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The Parish of
Our Lady of Fatima
(Paróquia Nossa Senhora de Fátima das Furnas da Tijuca)
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Lewtak Pipe Organ Builders, Inc.

By Lance G. Hill



The new organ for Brazil in the assembly room of the Lewtak shop in North Carolina

A little bit of humanity begins this article. I first met Tom Lewtak while he was a graduate organ student at the State University of New York at Binghamton. We became friends immediately, and my wife and I became the godparents to one of his sons. The friendship has endured now for 27 years! In the meantime, I was honored to witness and discuss the many points of the development and construction of this particular organ, marveling at the skill and artistry of the Lewtak team. I wish to give the reader the perspective of a person familiar with the firm from the time of its conception—Lewtak Pipe Organ Builders will celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2021—and also to present the viewpoint of someone who is a lifelong professional involved in the technical domain of the musical world.

It all began in 2013 when a group of students was giving a concert on the Tannenberg organ at the Home Moravian Church in Old Salem, North Carolina. Afterward, one student from East Carolina University approached Tom Lewtak, mentioning that he was Brazilian and wondering if Lewtak Pipe Organ Builders would be interested in building an organ for his friend, a priest. Tom recounts: “Dr. Kris Rizzotto, a fine



Preliminary sketch of the organ facade's design concept

organist and composer, had no idea that our casual conversation might result in a shop undertaking this unusual organ." After going through various twists and turns and after building three other new instruments, work on what they call the "Brazil organ continued at a slow but consistent pace. Seven years later, the organ is now ready.

While the project commenced in the fall of 2014, the time of Tom's trip to see the church in Rio de Janeiro, it also saw the priest being transferred to another church and thus, in a truly remarkable twist, the whole project moving with the priest. The original case design was prepared for a different church, one with much ornamentation in the Brazilian rococo style. The new location is a considerably smaller Portuguese missionary-style building with much less inner ornamentation and opulence, one that Mr. Lewtak deemed to be more suitable for the size of the organ. The physical space for the instrument, however, was greatly limited, thus requiring the builder to redesign the organ case and its facade in order to fit into the new church. The redesign occurred after many of the original ornaments were already made.

The Brazil organ is the smallest that Lewtak Pipe Organ Builders has ever constructed. It boasts a modest ten stops and twelve ranks of pipes. This naturally makes each stop that much more important. Everything counts, and each stop has a significant impact on the ensemble. Every rank was voiced with ultimate care to provide the individual flavor in addition to the proper blend with other stops. Quality was considered far more important than quantity. The size was dictated by the church's dimensions, but primarily by the budget. New pipe organs remain a rarity in Brazil, partly because of difficult economic times.

The first sketch of the facade was jotted on a piece of scrap paper by Father Sergio Muniz, the pastor of Our Lady of Fatima Parish, during dinner in Rio. His initial idea prevailed, and the refined version became a faithful rendering of the priest's concepts. Due to the lack of funds, the organ was built slowly. There was difficulty in time-paying, and therefore many other projects took precedence. In many ways, it was one of the most difficult ventures ever attempted by the shop because of the considerable spread in time.

The organ is a tracker, with both the key action and the stop action operated via mechanical linkage. Only two items in the organ were equipped with electricity: the blower and lights above the music rack. The construction benefited from the firm's ultramodern machinery, with many parts of the organ, including the cabinet and facade, crafted using the CNC machine and laser cutters. Having this capability in-house allowed them to push the envelope right from the design stage. They let their imaginations venture into territories considered off-limits simply because of the difficulty in achieving the results. What used to be regarded as budget-breaking propositions are now within reach at a modest cost.



Keydesk placed on the back wall of the organ cabin



View of the facade showing intricate ornamentation (1)

Worth mentioning is Lewtak's obsessive attention to detail, often with complete disregard for the time, effort, and cost needed to attain the proper result. This is especially true when it comes to tonal finishing, which often takes many months after the organ is deemed playable. The builder's clients rave about the quality they receive, a most important ingredient for any business wishing to flourish and endure. Time teaches one over the years to only use the best materials obtainable for the interior and exterior.

The ornaments were handmade by Tom Lewtak's brother Paul, who lives in Poland and is an accomplished sculptor. They took him four months to create, after which they were shipped over to the shop in North Carolina. In this complicated process, the original ornaments were sculpted in clay. A mold was then created into which epoxy resin was later poured. After curing, each ornament was artistically painted to achieve the desired effect. All this for one reason: In the Brazilian climate, wood-eating bugs quickly devour anything made from the soft wood normally used for these kinds of ornaments. The drawknobs for the organ's stops are made from rosewood and have inserts from genuine Baltic amber—just a touch of Tom's Polish roots coming through, since he has seen amber jewelry everywhere in his native city of Gdańsk. Amber remains highly prized for its uniqueness and intrinsic beauty. The facade pipe mouths are gilded with 24-karat gold, and so are the twisted ropes visible in the moldings on the case. The entire facade is made of solid sapele, an African wood with an exceptionally attractive grain pattern. No expense was spared. Due to the design change in the midst of the project, the company had leftover ornaments and decided to place them in the back of the organ case and above the music desk and keyboards.



View of the facade showing intricate ornamentation (2)



Candle sconces were crafted to maintain character appropriate to an older-style, all-mechanical organ.

The country of Brazil is indeed fortunate to have this glorious instrument with both its musical capabilities and its extraordinary appearance. Being destined for South America, made in North America by an organbuilder with strong European roots, it is truly a global effort, one that will greatly enhance the sacred liturgies of Father Muniz and his parish.

A wealth of information about the builder, this project, and others is available on [Lewtak's web portal](#).

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Photography: Kacper Lewtak

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