

THE HAARLEM ESSAYS

Celebrating Fifty International Organ Festivals

Edited by Paul Peeters

Dr. J. Butz · Musikverlag

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Preambulum

Sixty-three years ago a rather unusual idea was launched in Haarlem to organise an international organ improvisation competition. Without any doubt, it was inspired by the magnificent Müller organ, which has ‘diverted’ the people of Haarlem (and many prominent visitors) since the eighteenth century.

In this anniversary publication you can read all about how this idea was realised and how it has continued to develop through fifty editions. About the ‘grandmother’ of organ festivals, as it has been called, about the international summer academy, and lots more in the form of essays on the organ and its music. An *Intermezzo* contains portraits and interviews with some of the very special people who have been involved – contestants and jury members, teachers, students and stop pullers. In short, a book full of facts and figures and *couleur locale* for ‘Haarlem lovers’ of all types. If you are as curious as we are to know more about this famous organ festival, then this is the book to read.

The board is indebted to a host of people. Not least our editor Paul Peeters and our translator Stephen Taylor (who did much more than translate), and Cees Broekhuijsen, with his expertise on publishing. Many others to whom we are grateful are mentioned in the pages that follow.

This publication also pays homage to our predecessors on the board, and to the town council of Haarlem which organised the festival for many years. We sincerely hope that under future generations the Haarlem International Organ Festival will maintain its eminent position and continue to flourish.

Hans Koenders (Chairman of the Board)

Preface

On the occasion of the fiftieth Haarlem International Improvisation Competition

Then if he went on playing, dwelling on a fixed idea, changing and loosely shaping it, some one ... would ask:

“What is that?”

“Nothing,” answered the player. ...

“How can it be nothing,” the other answered back, “since you are playing it?”

“He is improvising,” ...

“He is making it up, can’t you understand? He just thought of that this very minute.”

“How can he think up so many notes right and left at once, ... and how can he say ‘It is nothing’ of something he is actually playing? One surely cannot play what is not?”¹

Thus Thomas Mann in *Doctor Faustus* (1947)

Connoisseurs and organ enthusiasts across the world would agree that many of the finest classical instruments are to be found in the Netherlands, and that the visual and tonal magnificence of the organ in St Bavo’s is second to none!

Some years after the Second World War, the aldermen of Haarlem took a decision that was to guarantee their town a unique and distinctive place in the cultural life of the Netherlands. An innovative concept was developed, unprecedented in or beyond Europe, for a summer festival at which new, unknown music, would be heard for the first time at the very moment of its creation. And so the organ of St Bavo’s achieved worldwide recognition as *the* medium for improvisation – a manner of making music that had not only passed into complete oblivion in the classical concert hall, but had become neglected by most organists as well. Among the younger generation, however, the idea of communicating the inspiration of the moment, rather than performing something predetermined and studied, had a particular appeal. It was for the masters of this discipline – as appropriate in a competition – to decide who achieved this in the most convincing manner.

1 “Spielte er dann fort, einem fixen Gedanken nachhängend, ... so fragte wohl einer: Was ist das? Nichts, antwortete der Spielende. ... – Wie kann es nichts sein, da Du es ja spielst? – Er phantasiert, ... er improvisiert, verstehst Du das nicht? Er hat sich das momentan so ausgedacht. – Wie kann er sich so viele Töne rechts und links auf einmal ausdenken, ... und wie kann er sagen, es ist nichts, von etwas, das er doch spielt? Man kann doch nicht spielen, was es nicht gibt?” (Thomas Mann, *Doktor Faustus. Das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn erzählt von einem Freunde*, Frankfurt 1967, p. 114; English translation by Martin Secker, London 1949, p. 113.)

Preface

From the very beginning, the Haarlem improvisation competition aroused widespread interest in music circles in and far beyond Europe and quickly became renowned. It was most gratifying to see the art of improvisation rise from a position of low esteem to one of honour. Consequently, in German speaking countries in particular, conservatories created teaching positions for this discipline within only a few years. Many organ improvisation competitions have since sprung up in Europe; their reputation always depends to a degree on the quality of the instrument in question.

Since its establishment in the year 1951, the Haarlem competition has now taken place fifty times, and the challenge trophy (for players who won three times in a row, and originally known as the ‘Silver Tulip’) was awarded (only) five times in all those fifty occasions. In the meantime the reputation of this prestigious event, hand in hand with the renowned summer academy, has extended throughout and beyond Europe to the USA and the Far East.

In our ongoing endeavour to retain the old and valuable – not least in musical matters – while being receptive to the new, the sound of the celebrated Müller organ in St Bavo’s has acquired a symbolic status. It is capable of rendering classical organ music in the most compelling manner. But what is more, it continues to challenge us, precisely in the field of improvisation, to create new and hitherto unheard sounds – a challenge which remains as fresh as it was on the very first occasion.

It is my pleasure to wish the Haarlem competition another fifty successful editions.

Hans Haselböck

Introduction

The Haarlem Essays, celebrating fifty international organ festivals, has become a substantial volume. Our ambitious aim was to compile a book full of articles of general and specific interest – not simply an anniversary album but a document on the history of the festival. To this we wished to add essays of substance devoted to many aspects of improvisation and interpretation, as well as descriptions of Haarlem organs that continue to play an important role in the festival, thus giving the book a particular value of its own. Although the content as a whole is clearly structured, the individual essays are sufficiently independent to be read in a sequence of the reader's own choice.

Part One focuses on 'Haarlem': the history of the festival (how it came about, the first competition in 1951), the place of 'Haarlem' on the worldwide improvisation map, the themes of forty-nine competitions, the place of modern music in the festival, the summer academy (established in 1955) and, last but not least, the organs, which are discussed from a number of vantage points.

The Intermezzo that follows is, appropriately, somewhat lighter, and contains shorter contributions introducing the reader to winners, jury members, competitors, summer academy students, festival visitors, stop pullers and organisers. The Stadsorganist shares personal experiences with us, 'framed' by (critical) notes on the 2012 finale and thoughts on freedom and control in composition and performance.

Part Two offers essays on the background and significance of organ repertoire from the sixteenth century to the present day. Thoughts on the true nature of improvisation and on basso continuo in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries supplement an overview of the ancient craft of improvisation through the ages. The last two articles, on the relationship between organ and repertoire and between organ building and improvisation, were written in the 1950s by the familiar 'Haarlem' celebrities Marie-Claire Alain and Anton Heiller. They are presented here for the first time in an English translation, and although they are clearly documents of their time, through the authors' sharp and intelligent observations they have lost little of their original impact.

In the Coda the reader will find a complete overview of the themes of the final rounds of the improvisation competitions from the very beginning in 1951, as well as lists of competitors and jury members and surveys of their countries of residence.

The book includes a CD with recordings of remarkable competition improvisations; they not only illustrate matters discussed in several essays but also give a glimpse of the very heart of the Haarlem International Organ Festival.

An enormous amount of material has forced us to make choices, and the considerations involved were not always easy. We have attempted in various ways to spotlight those who have taken leading roles over the years, including several who, sadly, are no longer among us.

In editing the texts we have aimed for cohesion and consistency without impairing the individual character of the contributions. Thus authors decided for themselves whether to make use of footnotes, and in a few cases a bibliography and source list are included. Original quotations in all languages other than Dutch are given in footnotes; in translating them into English the approach has been literal rather than literary.

The production of a volume of this scale would hardly be possible without considerable help. First and foremost I am grateful to the other members of our quartet, Hans Koenders, Cees Broekhuijsen and Stephen Taylor, without whom this book would not have seen the light of day. In initial discussions, way back in 2009, Emile Wennekes made certain proposals which helped to determine the nature of the content. A reading committee consisting of Joost van Gemert, Kasper Jansen and Stephen Taylor has been of great assistance in assessing the many contributions. In addition to his work on these two committees, Stephen Taylor has not only created outstanding translations but has in effect played an editorial role, thus providing me with an ideal sparring partner.

I wish to thank all our authors for their contributions, for their patience, and for making this book what it is: consultations were frequent and work periods intensive.

Peter Ouwerkerk has reset all the competition themes and provided a number of new musical examples. Together with Stephen Taylor he collected and selected photo material, and Peter has assisted me with many practical matters.

Much preparatory work was undertaken to make archive material and competition reviews available to our authors. Sanne Klaver not only combed the leading journals and made copies of relevant texts, but also went through the festival archive in the Noord-Hollands Archief and compiled overviews of the content, enabling authors to find specific material quickly. Mr Bert Feijth presented us with his complete collection of programme booklets from 1951 on, which were scanned and made available to the authors. Staff of the Noord-Hollands Archief and the Haarlem Library have eased our work. My thanks are due to the Göteborg Organ Art Center (GOArt) of the University of Gothenburg for making available recorded but unpublished interviews with Hans Haselböck and Anders Bondeman dating from 2000, which Peter Planyavsky consulted for his essay.

Finally, my sincere thanks are due to the staff of Dr. J. Butz Musikverlag in Bonn, particularly to the owner-director Mr Hans-Peter Bähr, and to Ms Eva Röser who was responsible for the production of this book. Our collaboration has been both pleasant and fruitful.

We hope you will have as much enjoyment reading this book as we have had in making it.

Paul Peeters