

DESIGN HOUSE • CURT JOHN WITT

# THE MORELIA CATHEDRAL ORGAN

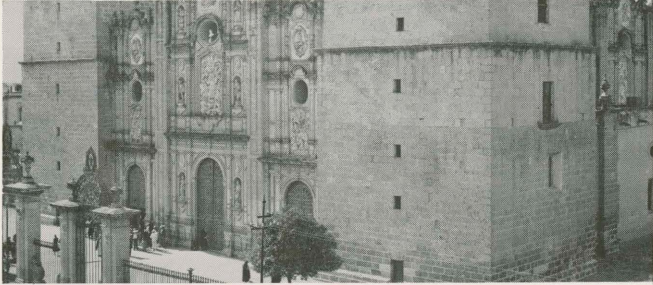
Michoacan, Mexico

Original German  
Walker Organ  
—1905

*This 70-rank instrument is still unchanged, exactly as installed by the maker, and was for many years the largest organ in the Western Hemisphere.*

Alfonso  
Vega  
Nunez,  
organist





Michoacan, Mexico

# THE MORELIA CATHEDRAL ORGAN

BACH: *Fantasia y Fuga en Sol Minor*  
 VIVALDI: *Concerto #2 in A minor*  
 BACH: *Fugue in G minor ("Little")*

## THE CATHEDRAL

In Morelia, in the state of Michoacan, Mexico, there stands a great cathedral. Towering 200 feet over the *zocalo*\* in the afternoon sun, its shadows fall deep in the market places and into the life of the people. Here, as in all of Mexico, the church is the heart of the city. But in Morelia, the cathedral is exceptionally old and large and beautiful.

The building of the great Morelia cathedral in the 17th century saw the passing of many generations. Begun in 1640, the Morelia architecture retained a remarkable integrity of form; through more than 100 years of building the original *plateresque*\*\* plans must have been followed very closely.

\* the square park which is the center of the city in Mexico.

\*\* literal translation: "resembling old silver"

## THE ORGAN — A FAMOUS WALKER INSTALLATION

In Michoacan the year 1905 was a supreme moment, for then, 150 years after the cathedral was completed a great organ was brought from Germany, — the largest and finest instrument in the Western Hemisphere.

Built by E. F. Walker & Cie., Ludwigsburg, Wurtemberg the organ has approximately 70 ranks of pipes, unmodified since the original installation. With its many mixtures and fractional stops, it is capable of sounding more *baroque* than most modern baroque organs. The unusual 32 foot *Princ Bass* (stopped) is heard in the Vivaldi.

The Morelia organ is a supreme example of the builder's art in an era which can be described as neither "new" nor "old" but which embraced the beginnings of some modern techniques in console design and voicing of pipes. Among the builders of that time, Walker & Cie. was outstanding.

## THE ACOUSTICS

A clue to the vast dimensions of the cathedral interior can be gathered from the acoustics displayed in the recording. Today we are conditioned to hearing a Bach *fugue* in surroundings so "dry" that each note of melody and counter melody is discernible by itself . . . a useful but essentially *UN-traditional* perspective. Here, in the majestic architecture of a cathedral *built in Bach's time* we hear the sound of a *fugue* as Bach conceived it — not as lace work through a microscope, but as sweeping musical architecture, an edifice of scope and grandeur. Microphones were placed as close to the organ as reasonably practicable for maximum musical articulation. Especially in the binaural edition, however, the great expanse of stone walls and floor, high ceilinged arches and coupled cavities is cannily unveiled.

## THE RECORDING

The record was made late in the evening of Ash Wednesday. A normal course of events was taking place in the cathedral; the main doors were closed for the night, boys were tidying up the interior, off in the distance a priest was performing his duty, and late-comers were engaged in worship in the Privileged Sanctuary. Here, the

only available power outlets for recording equipment were located directly alongside the illuminated statue of the Virgin Mary; yet the Mexicans with their great good tolerance and hospitality appeared not to notice the commotion of flickering lights, extension cords and unaccustomed figures in the Sanctuary.

After a few minutes of recording one of the priests came out and inquired as to when we would be finished, for the assisting boys had not yet had their dinners. The long conversation which ensued (in Spanish, during Vivaldi) can be distinguished vaguely in the background of the binaural edition. The sound of voices carried from a hundred feet away in the cavernous acoustics is of more than recording interest. Caught on records, it is a moment which reveals something of Mexico. Human concern mingled naturally with worship; great music played in a great cathedral; Morelia on Ash Wednesday.

Alfonso Vega Nunez has a remarkable and forthright talent. Less than two hours after first meeting him and asking him to record, we were all in the cathedral, working.

Besides being the official organist of the cathedral, he is director of the Bellas Artes in Morelia, one of the oldest schools of music in Mexico. A native of Morelia, Maestro Nunez has had an extensive concert career, touring western U. S., Latin America and the West Indies.

ORGAN: E. F. Walker & Cie. Ludwigsburg, Wurtemberg 1905 — 70 Ranks

Viola de Gamba 8'	Bourdon 8'	Quintaton 8'	Princ 8'	Holtflote 4'	Octav 4'	Octav 2'	Principal 16'	Cornett 8' 3-5 fach	Mixtur 2' 6 fach
Dolce 8'	Gems 8'	Rohrflote 4'	Gemshorn 4'	Quinte 5 1/3'	Quinte 2 2/3'	Flauto Major 16'	Trompeta 8'	Clairon 4'	Bassoon 16'
Sub Bass 16'	Octav Bass 8'	Violon Cello 16'	Violon 8'	Octav Bass 8'	Octav Bass 4'	Quint Bass 10 2/3'	Trompeta 8'	Posaune 16'	Princ Bass 32'
Trompeta 8'	Cornett 8' 3-4 fach	Liebel Gedeckt 16'	Fugara 4'	Travers Flote 4'	Geigen Principal 8'	Concert Flote 8'	Liebel Gedeckt 8'	Aeoline 8'	Bourdon 16'
Piccolo 2'	Viola 4'	Bifra 16'	Principal 8'	Spitz Flote 8'	Tremolo fur Oboe	Oboe 8'	Voix Celeste 8'	Clarinette 8'	Cymbel 3 fach
Quintaton 16'	Sallcional 16'	Octav 4'	Flauto Dolce 4'	Viola D'Amour	Gedeckt 8'	Sallcional 8'			

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