

Creativity and artistry in organ music

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The distinguished musician considers factors which should apply to all those who aspire to be composers.

Often musicians are referred to as 'artists'. But is every person who performs music an artist? What does being an artist actually mean? What do we look for regarding creativity in artistic performance? Such questions are natural for musicians who try to do their job in creative ways – not just to repeat the notes mechanically. Can aesthetics – as a science, dealing with art and beauty – answer these questions? Can artistry be 'developed' in the creation and interpretation of organ music?

In beginning our considerations, let us examine some definitions and aesthetic concepts towards building tools to help us formulate conclusions.

Art and Artist

Art in human life has been present since the earliest times. Although aesthetics as an autonomous science was separated from philosophy relatively late, within philosophical discourses it was present from the beginning of abstract thought. Originally, the concept of individual creativity was not separate, and art was often understood as the ability to combine three factors: material (given by nature), knowledge (flowing from tradition) and work (derived from man). Initially, creativity was understood passively as imitation (*mimesis*), following which the process of defining and analysing the phenomenon of individual creativity, key to our considerations, began.

An artist is "someone who creates things with great skill and imagination."¹ The medieval practical perception of art says: an artist is "someone who – according to art – works through tools

on matter", giving rise to such synonyms as: master, expert, guru, and even virtuoso, with antonyms of amateur, inexpert, nonexpert.² The 'artist' concept has changed over time and is even off-defined now.³ In synthesising the achievements of ancient aesthetics, there are several key issues which define an artist: imagination, thought, knowledge, wisdom, the idea he has in his mind, abilities in using the rules of art. In art, only the artist is the legislator.⁴ The artist's features may well be those of creativity, sensitivity, intuition, "getting lost" in the creative process, putting everything in the creative process (from concept to implementation), self-analysis and self-correction. No less important for the effective implementation of artistic goals are persistence/consistency, hard work from an early age and throughout the life, self-discipline, mental resilience, responsibility, the ability

to set goals and implement them, the ability to observe the world, perceptiveness, openness. The artist's goals have changed over time, although the most persistent include materialisation, giving the form of universal ideas, passing on values, giving satisfaction and pleasure to the recipient,

bringing the recipient to a catharsis state, transforming ugliness into beauty. To simplify further considerations, the 20th-century post-modern meanings of the artist's concept were frequently rejected.

It is much more difficult to answer the question of what characterises a good artist. He (or, of course, she) should be understandable, but we find many examples of artists who remain incomprehensible to their contemporaries, after years and even centuries of being pillars in their fields. An artist should be popular, in the sense of reaching the consciousness of the recipients;

however, popularity itself does not testify to the quality of artworks, which should refer to universal values and ideas that are understandable and important for humanity regardless of the era. This eternal question remains unanswered.

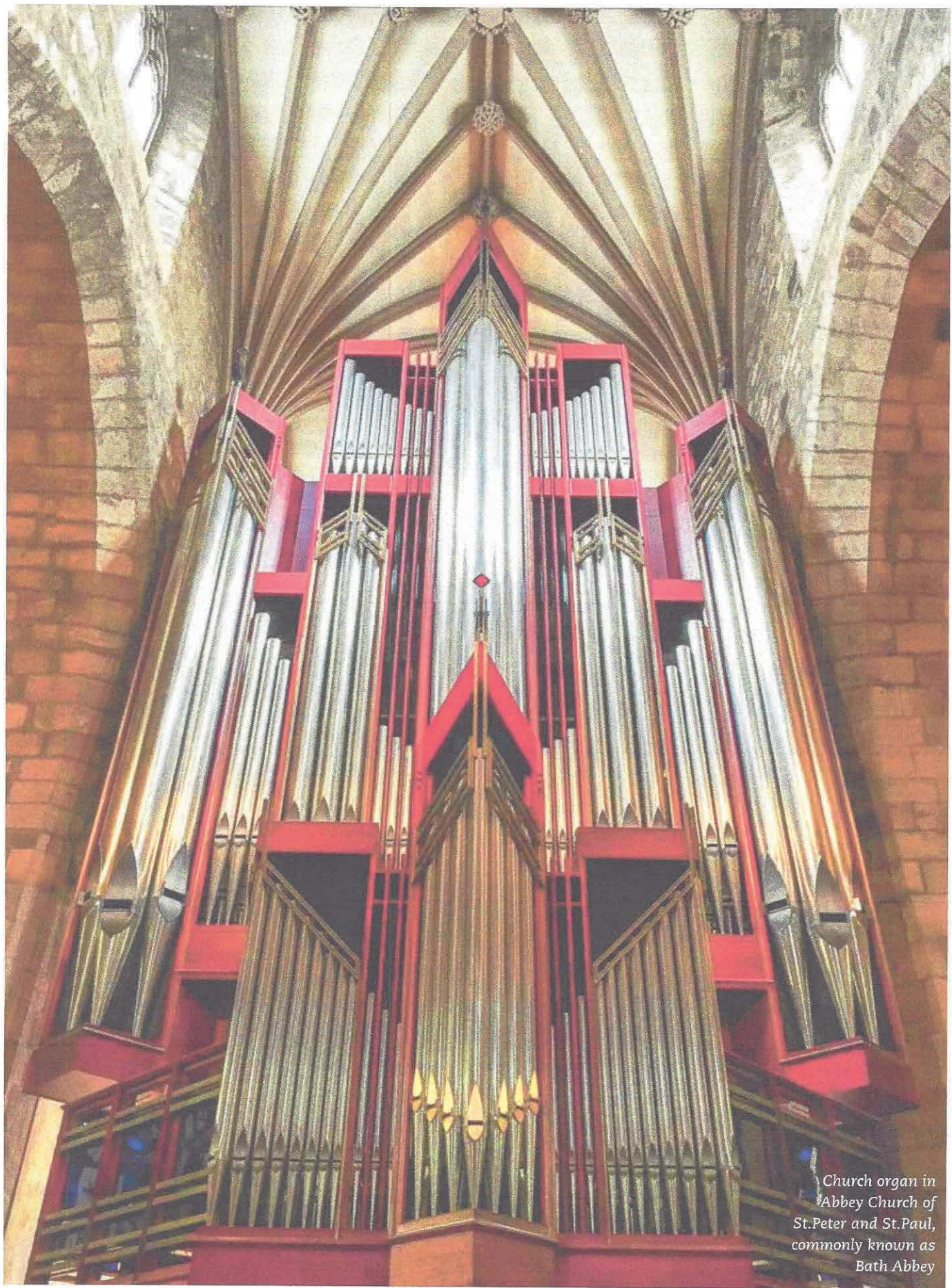
Creativity

Creativity has been described as the "ability to produce or use original and unusual ideas or to make something new or imaginative",⁵ which surely implies cleverness, creativity, imagination, imaginativeness, ingeniousness, ingenuity, innovativeness, invention, inventiveness, originality.⁶ The phenomenon of creativity is an issue of psychology (individual creativity: composers, performers), sociology (creativity of groups: orchestras, choirs), management (creativity of organisations) and aesthetics (artistic creativity). It is not an easy task to define and to research creativity, although we often know it when we hear or see it.

The key role in the creativity process is, naturally, that of involvement. Every child is surely born inherently creative, although upbringing and educational processes impose restrictions, suppressing the child's innate creativity; the process of recreating or "digging in" to creativity becomes key.⁷

Sources of artistic creativity are often the result of inspiration, acts of creation in the image of nature, the discovery of timeless ideas and incorporating them; an imitation of divine creativity; meeting the needs of social groups (the sociological theory of creativity); the use of excess energy after basic human needs are fulfilled; the state of culture having various artistic ideals at a certain level of human development (a cultural approach); sums of socioeconomic ideological conditions in which the artist lives (the historical approach); and finally the expression of the creator's personality (the psychological factor).⁸

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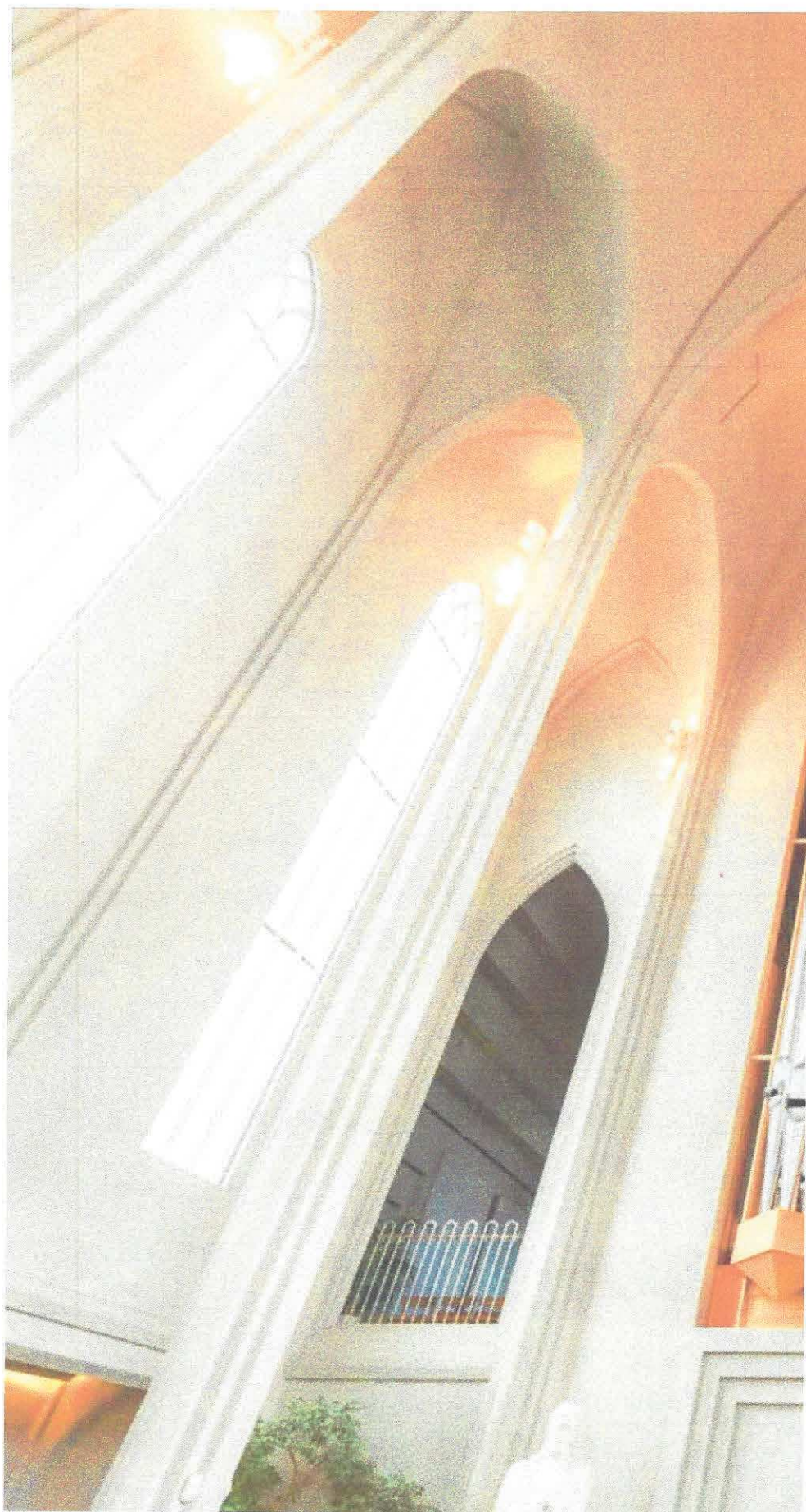


Church organ in
Abbey Church of
St.Peter and St.Paul,
commonly known as
Bath Abbey

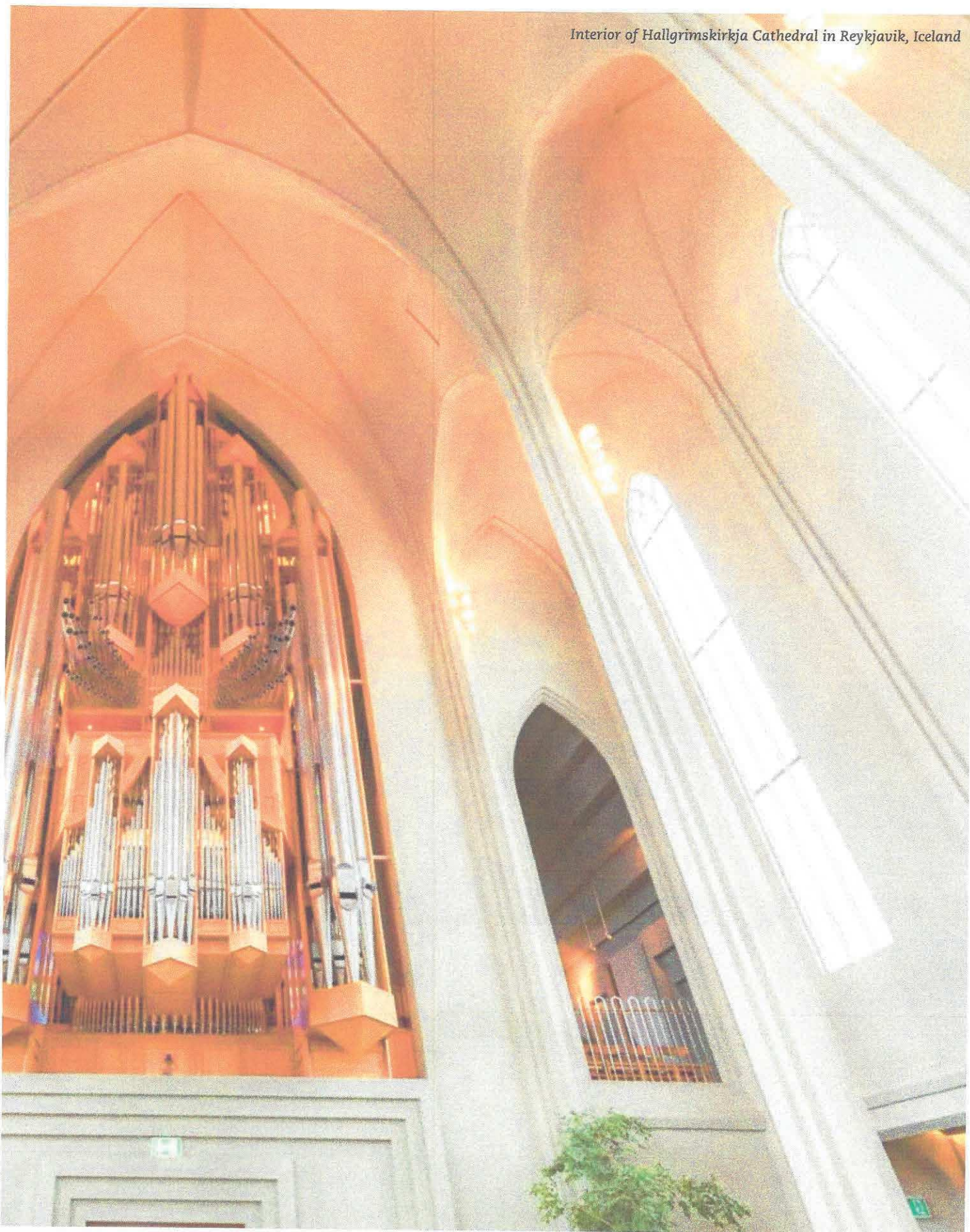
The psychological theories of artistic creativity are: "creativity as an inspiration", "creativity as a labour" and "creativity as a personality expression". In the theory of creativity as inspiration, the creator achieves particularly significant artistic results not solely to his knowledge and skills, but also to inspiration (a set of factors that cannot be rationally explained, and which come to the fore in unexpected moments). The results of inspiration are unpredictable; in this theory, creativity is understood as a mysterious gift that man doesn't control; it can be said that the uniqueness of the product is the uniqueness of the mental process that led to the work; we are dealing here with a combination of the theory of inspiration and the theory of genius and individualism. The theory of creativity as a labour points to factors such as work, toil, overcoming obstacles and effort: a man may have natural abilities, but he must work on them to create true art works; the necessary conditions for creativity are knowledge of the creation rules and the ability to use them; labour remains an inalienable element of the creative process, though not the only one. The theory of creativity as a personality expression suggests that the creator can also express what others feel through expression; the expression that underlies creativity is controlled by the creator's consciousness; art is a way of communicating, and its role is to communicate internal states; artists externalise their states of mind to enable recipients to achieve similar states.

Creative personality

To answer the question of what makes a person undertake creative activity and thus become an artist, we must refer to aesthetics, through which are developed concepts of "basic personality" and "creative personality". Creative personality is a selection of basic personality traits that condition the start of creative activity, its continuation and give shape to the work. Some of the features are manifested in the resultant work, whilst



Interior of Hallgrímskirkja Cathedral in Reykjavík, Iceland





others are a condition for undertaking creative work. Creative personality develops on the background of the basic personality. In the artwork we shall never find a full reflection of any of the personalities, although we can conclude traces of the creative personality from it. In order to identify the characteristic features of the artist's imagination, one ought to become familiar with his entire work. The issue of creative personality is combined with an artistic style. While the overall achievements of the artist allow one to reconstruct the author's creative personality, the given artwork permits a reconstruction of a specific approach to the world, a point of view from which all phenomena presented in

the artwork are captured.

Where than should an artist look for creativity? The answer is inside the individual, inside of their personality. There is no sense to look for an individual's creativity in other artists' works; this way will lead to copying or to avoiding. The real source of our creativity is inside each one of us, in our creative personality. We need to raise and develop our "creative child" – as it were, to grow and flourish.

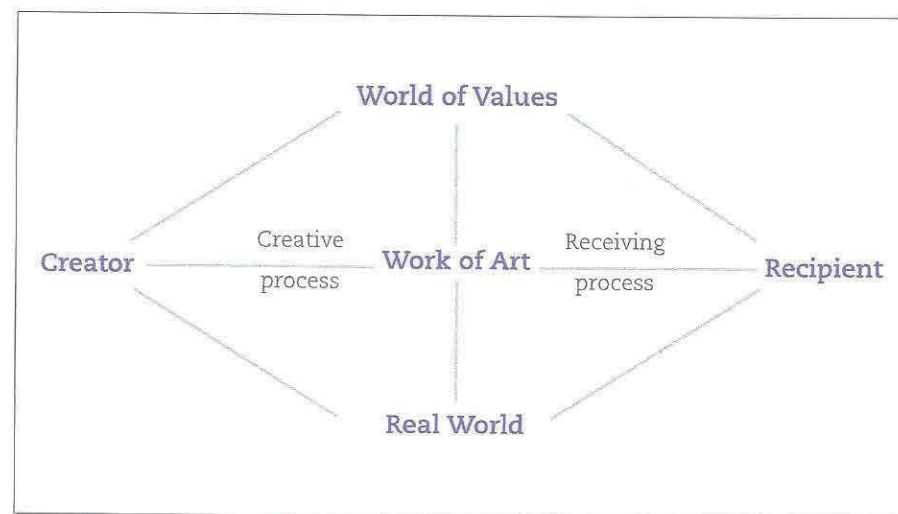
Many researchers, analysing the creative process of artists, separate its conceptual, experience, implementation and post-implementation phases, creating a typology of creative personalities, such as intuitive, reflective and

behavioural. These don't appear in pure form necessarily but rather as a mix in different proportions. The intuitive type is characterised by close entanglement of the experience and realisation phases, the participation of pre-reflective awareness: the process of carrying out the work is fast and with a sense of well-made decisions, with the most important creative moments realised on the basis of acts of intuition without motivation of the discursive type, without the participation of full awareness (musical improvisers). The reflective type is characterised by a clear phase separation, where the experience phase precedes that of the implementation. There is full consciousness involved,



St. Michael
Church in
Hamburg,
interior

with a complicated structure, and hesitation in the choice of concept and means of expression. In this, the creative process is lengthy, the artist controls his intentions, creates a concept, and implements it more or less consistently. The reflectiveness of the creative process is special, for it is not solely intellectual reflectivity. It is also emotional, often concerning personal matters and revolving around experiences gained during contact with reality. In the case of behavioural type, the phases of the process are separated from each other, except that the implementation phase precedes the experience phase to some extent; it involves both types of consciousness. It is a kind



Picture 1. Diagram of the aesthetic situation.

Source: Michał Szostak

of trial-and-error method – the artist doesn't know what the final work should look like and doesn't feel the need to take such or other steps; it is more about incorporating a not entirely clear artistic vision into further real shapes.

Aesthetic situation

The concept of the "aesthetic situation" is translated the theory of "axiological situation" into the aesthetics area (Picture 1 above): the creator in the process creates an artwork; the artwork is received by the recipient; each of these elements has connections and interactions with the world of values and what happens in the real world.⁹

Creative process

Although the most important - from the point of view of aesthetics – are values, and the most visible symptom of creativity is the artwork itself, it is in the person (mind, consciousness, sub-consciousness) of the creator that the most important processes that make up the phenomenon of creativity occur. I shall use the theory of creativity in empirically-oriented aesthetics to trace the creative process thoroughly.

Several conditions influence the undertaking of artistic creation, which

are collectively called disposition or creative attitude: personality conditions (abilities and interests leading to the attitude of interest in creating and appreciating art); social conditions (the impact of the environment and education, and public opinion regarding the position of art and evaluation of the works of other artists); wealth of experience (the sum of the artist's individual experiences).

To start the creative process, a creative attitude is not enough – creativity is also needed; motifs can be of two types: assigned – directly affecting the shaping of the work and which can be realised with the participation of creative work (consideration for yourself, i.e. the desire to create a work that meets and expresses the creator's expectations; consideration for the work, i.e. attention focused on perfection of the work, realising a high aesthetic value; consideration of the recipient, i.e. the willingness to provide others with the experience that artwork can bring). Other unassigned factors include those marked in the work indirectly and which are possible to implement also by means of other activities; additionally activating creative potencies (economic considerations, social coercion, compliance with stereotypes).

For a work to be created, there must be a direct impulse for undertaking a creative process, i.e. psychological activation through an external or internal stimulus: 1. a lack of perception in the world that allows fulfilment or which requires fulfilment (seeing imperfection, the artist decides to enrich reality with a new value); 2. fascination with the world, reality (the artist wants to show admiration for the world and things in the dawn and save this state from oblivion); 3. an excess of personal experiences from which the artist wants to be free (i.e., wanting to present them to others, looking for a way to express them in artistic form).

The sum of the elements to date in the form of internal coercion leads to the final decision to undertake the creative process; then real preparation for artistic work and first efforts take place; sometimes the artist immediately starts the work, but more often the work is preceded by three stages: the concept of the work, artistic vision and artistic intention.

The implementation process starts when the artist begins to actually objectify his intention. The material is shaped so that it realises a certain aesthetic value; the important phases here are to shape the material so that it is equivalent to an artistic vision. At this point, it may be worth paying attention to situations unforeseen in the work's previously planned concept, resulting from an unforeseen coincidence or even an error at the stage of implementation; or forcing the unintended result of an action (such as erroneous sounds played during improvisation) into a valuable and immanent part of an artwork requiring the artist's reflex, observation skill and creativity.

After the end of the physical creative process, there is a post-implementation phase consisting of verification of the value of artist's work and artist's distance to the work.

Artwork

Artwork is "an object made by an artist of great skill",¹⁰ "a product of one of the fine arts" or "something giving high

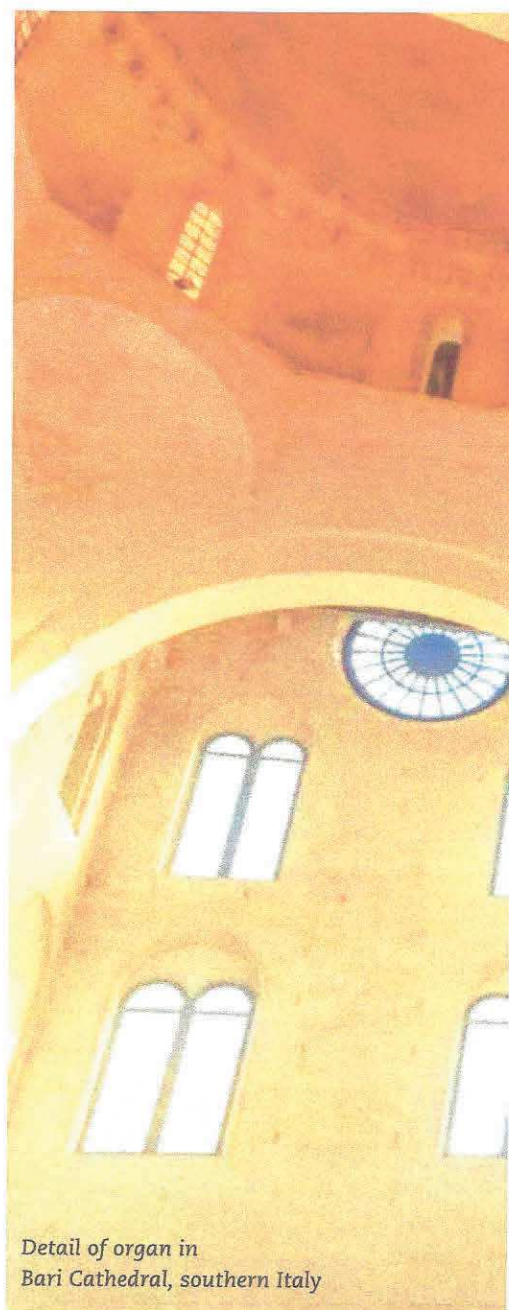
aesthetic satisfaction to the receiver'.¹¹ From the point of view of art, the artwork is a central element of many aesthetic situations. The artwork is independent of the creative process, and the creative process is independent of the creator's basic personality. The artist's work testifies to the artist only.

We might not forget that eliminating the world of values from the artwork directs us straight into the embrace of kitsch. It should be avoided.

Receiving process

Recipients of an artwork are specific individuals (when the work was made according to special order), or all potential listeners who come into contact with the work intentionally or accidentally. Certainly, recipients are a source of feedback for the artist about the work and values read from the work. In art, the artist observing the reactions to his work can compare his intentions with the actual reception, and use this knowledge in the implementation of new works, or in modification of the received work. This receiving process (called aesthetic process) consists in sensual reception of the message located in the work. The artwork's receiving process begins with ignorance and ends with interpretation.¹²

Let us consider, at the end of our considerations, the theory of interpersonal communication. Communication is a "process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behaviour."¹³ Transferring it into language of art, we can say, that the creator encodes the message in an artwork and put it into a channel; the receiver decodes the message to read (understand) what the sender wanted to tell. There is an important trap here: the receiver should be able to decode the creator's message (artwork) in a proper meaning, otherwise the improperly decoded message will be received in a different way – not as the creator wanted. Creators – should remember another element: the receiver acts in a situation hindered by noise, which disturbs and complicates the entire receiving process.



*Detail of organ in
Bari Cathedral, southern Italy*

Conclusions

Summarising, we can say that a musician is an artist if they act in the aesthetical situation consciously: drawing from the world of universal values and creating artworks in the real world. Additionally, if clear language is used, the message is encoded in an understandable way and the artist's action is rooted in their creative personality. Then the creator can be called an artist in the fullest sense of the word; understanding by the receiver will make the artist successful. Especially in liturgical music we cannot forget the issue of intelli-

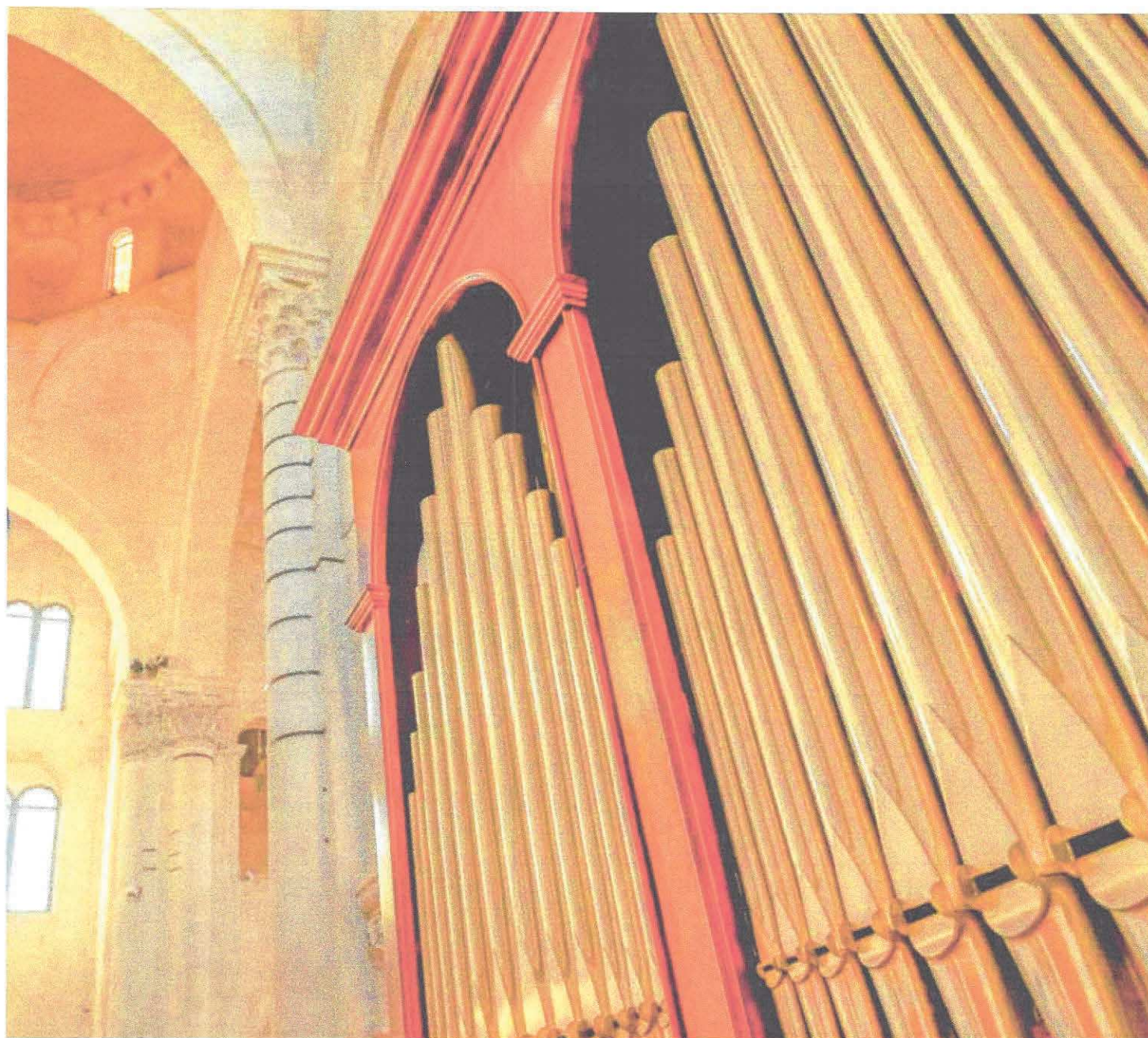


Photo: joaquinorbalan.com

gibility of the artwork to the receivers; after all, the liturgy should help its participants grow, not just to be at all incomprehensible. ■

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