





## REVIEW

Grzegorz Poźniak, *Powojenne losy firmy organmistrzowskiej „Berschdorf” z Nysy*. Opole: SINDRUK-DIMK 2020, pp. 371, ISBN 978-83-959719-1-4.

### *The sounds of the organ on the “wandering cart”*

“Memory is not a ‘depository of facts,’ but facts can be brought back into memory over time. In the case of important events or outstanding characters, this statement is an imperative: whenever possible, forgotten facts which can be found in various archives, chronicles and notes should be given a new life – this time historical one. This type of existence is the memory which makes it possible for the descendants to recreate their own roots, history or traditions.” This is what Grzegorz Poźniak wrote in 2019 in the introduction to his book entitled “*Berschdorf*” *Organ-building company from Nysa. Activities in the Opole region based on the collections of the State Archives in Opole*, when he gave the readers his next book devoted to the organ-building workshop in Nysa. But at that time no one expected that a few months later the author would become a participant of the post-war history of the Berschdorf family. This was due to the documents and photos from the family collections given to him by Carl Berschdorf’s grandchildren. Among these documents the diaries of the organ builder have a special place. And these precious archives which are a direct testimony of the everyday life of C. Berschdorf and his family, and the history of the organ builder presented by him personally became the main subject of the monograph.

In view of the above, it is indisputable that the book presented to the readers was based on the most reliable source materials, in which one can find information about the family life of the Berschdorfs and the activities of their organ-building workshop. The small diary, which probably accompanied Carl Berschdorf in his everyday life, was the first recipient of his thoughts and actions.

The discussed monograph presents the unknown history of the *Berschdorf* company in Nysa after World War II. The whole book starts with an *Introduction*, in which the author systematizes successive generations of the Berschdorf family. The main content of the first five chapters are the organ builder’s notes from 1945–1950, with the exception of 1948, since the diary of that year has probably been lost. Thus, the starting point is 1945



and the escape of the family from Nysa before the front line and the resumption of the workshop in Regensburg — the city where Carl Berschdorf spent the rest of his life.

The next diaries, which can be treated as witnesses of the drama of war and family wandering, are testimony of the fate of the organ-building workshop at the time of loss of all their possessions and the need to start a “new life”. They also perfectly show Carl Berschdorf himself — his personality, thoughts, lifestyle, piety and total trust in God’s Providence, expressed in the motto which regularly appears in his notes: *Omnia ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.

The memories of Gabriele Reuter — the youngest daughter of Carl Berschdorf — are the next part of the book. They constitute chapter VI of the monograph, complementing the previous chapters. Although their contribution as far as organ building is concerned is not significant, they provide invaluable information about the family life of the Berschdorfs: their everyday life, intergenerational relations, piety and features that characterize the family members. The whole is presented in a synoptic way: next to the original German text by Gabriele Reuter, there is Polish translation which helps Polish audience understand it better, and at the same time they have the possibility to verify the described facts with the original version. It should be noted that this chapter closes the story of Carl Berschdorf — the father of the family and the organ builder.

Chapter VII of the discussed monograph, which consists of a sketch of the history of the *Berschdorf* company and a catalogue of works by Irmgard Berschdorf, makes an extremely significant contribution to the current knowledge about the organ-building activity of the Berschdorfs and the instruments they have built. Thanks to the notes found in the home archive of Carl Berschdorf’s grandchildren living in the United States of America, the existing catalogue of instruments has been expanded by 71 items. Thus, the author of the book that is the subject of this discussion, for the first time submitted to contemporary knowledge dealing with the history of Silesian organ building, a list containing 231 opuses of Berschdorf instruments along with the date of building, name of town and number of the stops.

The last chapter of the discussed monograph is entirely devoted to Norbert Berschdorf — the only son of Carl Berschdorf, who decided to emigrate to the USA where he lived and worked until the end of his life. It should be noted that so far his activities remained undiscovered and thanks to the consistent research conducted by the author of this publication they were presented to the public. In this way, the person and work of Norbert Berschdorf (the third and the last generation of the company) were for the first time described in detail in literature. There is his biography as well as a catalogue of his works in the United States of America. The death of Norbert Berschdorf in 2003 ends the story of the organ building company Berschdorf, which started its activity in Nysa and existed for over 100 years. Thanks to the source research carried out with complete accuracy, which is the result of the scientific activity of the author of this book who at the same time took care of the reliability of the information provided, the post-war — beautiful and tragic fate of one of the most outstanding organ building companies in the history of Silesia was restored to memory and precisely described.

In addition, it should be noted that the previously unpublished photographs found in the family archives are extremely valuable elements of the monograph. They not only en-

rich but, above all, complement the historical facts presented in the monograph, being at the same time their “tangible” and “material” evidence. It is also worth emphasizing that the graphic design and the solidity of the publication deserve recognition.

We should therefore welcome the monograph by Grzegorz Poźniak, who through his research presented a wide view of the life and works of the Berschdorf family, at the same time bringing back to memory characters who were, in a sense, forgotten or not known, which should be especially appreciated. This book is not only very desirable in the music and church environment, organ studies and musicology but also makes a valuable contribution to the history of the Silesian region. It is also the third monograph of this author, devoted to the history and activity of the *Berschdorf* organ-building company from Nysa, and due to its innovative nature, it presents an important supplement to the state of research on the traditions of organ building in Silesia and Central and Eastern Europe.

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## REVIEW

MICHAŁ SZOSTAK, *The Organ as a Source of Inspiration: The Rebirth of a Giant (Paris – Vatican – Licheń) / Organy jako źródło inspiracji: odrodzenie giganta (Paryż – Watykan – Licheń)*. Series: Opoliensis Musica Ecclesiastica 9. Opole: SINDRUK-DIMK 2021, pp. 583. ISBN 978-83-959719-4-5.

The nineteenth century is a period of rapid transformation in organ building. The emerging symphonic organs became an inspiration for the composers active during this period. Dr Michał Szostak's latest publication is devoted to the topic of inspiration and the study of its role in the creative process. The author focussed mainly on issues around inspiration through the sound of Aristide Cavallé-Coll's symphonic organs and the organ in the basilica of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Licheń located in Licheń Stary. The study presented here is an original approach to this subject matter.

The core of the reviewed publication is constituted by the author's doctoral thesis entitled *The Organ as a Source of Inspiration in the Art of Improvisation and Performance Practice* written under the supervision of Professor Andrzej Chorościński and defended in 2019 at the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw. The contents of the dissertation was supplemented with more than a dozen articles

