

Safeguarding Historical Instruments at “Luca Marenzio” Conservatory of Brescia: The Garimberti Quartet and the Antegnati Organ Tradition

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RESEARCH UNIT

Conservatorio di Brescia “Luca Marenzio”

Project Overview

This initiative focuses on a **selected group of historically significant musical instruments owned**, used, or otherwise accessible to the Conservatory—an exemplary nucleus representative of the heritage traditionally preserved within Italian Conservatories.

On this first cataloguing foundation, two complementary lines of activity develop:

- The use of the Garimberti Quartet by Conservatory students in concert performances, with video documentation contributing to IartNET’s contemporary production outputs and, potentially, to research dissemination;
- The development of a research strand centred on the Antegnati organ tradition, which likewise includes video-documented performative activities.

The Garimberti Quartet

The primary focus is the **cataloguing of the “Garimberti Quartet”**, comprising two violins, a viola, and a cello built in 1926 by the luthier Ferdinando Garimberti and made available to the Conservatory by the Berlucchi family. The documentation also includes several nineteenth- and twentieth-century pianos.

The Antegnati Organs

The **Brescian Antegnati family of organ builders** was active for more than two centuries, from the Renaissance to the early eighteenth century. A number of their instruments survive—often partially preserved in their original components—and most are located in the Brescia area.

For repertory and documentation purposes, the work began with the organ currently in use at the Conservatory’s branch in Darfo, subject to actual accessibility given that restoration of the building is about to start. The former church of Santa Maria della Consolazione (now the Municipal Auditorium) houses a small organ (45-key keyboard, 10-pedal pedalboard, seven stops on the manual and one on the pedal) installed in the late eighteenth century and originating from another, still unidentified, church. Both the building and the instrument are owned by the Municipality of Darfo Boario Terme.

The organ was restored in 1988 by the Pedrini firm (Binanuova, Cremona), following severe deterioration resulting from years of neglect. The restoration report prepared by the Superintendency identified “Antegnati pipework,” indicating that a substantial portion of the pipes belonged to the celebrated sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Brescian organ-building dynasty.

Although the restoration was intended to support teaching activities, the instrument was seldom used. In 2022, a minor maintenance intervention by organ builder Pietro Corna provided the opportunity for a detailed inspection by Maurizio Isabella, one of Italy’s leading specialists. The examination clarified both the organ’s provenance and the extent of the surviving historical material: approximately 60% of the pipework, the main windchest, and part of the mechanical system appear to derive from an Antegnati organ built in the late sixteenth century. Transferred from another church, the instrument was adapted to a new wooden case and supplemented with eighteenth-century pipes during relocation. The 2022 investigation also identified multiple layers of markings and further evidence of the eighteenth-century reconstruction.

This discovery—first hypothesised in 1988 and more clearly defined in 2022—is highly significant, as the organ stands among the very few surviving Antegnati

instruments, comparable to those in San Giuseppe and San Carlo in Brescia, Almenno San Salvatore (Bergamo), Peglio (Como), and San Vincenzo in Cremona.

The project aims to broaden the scope of cataloguing and research to include the wider Antegnati organ heritage throughout the Brescia area.

Actions

- **Catalogue the selected instruments** in accordance with the ministerial standards established by the Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione (ICCD) for musical instruments. The catalogue entries will include sound documentation (sampling), photographic records, and video-recorded performances associated with each instrument.
- **Document and analyse the Darfo organ** through detailed study of its materials, structures, and historical components, incorporating the results of recent inspections and historic restoration documentation.
- Plan conservation work to be carried out once the architectural restoration of the Darfo church is completed. Future interventions follow these **criteria**:
 - revision of the main windchest, addressing mechanical imperfections and improving tuning and temperament;
 - reassessment of the tuning extensions and voicing adjustments introduced during the 1988 restoration.
- **Conduct dimensional, photographic, and material surveys on the instrument once accessible.** The opening of the organ—required for revision and conservation—allows for comprehensive measurement and recording of:
 - internal and external dimensions of the windchest, with plans, sectional drawings, and axonometric views;
 - the full pipework (mouth dimensions, height, diameter, foot, etc.), with documentation of engraved markings and makers’ symbols;
 - wooden and metal components, including casework and the instrument’s architectural housing.
- **Extend the cataloguing perspective to the broader Antegnati organ heritage** in the Brescia region, integrating archival sources, technical analyses, and territorial research.