

Organists' Review



**The English organ & its
"peculiar mysteries":
S.S. Wesley and "organ-effect"
in the 1830s & 40s**

Andrew McCrea

"The highest style of art"

Christopher Gray introduces the legacy of
T.C. Lewis

The Organist's Toolkit

Ann Elise Smoot explains performance
preparation and Gloria Toplis replies to
Daniel Hyde's article in March 2012

An address by John Rutter

Given on 20 May 2012 during the London
Festival of Contemporary Music,
John Rutter discusses the links between
his music and religion

THE ORGAN OF

Guadalupe Church, Graciosa Island

Luís C.F. Henriques

Graciosa Island is situated in the central group of the Azores archipelago and is one of the smallest islands. One does not know the date it was first spied but it was supposedly explored by Portuguese sailors in the first quarter of the 15th century.¹ 2 May 1450 is commonly cited as the date of its discovery, although there is no documentary evidence to support this statement.² The island was initially settled by people from Minho (North Portugal); although the Flemish established two settlements of greater importance in Praia and Santa Cruz. The latter received a *carta de foral* elevating it to *vila* in the year of 1486.³ The *freguesia* [parish] of Guadalupe is still part of Santa Cruz.

The *freguesia* of Guadalupe was founded in 1644. Its name derived from a chapel built (in the proximity of the modern church) in the mid-16th

century to house an image of the Virgin, brought from Mexico by Domingos Pires da Covilhã, one of the first settlers of the village.⁴ Despite this early start, the building of Guadalupe's parochial church only started on 15 May 1713; the first mass was celebrated 5 August 1756.⁵

The parish church houses an organ built in 1775 by Leandro José da Cunha. This instrument is the second oldest extant in the Azorean archipelago and is the oldest for which the builder is known. It is located on an elevated gallery at the Epistle side of the church, an unusual position in the archipelago.

The builder, Leandro José da Cunha, was born in Lisbon in 1743 and died in 1805.⁶ He was a descendant of a family of organ-builders from North Portugal, his father, João da Cunha (born in Lisbon, 1712, and died in the same city, 1762) and grandfather, Filipe da Cunha

(born in Caminha around 1680 and died in Lisbon, 26 November 1744). The family activity started in Lisbon around 1700 and all of them were organ tuners for the Royal Chapel of Bemposta.

This family is of particular interest for Portuguese organ builders as it remained in the business for at least three generations and this was rare. However, it allowed skills to be passed from generation to generation and enables us to track the transmission of knowledge along successive generations following an illustrative example of historical organ-building in Portugal during the 18th century.

The organ itself has only one manual with a range from C¹ to d⁵, and no pedalboard. The keyboard is split (*partido*), a system that allows the keys above middle C sharp to use different stops to those below middle C natural. The keyboard is also of a "short octave"



1 António de Brum Ferreira, *A Ilha Graciosa* (Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 1987), 51.

2 Ferreira, *A Ilha Graciosa*, 54.

3 Monte Alverne, Agostinho. 1986. *Crónicas da Província de S. João Evangelista das Ilhas dos Açores*. Edição moderna. Ponta Delgada: Instituto Cultural de Ponta Delgada.

4 Luís Daniel, ed., *Graciosa – Guia do Património Cultural* (Lisboa: Atlantic View, 2004), 73.

5 Daniel, *Graciosa – Guia do Património Cultural*, 74.

6 The author warmly thanks Portuguese historian Ana Paula Tudela for all the biographical information related to the Cunha family.

type: the first octave apparently begins with a C, but this key, and the keys F sharp and G sharp, sound respectively C, D and E and the notes C sharp, D sharp, F sharp and G sharp are non-existent in this octave. The wind supply is produced by the original cuneiform bellows. The action is made by vertical *sarilhos* built with a mix of wood and iron, also a original characteristic of the instrument.

The organ case is 310cm high, 145cm wide, and 67cm deep. It is in the shape of a closet with an integral façade, consisting of the flue pipes of the *oitava real* register, for the left hand. Its exterior decoration is mostly lacquered, imitating wood; the centre imitates gilded wood.

The organ's registration is composed of eight stops, four activated by the left hand and the other four by the right. Left hand stops: *Flautado Quinzena*, *Flautado de 6 Tapado* (full stop), *Flautado de 12 Aberto Tapado* (full stop), *Flautado de 6 Aberto* (full stop); for the right hand: *Concentrado de Quintas III Vozes* (full stop), *Quinzena*, *Cornetilha*, *Flautado de 12 Aberto*. There are no auxiliary pedals for calling or cancelling mixtures.

After 30 years of inactivity, the organ was restored by master organ-builder, Dinarte Machado. He maintained all its original characteristics and added an electric ventilator to boost the manual wind-supply. The work was commissioned by a committee from the Parish of Guadalupe lead by Father Dinis Silveira. The organ was inaugurated in its original location in the church 31 July 2010, and is a fine example of Portuguese organ building during the last decades of the 18th century.



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