

MUSIC

Co-Cathedral's organ sets the bar for city's music

Friday recital to show off its exquisite sound

By CHARLES WARD

Like European cathedrals, the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart is poised to become the city's heart of great religious, liturgical and organ music.

With its long, tall shape (known as "shoe box" in sonic jargon), the co-cathedral is blessed with acoustics that allow sound to swirl robustly throughout the building. Such a setting is perfect for Martin Pasi's 5,499-pipe organ, which David Higgs will play Friday in a recital that caps a week of dedicatory activities.

Opus XIX, as the instrument is called because it's Pasi's 19th, is the largest pipe organ in a Roman Catholic cathedral in Texas, said Crista Miller, associate director of music and cathedral organist. It also is the first new pipe organ to be installed in a Roman Catholic Church in Houston since 1983, she said. The last, by Houston's Visser-Rowland, is at St. Anne's Catholic Church.

And, at 75 stops, or types of sounds, Opus XIX is among the largest pipe organs in the city.

The instrument sits in the co-cathedral's high rear balcony, which can hold 108 singers and 20 instrumentalists. That will allow performances of choral works with organ and/or instrumental accompaniment few churches can easily accommodate.

Anton Bruckner's *Te Deum* and Maurice Durufle's *Requiem* are already scheduled for later this year. Such pieces illustrate the flexible sound created

by Pasi in conjunction with the cathedral's musicians and consultant Robert Bates of the University of Houston.

"It's thrilling to play and hear, and it does everything one expects out of a large organ, from a gorgeous whisper to a glorious wall of sound," said Matthew Dirst, prize-winning organist at St. Philip Presbyterian Church and artistic director of Ars Lyrica Houston.

Overall, the sound, or tonal design, of Opus XIX is "eclectic," Dirst said. That is, the organ will be suitable for many types of works important for Catholic worship, particularly key 18th- to 20th-century French music. That contrasts with the Fritz Noack organ at Christ the King Lutheran Church, which was modeled after instruments J.S. Bach played. Music of the Protestant German Baroque sounds best on it.

Pasi's major inspiration for Opus XIX was a 1775 instrument in the Basilica at St. Maximin, Provence, France. It provided ideas for pipes suitable for "French classic" organ works of the 17th and 18th centuries. Pasi also drew on great instruments of the Netherlands and Northern Germany, considered to be the finest examples of Baroque organ building.

The organ's additional stops will accommodate the fabulous French music of the late-19th and early-to-mid 20th centuries, such as the famous *Toccata* from Charles-Marie Widor's *Symphony No. 5* for organ, and the works of Olivier Messiaen, to be featured in survey of his music beginning in 2011.

The co-cathedral has planned a massive sched-



JAMES NIELSEN : STAFF

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGE: The new pipe organ at the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart surrounds the massive Resurrection Window. The 40-foot-tall, 20-foot-wide stained-glass window is on the facade of the Co-Cathedral.

ule of musical events that highlight the power and flexibility of the new instrument.

"It should do much for not only the cathedral's musical programs but for the city's organ scene in general," Dirst said. "We now have an amazing collection of first-class instruments here, and in wonderful acoustical environments, from the historically inspired to the very eclectic."

A commitment to art — visual and musical — was a major focus when designing the new co-cathedral. Making church officials aware of the cost of an important instrument took "some educating," Miller said, but the process was successful. Funding came in part from Houston investment manager Faye Sarofim, the Brown Foundation and individual donors, a diocesan representative said.

"I was eager to build here, knowing the building

was going to be a strong room (acoustically) to work in," Pasi said.

Aficionados like those coming to Houston in 2016 for the national convention of the American Guild of Organists will undoubtedly chatter and clash over the sound of Opus XIX. (Organists are like opera fans in their ability to hold strong opinions about small matters.) But they will also be interested in the way Pasi solved an architectural problem that almost caused him to drop the project.

In many cathedrals, the rear wall with the choir-and-organ balcony features a rose window. That's a perfect shape for organs like Pasi's, which are constructed according to historically accurate mechanical, or tracker, action. (Organists push down a key on the keyboard, which mechanically opens a valve that lets air into a pipe.)

The towers of pedal

pipes can frame the window with the rest of the pipes situated between the towers and below the window.

But the co-cathedral features the large, rectangular Resurrection Window. Pasi had to find a way to place the organ pipes on both sides of the window without using mechanical action to link them.

Around the time Pasi interviewed for the project in 2006, he became aware of a new electronic device created by a Canadian company. The main part of the organ, on the left side as a viewer faces the balcony, uses mechanical action, while the pipes to the viewer's right are electrically activated by the device.

Crucially, the device mimics the touch and feel of the mechanical action as the organist plays the keyboard for those pipes.

The design is unusual, if not unique, in Houston. "Without the device,

HEAR THE INSTRUMENT

The new organ at the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, 1111 St. Joseph Parkway, will be one of the largest in the city. Here are some opportunities to hear the new instrument:

■ **Organ Recital:** David Higgs, chairman of the organ department at the Eastman School of Music, performs at 8 p.m. Friday. Tickets cost \$25.

■ **CANTARE Houston:** The group performs Rachmaninoff's *Vespers* at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday. Tickets cost \$25.

■ **Organ recital:** Philippe Lefebvre, organist at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, performs at 8:30 p.m. Oct. 29.

■ **Organ recital:** Robert Bates, organ professor at the University of Houston's Moores School of Music, performs at 7:30 p.m. Dec. 7.

■ **Free lunch recitals:** Organ students at the University of Houston perform free recitals at about noon the first Friday of every month starting in January.

■ **Organ recital:** Co-Cathedral organist Crista Miller performs at 7 p.m. Jan. 18.

■ **Information:** www.opusxix.org

I probably wouldn't have taken the job," Pasi said.

Charles Ward was the *Chronicle's* classical music critic from 1975 to 2008. E-mail him at sirernest42@gmail.com.

HBO gives a sneak peek at Springsteen documentary

By ANDREW DANSBY
ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

Bruce Springsteen fans have known for some time about the forthcoming *The Promise: Darkness on the Edge of Town* box set due on Nov. 15. Included in the set (three CDs and three DVDs) is a 26-song DVD taken from a Dec. 12, 1978, Springsteen stop at the Summit. Also among the wares is *The Promise: The Making of Darkness on the Edge of Town*, a documentary that, true to its title, captures the process of making Springsteen's classic fourth album. A sneak peek of the film will air tonight at 8 on HBO.

The Promise mixes ample archival footage from the sessions with contemporary interviews with all the major players. It makes for gripping viewing, opening after the breakthrough of *Born to*



FRANK STEFANKO:

SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

FUTURE SUPERSTAR: Bruce Springsteen is shown in his younger years in a scene from *The Promise: The Making of Darkness on the Edge of Town*.

Run. If you thought *Born* offered the band some sort of creative leeway, it turns out the members claim to

have been nearly broke and frozen as to what to do after it became a hit. The simple solution would've been to make another *Born to Run*. Instead the sessions for *Darkness* were labored. Because a camera was in the studio, the film includes moments of playful clowning between Springsteen and guitarist Steven Van Zandt as well as other moments when Springsteen pulls rank on everyone in the studio and

calls his own shots.

It also includes an interesting segment on Springsteen's productivity and the number of great songs that fall by the wayside because of his meticulous process, which even he now admits can be obsessive. To that end the new box set will contain 21 previously unreleased songs he worked on between *Born to Run* and *Darkness*.

The film begins to close

with *Darkness's* completion and some footage from the subsequent tour. Scanning the credits, it doesn't appear any of that footage is from the Summit concert. But who'd know better than those who were there? Do you remember Springsteen's Dec. 12 show? Please feel free to share thoughts, memories, photos of ticket stubs or anything else at andrew.dansby@chron.com. *Darkness* being

THE PROMISE: THE MAKING OF DARKNESS ON THE EDGE OF TOWN

■ **When:** 8 tonight

■ **Where:** HBO

my favorite Springsteen album, I'd love to hear about the show.

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