

Humanities - Arts and Humanities in Progress 23

Girėnas Povilionis  
Diego Cannizzaro  
Rima Povilionienė

# Vox Humana Craftsmanship

Origins, Intersections and Influence  
on Lithuanian Pipe Organ Building

 Springer

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Girėnas Povilionis · Diego Cannizzaro ·  
Rima Povilionienė

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on Lithuanian Pipe Organ Building

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Girėnas Povilionis  
Department of Organ and Harpsichord  
Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre  
Vilnius, Lithuania

Diego Cannizzaro  
Conservatory of Music Vincenzo Bellini  
Istituto Superiori di Studi Musicali  
Caltanissetta, Italy

Rima Povilionienė  
Department of Musicology  
Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre  
Vilnius, Lithuania

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## Preface

The pipe organ is a musical instrument in which various components blend into a complex whole and impressive architecture and elaborate ornamentation are combined with a wide range of timbres. The organ can sound like a flute chorus (*Flet Major, Flet Minor, Fletowers, Quintadena, Jula, Waldflet*, etc.) or string (*Gambe, Salicional, Viola, Geigenprincipal*, etc.) or wind instruments (*Trompete, Oboe, Fagott, Clarinette*, etc.), or produce a powerful roar that recalls a lion or bear (*acoustic drum, Posaune, Bombard, Bärpfeife*) or a jingle of bells (*Vox Campanarum, Cymbelstern*). Organ pipes may sing in an angelic, heavenly, or even human voice (*Vox angelica, Vox celestis, Vox humana*), and they can create an undulating effect like a sea wave (*Unda maris*). The sound produced by wooden and metal pipes of a variety of sizes is an integral part of the instrument's unique character, while the organ stoplist is like its signature, from which a person can make judgments about the size and style of the instrument, the organ building school it is related to or even the organ master to whom it can be attributed. Individual countries and organ building traditions have different names for the same stops, which are written in different languages and display morphological variations. Precise identification of the name of a stop in accordance with both the pipework itself and the authentic inscriptions on the pipes is instrumental in investigating the geographic origins and authorship of an organ.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, organ building in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL, which included the Lithuanian area encompassing some neighboring territories in Latvia, Poland, and Belarus) was boosted by the intensification of the construction and reconstruction of churches. At that time, Lithuania saw the flourishing of the art of organ building, which continued until the early nineteenth century, and evolved into the independent and original Vilnius organ building school of the late Baroque, from approximately 1740 till 1850. The school's heritage encompasses both large instruments, which are of great value in a Western European context, and small Baroque positives with 7 to 12 stops. Stoplists of the Vilnius school organs include stops that were traditionally employed in instruments of various sizes, representing the fusion with neighboring schools of different historic periods. An examination of approximately one hundred fully or partially surviving organs attributed

to the school along with historical organ stoplists show that several stops were used extremely frequently, and their names were recorded in a rare form, most probably borrowed from the Gdańsk and Königsberg organ makers (such as the *Jula*, *Unda maris*, and *Flet travers*, the principal stop *Sedecima*, and the string stop *Salcinal*). This monograph is devoted to the examination of authentic reed stop *Vox humana*, which along with the *Trompette* stop is particularly often found in the large Baroque organs built by Vilnius organ makers and has survived to the present day in several organs.

My intention to get deeper into the appearance and development of the *Vox humana* in Lithuanian Baroque organ heritage was encouraged by the fact that the spread of this organ stop was affected by the East Prussian organ building school of German legacy through the master Adam Gottlob Casparini (1715–1788), who settled in Königsberg, and possibly Gerhardt Arendt Zelle (?–1761), who is considered the founder of the Vilnius late Baroque organ building school. The widespread activity of the Casparini family masters with Eugenio Casparini, an influential organ builder in the Venice region of Italy, at the forefront, helped me develop the idea to delve into the links between Italian, Prussian, and Lithuanian organ building traditions.

Being a Lithuanian historic pipe organ researcher and restorer with a master's degree as an organist, I have recently devoted significant time to the restoration and reconstruction of important Lithuanian instruments such as Adam Gottlob Casparini's magnificent 1775–76 organ at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius; a Baroque organ with romantic instrument addition by Waclaw Biernacki in Pivašiūnai, an important sanctuary in our country; a 1938 instrument by Otto Kratokvil with a Baroque façade in Telšiai's Cathedral; and a 25-stop Romantic instrument by Juozapas Radavičius built in the Žemaičių Kalvarija church. Simultaneously, I did not stop striving to initiate a project to examine the spread of the *Vox humana* in Lithuanian Baroque organs from the second half of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century, when this stop remained one of the main exclusive reed stops in almost all large (two-manuals) Lithuanian Baroque organs and positives (small organs). This led to a successful application for the project "Genesis and Comparative Study of the Vilnius Baroque Organ Building School Stops *Vox humana* and *Unda maris*: Adaptation of Caspari(ni) and Environment Traditions" to the Research Council of Lithuania.

Finally, my project, implemented between 2018 and 2021, was the impetus behind this monograph that summarizes my long years of research, which began well prior to 2018. I continued my initial attempts to study the *Vox humana* phenomena in cooperation with my wife, musicologist Prof. Dr. Rima Povilionienė, and at the same time enriched the current research with my practical experience and the technical data I collected. Thanks to my wife's collaboration with musicologist and semiotician Dario Martinelli, we got in contact with Dr. Diego Cannizzaro, an Italian organist and researcher as well as an official supervisor and consultant of historic organ heritage for the Sicilian Government, Palermo University, and the Diocese of Cefalù, who generously agreed to share his insights into the Italian *Vox humana* case.

Furthermore, over the course of my research, I was extremely fortunate to implement some discoveries at the churches in Lithuania (e.g., in Kurtuvėnai) and Belarus

(Budslau and Pinsk) and to collect some new material from the organs in the village of Žemalė and the fascinating large Baroque organ by Casparini at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius. For example, my research expedition in autumn 2014 to the Kurtuvėnai church revealed to me that a bunch of old metal and wooden pipes were stored in a room above the sacristy; I was impressed to find more than a half of the extant material to be from the late eighteenth century, which allowed me to reconstruct the original stoplist. During my expedition to Belarus in December 2019 and in my work with Alexander Burdelev, a Belarusian organ researcher who holds a Ph.D. in discrete mathematics, I obtained the opportunity to examine the rediscovered old remnants of the *Vox humana* pipes from Jantzon's organ in Budslau.

In this monograph, I seek to draw together two disciplines to examine original *Vox humana* pipes, combining the art historian's and a technological (such as organ restorer, chemical-analysis and technical measurement) approach, and thus identify the reasons for different sounds and organ builders' search for the most appropriate sound result in manufacturing technology. The study of historiographic records and systematization of extant original examples of the *Vox humana* stop in Lithuanian organs is a principal focus in the first part of the monograph, which consists of three chapters. Dealing with the etymology of the eloquent expression "*vox humana*" and its attribution to a certain organ sound, in cooperation with Dr. Rima Povilionienė, I present a contradictory centuries-long process that was evoked by the variety of names for the *Vox humana* stop. The first chapter highlights the disagreement between the name and sound based on excerpts from treatises from the seventeenth to beginning of the twentieth centuries. The second chapter presents the contribution of Dr. Diego Cannizzaro, our Italian project partner, who discusses the Italian *Vox humana* equivalent, the *Fiffaro*, commenting on historical records such as organ building contracts with the Antegnati masters and the characteristics of early Sicilian organs. In the third chapter, I share a collection of facts from archival sources mentioning the *Vox humana*'s appearance in Lithuanian Baroque organs and comment on the extant examples of old resonators and boots of the pipes.

In the second part of the monograph, I reveal the possible link between the Italian organ building features and the central European area through an overview of the legacy of influential organ masters from the Casparini dynasty. Eugenio Casparini, a German-origin (from Silesia) organ master who lived and worked in Italy for over 50 years, is singled out as the key figure in the fourth chapter. His intricate experiments in the improvement of the mechanical parts of organ and the search for new qualities of sound were introduced to his direct successors, who were his son and grandsons as well as apprentices such as Andreas Silbermann. The overview of work done by Adam Gottlob Casparini, Eugenio's grandson and the privileged organ master of the Königsberg Court, makes a direct link to the organ building tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Continuing the discussion about the links between the Casparini family's work and the Lithuanian organ building tradition, the fifth chapter focuses on masters who worked throughout the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in order to establish the spread and impact of foreign traditions of craftsmanship and display the development of the Vilnius late Baroque organ building school. During the latter part of the eighteenth century, Vilnius, the center



of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, attracted a significant community of organ builders: Gerhardt Arendt Zelle, who is regarded as the founder of the Vilnius organ building school, and his sons Paulus Gerardus and Michael; Joachim Freidrich Scheel and his son Johann Friedrich; Nicolaus Jantzon and his son Friedrich Samuel; Ludwik Jozef Klimowicz; and others. Their work shared some common stylistic features and a similar approach to the constructional and musical elements of the instrument.

The third part of the monograph is devoted to the examination of the construction specifics of the *Vox humana* pipes. For nearly 500 years of its existence, this organ stop experienced many modifications. At different times, organ masters continued to experiment with the elaboration of pipe scales, the creation of intricate shapes, and the search for the appropriate material. No other organ stop has accumulated such a variety of shades of sound-timbre; therefore, the subtle manufacture and voicing of *Vox humana* pipes may be regarded as proof of an organ builder's excellence. The sixth chapter, written in collaboration with Dr. Rima Povilionienė, comments on historically established Baroque models and some cases of reed-type *Vox humana* construction in eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century organs. Finally, in the seventh and final chapter, I introduce some experimental attempts and collected analytical data, revealing and exposing the difference in sound production based on the composition of metal and the specifics of tongue and resonator construction.

The writing of this monograph was supported by a grant from the Research Council of Lithuania (project "Genesis and Comparative Study of the Vilnius Baroque Organ Building School Stops *Vox humana* and *Unda maris*: Adaptation of Caspari(ni) and Environment Traditions", agreement No S-LIP-18-40). I express my sincere appreciation to the Editorial Board of the *Numanities—Arts and Humanities in Progress* series for inclusion of this volume into the series published by Springer Verlag. I also would like to thank Latvian organ restorer Alvis Melbārdis sharing his proficiency and practical advice for the implemented experiment; Krzysztof Urbaniak, a Polish organist and researcher, who provided some useful contextual information and photos; Balys Vaitkus, a Lithuanian organist for his valuable comments reviewing the text of the monograph; Alexander Burdelev for sharing the joy of the discovery of the *Vox humana* remnants in Budslau; Kerry Kubilius for providing a careful proof-reading; and everyone associated with the writing and publication of the monograph. Most importantly, I feel deeply indebted to the contributors to this monograph, Dr. Diego Cannizzaro and my wife Prof. Dr. Rima Povilionienė in particular; her faithful concern and support I felt and continue to feel all through my long years of research.

Vilnius, Lithuania

Girėnas Povilionis

# Contents

<b>Part I Establishment of the <i>Vox Humana</i> Stop in Pipe Organ Building: Some Historical Observations</b>	
<b>1 In Search of an Appropriate Name: Consolidation of the <i>Vox Humana</i> Designation</b> .....	3
Girėnas Povilionis and Rima Povilionienė	
1.1 The Emergence of the <i>Vox Humana</i> in European Organ Building .....	3
1.2 A Variety of Names: From a Bear’s Roar to the Human Voice .....	7
1.2.1 Cases of Literal Translation of “ <i>Vox Humana</i> ” .....	8
1.2.2 Semantically Linked Names .....	10
1.2.3 Fanciful Designations .....	13
1.3 Discrepancy in Verbal Naming and Sound Perception .....	19
<b>2 From the <i>Fiffaro</i> to the <i>Voce Umana</i>: Beating Stops in the Italian and Sicilian Organ Building Tradition</b> .....	23
Diego Cannizzaro	
2.1 Establishment of the <i>Fiffaro</i> and the First Attempts in Italian Organs .....	24
2.2 The <i>Fiffaro</i> in the Bergamo Area Organ Building Tradition: Cases of Antegnati Craftsmanship .....	25
2.2.1 Notes on the <i>Fiffaro</i> in the Contracts with Graziadio Antegnati .....	27
2.2.2 Organ Building Contracts with Costanzo Antegnati .....	30
2.2.3 Organ Building Contracts with Giovanni Francesco Antegnati .....	33
2.3 Some Aspects of the Sicilian Organ Building Tradition .....	36
<b>3 The <i>Vox Humana</i> in Lithuanian Baroque Pipe Organs</b> .....	45
Girėnas Povilionis	
3.1 The Development of an Individual Baroque Organ Building School in Lithuania .....	46

3.2	In Search of Reed Stops in Lithuanian Baroque Organs .....	48
3.3	Testimony About the <i>Vox Humana</i> in Archival Records .....	58
3.4	Extant <i>Vox Humana</i> Examples in Lithuanian Organs .....	68
3.4.1	Franciscan Church in Kretinga, End of the Seventeenth Century/c. 1680, Unknown Master .....	68
3.4.2	Budslau Basilica, 1781/83, Nicolaus Jantzon .....	71
3.4.3	Tytuvėnai Church, 1789, Attributed to Nicolaus Jantzon .....	73
3.4.4	Kurtuvėnai Church, 1791–1793, Mateusz Raczkowski .....	77
3.4.5	Vilnius Church of the Holy Spirit, 1775–1776, Adam Gottlob Casparini .....	82
<b>Part II From Italy to Lithuania: The Casparini Dynasty and the Consolidation of Lithuanian Baroque Organ Building</b>		
<b>4</b>	<b>Over Two Centuries of Caspari(ni) Activity: From North to South .....</b>	<b>89</b>
Girėnas Povilionis		
4.1	The Casparini Dynasty .....	89
4.2	Eugenio Casparini: “Tedesco(I) Italiano(I)” .....	93
4.3	Following Eugenio: Later Generations .....	101
4.3.1	Adam Horatio Casparini .....	101
4.3.2	Georg Sigismund Caspari .....	105
4.3.3	Adam Gottlob Casparini .....	107
<b>5</b>	<b>Following the Activity of Lithuanian Late-Baroque Organ Builders .....</b>	<b>125</b>
Girėnas Povilionis		
5.1	Settling in Vilnius and Working in the Area .....	125
5.2	A Duo of Vilnius Organ Masters: Joachim Friedrich Scheel and Ludwik Jozef Klimowicz .....	134
5.3	The Founder of the Vilnius School: Gerhardt Arendt Zelle and His Milieu .....	140
5.4	Nicolaus Jantzon’s Oeuvre and the Flourishing of the Vilnius School .....	152
<b>Part III Creating the <i>Vox Humana</i>’s Variety of Sounds</b>		
<b>6</b>	<b>Characteristics of the <i>Vox Humana</i>’s Resonator Construction .....</b>	<b>163</b>
Girėnas Povilionis and Rima Povilionienė		
6.1	On the Configuration of the <i>Vox Humana</i> Pipes in Written Sources .....	163
6.2	The Typology of the <i>Vox Humana</i> Resonators .....	168
6.3	The <i>Vox Humana</i> Pipes of Cylindrical-Conic Construction .....	172
6.4	The <i>Vox Humana</i> Pipes of Double-Conic Construction .....	178

<b>7 Observations on Metal Alloy and Types of Tongue and Shallot in Lithuanian Baroque Pipe Organs</b> .....	187
Girėnas Povilionis	
7.1 Reviving the Historically Accurate Sound .....	187
7.2 On Lead–Tin Composition of the Resonators .....	189
7.3 Impact of Copper–Zinc Composition on the Quality of Timbre ....	200
7.4 The Subtlety of Shallot Construction .....	212
<b>General Conclusions by Girėnas Povilionis: March 2022—The Discoveries Continue</b> .....	221
<b>Appendix A: Stoplists of the Organs by Casparini</b> .....	225
<b>Appendix B: Representative Stoplists of Vilnius Late Baroque Organ Building School</b> .....	241
<b>Appendix C: Interactive Audio-Video Catalogue with QR Code</b> .....	251
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	253
<b>Index</b> .....	263

## About the Authors

**Girėnas Povilionis** (b. 1976) has a Ph.D. in the humanities (2006). He is an associate professor at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre (LAMT), a senior specialist at the Lithuanian Centre for Culture Heritage, an organ historian, and a researcher and restorer. He also lectures at the LAMT. Between 2009 and 2011 he was a postdoctoral fellow funded by the European Union Structural Funds project “Postdoctoral Fellowship Implementation in Lithuania” at the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute. In 2000, he completed his studies for an MA in solo organ playing at the LAMT. He improved his skills in organ building and restoration in France from 1999 to 2000, at Gotland University in Sweden in 2001 and 2006, and at the Centre for Organ Art (GoArt) at Gothenburg University from 2001 to 2002. In 2007, he established the Centre for Organ Heritage in Lithuania and currently supervises a comprehensive online database of historical Lithuanian organs at [www.vargonai.com](http://www.vargonai.com). Povilionis’s scientific activities encompass research into historic organs and the issues of the preservation and restoration of this heritage. He has presented his research at international conferences and congresses in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, France, Sweden, the UK, the USA, Denmark, Poland, and Portugal. He has published over 40 scientific articles and two monographs, delivered workshops in various towns in Lithuania, and given lectures at the Latvian J. Vītols Academy of Music. He has managed the Lithuanian Historical Organs 3-CD project and the Days of Cultural Heritage in Lithuania. From 2018 to 2021 he implemented a research project on the *Vox humana* pipe organ stop funded by the Research Council of Lithuania.

Currently, Girėnas is restoring various famous Baroque organs in Lithuania: Adam Gottlob Casparini’s 1775–76 organ at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius; a 25-stop Romantic organ by Juozapas Radavičius at the church in Žemaičių Kalvarija, and a Baroque organ with a Romantic instrument addition by Waclaw Biernacki in Pivašiūnai, an important sanctuary in Lithuania. Among his recently restored projects are a 1938 instrument by Otto Kratokvil with a Baroque façade in Telšiai Cathedral

and the late-Baroque one-manual organ in the Žemalė church as well as many other organs in Lithuania. For more information, please visit Girėnas's profile at [www.vargonai.com/vpc/vadovas-dr-girenas-povilionis/](http://www.vargonai.com/vpc/vadovas-dr-girenas-povilionis/).

**Diego Cannizzaro** (b. 1968), graduated in piano (1992) and organ (1995) and holds a Ph.D. in musicology (2004). He is a professor of organ and early keyboard at the Conservatory of Music ISSM Vincenzo Bellini in Caltanissetta, Italy. He is an organist at the Cathedral of Cefalù, an inspector of the historical organs in Sicily and a researcher at the E-Campus University of CUN in Cefalù. He holds the position as the president of Centro Studi Auditorium Pacis in Castelbuono, Palermo, and is the artistic director for the In Tempore Organi and Unda Maris festivals. He has performed at significant international organ festivals in Europe and the USA. Diego has recorded over 20 compact discs, including a monographic collection of organ works by Filippo Capocci (nineteenth century), Giovanni Salvatore (seventeenth century, the first mondial recording), Pietro Vinci (sixteenth century), Alessandro Scarlatti (eighteenth century), and Pietro Alessandro Yon (twentieth century). He has published over 40 articles, monographic texts, and essays about the South Italian history of organ building. Diego has been a guest lecturer at the Rimskij-Korsakov Conservatory in St. Petersburg, the Enghien and Ath Academies in Belgium, the National University of California, the Real Conservatorio Superior de Madrid, and the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre in Vilnius.

**Rima Povilionienė** (b. 1975) holds a Ph.D. in the humanities (2007). She is a full-time professor at the Department of Music Theory of the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre (LAMT), the assistant editor-in-chief of the scientific yearly publication *Lithuanian Musicology*, and an editor at the Lithuanian National Philharmonic. She has held a research position at the International Semiotics Institute (ISI) at Kaunas University of Technology. Rima interned at the Institute of Musicology at Leipzig University (2004) and IRCAM (2012 and 2019). She has been a guest lecturer at such institutions as Leipzig University, the Tbilisi Conservatoire, the Belgrade University of Arts, the Jazeps Vitols Latvian Academy of Music, Vilnius University, and the Kaunas University of Technology.

Rima has edited over 15 collections and published over 30 academic texts and nearly 200 critic reviews. Her monograph *Musica Mathematica* (in Lithuanian, 2013) was awarded the Vytautas Landsbergis Prize for the best musicological work of the year. The English edition of the monograph was published by Peter Lang in 2016. She is an editor of two collections for Springer (2017 and 2019).

# List of Figures

Fig. 1.1	<i>Anthropoglossa minima</i> and <i>Anthropoglossa maxima</i> pipe examples in Kircher’s <i>Musurgia</i> , Plate IX, Figs. XVII & XVIII (Kircher 1650: Iconismus IX fol. 500) . . . . .	9
Fig. 1.2	Woodcut <i>Maximilian I Hearing Mass</i> by Hans Weiditz the Younger, c. 1515 (illustration reference: CampbellDodgson, <i>Catalogue of Early German and Flemish Woodcuts Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings of the British Museum</i> . British Museum, London, 1911, cat. no. II.173.56†, retrieved from <a href="http://www.metmuseum.org">www.metmuseum.org</a> ) . . . . .	16
Fig. 1.3	A copy of <i>Apfelregal</i> , music instrument (photo credit: Orgelbau Kögler, <a href="http://www.orgelbau-koegler.at">www.orgelbau-koegler.at</a> ) . . . . .	17
Fig. 1.4	On the left and centre: drawings of the ancient <i>Apfelregal</i> (published in Wedgwood 1905: 134; Audsley 1905: 589 and reprinted in Audsley 1921: 224); illustration on the right presents the <i>Knopfregal</i> (published in Audsley 1905: 589 and reprinted in Audsley 1921: 224) . . . . .	18
Fig. 1.5	Different shapes of the pipe for old organ stop <i>Bärpfeife</i> (published in Adlung 2011: 73; reprinted from Praetorius’s <i>Syntagmatis musici. Tomus secundus De Organographia</i> , Wolfenbüttel, 1619, Plate XXXVIII, Figs. 19–23) . . . . .	19
Fig. 2.1	Organ in Valvasone Cathedral (Pordenone, Italy, master Vincenzo Colombi, 1533), mannerist paintings by Giovanni Antonio de’ Sacchis-Pordenone . . . . .	26
Fig. 2.2	Organ façade by anonymous master (attributed to Raffale La Valle, 1579), La concattedrale di San Giovanni Battista in La Valletta, Malta (photo credit: Fratelli Ruffatti, <a href="http://www.ruffatti.com">www.ruffatti.com</a> ) . . . . .	38

Fig. 2.3	<i>Flauto alla todisca</i> with stopped pipes; organ by anonymous master (attributed to Raffale La Valle, 1579), La concattedrale di San Giovanni Battista in La Valletta, Malta (photo credit: Diego Cannizzaro) . . . . .	39
Fig. 2.4	Organ by Donato Del Piano, built between 1755 and 1767, Monastero dei Benedettini San Nicolò L' Arena in Catania (photo credit: <a href="http://www.comune.catania.it">www.comune.catania.it</a> ) . . . . .	42
Fig. 2.5	<i>Voce umana</i> pipes from 1770 organ by Baldassare Di Paola at the Church of St. Elena and St. Costantino in Corleone, Palermo. Organ was restored by Giuliano Colletti (photo credit: Giuliano Colletti) . . . . .	44
Fig. 3.1	Organ façade at the church in Joniškis, built by unknown master (hypothetically attributed to Nicolaus Jantzon), c. 1770–80 . . . . .	50
Fig. 3.2	Organ façade at the Church of St. Catherine in Vilnius, built by Joachim Friedrich Scheel and Ludwik Klimowicz in 1761 . . . . .	52
Fig. 3.3	Manuscript of the 1848 contract concluded by organ builder Fridrik Karol Sztramplir and the church in Skuodas (illustration taken from VUB RS, f. 196–50, l. 29) . . . . .	54
Fig. 3.4	Organ façade and keydesk during the restoration in 2020, the church of Žemalė, unknown master, 1839 . . . . .	56
Fig. 3.5	<i>Vox humana</i> pipes, the organ at the church of Žemalė, unknown master, 1839 . . . . .	57
Fig. 3.6	Description of the <i>Vox humana</i> pipes for Jantzon's organ at the Bernardine church in Vilnius, 1766, fragment from the chronicle of Vilnius Bernardine Monastery (illustration taken from <i>Chronologia erectionis</i> : 272) . . . . .	59
Fig. 3.7	Organ façade at the Bernardine church in Vilnius, Nicolaus Jantzon, 1766 . . . . .	60
Fig. 3.8	Organ façade at the church in Troškūnai, Nicolaus Jantzon, 1790 . . . . .	63
Fig. 3.9	Current organ façade (after the enlargement in the mid of 19th c.) and hypothetic reconstruction of authentic structure, the organ at the Church of Sts. Johns in Vilnius (relocated from Polotsk), attributed to Nicolaus Jantzon, 1765–66 . . . . .	65
Fig. 3.10	Current organ façade and two hypothetic illustrations of rebuilt and original structure, the organ at the Vilnius Cathedral (relocated from Augustinian church in Vilnius), attributed to Nicolaus Jantzon, 1780–85 . . . . .	67
Fig. 3.11	Organ façade before and after restoration, and fragment of <i>Zink/Trompete</i> pipes, organ at the Franciscan church in Kretinga, unknown master, end of the seventeenth century . . .	69



Fig. 3.12	Fragments of discovered <i>Vox humana</i> parts, organ at the church in Budslau, Belarus, Nicolaus Jantzón, 1781/83 (photo credit: Alexander Burdelev) . . . . .	72
Fig. 3.13	Organ façade, the church in Budslau, Belarus, Nicolaus Jantzón, 1781/83 . . . . .	73
Fig. 3.14	Authentic record inside windchest, organ at the church in Budslau, Belarus, Nicolaus Jantzón, 1781/83 . . . . .	74
Fig. 3.15	Organ façade and <i>Vox humana</i> pipes, organ at the church in Tytuvėnai, attributed to Nicolaus Jantzón, 1789 . . . . .	76
Fig. 3.16	Organ façade, the church in Kurtuvėnai, Mateusz Raczkowski, 1792–93 . . . . .	77
Fig. 3.17	Fragments of discovered <i>Vox humana</i> pipes, organ at the church in Kurtuvėnai, Mateusz Raczkowski, 1792–93 . . . . .	80
Fig. 3.18	Organ façade, the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, Adam Gottlob Casparini, 1775–76 . . . . .	83
Fig. 3.19	<i>Vox humana</i> pipes (2006 reconstruction, currently being replaced with the new reconstruction by Girėnas Povilionis finished in 2023), organ at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, Adam Gottlob Casparini, 1775–76 . . . . .	84
Fig. 4.1	Eugenio Casparini’s handwritten statement, 1672 (copy of the document provided by the courtesy of the organ builder Francesco Zanin) . . . . .	100
Fig. 4.2	Organ façades at the Church of St. Peter and Paul in Görlitz, 1703 (the first illustration published in Boxberg 1704; current photo credit: Wikipedia encyclopedia, Frank Vincentz, 2010), and the Basilica of St. Erasmus and St. Pancras in Hirschberg/Jelenia Góra, 1706 (photo credit: Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository, fotopolska.eu, 2005) . . . . .	102
Fig. 4.3	Organ façade at the Königsberg castle church (Burgkirche), Georg Sigismund Caspari, 1724–26 (photo credit: Renkewitz et al. 2008: 255) . . . . .	107
Fig. 4.4	Organ façade, the church in Adakavas, attributed to Adam Gottlob Casparini, mid-18th century . . . . .	110
Fig. 4.5	Painted shield behind the positive, the church in Adakavas, attributed to Adam Gottlob Casparini, mid-18th century . . . . .	111
Fig. 4.6	Organ fragments, the church in Adakavas, attributed to Adam Gottlob Casparini, mid-18th century . . . . .	112
Fig. 4.7	Inscriptions on the organ façade, the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, Adam Gottlob Casparini, 1775–76 . . . . .	113
Fig. 4.8	Organ console before the restoration, the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, Adam Gottlob Casparini, 1775–76 . . . . .	114

Fig. 4.9	Fragments of organ decoration; the organ at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, Adam Gottlob Casparini, 1775–76	115
Fig. 4.10	Sculpture of King David, left: painted in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; right: original state after polychrome expertise; the organ at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, Adam Gottlob Casparini, 1775–76	116
Fig. 4.11	Angel sculpture and <i>Vox Campanorum</i> equipment; the organ at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, Adam Gottlob Casparini, 1775–76	116
Fig. 4.12	Fragments of bellows and windchest with pipes, the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, Adam Gottlob Casparini, 1775–76	117
Fig. 4.13	Fragments of console and mechanic action, the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, Adam Gottlob Casparini, 1775–76	118
Fig. 4.14	Examples of metal and wooden pipes, the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, Adam Gottlob Casparini, 1775–76	119
Fig. 4.15	Comparison of organ façades, from left to right: Adam Gottlob Casparini, Vilnius Church of the Holy Spirit, 1775–76 (original condition); hypothetically attributed to Nicolaus Jantzson, Vilnius Cathedral, 1780–85 (current state after major rebuilding); Nicolaus Jantzson, Vilnius Sts. Johns' Church, 1765–66 (current state after major rebuilding)	122
Fig. 4.16	Comparison of organ façades, from left to right: Nicolaus Jantzson, Budslav, Belarus, 1781/83 (original condition); hypothetically attributed to Nicolaus Jantzson, Vilnius Cathedral, 1780–85 (digitally restored original state); Nicolaus Jantzson, Vilnius Sts. Johns' Church, 1765–66 (digitally restored original state)	122
Fig. 5.1	Organ façade and the inscriptions on the pipe <i>Jula</i> , organ at the church of Pasiene, Latvia, unknown master from Vilnius, 1765	127
Fig. 5.2	Organ façade and the inscription in the windchest, organ at the church in Laši, Latvia, Friedrich Samuel Jantzson, 1798	128
Fig. 5.3	Organ façade and the inscription, organ at the church in Lēnas, Latvia, Tomas Francisk(us) Dreynowski, 1809	129
Fig. 5.4	A fragment from the Bernardine Monastery's archival record about a positive built by Józef Olszynski in 1737–39 at the Chapel of St. Bonaventure of Vilnius Bernardine church (illustration source: <i>Chronologia erectionis</i> : 224)	131

Fig. 5.5	Baroque-style organ at the church in Eigirdžiai, 1835–36 . . . . .	132
Fig. 5.6	Baroque-style organ with a Classical façade in Raguvėlė's church, circa 1796 . . . . .	133
Fig. 5.7	Classical organ by unknown master at the church in Alizava, 1856(?) . . . . .	133
Fig. 5.8	Classical organ by unknown master at the church in Antašava, 1862(?) . . . . .	133
Fig. 5.9	Organ façade in the Dominican church of St. Philip and St. Jacob, the Apostles, in Vilnius, Joachim Friedrich Scheel, 1763–65; two old drawings No. 18 and 21 of an organ façade for the Ratnyčia, Dunilovichi and Nesvizh churches, c. 1763 (illustrations taken from Old and Rare Books Department, Vilnius Academy of Arts Library, Inventory No. 3344) . . . . .	135
Fig. 5.10	The agreement of 16 August 1761 with masters Joachim Friedrich Scheel and Ludwik Jozef Klimowicz on building a small organ at Kurtuvėnai's church (illustration taken from Collections of Šiauliai Aušra Museum; UDK 908(474.5), l. 1) . . . . .	137
Fig. 5.11	Drawing of an organ façade, second half of the eighteenth century (illustration No. 11, Old and Rare Books Department, Vilnius Academy of Arts Library, Inventory No. 3344); organ façades in St. Catherine's Church in Vilnius, 1761, and St. Theresa's Church in Vilnius, 1763–65 (see only the central part of the façade), attributed to Joachim Friedrich Scheel and Ludwik Jozef Klimowicz . . . . .	138
Fig. 5.12	Organ façade at the Evangelical Lutheran church in Vilnius, Gerhardt Arendt Zelle, 1751–53 . . . . .	142
Fig. 5.13	Organ façade at the Church of St. George in Vilnius, façade dated c. 1770 . . . . .	144
Fig. 5.14	Organ at the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Vilnius, Michael Zelle, 1780. Photograph by Juozapas Čechavičius, c. 1870–80 (photo credit: collections of Vilnius University Library, F82-900, ID VUB01-000,384,160) . . . . .	145
Fig. 5.15	Organ façade at the church in Siesikai, relocated from Baruny, Belarus, Michael Zelle, 1782 . . . . .	146
Fig. 5.16	Inscriptions on the pipes, the organ at the church in Kartena, Paulus Gerardus Zelle, 1774 . . . . .	147
Fig. 5.17	Organ façade at the church in Kartena, Paulus Gerardus Zelle, 1774 . . . . .	148
Fig. 5.18	Organs at the churches in Grabnik, 1763, and Stare Juchy, 1772, Johann Christoph Ungefug . . . . .	150
Fig. 5.19	Organ at the church in Dotnuva, 1827, Modest Michniewicz . . .	155
Fig. 5.20	Organ at the church in Joniškėlis, 1802, Mateusz Raczkowski . . . . .	157

Fig. 5.21 Impact map of organ masters from Eugenio Casparini to the representatives of the Vilnius late-Baroque organ building school ..... 160

Fig. 6.1 Two designs for *Vox humana* pipes provided by Schlimbach (Schlimbach 1843: Appendix, Table V, Figs. 7 and 8) ..... 165

Fig. 6.2 The models of the reed pipes illustrated in Praetorius’s *Theatrum Instrumentorum* (illustrations selected from Praetorius 1619: Pl. XXXVIII). In the upper row: (1) *Trommet* (listed in Praetorius’s plate as No. 8), (2) *Krumbhorn* (No. 9), (3) *Schalmey* (No. 10), (4) *Zinck* (No. 12), (5) *Messing Regahl* (No. 14), (6) *Gedempfft Reghal* (No. 15), and (7–9) *Krumbhorn* (Nos. 16–18); in the lower row: (10) *Sorduen* (No. 11), (11) *Rancket* (No. 13), and (12–16) *Baer Pfeiffen allerley Art* (Nos. 19–23) ..... 167

Fig. 6.3 Drawings of early reed pipes provided by Audsley, though without reference to the original source: “No. 1 is the Sordun, having a capped resonator pierced with several holes for the emission of sound. No. 2 is the Knopfregal, having its pear-shaped head cut after the fashion of a sleigh-bell. No. 3 is the Apfelregal, the spherical head of which is pierced with numerous small holes for the emission of sound. No. 4 is the Krummhorn, the tone of which is said to have resembled that of the old instrument of the same name. No. 5 is the Schalmey the tone of which imitated that of the obsolete instrument called Schalmei or Shawm. No. 6 is the Bärpfeife, which yielded a subdued growling tone. No. 7 is the Messingregal, the tone of which had a brazen clang. No. 8 is the Ranket or Grossranket, the resonator of which is cylindrical, stopped, and pierced close to the reed with sound-holes. No. 9 is the Jeu Erard, the resonator of which is pierced with a sound-hole where the inverted conical part joins the hemispherical top. [...] With these brief remarks we may take leave of the old and obsolete reed pipes, which are interesting chiefly from a historical point of view, [...]” (Audsley 1905: 589–90; the illustration was reprinted in Audsley 1921: 224) ..... 168

Fig. 6.4 General elements of reed pipe construction (for the background of the scheme we put a cross section illustration from the 1888 Locher’s organ stop glossary; Locher 1888: 53) ..... 169

- Fig. 6.5 On the left: two geometric shapes of cylinder and truncated cone as the basis for the construction of *Vox humana* resonator; and some versions of their combination on the right: cylinder attached to the inverted cone, triple combination of two cylinders and inverted cone in the middle, wide double conic figure like a spinning top, and narrow double cone like a spindle ..... 170
- Fig. 6.6 Four drawings of cone-cylinder shaped construction (illustrations from the left: Bédos de Celles 1766: Pl. XVIII, Fig. 141; Schlimbach 1843: Table V, Fig. 8; Audsley 1905: 610, Fig. CCCLVI; and Praetorius 1619: Pl. XXXVIII, Fig. 12); pipes of *Zink* stop by unknown master, end of the 17th c., the Franciscan church in Kretinga, Lithuania ..... 173
- Fig. 6.7 A drawing of *Vox humana* pipe in Norman and Beard's organ in Norwich Cathedral, built in 1899 (illustration published in Miller 1913: 92, Fig. 20) ..... 174
- Fig. 6.8 Drawings of cone-cylinder shaped pipe with a hole on the side of body (illustrations from the left: Wedgwood 1905: 178; Audsley 1905: 589; Schneider 1970: Abb. 20); *Vox humana* pipes in the instrument by Robert Morton Organ Co., built in 1928 for Ohio Theatre (photo credit: Anthony Fabro, pipeorgandatabase.org) ..... 175
- Fig. 6.9 Resonator with cylindrical-conic section on a cylindrical foot, with pierced top: newly manufactured *Vox humana* pipes for the new organ by GOArt, 2000, the New Church in Örgryte, Sweden; reconstructed *Zinke* pipes from Arp Schnitger's organ in Hamburg Hauptkirche St. Jacobi (photo credit: GOArt) ..... 176
- Fig. 6.10 Resonator with cylindrical-conic section on a cylindrical foot, with pierced top: 1866 addition by Zwier van Dijk to the organ of Albertus Antonius Hinsz, 1741–43, St. Nicholas Church in Kampen, The Netherlands (photo credit: Willem van Twillert, [www.willemvantwillert.nl](http://www.willemvantwillert.nl)); Pehr Schiörlin, 1806 Gammalkils Kyrka in Linköping, Sweden (photo credit: Krzysztof Urbaniak) ..... 177

- Fig. 6.11 Examples of spindle-shaped *Vox humana* pipes: Arp Schnitger, 1699, the church in Uithuizen, the Netherlands (photo credit: Sietze de Vries, [www.sietzedevries.nl/organs-groningen/](http://www.sietzedevries.nl/organs-groningen/)); Andreas Hildebrandt, 1719, St. Bartholomew Church in Paslęk, Poland (photo credit: Krzysztof Urbaniak); Johann Hinrich Klappmeyer, 1727–30, St. Nikolai Church in Altenbruch, Germany (photo credit: Sonus Paradisi Project, [www.sonusparadisi.cz/](http://www.sonusparadisi.cz/)); Albertus Anthonius Hinsz, 1731, the church in Zandweer, the Netherlands (photo credit: Sietze de Vries, [www.sietzedevries.nl/organs-groningen/](http://www.sietzedevries.nl/organs-groningen/)) . . . . . 179
- Fig. 6.12 Examples of spindle-shaped *Vox humana* pipes in Lithuanian organs: Adam Gottlob Casparini, 1775–76, Vilnius Church of the Holy Spirit (reconstruction); attributed to Nicolaus Jantzon, 1789, Tytuvėnai; Mateusz Raczkowski, 1791–93, Kurtuvėnai; unknown master, 1839, Žemalė church . . . . . 181
- Fig. 6.13 Wide double-conic pipe drawings of a *Bärpfeife* (Wedgwood 1905: 6) and a *Krumbhorn* (Praetorius 1619: Pl. XXXVIII, Fig. 17); wide double-conic *Vox humana* pipes by the cylindrical-conic pipes of *Dolceaan* stop in the organ by Christian Müller, 1738, Grote Kerk (St. Bavokerk) in Haarlem, The Netherlands (photo credit: Henrik West, 2014, flickr); *Vox humana* pipes by Johannes Radeker and Rudolph Garrels, 1717–19, St. Magnus Church (Magnuskerk) in Anloo, the Netherlands (photo credit: [prospectum.com](http://prospectum.com/)); *Vox humana* pipes by Albertus Antonius Hinsz, 1733–34, Petruschurch in Leens, The Netherlands (photo credit: Sietze de Vries, [www.sietzedevries.nl/organs-groningen/](http://www.sietzedevries.nl/organs-groningen/)) . . . . . 182
- Fig. 6.14 Pipe examples of double-cone and cylinder combination: drawings of double and quadruple-conic *Basson* (Bédos de Celles 1766: Pl. CXXIX, Figs. 4 and 5), the *Doppelkegel-regal* and the *Kopf-Regal* (Schneider 1970: Abb. 1 and 14); *Vox humana* pipes in the organ by masters Kam and Muelen, 1842, Church of St. Bonifatius in Dordrecht, the Netherlands (photo credit: Henk van Eeken Orgelmaker, [www.henkvaneeeken.com](http://www.henkvaneeeken.com/)); *Vox humana* pipes in the organ by Heinrich Andreas Contius, 1779, Holy Trinity Cathedral in Liepāja, Latvia (photo credit: Uldis Muzikants, 2016) . . . . . 183

Fig. 6.15	Early drawings of triple-conic construction, from the left: <i>Krumbhorn</i> and <i>Baer Pfeiffe</i> by Praetorius (Praetorius 1619: Pl. XXXVIII, Figs. 18 and 19), and <i>Krummhorn</i> and <i>Bärpfeife</i> by Audsley (Audsley 1905: 589); <i>Vox humana</i> pipes (bottom of the photo) by Johann Heinrich Hartmann Bätz, 1762, rebuilt by Jonathan Bätz in 1837, Evangelical church in The Hague, the Netherlands (photo credit: Wim Verburg, <a href="http://www.orgelsite.nl">www.orgelsite.nl</a> ); <i>Barpfeife</i> pipes by Rudolf von Beckerath, 1957, Trinity Evangelical Lutheran church in Cleveland, USA (photo credit: Ryan Mueller, 2013, <a href="http://pipeorgandatabase.org">pipeorgandatabase.org</a> )	185
Fig. 7.1	Organ façade and <i>Principal</i> pipes, the San Giorgio Church in Venice, Eugenio Casparini's repair in 1660	190
Fig. 7.2	Analyzed surface of metal, taken from façade <i>Principal</i> pipe, the organ at the San Giorgio Church in Venice, Eugenio Casparini's repair in 1660 (the photo provided by organ restorer Francesco Zanin)	193
Fig. 7.3	Analyzed samples of the organ at the Church of the Holy Spirit, Vilnius, 1775–76, Adam Gottlob Casparini	206
Fig. 7.4	Analyzed samples of the organ at the Church in Budslau, Belarus, 1781/83, Nicolaus Jantzón	207
Fig. 7.5	Analyzed samples of the organ at the Church in Naujasis Daugėliškis, between 1780 and 1785, attributed to Nicolaus Jantzón	208
Fig. 7.6	Analyzed samples of the organ at the Church in Tytuvėnai, 1789, Nicolaus Jantzón	208
Fig. 7.7	Analyzed samples of the organ at the Church in Kurtuvėnai, 1792–93, Mateusz Raczkowski	209
Fig. 7.8	Analyzed samples of the organ at the Church in Žemalė, 1839, unknown master	209
Fig. 7.9	Analyzed samples of the organ at the Church in Pinsk, Belarus, the 1st part of the 19th c., unknown master	210
Fig. 7.10	Analyzed samples of the organ at the Lutheran Church in Žemaičių Naumiestis, the middle of the 19th c., unknown master	211
Fig. 7.11	Authentic boots and blocks of <i>Posaune</i> (square) and <i>Trompete</i> (cylinder) in the organ by Adam Gottlob Casparini, the Church of the Holy Spirit, Vilnius, 1775–76	213
Fig. 7.12	Authentic block of <i>Vox humana</i> in the organ by Nicolaus Jantzón, Budslau Church, Belarus, 1781/83	214
Fig. 7.13	Authentic blocks of <i>Trompete</i> in the organ by Nicolaus Jantzón, Naujasis Daugėliškis, between 1780 and 1785	214
Fig. 7.14	Comparison of the blocks in Naujasis Daugėliškis (left) and Budslau (right) organs	215

Fig. 7.15	Authentic boot and block of <i>Vox humana</i> in the organ by Mateusz Raczkowski, Kurtuvėnai Church, 1792–93 . . . . .	216
Fig. 7.16	Authentic block of <i>Trompette</i> (?), unknown master, Pinsk Church, Belarus, the 1st part of the 19th century . . . . .	216
Fig. 7.17	Replicas of Lithuanian Baroque blocks, from the left: (1) <i>Posaune</i> and (2) <i>Trompette</i> by Casparini, and <i>Vox humana</i> in (3) Kurtuvėnai and (4) Žemalė . . . . .	217
Fig. 7.18	Replica of <i>Vox humana</i> , the organ in Žemalė Church, unknown master, 1839 . . . . .	218
Fig. 7.19	Experimental <i>Trompette</i> examples representing the German (straight front) and French (round front) types of Baroque shallots, manufactured by VŠĮ Vargonų paveldo centras (Lithuanian Organ Heritage Centre) under the guidance of Girėnas Povilionis . . . . .	219
Fig. 7.20	Experimental wooden shallots and tongue, manufactured by VŠĮ Vargonų paveldo centras (Lithuanian Organ Heritage Centre) under the guidance of Girėnas Povilionis . . . . .	220
Fig. A.1	Façade “twins”, organ builder Nicolaus Jantzon. On the left: the organ in Budslau Basicila (1781/83); on the right: the digitally reconstructed original façade in Vilnius Cathedral (between 1780 and 1785) . . . . .	223
Fig. A.2	Handwritten records in the windchest of the organ, the church in Naujasis Daugėliškis . . . . .	224



# List of Tables

Table 2.1	Stoplist of the organ of Valvasone Cathedral (A 492.5 Hz at 22, master Vincenzo Colombi, 1533) . . . . .	25
Table 2.2	Original measures of 10 authentic <i>Fiffaro</i> pipes in comparison to original pipes of <i>Principale</i> , measures in mm. Organ by Graziadio Antegnati, 1565, Basilica palatina di Santa Barbara in Mantua. Restoration by Giorgio Carli, 1997 (source of data “Specimen Measurements ...” 2006–2011) . . . . .	35
Table 2.3	Measurements of <i>Voce umana</i> and <i>Principale</i> 8’ pipes of the organs by Donato Del Piano (data provided by the courtesy of the organ builder Francesco Oliveri) . . . . .	43
Table 2.4	Measures of <i>Voce umana</i> and <i>Principale</i> 8’ pipes of the organs at the Church of St. Elena and St. Costantino in Corleone, Palermo (data provided by the courtesy of the organ builder Giuliano Colletti) . . . . .	43
Table 3.1	Reconstructed stoplist, organ at the church in Joniškis, built by unknown master (hypothetically attributed to Nicolaus Jantzon), c. 1770–80 . . . . .	50
Table 3.2	Stoplist from the organ building contract (published in Zgliński 2003), organ at the Church of St. Catherine in Vilnius, built by Joachim Friedrich Scheel and Ludwik Klimowicz in 1761 . . . . .	53
Table 3.3	Stoplist from the 1848 contract, organ at the church in Skuodas, organ builder Fridrik Karol Sztramplė . . . . .	55
Table 3.4	Stoplist, organ at the church in Žemalė, unknown master, 1839 . . . . .	55
Table 3.5	Stoplist of the organ by Nicolaus Jantzon, built in 1776 at the Bernardine church in Vilnius; including notes according to Galicz 1861 . . . . .	61

Table 3.6	Reconstructed stoplist of the organ by Nicolaus Jantzon, built in 1790 at the church in Troškūnai (instrument parts currently in Šimonys). Stops whose original names were found on the pipes are marked by an asterisk *. Stops in brackets—their existence cannot be confirmed by sufficient factual data, but is presumed referring to analogues, etc. . . . . .	63
Table 3.7	Stoplist of the organ attributed to Nicolaus Jantzon, built in 1765–66 for Polotsk, relocated and enlarged in mid 19th c. at the Church of Sts. Johns in Vilnius (stoplist published in Galicz 1861: 119) . . . . .	66
Table 3.8	Organ stoplist at the Cathedral in Vilnius in 1857 (relocated from Augustinian church in Vilnius), attributed to Nicolaus Jantzon, 1780–85 (stoplist published in Galicz 1861: 130) . . . . .	66
Table 3.9	Organ stoplist at the Franciscan church in Kretinga, unknown master, end of the seventeenth century/c. 1680. Left: the stoplist based on the nineteenth-century inscriptions on the keydesk, copied in 2001; right: the stoplist after rebuilding in 2004 . . . . .	70
Table 3.10	Stoplist of the organ by Nicolaus Jantzon, built in 1781/83 at the church in Budslau, Belarus. The names of stops are indicated on the inscriptions on the console, which were supposedly made in the nineteenth century. The names in italic were found inscribed on C pipes of the Great octave . . . . .	71
Table 3.11	Stoplist of the organ by Nicolaus Jantzon, built in 1789 at the church in Tytuvėnai. The names of stops in italic were found inscribed on C pipes of the Great octave . . . . .	75
Table 3.12	Summary of discovered authentic pipes of the Kurtuvėnai church organ, Mateusz Raczkowski, 1792–93 . . . . .	78
Table 3.13	Reconstructed stoplist of the Kurtuvėnai church organ, Mateusz Raczkowski, 1792–93. Presumptive stop name according to analogs indicated with single asterisk *. Records of stop names that were detected on the pipes indicated with double asterisk ** . . . . .	80
Table 3.14	Authentic stoplist, organ at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, Adam Gottlob Casparini, 1775–76 . . . . .	84
Table 4.1	The Casparini organ builders' family tree (the highlighted masters presented in this monograph) . . . . .	91
Table 4.2	Specific registers in Casparini organs (based on Kruijt 2006–2017) . . . . .	92
Table 4.3	List of the organs by Eugenio Casparini (with the reference to Kruijt 2006–2017) . . . . .	98

Table 4.4	List of organs by Adam Horatio Casparini (with the reference to Kruijt 2006–2017) . . . . .	104
Table 4.5	List of organs by Georg Sigismund Caspari (with the reference to Renkewitz et al. 2008: 242–91) . . . . .	108
Table 4.6	Organ stoplist, the church in Adakavas, attributed to Adam Gottlob Casparini, mid-18th century . . . . .	112
Table 4.7	2017 register of missing metal and wooden pipes, organ the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, Adam Gottlob Casparini, 1775–76 . . . . .	120
Table 5.1	Stoplist of the organ in Pasiene church, Latvia, unknown master from Vilnius, 1765 . . . . .	126
Table 5.2	Stoplist of the organ by Jozef Olszynski, 1737–39, Chapel of St. Bonaventure of the Bernardine church in Vilnius . . . . .	130
Table 5.3	Stoplist of the organ by M. Gawrylłowicz (Paurylłowicz?), 1835–36, the church in Eigirdžiai . . . . .	132
Table 5.4	The stoplist of the organ at Kurtuvėnai’s church, 1761–62, as provided in the agreement . . . . .	136
Table 5.5	Summary of the organs historically confirmed or attributed to Joachim Friedrich Scheel, Ludwik Jozef Klimowicz, and Johann Friedrich Scheel . . . . .	139
Table 5.6	Original stoplist of the organ at the Kartena church, Paulus Gerardus Zelle, 1774. The stops with asterisk * preserved majority of original pipes . . . . .	148
Table 5.7	Summary of the organs historically confirmed or attributed to Gerhardt Arendt Zelle, his sons Paulus Gerardus and Michael, and Zelle’s apprentice Johann Christoph Ungefug . . . . .	151
Table 5.8	Stoplist of the organ at the Dotnuva church, Modest Michniewicz, 1827 . . . . .	155
Table 5.9	List of the organs historically confirmed or attributed to Nicolaus Jantzon, his son Friedrich Samuel, and followers Mateusz Raczkowski and Modest Michniewicz . . . . .	158
Table 6.1	Classification of representative <i>Vox humana</i> pipe shapes . . . . .	171
Table 7.1	Measurements of façade pipes in mm (No. = position from left to right; the data provided by organ restorer Francesco Zanin) . . . . .	191
Table 7.2	Chemical composition data, façade <i>Principal</i> pipe, the organ at the San Giorgio Church in Venice, Eugenio Casparini’s repair in 1660 (the data provided by organ restorer Francesco Zanin) . . . . .	192
Table 7.3	Metal composition of <i>Principal</i> pipes in the façade, the organ at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, Adam Gottlob Casparini, 1775–76 . . . . .	194

Table 7.4	Metal composition of <i>Principal</i> pipes in the façade, the organ at Budslau Church, Belarus, Nicolaus Jantzon, 1781/83 . . . . .	195
Table 7.5	Metal composition of other flue pipes, the organ at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, Adam Gottlob Casparini, 1775–76 . . . . .	196
Table 7.6	Metal composition of newly manufactured <i>Vox humana</i> resonator, the organ at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, Adam Gottlob Casparini, 1775–76 . . . . .	197
Table 7.7	Metal composition of authentic <i>Trompete</i> resonator, the organ at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, Adam Gottlob Casparini, 1775–76 . . . . .	197
Table 7.8	Composition of lead–tin in Lithuanian Baroque organs . . . . .	199
Table 7.9	Composition of copper–zinc tongues, shallots and tuning wires in Lithuanian Baroque organs . . . . .	203
Table 7.10	Composition of copper–zinc tongues, shallots and tuning wires in the Lutheran Church, Žemaičių Naumiestis, the middle of the 19th century . . . . .	204
Table 7.11	The layer of lead in the upper part of Baroque shallots in Lithuanian organs . . . . .	220
Table A.1	Stoplist of the organ by Eugenio Casparini in Padua, Basilica di Santa Giustina, 1681 . . . . .	227
Table A.2	Stoplist of the organ improved by Eugenio Casparini in Trento, Santa Maria Maggiore, 1687 . . . . .	228
Table A.3	Stoplist of the organ by Eugenio Casparini in Brixen Cathedral, 1690 (from Kruijt 2006–2017) . . . . .	229
Table A.4	Versions of stoplist, organ by Eugenio Casparini in Maia Bassa, San Vigilio, 1694 . . . . .	229
Table A.5	Stoplist of the organ by Eugenio Casparini in Görlitz, St. Peter and St. Paul church, 1703 (from Boxberg 1704) . . . . .	231
Table A.6	Stoplist of the organ by Eugenio and Adam Horatio Casparini in Hirschberg (Jelenia Góra), Basilica of St. Erasmus and St. Pancras, 1706 (from Meyer 1757: 49–50) . . . . .	232
Table A.7	Stoplist of the organ by Adam Horatio Casparini in Breslau (Wrocław), St. Bernardine church, 1709 (from Meyer 1757: 16–17) . . . . .	232
Table A.8	Stoplist of the organ by Adam Horatio Casparini in Ohlau (Oława), St. Lawrence church (or Pfarrkirche as indicated by Meyer), 1712 (from Meyer 1757: 73) . . . . .	233
Table A.9	Stoplist of the organ by Adam Horatio Casparini in Breslau (Wrocław), St. Christopher church, 1715 (from Meyer 1757: 19) . . . . .	233
Table A.10	Stoplist of the organ by Adam Horatio Casparini in Wohlau (Wołów), St. Lawrence church (Pfarrkirche), 1716 (from Meyer 1757: 101) . . . . .	234