friar Alessandro da Bologna (April 1486-mid March 1492); friar Girolamo d'Antonio da Bologna (27 June 1487-April 1488). D'Accone, 'Sacred music in Florence', 321.

being said, great musical centers such as Santissima Annunziata did no longer accept the candidature of clerics if they did not have an adequate training, and they were no longer paid to work as organist or chanter. This Florentine friary was without a doubt the most active mendicant community in the domain of music. The other friaries sometimes had recourse to external musicians while at the same time training their own musicians and craftsmen who excelled beyond their community.

Sponsoring and poverty

The association between mendicants and artistic sponsorship is far from evident. I have been able to create a database collecting building and repairing fees for circa 650 Italian organs, and to identify in most cases who were the commissioners of such operations. What remains indeed is the question of poverty in confrontation with these huge expenses. Since 1336, the Franciscans had the right to accept presents (even presents of great value), on condition that they were transformed into goods that benefited the community as a whole, such as books for the convent library.⁴⁷ Henceforth, gifts received could very well be destined for the construction of an instrument that benefitted everybody. Mendicant friaries developed in towns, just like the organ, and for that reason mendicant communities were well-situated to become familiar with the instrument and to get to know craftsmen able to produce it (see the circular diagram at the end of the article). Italian Franciscan churches were behind some 40 organ commissions, whereas Augustinian ones counted for some 30 of them. Other mendicant churches of Dominicans, Servites and Carmelites were also important clients, but to a lesser degree. Finally, some ten Benedictine abbeys (among which several female monasteries) also commissioned instruments. Most frequently, the sales contracts name the community as legal person. Where this is not the case, they mention the prior or the guardian who represented the community. The commissions undertaken at the initiative of these superiors marked without doubt their intent to portray a united front to their community, which also had a right of scru-

47 Louise Bourdua, *The Franciscans and Art Patronage in Late Medieval Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 15, 26.

tiny at the convent level. But there was also scrutiny at the provincial level, as can be illustrated with the Observant Franciscans from Tuscany, where the provincial vicar could ask for the accounts of friar craftsmen in order to check for abuses and superfluous expenses.⁴⁸

A communal commission took place within a well thought-out liturgical context. In the *Liber consiliorum* of the Dominican Santa Maria di Castello friary of Genoa, the motivation to place an order for a new instrument — when the previous one had become unusable — was ‘to help the choir and for the devotion of the people’ (*pro adiutorio chori et pro devotione populi*).⁴⁹ We find here the same concern about the gathering of believers as in the previously cited passage from the 1523 Dominican general chapter. In the same period, San Pietro Martire, an Observant friary erected at Murano in the fifteenth century, finalized the rebuilding of its church ravaged by a fire in 1472. The consecration took place in 1511, but the friars only cared to have an organ constructed in 1520. The terminology used had no reservation whatsoever concerning the justification to obtain an organ, nor any concern for poverty or soberness:

‘After our church was finished and consecrated, an organ was missing, to make it more proper and majestic. Hence the friars of our friary of San Pietro Martire of Murano congregated in chapter in the priory of father Floriano of Brescia agreed with the organ master Gianbattista Facchetti of Brescia in the following manner...’⁵⁰

The modest size of the organ (ten feet) resulted in a likewise reasonable price (140 ducats), and the contract provided for a discount of twenty ducats by the maker ‘for the love of God’. The visual and ornamental dimension of the instrument was not disregarded: ‘the friars, in their turn,

48 Anna Maria Amonaci, *Conventi toscani dell'osservanza francescana* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 1997), 41.

49 Maurizio Tarrini, ‘Organari del Rinascimento in Liguria: I – Giovanni Torriano da Venezia’, *L'Organo, Rivista di Cultura Organaria e Organistica* 36 (2003), 107-225 (at 114).

50 ‘Doppo terminata e consacrata la nostra chiesa, mancava alla medesima un organo per renderla più decorosa e maestevole, convennero perciò li frati del nostro convento di San Pietro martire di Murano capitolarmente congregati nel priorato del padre Floriano da Brescia, con Gianbattista Fachetti da Brescia maestro d'organi nel modo seguente...’, Venice, Archivio di Stato, *Corporazioni religiose soppresse*, S. Pietro Martire di Murano, busta 29, published in Denise Zaru, *Art and Observance in Renaissance Venice. The Dominicans and their Artists (1391 — ca. 1545)*, trans. Sarah Melker (Rome: Viella, 2014), 50-51.

commit themselves to realize a casing [for the organ] with all elements that will contribute to its adornment and its beauty'.⁵¹

Finally, counter to what one might have expected, Giovanni Battista Facchetti was not an organ builder associated with Observant circles. His production was more typified by great assignments for the cathedrals of Reggio Emilia (1514), Milan (1515), Asola (1517), Crema (1525), Piacenza (1539), Cremona (1542), and Genoa (1552). One should add to this the organs of San Petronio in Bologna (1528) and San Pietro in Rome (1530). Yet the painter who decided to realize the shutter pictures based on the theme of the Annunciation (see **fig. 1 & 2**) was linked to the lay branch of the Dominican Observance. As Denise Zaru has demonstrated, Girolamo Bonsignori painted the two canvasses destined for the organ shutters of San Pietro Martire between 1508 and 1520, with the help of the funds provided by fra Gianmaria Conti in 1511 at the moment of his entry in the order of Friars Preachers.⁵² The chosen subject matter had nothing original. One could always evoke the legendary association of the city of the Doges with that particular biblical event, with recourse to the legendary foundation of Venice on the feast of the Annunciation in 461, just as it was done for Florence, which celebrated its urban new year on 25 March. I also think that this particular scene lent itself perfectly for a composite division over two similar vertical rectangles, due to restrictions imposed by the support structure. Whether open or closed – in this particular case, as the canvasses had colored scenes, it is reasonable to assume that they were installed on the interior side of the shutters (the exterior side being usually painted in grisaille), but it is impossible to prove this without traces of the hinges – the organ shutters necessitated that the represented scene could be divided in two equal and coherent parts. Full-bodied portraits of saints were another often-used solution for the very same reason.

From the start of the sixteenth century, the visual and aural presence of the organ in sacred spaces clearly no longer posed a problem within Observant circles. The chanted office remained a key issue, which manifested

51 'E li sudetti Frati s'obligarono di fare la cassa, con tutte l'altre cose, che all'ornamento e bellezza della medesima concorressero...'; Zaru, *Art and Observance*, 51.

52 Girolamo Bonsignori, *Annonciation*, Organ shutters, 2,80x1,80 m, Verona, Museo G B Cavalcaselle. Place of origin: Organ of S. Pietro Martire in Murano. Cf Zaru, *Art and Observance*, 175-182.

itself in the recruitment of singers and organists able to teach singing to the novices or the brothers. Between 1486 and 1488, the Augustinians of Santo Spirito in Florence paid a salary to Carlo de Burgis to teach plain chant and polyphony to novices.⁵³ Likewise, the Franciscans of the Arca di Sant'Antonio in Padua, the administrative body responsible for the upkeep of the Basilica and the monastery, by the mid sixteenth-century added teaching responsibilities to the tasks of the chapel master, to instruct 'little brothers' to 'sing in groups',⁵⁴ just around the time that the construction of a new organ was finalized by fra Vincenzo Colombo. All the same, in Franciscan circles the Observant discourse that pitted poverty against the acquisition of organs seemed to have had an impact on several friaries, such as the Observant house of Santa Maria di Fontecastello in Montepulciano, which only obtained an organ in 1743.⁵⁵ Among the Franciscans, the commissioning of organs remained a sensitive topic, even though, over time, they proved themselves to be very important patrons of the arts. Their tradition of commissioning art works started with a papal bull issued by Innocent IV, which allowed the friars to spend alms for such purposes.⁵⁶ As the Observance did not in all cases generate a full breach of unity between Observants and other friars of the same order, it is not always possible to clearly identify the orientation of the patrons. Nevertheless, the important number of commissioned organs shows that the Observance did not constitute an efficacious obstacle to the diffusion of the instrument, but that it rather questioned its use.

53 Florence, Archivio di Stato, C.R.S. 127, Santo Spirito 1, Libro campione A.A., 1475-1494, f. 118 v, Cited in Frank A. D'Accone, 'Some Neglected Composers in the Florentine Chapels, ca. 1475-1525', *Viator* 1 (1970), 263-288 (at 276).

54 'Ogni giorno feriale [...] insegnare alli fratini [...] e starvi insegnando per spazio di ore due al giorno, così per insegnare, come per cantare in compagnia', found in Oscar Mischiati, 'Profilo storico della Cappella Musicale in Italia nei secoli XV-XVIII', in: *Musica sacra in Sicilia tra rinascimento e Barocco, atti del Convegno (Caltagirone, 10-12 dicembre 1985)*, ed. Daniele Ficola (Palermo: Flaccovio, 1988), 23-46 (at 40).

55 Renzo Giorgetti, *Organi ed organari a Montepulciano* (Florence: Giorgio & Gambi, 1994), 33.

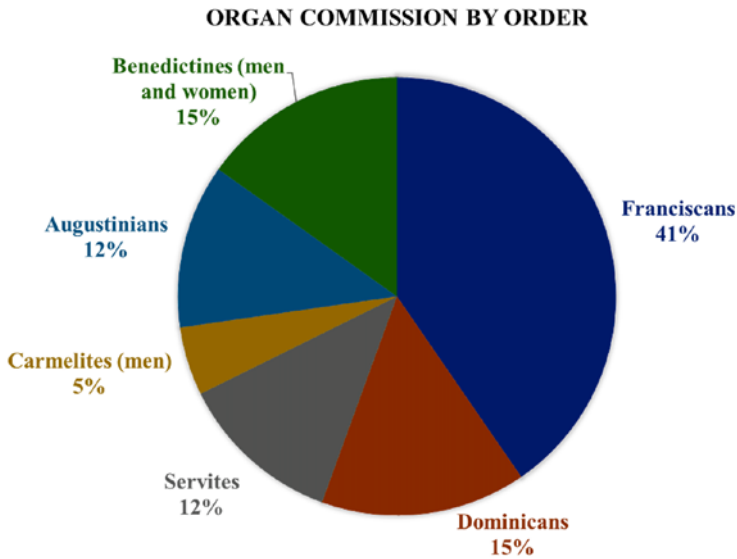
56 Bram Kempers, *Peinture, pouvoir et mécénat. L'essor de l'artiste professionnel dans l'Italie de la Renaissance*, trans. Daniel Arasse & Catherine Bédard (Paris: Gérard Monfort, 1997), 38.

Conclusion

The Observance as a reform movement, concerned with communal discipline centered on the rule, tried to create a proper regulatory framework for the organ. As it entailed a considerable expense, the acquisition of a new instrument was necessarily a community decision that could be in conflict with the many calls for simplicity and the soberness reiterated by Observant leaders. The more or less imagined return to an original rule (dating back about two centuries) raised the issue of the absence of regulations about organs in these texts, written in a period when the instrument was not yet widely disseminated. In the fifteenth century, various ecclesiastical institutions found themselves obliged to regulate the use of the organ, precisely because it became an essential instrument in solemn liturgical celebrations. Rather than forbidding the instrument, the Observants tried to limit its use, without really slowing down its development. They could have been tempted to fight actively against the instrument in the name of poverty, in order to distinguish themselves from other religious congregations, but by and large the friars encouraged or allowed the formation of musicians and valuable artisans. The 'secularization' of these *métiers* – connected with the professionalization of organists and organ builders – doubtlessly helped to put the organ beyond the range of interference of Observant movements. Whether one forbade or promoted it, the organ was indicative of a certain conception of community, and as such every order, Observant or not, was forced to reflect on the place it wanted to grant it. To the extent that cultural production could be exploited in service of Observant ideals, the organ contributed in its own way to the reputation of the communities using it, precisely because it was capable of stirring up emotions and convert souls. Letting an organ sound or keeping it silent remained, during the Renaissance as today, a question that could lead the whole Church to take a stand, leading it eventually to be at odds with the rest of the city.

The production of friar Bernardo of Argentina

Town	Church	Client	Year
Florence	S. Pancrazio	Vallombrosians	1520
Florence	Duomo		1523
Impruneta	S.M. dell'Impruneta		1528
Florence	SS. Annunziata	Servites	1529
Florence	S. Pier Maggiore		1531
Fiesole	Duomo S. Romolo		1532
Florence	Duomo		1532
Imprunteta	S.M. dell'Impruneta		1535
Empoli	Collegiata S. Andrea		1536
Florence	Duomo	Opera del Duomo	1537
San Giovanni Valdarno	Basilica S.M. delle Grazie		1537
Fiesole	S.M. Primerana		1538
Florence	Duomo (<i>in cornu Epistolae</i> , cantoria Donatello)	Opera del Duomo & Cosimo 1°	1542
Florence	S. Spirito	Augustinians	1551
Florence	S.M. Novella	Dominicans	1553



Illustrations



Girolamo Bonsignori, *Annunciation*, organ shutters, 2,80m x 1,80m, Verona, Museo G.B. Cavalcaselle, chiesa S. Francesco al Corso. Place of origin: organ of S. Pietro Martire in Murano. Reproduced under a Creative Common licence (CC BY-SA 4.0).