

Haarlem International Organ Festival 2012

From Sweelinck to Szathmáry's *Fukushima Requiem*

By Stephen Taylor

In the second half of July, leading figures from the international organ world gathered again in Haarlem, the Netherlands, for the 49th edition of the Haarlem International Organ Festival. It was here, in this wonderfully picturesque town very near Amsterdam, that the first Haarlem improvisation competition was held in 1951. Four years later, in 1955, the summer academy was launched, and the two events were held annually until 1986, and thereafter biennially.

Improvisation competition

The competition is unique in its focus on contemporary improvisation. In each round, after an hour's preparation with pencil and paper only, competitors offer a 10-minute concert improvisation. Eight participants from France,

Poland, the USA (Jason Roberts, Connecticut), and Holland were selected in the spring of 2012 by means of submitted recorded improvisations on short motifs by Louis Maillié (Lyon and Paris). In the first two rounds, all eight selected competitors showed their skills first on the monumental Müller organ in St. Bavo's and then on the Cavaillé-Coll instrument in the Philharmonie Concert Hall. The theme in Round 1 was a melody from the 16th-century *Antwerp Liedboek*. Round 2 was something of a surprise: instead of a musical idea, a semi-abstract, 90-second film served to inspire the competitors! The three finalists were presented with the following theme from the hand of the Viennese organist (and Haarlem veteran!) Peter Planyavsky.

The five-member jury (Lionel Rogg, Wolfgang Seifen, Naji Hakim, Joost Langeveld, and the Dutch composer Klaas de Vries) reflected different schools of thought. Winner of the 2012 competition was the Frenchman **Paul Goussot**, who competed in the grand finale against French colleague **Noël Hazebroucq** and the Polish organist **Edyta Müller** (at last, a female improviser!). The Dutch national daily *De Volkskrant* wrote:

Although the three finalists were a good match, Goussot achieved the most convincing balance between the virtues of 'organistic' freedom and the binding power of the theme. He employed lucid rhythms, well-sounding harmonies, and did not shy away from adventurous harmonic progressions. Just before the end, chords erupted from the pipes like flashes of fire, but then he suddenly slowed, finishing his improvisation in a whispering coda. This winner of the 49th improvisation competition is a man who combines musical instinct and craftsmanship with a sense of theatre.

Another leading national daily added: "With the Haarlem International Organ Improvisation Competition many great organ careers have been launched . . ."

The International Summer Academy

The Haarlem Summer Academy 2012 offered an 11-day program of



The 1738 Müller organ at St. Bavo's

masterclasses plus a two-day symposium. In daily two-hour sessions, *capita selecta* from more than four centuries of organ repertory were discussed in depth. Center stage in the academy is the Müller organ in St. Bavo's (where the gallery fortunately accommodates up to 30!) But other important historic and modern instruments in the town are also used, all within walking distance.

Teachers at the 2012 summer academy were Harald Vogel on Sweelinck, Margaret Phillips on early English music, Ton Koopman, Jean-Claude Zehnder, Jacques van Oortmerssen and James David Christie on J. S. Bach, Olivier Latry and Louis Robilliard on French and German Romantics, Martin Sander on Max Reger, Roman Summeder on contemporary 'keystones', Zsigmond Szathmáry (working with young composers), Jos van der Kooy and Peter Planyavsky on improvisation, and Leo van Doeselaar on repertory for organ and strings.

This year's academy was attended by 85 students from 27 countries and five continents. In addition to a group of young Russian players (regular guests for some years), a new group of Chinese students included young teachers from Beijing and Shanghai. Previously officially a postgraduate program, the academy now accepts undergraduate music students, reflecting the festival's policy to



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Louis Robilliard and Olivier Latry in a joint masterclass on German and French Romantics.



The three finalists of the improvisation competition: Edyta Müller, Noël Hazebroucq, and Paul Goussot.

attract the very best young players. Daily lectures and discussions allowed both students and the general public to meet and hear all the academy teachers.

Festival symposium

Midway between the two academy weeks, the festival symposium "From Sweelinck to Bach" took the entire academy to the famous organs at Oosthuizen and Edam and to Amsterdam (Oude and Nieuwe Kerk), where lectures and recitals were given by Harald Vogel, Margaret Phillips, Jean-Claude Zehnder, and Christoph Wolff, among others.

Young talents

For the second time, the Haarlem summer academy included a six-day course for young talents aged 13 to 18. After an international call, six players were selected on the basis of a written recommendation from their teachers and a submitted recording (a fast movement from a Bach trio sonata and a *Pièce de Fantaisie* by Vierne). In six two-hour sessions, the young players (from Holland, Germany, France, Croatia, Ireland, Portugal, and the USA) were coached by Olivier Latry and Margaret Phillips. These young organists made good use of the opportunity to attend all festival activities and to visit other masterclasses. No fewer than three of the young talents from the 2010 course returned to Haarlem to take part

in other masterclasses—the Haarlem disease is highly contagious!

Young composers

The Haarlem young composers' course took place again under the inspirational direction of the Hungarian-German Ligeti pupil Zsigmond Szathmáry. After an international call, three new organ pieces by young Dutch and German composers were selected for discussion during the six-session masterclass. Important considerations in the selection process were composition technique, originality, and whether a work was idiomatically suited to the organ. The new works were discussed with the composers (two of whom performed their own works) and presented to the public during a festival recital in St. Bavo's.

For the second time, the Leipzig Summer Academy will include this concert and a preparatory course under Szathmáry in its 2013 program. Thus young composers are assured of repeat performances of their new works at prominent international venues.

New music

The festival concert programs featured many premieres: Zsigmond Szathmáry's *Fukushima Requiem* was broadcast live on Dutch national radio; Dutch premieres included *EOOS* for



Organ in ensemble: an opportunity for organists to work with Baroque strings and Leo van Doeselaar

organ and panpipes by Klaas de Vries, Radulescu's *Madrigali*, Kagel's *Phantasie für Orgel mit Obbligati* for organ and tape, *Der Dom und das Meer* for organ and tape by Mesías Maiguashca, and Szathmáry's *Leichte Brise*—grosser *Orkan*. In a spectacular closing recital, Olivier Latry and Shin-Young Lee performed Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

50th anniversary

The 50th edition of the Haarlem International Organ Festival will take place July 11–26, 2014. Newcomers to the festival—and Haarlem veterans—will be warmly welcomed!

Note

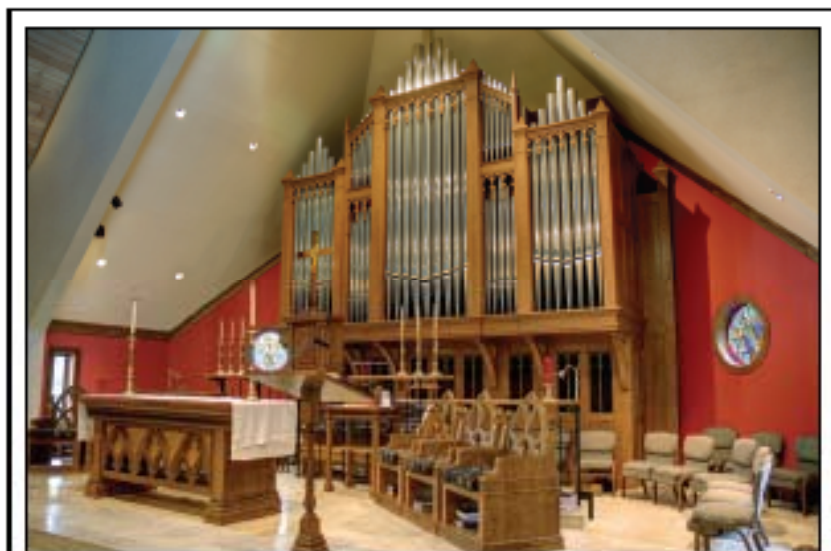
Many of the items referred to in this article, including competition themes (and film), academy repertoire, and audio and video re-

cordings of recitals and concerts (including *Fukushima Requiem* and *The Rite of Spring*), are available through www.organfestival.nl, where news of the 2014 festival will appear in the coming months.

Stephen Taylor was a chorister at Bristol Cathedral and organ scholar of Jesus College, Oxford. In the Netherlands he studied with Ewald Kooiman, Nico van den Hooven, and Jan Welmers, and was awarded the Prix d'Excellence in 1977. He was organist of the Nicolaïkerk in Utrecht for more than twenty years and is active as a soloist and continuo player and as an author and translator. Taylor joined the Haarlem Festival organization in 2007. His translation of Ton de Leeuw's *Music of the Twentieth Century* was published by Amsterdam University Press. In 2006 he was awarded the St. Martin Medal of the city of Utrecht for his contribution to its cultural life. His three-volume tutor on practical harmonization, *The Lost Chord*, has recently been published for the first time in English.



Olivier Latry and Shin-Young Lee prepare their performance of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* for the final festival recital.



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LÉTOURNEAU PIPE ORGANS

UNITED STATES
1220 L Street NW
Suite 100, Box 200
Washington, DC
20001
Tel: 202-623-PIPE
Fax: 202-737-1818
info@letourneauorgans.com



CANADA
16133 Avenue Simard
St-Hyacinthe, Québec
J2T 3N1
Tel: 418-774-2028
Fax: 418-774-3008
info@letourneauorgans.com
www.letourneauorgans.com