

Saving cultural heritage from the wear and tear of Mother Nature

Voice-over 1:

Jaroslav Kagamiec has been playing organs since he was ten years old. Today he's playing his favourite one in the Minor Basilica of St. Andrew, around sixty kilometres east of Krakow in Poland.

It's also one of the oldest of its kind in the country, having been in use since 1611. The signs of ageing are starting to show.

Here, Jaroslav's playing a Renaissance-period piece written especially for the instrument.

Voice-over 2:

This organ is a witness to history. Through it we know, with a good degree of precision, what kind of sound was made during the Renaissance and Baroque periods. We don't have much written documentation of that particular time. But a trained organist can figure out what the music was like back then just by following a musical score, playing it on the keyboard, and taking full advantage of the sounds provided by the pipes. Preserving instruments like this is very important for our national cultural heritage.

Voice-over 1:

This, like Poland's 4,000 or so other historical organs, is at risk. Its complex internal structure, a labyrinth of wood, iron, lead and tin, is very sensible to any changes in its climatic surroundings.

That's why physicist Lukasz Bratasz makes monthly trips into its belly. Special sensors and sophisticated computer software allow him to monitor micro-acoustic emissions from cracks in the wooden structure. Cracking is a problem for an organ: too much fractured wood and its bellows will mellow, and its wind will stop whistling.

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