

2008-09 Declared International Year of the Organ

(NAPSA)—If asked to name the world's oldest keyboard instrument, most people would say the piano. They'd be wrong. It's the organ—the venerable instrument that people generally associate with churches and choirs.

What people don't know is that the organ has been a mainstay of international musicians since the 12th century. Originating some 2,000 years ago in ancient Egypt, the organ has been used in gladiatorial games, as gifts by kings and queens and, most importantly, as a tool to produce the world's universal language: music.

In recent years, there has been a resurgence in organ music due to the opening of numerous new concert halls across the country. Featured in many of these venues are spectacular organs like the 3,051-pipe C. B. Fisk organ in the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall, in Orange County, Calif., and the 3,617-pipe Schoenstein & Company organ built for the Schermerhorn Symphony Center in Nashville.

The famous Frank Gehry-designed Walt Disney Concert Hall, which opened in late 2003 in Los Angeles, also boasts a stunning new organ. Built by a German organ builder with a façade designed by architect Gehry and installed by organ consultant Manuel Rosales, the instrument is visually unique and features 6,125 pipes, ranging in size from a few inches to an astounding 32 feet.

Today, in fact, organs can be found everywhere in the world. Japan, for example, has organs in many concert halls, colleges and schools, most of them imported



A year of festivities will pay tribute to the "King of Instruments."

from Europe and America in the years following World War II.

South Korea and Taiwan also recently acquired several organs for concert halls and churches, and an American firm built a large organ for a concert hall in China's Forbidden City.

Year of the Organ

To further promote the organ and its music, the American Guild of Organists (AGO), a national organization that promotes the organ and its music, has designated 2008-2009 as the International Year of the Organ (IYO). This celebration, beginning July 2008 and continuing through June 2009, will feature a multitude of activities worldwide, ranging from organ concerts and recitals to organ-building workshops and special organ music appreciation classes for students.

Highlighting the IYO will be the "Organ Spectacular," scheduled for October 19, 2008. On that day, more than 250 concerts will be held globally to showcase the organ and its colorful history, how

it has evolved through the ages and its indelible impact on society and culture.

"We are thrilled the organ will be on center stage around the world, and that people of all ages and nationalities will have the opportunity to learn more about the 'King of Instruments,'" noted AGO President Frederick Swann.

"The Organ Spectacular and subsequent events during the year will encourage more people to get to know the instrument, particularly young people who are drawn to all types of music today," added James E. Thomashower, AGO executive director.

The Organ Spectacular, Thomashower noted, is being coordinated by the AGO national organization and hundreds of local Guild chapters. Organizations such as the Royal Canadian College of Organists and other music organizations throughout the world are joining with the AGO to highlight the organ throughout 2008-2009.

The October event will feature premieres of two new organ works: a composition by Bernard Wayne Sanders of Muehlheim, Germany, which recently won first prize in an international composition competition sponsored by the AGO; and a new work written by renowned American composer Stephen Paulus.

The year of festivities will be inaugurated with special events at the 2008 National Convention of the AGO being held in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. For more information on the American Guild of Organists, the International Year of the Organ and the Organ Spectacular, visit www.agohq.org or e-mail os@agohq.org.