

Prologue

O happy Cecilia!

How happy Cecilia, virgin and martyr of Rome,
on this day when a song of purity
resounds in the place dedicated in her honor.

We have gathered to celebrate the completion
of a rare and wonderful work of art,
richly complex and utterly simple,
an object of curiosity and fascination,
a labor of love that will be for some
a mediator of beauty,
for others, an icon of faith.

As with an appreciation of beauty and the deepening of faith,
our understanding of music grows
with many encounters over a lifetime.

While you listen to new sounds and new music tonight,
take care not to judge yourself
nor worry about understanding all that you hear:
Enjoy this great gift of history,
the gift of this generation to generations to come!

From its pre-Christian Greek invention in Alexandria...
through ancient Roman spectacle...
through Carolingian pageantry...
through Medieval speculation...
through cultural Renaissance...
and golden Baroque...
revolution...
revival...
reform...

the organ comes down to us through the ages
not only as a monument to human skill and genius,
but as an architectural testament
to creation ordered for praise,
an embodiment of harmony
in wood

metal
air

Sounded Word
made flesh
inspired with holy Breath
birthed in martyr's blood

O happy Cecilia!

Today is born
an Organ

The Harmony of the Cosmos

'From harmony, from heavenly harmony,
 This universal frame began:
When nature underneath a heap
 Of jarring atoms lay,
 And could not heave her head,
The tune voice was heard from high,
 "Arise, ye more than dead!"
Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry,
 In order to their stations leap,
 And Music's power obey.'

For us moderns
 for whom music is a vicarious vehicle for our emotions,
 an anaesthetic to dull our human pain,
 the sound-track of our lives,
the notion seems quaint at best
 that galaxies and atoms
 dance in harmonic patterns,
 that trees and acorns grow in proportions that sing,
 that human communities and bodily cells
 depend for their very lives on harmony and unity.

But the organ stands in our assembly
 reminding us that those things we can measure
 have tone and pitch,
 a purpose of praise beyond mere usefulness,
 and that unity and variety live together in beauty.

In the Saint Cecilia Organ,
a unique system of two temperaments or tuning systems
highlights a great paradox:
from our place in time,
we catch only a momentary glimpse
of the pure harmony of the cosmos
as we climb and combine the scales of melody.
To complete the scale, to close the octave (or diapason),
we sacrifice that vision of purity,
at least until our earthly journey is complete.

'From harmony, from heavenly harmony,
This universal frame began:
From harmony to harmony
Through all the compass of the notes it ran,
The diapason closing full in man.'

The Harmony of the Divine Logos

The Music to which poet John Dryden refers
in his "Song for St. Cecilia's day,"
that Music which nature obeys,
"leaping in order to their stations,"
is the very Word of God, "*Dabhar*" in the Hebrew Scriptures,
the Creative Energy that calls all things into being out of nothing.
The Greek mind conceived of this Word as *Logos*,
the Intelligence that brings order out of chaos.
Christians believe that it is Christ who is this Word, this Divine Logos,
who "holds all things together in harmony,"
the transcendent Creator God taking human flesh,
to which he is obedient even unto death.
Risen from death, he dwells among us in sacraments or signs of
his Real Presence.

'In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

'And the Word became flesh and lived among us,
and we have seen his glory...
full of grace and truth.'

The Harmony of the Spirit

The organ is first and foremost a wind instrument.
The wind blown from great bellows
and harnessed in massive windchests
is trained to sing in measured columns of air
defined by wood and metal pipes
as tall as a three-story building
and as small as a child's finger.

To watch an organ builder
take the matter of earth into hand
and breath life into a newly molded pipe
cannot help but evoke the Spirit of God
bringing Adam to life.

A 12th-Century bishop wrote to his people,

'...I take no great pleasure in the sound of the organ;
but it encourages me to reflect that,
just as diverse pipes, of differing weight and size,
sound together in a single melody
as a result of the air in them,
so we should think the same thoughts,
and inspired by the Holy Spirit, unite in a single purpose...
All of this I have learned from the organs installed in this church.
Are we not the organs of the Holy Spirit?'

Sung at confirmations, ordinations and coronations for centuries,
the hymn "Veni Creator Spiritus" is an ideal source of musical reflection
on the wisdom of this 12th-Century bishop.

The choirs and the organ will sing the stanzas of the hymn in alternation,
just as the liturgy was performed for several centuries in parts of Europe.
It is hard to fathom the amount of time people spent in worship
before our internal clocks were conditioned by the television schedule,
but this hymn will give us a good idea.

It is equally remarkable that for several hundred years,
organs "sang" liturgical texts in alternation with voices.
While the reasons for this practice remain unclear,
it seems plausible that the winded voice of the organ
came to symbolize the Holy Spirit,
who, 'since we do not know how to pray as we ought,'
'intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.'

The Harmony of the Church and the New Jerusalem

We have contemplated the organ as a metaphor
for the Creation ordered for the praise of its Maker,
for the power of music to bear the Word of God
and for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The organ also symbolizes the Church:
earthly bodies collected in a common house,
animated by the Breath of Life,
united in purpose and mission,
destined for the glory of the New Creation.

As composer Olivier Messaien builds a musical edifice
of the Eternal Church of "living stones,"
imagine the appearance of the New Jerusalem.
And if you can't imagine it, look at the organ!

But lest we imagine our pilgrimage is over,
let us remember that with beauty and glory
come also mercy, purity, justice and peace.