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- Submitted photo This organ from Grace Lutheran Church in Mankato still has pieces from the original instrument installed in 1938. Submitted photo



- Submitted photo Cristiano Rizzotto performs at Grace Lutheran Church Thursday. Brazilian-born, Rizzotto sought out the church wanting to play on it's 76-year-old Hendrickson organ. Submitted photo





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Rizzotto sought out Grace Lutheran for its storied instrument

By Robb Murray rmurray@mankatofreepress.com [The Land](#)

How did Grace Lutheran Church in Mankato manage to find Cristiano Rizzotto, the up-and-coming Brazilian organist for a gig at the church next week?

They didn't.

“He found us,” says Robyn Menk, the church's Worship and Music coordinator.

Inside the sanctuary, it seems, there is one gem of an organ. Built by the legendary Hendrickson family of St. Peter, the organ has treated congregations to powerful pipe blasts for decades, and its quality has a reputation all its own.

Hence the call from Rizzotto.

“I received an email from him in the fall and he was randomly searching and came across our Hendrickson organ,” Menk said. “He called us about wanting to play.”

Rizzotto holds a bachelor's degree in piano performance from the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, where he studied piano and graduated Magna cum Laude in 2010. During 2009, he was an exchange student in the United States, sponsored by the Brazilian government's Ministry of Education.

When he returned to Rio became the organist of the city's Benedictine Abbey, owner of the oldest organ in South America. In 2011 he received a master's degree in sacred music and organ from East Carolina University. He is currently pursuing a doctorate at the American Organ Institute at the University of Oklahoma and is the music director and organist at the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church in Duncan, OK.

With all that experience and an impressive resume, he could probably play any organ he wants.

That's why he called Grace Lutheran.

"When I first got his email, I kind of wondered, 'Who is this person and where is he from?'"

The organ's history is as impressive as the man coming to play it.

Grace Lutheran and its organ go way back. Way, way back. The initial organ was installed in 1937 at the site of the old church, a Victorian building. Upgrades were made a year later under the direction of E. J. Halling, who was a professor at what is now Minnesota State University. Halling negotiated the installation of a new organ, a nine-rank instrument containing 628 pipes.



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It stayed that way until 1966.

During the early part of that decade the church decided it needed a new building, and Halling made sure any new building would have room the organ. They brought in Charles Hendrickson, master organ maker of St. Peter, to consult on the move.

According to church records, “It was decided to use as much of the 1938 instrument as possible with some additions and revisions. The console, blower, 7 ranks of pipes, chimes, electrical wiring and a few chests were saved.”

The organ was installed in the building in 1967. Some fundraising allowed them to expand the organ’s capacity to contain 24 ranks and 1,386 pipes.

In the 1970s the church upgraded again. It purchased a keyboard from Lyceum Theatre to replace 1937 console. After that upgrade, it had 30 ranks and 1,677 pipes. Other upgrades occurred since, another new console, new Great division with horizontal trumpet, additions to the pedal division and some revoicing of the old. Eventually it would grow to 41 ranks and 2,411 pipes, playable from a new three-manual console.

Today the organ has a replacement value of about \$530,000 and still uses pieces from the 1938 organ.

“It really is a beautiful instrument,” Menk said.

And it’s not the kind of instrument that gets used occasionally. Grace Lutheran’s organ gets used weekly.

“The organ is a central part of our worship and it has been for years,” Menk said. “We have quite a rich history of music leadership.”

Grace employs what Menk referred to as a “convergence worship,” which incorporates all different music styles into the service.

“We choose the music based on what’s going to enhance the message of the scripture,” she said. “And the organ is used nearly every Sunday.”

If you go What: Performance by organist Cristiano Rizzotto of Brazil When: 7 p.m. Thursday Where: Grace Lutheran Church in Mankato Cost: Free

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