

Der Aa-Kerk Organ Finally Restored

Robert August

Peter Westerbrink's recital on October 14, 2011, marked the beginning of the "Schnitger's Dream" festival, celebrating Orgelmakers Reil's restoration of the Der Aa-Kerk (Groningen, Netherlands) organ. The festival included concerts, exhibits, theater productions, and a symposium. Dr. Jan Luth presented his monograph "Wereldberoemde Klanken: Het Schnitgerorgel in de Der Aa-kerk te Groningen en zijn voorgangers" (World Famous Sounds: The Schnitger Organ in the Groningen Der Aa-Church and Its Predecessors), while titular organist Peter Westerbrink presented "Return of the Queen," the first CD recording¹ of the newly restored instrument.

The Der Aa-Kerk's organ was built first for the Academiekerk (Academy Church) in 1702. In 1699 Arp Schnitger was commissioned to build a two-manual instrument with independent pedal. The organ was built two years later, with an added third manual. Schnitger's instrument comprised three manuals: Hoofdwerk, Rugpositief, Borstwerk, and Pedaal. Approximately 10 of its 33 stops came from the Academy Church's previous organ, built by Hendrick Harmens van Loon and Andries de Mare in 1674/78. In 1754 the instrument was cleaned and repaired by A. A. Hinsz, who also added a Rugpositief-Hoofdwerk coupler.

In 1814 the organ was donated to the Der Aa-Kerk, which had been without an organ since the church's disastrous tower collapse of 1710. In 1815 J. W. Timpe moved the organ to the Der Aa-Kerk, leaving the stoplist unchanged while modifying the organ case. In 1830 Timpe replaced Schnitger's Borstwerk with a new Bovenwerk, and the Hoofdwerk's Vox Humana was replaced by the Rugpositief's Dulciaan. The old Vox Humana was partly reused on the Bovenwerk. A Trompet 8' was added to the Rugpositief, and the Quint 1½' and Sexquialter were replaced by a Flageolet 1' and a Terts 1½'. At this time Timpe also replaced the pedalboard, removed one of the tremulants, and added a Rugpositief-Pedaal coupler. In 1858 P. van Oeckelen made some significant changes, including new windchests for the Hoofdwerk and three new pedal stops (Subbas 16', Holpijp 8' and Quint 10¾'), situated in the undercase), removal of the organ's back wall to accommodate additional pipework, and replacement and/or modification of several stops.

Until the 1950s several modifications and repairs were conducted by Jan and Klaas Doornbos, including replacement of the bellows, addition of a swell box, a new Bazuin 16' (Bombarde 16'), and replacement and modification of several stops. D. A. Flentrop modified the Bazuin 16' in 1953, and in 1959 Mense Ruiter moved the Bovenwerk Quintfluit up, changing it into a Flageolet 1'. By 1970 the church was in serious disrepair and renovations were carried out between 1976–1985. The American organ company Taylor & Boody dismantled the organ's Schnitger components in 1977 while the rest of the organ remained in the church, carefully wrapped.

In 1990 the organ was returned to the renovated church. Re-installation and renovations were conducted by Orgelmakerij Gebr. Reil of Heerde, under the supervision of advisors Klaas Bolt, Stef Tuinstra, and Harald Vogel. In 1992–93, organ advisor Rudi van Straten presented a plan that aimed to restore the organ to its 1858 state—with some technical improvements. After some modifications, the plan was approved, and in 1996–97 Orgelmakerij Gebr. Reil dismantled the instrument. Instability of the organ case, however, required a revision of the restoration plans, eradicating the prospect of an 1858 reconstruction. The new plans were met by resistance, resulting in lawsuits with rulings in favor of opponents.

In 2004 a new committee was appointed with Els Swaab, Peter van Dijk, and Harald Vogel, each representing one of the parties involved. Revised reconstruction plans aimed to restore the organ back to its 1996 state, with an additional supportive back wall for the organ case. The 2010–2011 restoration was carried out by Orgelmakerij Reil in Heerde.

Stoplist

M = De Mare/Van Loon
S = Schnitger
T = Timpe
O = Van Oeckelen
D = Doornbos
R = Reil

Hoofdwerk C–c3

16'	Praestant	S/M
16'	Bourdon	O
8'	Octaaf	M
8'	Holpijp	M
8'	Salicionaal	O
4'	Octaaf	M
4'	Nachthoorn	O
2½'	Nasard	D
2'	Octaaf	M/S
V	Cornet (discant)	O
III–V	Mixtuur	O/D
16'	Trompet	O
8'	Trompet	S

Rugpositief CDEFGA–c3

16'	Quintadena	S
8'	Praestant	S
8'	Gedekt	S
4'	Octaaf	M
4'	Roerfluit	M
2'	Gemshoorn	S
1½'	Sifflet	M/T/R
IV–V	Scherp	S/T/R
8'	Dulciaan	M/S
8'	Trompet	T

Bovenwerk C–c3

8'	Praestant	T/S
8'	Holfluit	T
8'	Viola di Gamba	T
4'	Fluit	T
4'	Octaaf	T/S
2'	Fluit	T
1'	Flageolet	D
8'	Clarinete	T/O

Pedaal CDE–d1

8'	Praestant	S
16'	Bourdon	M
16'	Subbas	O
10¾'	Quint	O
8'	Holpijp	O/D
4'	Octaaf	M
16'	Bazuin	R
8'	Trompet	S
4'	Trompet	S

Afsluiting Hoofdmanuaal
Afsluiting Bovenmanuaal
Afsluiting Rugpositief
Afsluiting Pedaal
Calcant
Koppeling Hoofdmanuaal (HW-BW) – bas/discant
Koppeling Rugpositief (RW-HW) – bas/discant
Koppeling Pedaal (Ped-RW)
Tremulant (BW) – R

Equal temperament
Pitch a1 = 478 Hz
Wind pressure: 82 mm wk

Notes

1. *Return of the Queen—Schnitgers Droom*, volume 1. Peter Westerbrink, Arp-Schnitger-orgel, Der Aa-kerk Groningen. *Praeludium in G* (Bruhns); *Was kan uns kommen an für Not* (Praetorius); *Magnificat primi toni*, BuxWV 203 (Buxtehude); *Wer nur den lieben Gott last walten* (Böhm); *Pièce d'Orgue in G*, BWV 572 (Bach); *Von Gott will ich nicht lassen*, BWV 658 (Bach); *Sonata III* (Ritter); *Fantasia sopra 'Von Gott will ich nicht lassen'* (Matter). CD SIOG201103, €17.50.

Robert August is director of music/organist at First Presbyterian Church of Fort Worth, Texas. Before coming to Fort Worth, he held the position of assistant university organist and choirmaster at the Memorial Church at Harvard University, while pursuing his doctoral degree at the New England Conservatory of Music. In 2010 his doctoral thesis on the organ works of Robert Schumann was



Groningen Der Aa-Kerk (photo credit: Harold Koopmans)

published in Europe and the United States, celebrating the composer's 200th birthday. Educated in the Netherlands and the United States, August has an extensive background in organ performance, and a long history of church performance and conducting. He has served as carillonneur at Brigham Young University, and as organist and conductor at several churches in the Netherlands. In addition to collaboration with artists such

as Christopher Hogwood and Simon Carrington, he has performed in Europe and the United States as a solo artist and accompanist, including tours and CD recordings with the Harvard University Choir, the Harvard Baroque Chamber Orchestra, and the Texas Boys Choir. Robert August often collaborates with his wife Dolores, who holds a master's degree in flute performance from the University of North Texas.

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