

# An adventure among Pistoiese organs from 1975 until today

by Umberto Pineschi

## Background

Today a good many, if not all, believe that in Pistoia the instrument “pipe organ” had constantly and universally been accepted as an important cultural force or even one of the most distinctive elements of the city. The reality, though, is quite different. It is true that the organ was highly esteemed until the end of the 19th century as one of the indispensable ingredients in the celebrations of the Mass and of the Vespers on Sunday and major feasts, and also as reason of pride for the notable achievements of the Pistoiese organ builders Tronci and Agati.

It is, however, equally true that since the beginning of the 20th century, this force was increasingly less esteemed and eventually completely forgotten. The proof is that there were no objections or protests whatsoever in the case of destructions or of serious damage to important instruments. For the destructions, it is sufficient to cite the organs of the Cathedral (Cesare Romani from Cortona 1589-91, enlarged by Giosuè Agati in 1838 and destroyed in 1953) and S. Andrea (Filippo Tronci 1840, destroyed in 1962). For the damage, it is sufficient to cite the dispersion of almost all the pipes of the monumental organ of S. Pier Maggiore (a three manual and two pedalboard instrument by Benedetto Tronci 1815) around 1944, the sale of all the pipes of the organ of S. Domenico (Ravani 1617) in 1945, the dispersion of all the pipes of the organ of the Spirito Santo Vecchio (also known as “San Leone”, Benedetto Tronci 1810) at the end of the 1950s, the dispersion of the windchest and of the pipes of the organ of the Madonna dell’Umiltà (Tronci 1783) in 1952, the destruction of the back gallery and of the organ of S. Bartolomeo (Filippo Tronci 1844) in 1958, and the dispersion of all the inside pipes of the organ of San Benedetto (Tronci 1823) in the years between 1960 and 1970. It is important to remember also many smaller organs, still valuable in spite of their size, removed, since 1950, even if only to open a window in the backfacade, as happened in Canapale, Candeglia, S. Alessio, of which only the metal pipes are left, and Pontepetri of which nothing remains, or disassembled and stored in the attic, as, for example the organ of the Misericordia in Pistoia (Filippo Tronci 1840) as late as 1972. All that happened, and it should be underlined, to the general indifference not only of the city authorities and citizens, but even of those whose official task was to protect these instruments.

Therefore, speaking with affection for the historical organs in Pistoia from the beginning of the 20th century to the beginning of the 1970s, and consequently believing that the organ activities that started in Pistoia in 1975 had blossomed spontaneously as in fertile ground, would support a real urban legend, diametrically at odds with the historical truth. However, since this legend exists and, moreover, has become a common belief even for those who have positions in the institutions, it is right for the person who knows this story for having lived it personally to report it, once for ever, as it actually took place. That is what I am going to do in this article. Fortunately, many people are still alive who can testify that what I say is the truth.

## The beginning

The rise of attention for the historical organs in Pistoia in the 1970s was almost accidental, due to my personal experiences, that began at a time when no individuals or institutions cared about them.

When I graduated in organ, I was sure, as almost all my Italian colleagues, that the electro-pneumatic organ was “the organ”. Professor Luigi Ferdinando Tagliavini was the only exception to this trend and was, therefore, mocked by almost everybody, beginning with the most eminent names in the Italian organ world, such as Mr. Fernando Germani and Mr. Ferruccio Vignanelli. Also in the conservatory of

Florence, where I did my studies, professor Alessandro Esposito's students considered the tracker action supporters simply poor deluded or even dangerous fanatics. I remember, in this regard, a trip that I took in 1970 with professor Esposito to Bergamo, his native city. The Tamburini firm of Crema, considered then the best organ builders in Italy, had recently restored the monumental organ of the Sant' Alessandro in Colonna, a three manual Serassi from 1781. While walking on the famous Sentierone, we happened to meet the organist of that church, Mr. Guido Gambarini, professor Esposito's good friend, who, when asked by him how the organ was after the restoration, gave, in his best Lombard dialect, this dry answer: "L'è semper l'istess cadenazz [It is still the same old jalopy]!".

In 1972 I decided to join the Haarlem Summer Academy, Nederland, only out of curiosity and with my teacher's disapproval. At that time Haarlem Academy had three exceptional professors, Anton Heiller, Marie-Claire Alain and Luigi Ferdinando Tagliavini. Following their master classes, I quickly realized that everything I had learned so far was to be reviewed from the ground up. Through the instruments that I had the opportunity to visit and play, I understood that "an organ which is not a tracker organ is not an organ, but an inhuman machine", as Mr. Heiller used to repeat. Therefore I went back to Haarlem in 1973 and 1974.

Mr. Tagliavini's interpretation course on Italian organ literature, though, was disappointing, certainly not because of the outstanding teacher, but for the instruments that were used, undoubtedly beautiful, as for example the Christian Müller in St. Bavo, but too far away from the Italian aesthetics..

Since, at my suggestion after Haarlem experience, the first historical organs had been restored in Pistoia, I suggested to Mr. Tagliavini, with whom I had become friends, to try an interpretation course on them similar to those of Haarlem. His first reaction was negative, because the same experiment had failed even before it began in Bologna, a city much more important than Pistoia for its organs. "If it was not possible in Bologna – concluded Mr. Tagliavini – then certainly not in Pistoia". I did not give up and insisted until Mr. Tagliavini, albeit with hesitation, accepted. On 17 April 1975, before a notary public, the charter of the association "Accademia di musica Italiana per Organo" was signed by me, as the president, my sister, as the secretary, and my brother in law, as the treasurer: three members all together.

I immediately started to organize the first course. It was then that I realized, with great disappointment, that Pistoia, today labeled as "the city of organs", would not hear of historical organs. I had the evidence of that when I tried to persuade main public and private individuals of the usefulness of my idea and had to face a net closing. Everyone, though with great kindness, suggested I give up, because it was – I was told very clearly – a cultural value that was only in my imagination. I also experienced violent reactions after a local newspaper published some of my articles on the organs of Pistoia and the initiative that I carried forward. The verbal aggressions were frequent, with a not very friendly: "It is time for you to stop breaking us... with your organs" by persons who met me in the city. When then I began to publicly denounce the destruction and the damage done to the historical instruments, even threats came from those who had been responsible for this havoc and were still in service in high position at the Superintendence. I suffered even a violent attack in the newspaper by the late Msgr. Sabatino Ferrali, archpriest of the cathedral, for my sentence, "the ancient cathedral organ had to succumb to the relentless march of the Romanesque", obviously directed mainly against him as one of the main proponents of the unfortunate restoration of the cathedral, which required, as a consequence, also, of course, the destruction of the organ whose fault was to block a mullioned window that he wanted at all costs reopened. In this atmosphere of hostility or, in the best of cases, of indifference I could count only three exceptions: Mr. Torello Bellandi, president of the Tourist Office, who offered the service of his organization for the collection of the requests to participate, Mr. Francesco Toni, mayor of Pistoia, who agreed to welcome the participants, and Mr. Gualtiero Baldi, one of the counselors on the board of a local bank, the Cassa di Risparmio di Pistoia e Pescia, who provided the refreshments to the participants at the closing ceremony of the course. I still remember with deep gratitude and affection these

people for their great courage to go against the trend. However, no financial aid was offered from any part. That meant that all expenses would then have to be covered by the subscriptions of the participants or, if these were not enough, by me personally.

Despite all these difficulties, I decided to go ahead. I planned and I had printed a pamphlet of information (reproduced in full in this article) and sent it to all my fellow organists who participated with me in the courses of Haarlem from 1972 to 1974 and of whom I had the addresses, with little hope of a positive answer. I had to do it all alone, unable to afford any help, not even to attach the stamps to envelopes. To my surprise, however, requests to participate arrived immediately not only from Italy and many other European countries, but also from outside Europe, reaching the same number registered for the courses in Haarlem. If Mr. Tagliavini's fame and charisma were determining factors, the fact remains that, while these had not worked in Bologna, in Pistoia, unexpectedly, they did work. Once again alone, I answered all the applicants and organized the course. I also had to take care of accommodation in hotels or, as used in Haarlem, in private households. The work was grueling, but was amply repaid by the result. The course took place in an atmosphere of great enthusiasm by the participants, none of whom had ever played an historical Italian organ, since in Italy those in a condition to be played was rare. In this desert, Pistoia was then a striking exception. The number of available instruments perfectly working in Pistoia —with Mr- Tagliavini you could not joke about it— did tell a U.S. participant: "Pistoia is really an organ paradise!". A little curious detail: I allowed myself the luxury to invite to help me, for the course, one of the secretaries of the course of Haarlem, Fokkeline Oosterwijk. It was fun to see the amazed faces of the participants of Haarlem finding the same secretary in Pistoia.

The list of the 71 participants in the first Pistoiese organ course, with their home country, gives an idea of this success:

Baronti, Attilio	Italy
Bernard, Michelle	France
Bolzonello Zoja, Elsa	Italy
Bonaretti, Domenico	Italy
Bovina, Gian Paolo	Italy
Breilinger, Gerhard	Germany
Buti, Pier Paolo	Italy
Caruana, Iris	Italy
Cisneros, Arturo	Mexico
Crema, Giuseppe	Italy
Damarati, Luciano	Italy
Davey, Edward August	South Africa
Davis, Lynne	USA
De Pieri, Sergio	Italy
Der Re, Attilio	Italy
Di Renzo, Giancarlo	Italy
Donati, Pier Paolo	Italy
Egnot, Johnnye	USA
Elizalde, Luis	Spain
Fabbri, Mario	Italy
Ferrara, Gianfranco	Italy
Ferrari, Vincenzo	Italy
Filippi, Maria Grazia	Italy
Fiorelli, Mauro	Italy
Forni, Umberto	Italy
Franzoni, Giovanna	Italy
Gaddi, Alfonso	Italy
Garforth, Catherine	France

Gerke, Irmgard	Germany
Gronchi, Anna Franc	Italy
Hagmann, Anneliese	Italy
Hofstetter, Robert Benjamin	USA
Innocenti, Stefano	Italy
Jacolenna, Aurelio	Italy
Liperini, Luana	Italy
Martin, K. Eugene	USA
Martin, Sarah L.	USA
Massarotto, Mario	Italy
Mc Donald, Eric	USA
Meli, Santi Alfonso	Italy
Mochi, Mariella	Italy
Mugge, Anthonia Willemina	Nederland
Nicoli, Fabrizio	Italy
Oppici, Paolo	Italy
Pancani Roe, Thelma	UK
Paolini, Sergio	Italy
Pappagallo, Mauro	Italy
Perotti, Giuseppina	Italy
Piazza, Giuseppe	Italy
Pierini, Claudio	Italy
Polimadei, Giuseppe	Italy
Previato, Fabio	Italy
Roth, David H.	USA
Saccardo, Mario	Italy
Salvatori, Grazia	Italy
Sandretti, Alessandro	Italy
Sbordone, Fabio	Italy
Schnorr, Klemens	Germany
Schuster, Martha	Germany
Spinelli, Giovanni	Italy
Stevens, Bruce B.	USA
Tasini, Francesco	Italy
Termini, Claudia	Italy
Tesi, Franco	Italy
Van Beek, Aart	Nederland
Van Beek, Ellen	Nederland
Van de Pol, Wjinand	Italy
Vesselinova, Temenuschka	Bulgaria
Viljoen, Willem	South Africa
Ward-Perkins, Hugh	UK
Zondagh, Stephanus C.	South Africa

The participants represented therefore Italy (46), USA (8), Germany (4), Nederland and South Africa (3 each), France and UK (2 each), Bulgaria, Mexico and Spain (1 each).

I thought this result a miracle and even today, in retrospect, I still think it was a real one. Of note, among the members of this list are the names of many who later became famous organists and conservatory teachers. The second course, which took place the following year, i.e. in 1976, saw an increase in the number of participants — the group photo published in this article was taken during the course of 1976, although these are not all the participants— and also saw the arrival of the first Japanese participants, a sector that would prove to be one of the richest results in the following years.

The indifference of the official Pistoia —the Pistoia that counted— was exactly the same, but the international success of the first two academies and the growing favor of organists led me to organize a third course in 1977 that also went well. It was only after the fourth course, that of 1978, that the public began to show some glimmer of interest, without, though, financial intervention. This interest gradually increased in subsequent years, but still without financial contributions, until the proposal, made in 1984, to establish a foundation that would take over the activities of the association. It seemed to me then that I had reached an important milestone and I agreed, taking in this foundation the post of artistic director.

### **The reasons for success**

Why, in 1975, was Pistoia able to establish itself suddenly in the international organ world? Certainly not for the number of its historical organs. In fact, the province of Pistoia has about 150 of them, compared with the about 230 in the province of Lucca and Bologna boasting some one hundred only in the city center. Pistoia was successful because it was the right place at the right time. In fact, no one in Italy then had a number of historic organs fully functioning and easily accessible equal to those that Pistoia had, with the added advantage of being a small town where you could go in five minutes on foot from one organ to another. In addition to master classes, concerts were offered with the most important organists or harpsichordists, then on the international scene (Gustav Leonhardt, Michael Radulescu, Marie-Claire Alain, Harald Vogel etc.), or also with groups (Leonhardt with the flutist Kuijken, the vocal ensemble The Scholars etc.), and a trip of at least one day, but sometimes also of two or three days was organized in order to see important organs outside Pistoia. A crucial factor, the participants were carefully and constantly monitored so that there was no cause for complaint, something that might seem trivial, but revealed by experience as one of the most important elements for the success of a course.

### **The decline**

This favorable situation lasted for seven years and looked like it could go on forever. Gradually, however, in other parts of Italy similar activities began or started being planned, starting from Bologna in 1982 with the restoration of the great organs of San Petronio, a major event for the organ world, but potentially a fatal wound to Pistoia, which certainly would not have never been able to compete with such monuments. In 1982 I publicly and vigorously declared, even in writing, that, paradoxically, the large number of organists, sometimes even more than a hundred, who attended its courses, was the good fortune of Pistoia, but, at the same time, the potential cause of its decline; the participants, after learning the formula of this activity in Pistoia, would reproduce it in their areas of origin with the historical organs that more and more were restored. The decline of Pistoia, perhaps inevitable, was accelerated by two major serious mistakes. When, in 1984, the city finally took over the Academy, the Board of Management of the new Foundation thought it appropriate that, given the success of the past years, nothing had to be changed, and, especially, did not understand that Pistoia, taking advantage of its prestige, should immediately invest in new organs to offer more attractive programs and to parry, this way, the blows coming from the competitors. The first error of 1984, then, was to assume the wrong belief that the academy would continue to work without changes, not thinking that success came because every year the formula changed, adapting itself to the changing needs of the organ world. Also the relationship with the participants deteriorated. For example, until 1984 each course would end with a farewell dinner, a “must” for the Haarlem Summer Academy that Pistoia had adopted, a kind of choral celebration of friendship. Everyone looked forward to it and often participants decided to return because of this special event. Even if the final dinner was a considerable expense, it was also a valuable investment, given the beneficial results it produced. There was no way to make it clear to the Foundation, which, as one of its first acts, abolished the tradition of the final dinner on the grounds that it was an

expense, or even a waste, not justifiable for the administration. Participants took this change very badly. The relationship between the Academy and the participants, cordial until then, immediately became much more cold and formal, not only for the abolition of the farewell dinner, but also for a series of similar attitudes. In short, the first priority was no longer organists and organ, as it had been until then, and participants sensed immediately the atmosphere had changed. The second mistake, probably the most serious, was to not understand the importance and urgency of investing in new organs that would allow the Academy to expand the teaching possibilities and, above all, to maintain, at least to some extent, a supremacy so laboriously won. No one paid attention to the insistent pleading of the one, me, who had invented and directed this activity for the past nine years, and, knowing the international organ world, understood well the danger that Pistoia was running. A corollary of not secondary importance should be added. The advent of the Foundation, a secular organization, was the end of the link with the liturgy in general, and with the Mass and Vespers in particular, that in the first nine years had always been closely aligned. During each course, in fact, a Mass was always celebrated, to remind the organists that their first task is to serve the liturgy, since the organs that are found in the churches were certainly not built for the purpose of concerts, but primarily to serve in the liturgy. Therefore the Academy wanted to emphasize that this is the most real and far more important use of the historic organ, different, if not even opposite, to the museum-like use typical of a concert, undoubtedly valuable, but secondary and not essential. The loss of the liturgical dimension was, therefore, another error, not without negative consequences, given that the participants were accustomed to what was one of the salient features of the courses in Pistoia.

That decline, which was all too easy to predict, inevitably came. Beginning in 1982, the year in which the carefully renovated great organs of the basilica of San Petronio in Bologna appeared on the scene, Pistoia instruments, beautiful, but for the most part of the 18th and especially of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and had brought good fortune to Pistoia and Italy in 1975 when there was nothing else available, began to reveal their limitations. Undoubtedly the great Renaissance and Baroque organs, that increasingly were restored and brought to the attention of the public obviously revealed themselves better instruments for the interpretation of the great Italian Baroque organ literature than those of the Pistoiese school, belonging to a later period and, therefore, more suitable for the literature of their time. Moreover, because of growing economic difficulties and especially for management decisions about spending priorities, the available organs, until then privileged from this point of view, were no longer kept in that perfect efficiency which had fascinated the participants. That, by the way, caused frequent clashes between me and the president of the Board of Management, for its claim to organize, for political opportunity, concerts on organs not perfectly in order. The consequence was the rapid and drastic decline in attendance in the courses.

## The revival

In 1520, an Observant Franciscan friar, Matteo Serafini da Bascio, realized that his order no longer corresponded to what St. Francis had imagined and, therefore, decided to abandon that order and to create a new one, that is the Order of Capuchin Friars Minor. Much more modestly, the author of this article, who had founded the Academy of Italian Organ Music and had delivered it to the Foundation of the same name, one day felt the need to make a choice similar to that of fra Matteo. Realizing that this institution had objectively, rightly or wrongly, almost nothing to do with what I had dreamed of in 1975, and since this process appeared irreversible, I decided, albeit reluctantly, to get out.

Finally free again, I was able to return to the spirit that had inspired me in 1975, obviously taking into account the changed circumstances. On 27 December 2001, I awoke the original association, that had remained “dormant” since 1984. I gave her, by notarial deed, the new name of "Giuseppe

Gherardeschi" Organ Academy, and with it I began all over again, but not alone this time but together with the organists who were holders of the principal organs of the city, that is Andrea Vannucchi, Anna Picchiarini and Kumiko Konishi.

The Gherardeschi Organ Academy found its home in the rectory of the parish of the Holy Spirit. Other organists joined them, five Italian residents, Mitsuru Azuma, Antonio Galanti, Wladimir Matesic, Roberto Menichetti, the German and Eliseo Sandretti, and two from other countries, that is the Swiss Guy Bovet, the German Ludger Lohmann, plus a well known musicologist, that is the Japanese Masakata Kanazawa. The "Giuseppe Gherardeschi" Organ Academy had then become a full-fledged international academy.

### The new path

In order to avoid the mistakes of previous experience, the Academy Gherardeschi has been given as goals, 1. a warm and personalized attention to users, and the schedule agile and flexible, ready to adapt quickly to the demands, 2. the recovery of the liturgical dimension and, especially, 3. the acquisition of new "targeted" organs that would serve to educate and which will help to draw in Pistoia organists in good numbers, hopefully like in its heyday. The Academy Gherardeschi uses for its activities especially the organs of the church of S. Ignatius of Loyola, namely the 1664 Hermans organ of 1664, which has become its symbol again, as it was in 1975, and a new organ built by Glauco Ghilardi from Lucca in 2007 in north German style, inspired by the Arp Schnitger organ of Kappel, placed in the balcony opposite to the Hermans organ, at the expenses of the Academy. In 2008 the same Ghilardi, again at Gherardeschi Academy expense, built the organ of the Carmine Church, which, though new, includes, as inside pipes, those surviving from the large 1840 Tronci organ, destroyed, as we have already stated, in 1962. It is a multi-purpose organ, as a project. In fact, despite being an essentially Pistoiese organ, it allows a legitimate "translation" of the Spanish repertoire thanks to the division in bass and treble of all the stops between c' and c # 1, as Filippo Tronci did for the organ of the cathedral of Montepulciano.

Recently the larger organ of the Cathedral of Pistoia, a Costamagna built in 1969, was restored on the initiative of the Chapter of the Cathedral of Pistoia, helped by the Gherardeschi Organ Academy. At the moment it is the largest organ in the city, with its 45 stops, and it is used by the Gherardeschi Organ Academy for the romantic symphonic repertoire. Since 1998, the same cathedral contains an organ built by Luigi and Benedetto Tronci in 1793 for the chapel of Villa Rucellai of Campi Bisenzio, Tuscany, noticeable for having been preserved absolutely intact. even in its meantone temperament. In its Headquarters, the Academy has three 2 manual and pedalboard organs, a two manual and pedalboard: Tamburini 1973, a 1982 Pinchi and a 1989 Ghilardi-Lorenzini, valuable not only for the individual practice of the participants, but also for some master classes.

All these instruments, constantly and carefully maintained and, therefore perfectly functioning, are used for two types of activities: about 25 Organ Vespers per year, consisting in a paraliturgical form, deliberately preferred to the organ concert, and interpretation courses, making use of organs that before 2007 did not exist, like the ones in the churches of S. Ignatius and Carmine, or that were in very bad condition, such as the Costamagna of the Cathedral.

Needless to say that each course is always enriched by the celebration of a Mass, with the participants playing the organ and singing the Gregorian chant. This new situation is attracting a lot of new organists to Pistoia. In 2012 there were courses in Pistoia for a total of 18 days, with a total of 50 participants, and in two other locations for 8 days, with 32 participants, with the result that the number of participants this year, 2012, have exceeded, albeit in different ways, those of 1975, when

this adventure began in Pistoia.

I can say that this year I finally found in the participants the same joyful enthusiasm that I had the satisfaction of seeing then and that I still vividly remember.

## Japan

The relationship with Japan deserve a separate chapter. It began in 1979, when, invited by a Japanese participant in the course of 1978, I gave a series of lectures on the Italian organ in Sapporo, Tokyo, Hiroshima and other cities. I thought this would be my first and last visit to Japan. In 1982, however, a course was organized, on an experimental basis, in Kanita (Tateyama, on the Tokyo Bay). The course went well, with about twenty people participating, and was therefore repeated in 1983, again in Kanita, and then, in 1984, in Gifu. At this point, it was decided to continue it, and since 1985 the course has been held regularly every year, until this year, therefore the 28th, in Shirakawa (Gifu prefecture), with participants from all parts of Japan and occasionally also from South Korea, USA and Australia. From the beginning, I had, as colleagues, Yuko Hayashi, a Japanese professor of organ at the New England Conservatory in Boston, USA, who has ceased several years ago for health reasons, Masakata Kanazawa, professor of musicology at the International Christian University in Tokyo and President of the Japan Organ Society, and Hiroshi Tsuji, an organ builder who died in 2005. In 2009 I asked Mr. Andrea Vannucchi to join me in teaching, and since then he has continued helping me in Shirakawa.

Shirakawa's officials are already planning a special celebration for the thirtieth anniversary of the beginning of the course which falls in 2014. In 2001 the Italian Institute of Culture in Tokyo had pointed out that the interpretation course of Italian organ literature in Shirakawa was the longest running Italian cultural activity in Japan.

## Today

The program of activities for the 2013 Gherardeschi Organ Academy has already been completed and is available on the website [www.accademiagherardeschi.it](http://www.accademiagherardeschi.it).