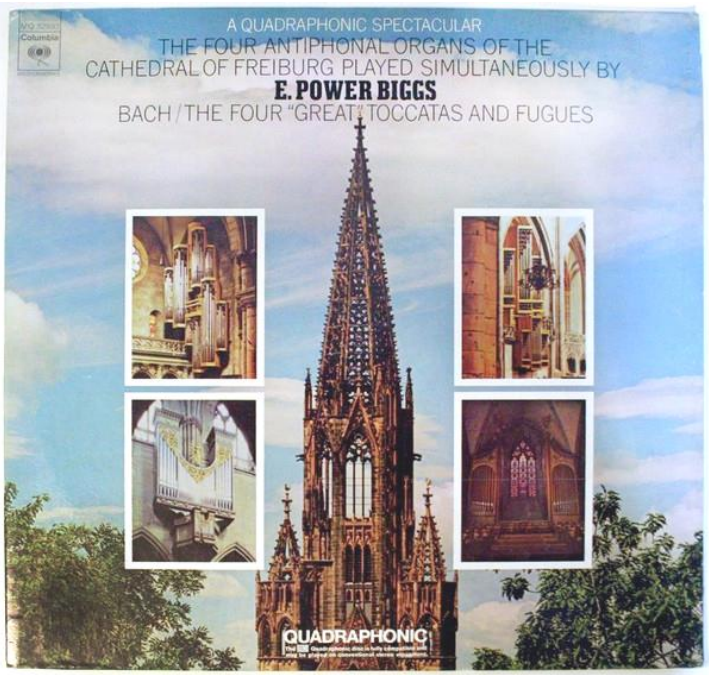
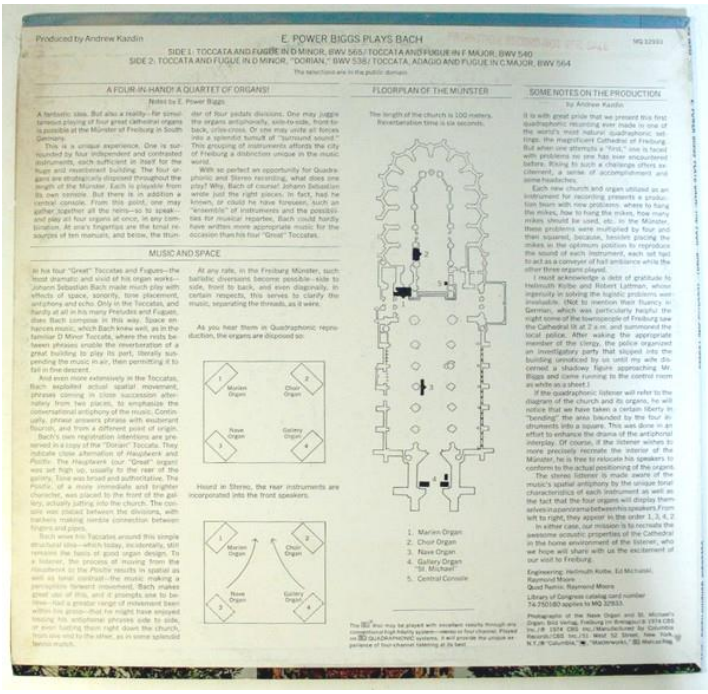
Tridentine Community News

June 26, 2022 – External Solemnity of the Sacred Heart

The Four Organs of Freiburg Cathedral

Can you name one recording that truly changed your life? This writer can. Forgive some first-person narrative: In middle school and high school, I was in charge of all things audio-visual at Detroit Country Day School. Yes, I was *that guy*. Electronics was also my hobby outside of school. This was the 1970s, so audio systems were the rage, and the hottest technology of the era was quadraphonic (four speaker) sound, what we now think of as surround sound. I had proudly acquired a Sansui QRX-9001 receiver (go ahead, Google it), still considered a collectible piece of gear, and avidly sought out quad recordings to showcase the possibilities of sound-in-the-round.





During a visit to the Bloomfield Township Public Library, I discovered an LP that to this day has no equal as a surround sound showpiece: *The Four Great Bach Toccatas and Fugues on the Four Antiphonal Organs of Freiburg Cathedral*, played by E. Power Biggs. This grand church has four pipe organs playable by a central console. The recording engineers mic'd each organ separately so that when played on a four-channel audio system, each organ was heard through its own speaker. For those who care about technical specs, the recording was available in several formats: Conventional stereo LP (boo, hiss), SQ quadraphonic LP, Q8 quadraphonic 8-track tape, and much later reissued as a surround sound SACD.

Biggs makes full use of all four organs, playing the pieces neither too quickly nor too slowly, pausing in places to accommodate the reverberant acoustics of the cathedral. I was not a practicing Catholic at this point, and not even particularly a fan of classical music, but the artistic and technological perfection of this recording was absolutely addictive. I even installed a quad 8-track player in my car so that I could listen to this recording on the road.

Fast forward a few years, and I was in Bavaria touring an historic church noted for its ornate rococo décor, the Wieskirche. While exploring the church and taking in the intricate designs, an organist began to practice, thundering out some piece. It was at that moment that things began to click: The majesty of the pipe organ, in the setting of a grand church, conveys the omnipotence of God in a way that words cannot.

God did have a plan: In 1979 upon arriving at college, I stumbled into the local Catholic church to resume the practice of my Catholic faith after seven years away from it. I had no idea that I was walking into one of the most musically impressive parishes in the world, St. Paul's in Cambridge, Massachusetts, home of the St. Paul's Choir School. The church at the time had two pipe organs, one in the right front and one in the rear choir loft, which were played antiphonally. The boys' choir processed in around the congregation, singing in descant. It was quadraphonic sound come to life, compelling me to learn more about the liturgy. The seed that experience planted caused me to seek out – and eventually help to organize – sites in metro Detroit that offered similarly impressive music programs.

The moral of this story is that sacred music, and especially grand pieces for the pipe organ, can serve as a tool of evangelization. With all that we read about efforts such as *Unleash the Gospel*, very little consideration is given to the potential of the Church's patrimony of sacred music to attract converts and reverts.

Tridentine Masses This Coming Week

Fri. 07/01 7:00 PM: High Mass at *Old St. Mary's* (Most Precious Blood) – Celebrant: Fr. Joe Tuskiewicz. Devotions to the Sacred Heart before Mass. Reception afterwards.

Comments? Ideas for a future column? Please e-mail info@windsorlatinmass.org. Previous columns are available at www.windsorlatinmass.org.