

SOL: Semaine de l'Orgue au Liban // Lebanese Pipe Organ Week 2019

Press conference

Introductory Speech of Br. Riccardo Ceriani, co-director of the Lebanese Pipe Organ Week  
(abstract)

{greetings}

My name is Br. Riccardo Ceriani and I am the Delegate for Music of the Custody of the Holy Land. In Lebanon I live in the Franciscan monastery of Harissa, where I teach Italian to our seminarians. From the monastery of Harissa I organize the Terra Sancta Organ Festival - which is the largest organ festival in the Middle East and the Levant, taking place in the eight countries where the Custody of the Holy Land is present. In Lebanon I help Fr. Khalil Rahme to organize the Semaine de l'Orgue au Liban, which I founded together with him in 2015.

Thanks to the joint venture between the School of Music of the Notre Dame University and the Terra Sancta Organ Festival of the Custody of the Holy Land, the Lebanese Pipe Organ Week has strong local roots and, at the same time, an international dimension, with the most renowned international organists.

For some years now, Lebanon has witnessed a renewed interest in the pipe organ: many churches and institutions have restored their pipe organs or have acquired new ones, while others are planning to install one: the Lebanese Pipe Organ Week acts as an incentive for this renaissance.

For this reason, each year the festival can be shown in new venues. This year we have three new entries: the new organ of the church of St. Elias in Antelias, the new organ of O-Club in Antelias and the new organ in the church of St. Anthony in Harissa.

We had also planned a concert in Bekaa valley, but this year it was not possible: it will be for next year.

This gives me the opportunity to underline one thing. In Lebanon festivals are all limited to a specific territory: the Lebanese Pipe Organ Week is probably the only festival that has the vocation to extend throughout Lebanon, the only festival that plans events both in Beirut and in Tripoli passing through Zouk Mosbeh, Harissa, Maayssra-Nahr Ibrahim (unplanned this year: unfortunately the organs are many and the days available are few, so every year we have to exclude someone).

The Lebanese Pipe Organ Week is also the first and the only festival in Lebanon dedicated to organ. The concerts are all in the churches, with the exception of the O-Club, and all are invited, regardless of their religious affiliation. The Lebanese Pipe Organ Week is indeed a unique opportunity offered to everyone to listen to the sound of the largest among musical instruments outside the religious liturgical context. And from this year the festival opens up to rock and jazz music, thanks to the O Club by Michel Fadel, with the new pipe organ built the Italian organ builder by Saverio Tamburini.

Normally in the Middle East where there is an organ there is a church and where there is a church there is a Christian community. For this reason organ music is perceived as a specific high quality repertoire that Christians can offer to the culture of the various countries. It is a moment of meeting for everyone as well. In this regard, this year the concerts held in the Franciscan churches are included in the celebrations for the 800th anniversary of the arrival of St. Francis in the Middle East and his meeting with the sultan of Egypt in 1219. Nowadays that meeting is taken as an example of dialogue and mutual respect between Christians and Muslims.

The various locations where the festival takes place represent in small the plurality of the Church in Lebanon, both in the different expressions of the Catholic Church (Latin and Maronite churches and among the Latins we find several religious orders: Franciscans, Carmelites, Lazarists, the Frères des Ecoles Chrésiennes) and Churches of other Christian confessions like the National Evangelical Church of Beirut (in this regard, I want to thank Father Habib Badr, who was the first to subscribe my proposal, when still I did not know Fr. Khalil and therefore before the project of the Lebanese Pipe Organ Week existed).

The Lebanese Pipe Organ Week wants also to give visibility to the educational project of the NDU School of Music: the concert of February 9 at St. Elias church in Antelias will be performed by the outstanding students of the organ class of the Notre Dame University School of Music, which is the only place in Lebanon where to study this instrument and one of the few in the Middle East. The organ course at NDU is an advanced course, now in its fifth year of activity, with the support of the Italian Institute of Culture and for two years in collaboration with the Custody of the Holy Land. The curriculum of studies is organized according to the parameters of European conservatories of music, thanks to the teaching of prof. Cosimo Prontera, organ teacher at the conservatory of music in Potenza (Italy). Next March these students have been invited to Italy by the Smarano International Organ Academy for a masterclass, ending with a concert near Trento.

I'll finish with an interesting notice: admission free to all concerts.