On Friday and Saturday, June 9 and 10, 2012, a concert and workshop focusing on the medieval organ were held at the Basel (Switzerland) Peterskirche. They dealt with concepts, designs, repertoire and the medieval organ used in ensembles. Another symposium and series of concerts was later organized in and around East Friesland (Rhede), commencing Monday, September 3, 2012, running until Sunday, September 9, dealing with much the same topics. Some instruments and participants were common to both events. Elsewhere Kimberly Marshall played and held courses in and around East Friesland (Rhede) with several of his contemporaries, another fruit from the experiences that had clearly motivated them strongly. Attendees came from Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, France, Czech Republic, USA, and Scandinavia. At the outset Harald Vogel made the poignant observation that this unusual gathering of medieval organs was an exceptionally important event in the history of the instrument, a hitherto virtually unthinkable assembly. It was organized by the Werner Organen, Winfried Dahlke in charge, supported by a squadron of organists, organbuilders, and others whose burning curiosity clearly motivated them strongly.

Walter Chinaglia, from Como (Italy) was another of those present in both Basel and Rhede with several of his own positives and portatives built from historic organs, careful emulation of their temperaments, key actions, and parallel developments in Gregorian chant. In the educational arena it seeped into musical institutions such as Eugène Gigout’s 19th-century Organ School in Paris or the early 20th-century Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, not to forget the work of Solesmes and similar centers.

The Phenomenon

The observant phenomenologist might well note something in the air—research into and performance of early music has now spread both forwards and backwards in time—from a “Bach-falcons” that began with Mendelssohn. S.S. Wesley, et al. in the early 19th century. By the late 20th century it had reached fortissimo, early Stravinsky, the “real” Wagner orchestra, and even Stravinsky’s Le Sacre du printemps, where authenticity of instruments used was a measure of performance excellence. Concurrently, moving back to ever earlier eras, the music of Buxtehude, Frescobaldi, Couperin, Correia de Araujo, and Sweelinck—among many others—has been rigorously regenerated through performance on historic organs, careful emulation of their temperaments, key proportions, wind quality, specifications, tonal and mechanical attributes, all of which illuminate performance practices.

The Phenomenon is now neither concealed, darkly “into convincing practical realization” nor in anything that is “seen through a glass darkly” into convincing practical realities, another fruit from the experiences of these increasingly skilled specialist builders. There are others—Marcus Stahl of Dresden and Stefan Keppler of Kotz, to name but two from Germany.
above the winch chest. The resemblance to an organ described in the 10–12th-century Seelisch Manuscript gives its French-originating inspiration. The prototypical culture that inspired the Rims instrument used lead as pipe material, constant scaling after the 11th-century Berne Anonymous MS.9 and keys as described by Praetorius for Harmonie.10 The Rims instrument had two manuals and two stops; two more are in the back. What could be called Chinaglia’s construction was written in his autobiography:11 ‘Organo di legno’ with a beautifully full and rich quality in the total experience of this organ. They were by Susanne Rühling M.A. and Michael Zierenberg.16 Extra time had to be allocated, taken from later sessions, to allow a second round of discussion about this amazing but potent little replica. It stood there, like a proud Roman sentinel, on its brown hexagonal pedestal, a living and working monument, much in copper or bronze, to the organ belonging to Aquincum’s 3rd-century fire brigade. Its prototype ironically survived a fire by falling into the cellar. Were they all out that night? Perhaps the seemingly unanswerable question—‘Was it a hydraulis or a bellows organ?’—might have been given a new light by hydraulics, since its survival could have been the result of having water poured over it as it fell. It is doubtful that burning floors falling into cellars with highลา liable organ bellows would do anything more than increase the conflagration. Such speculations aside, this instrument looked more like something from the age of steam and polished brass. Indeed, its amazing sound and polished brass. Indeed, its amazing sounds were quite reminiscent of steam whistles. Justus Willberg also tours Europe with a hydraulis,17 complete with air pumps, water cistern, pnigeus, and Greek repertoire, but following the older, Walker-Mayer interpretation. He was in Basel not so long before the June event, another manifestation of this fascinating phenomenon. The sounds of these Roman organs seem not unrelated to the new Rims organ when first heard from a modern perspective, although they are in reality tonally, musically, and mechanically universes apart.

Another star of both events was the two-stop, one-manual and pedal positive made for the author in 2010 by van der Putten. This instrument was also partly influenced by the van der Goes painting. The organ and I had been invited to make the trip from Basel specifically to talk, play, and be played at this conference. Much of the woodwork is Lebanese cedar, again contributing scent to the total experience. It was used in every concert and demonstration and featured twice on the cover of the flyer. (Rims was the third.) The two Rims flyer photos were taken at the Basel event by Jos van der Giessen where the Peteriskirche appropriately provided a nearly framed, truly ‘Gothic’ background. The positive was moved from Laufen (Switzerland, near Basel) to Rhiede (Germany), then Huizinge (Netherlands), Rysum (Germany), and Croningen (Netherlands) and back to Laufen (Switzerland) during this northern sojourn—about 12 days. The rest of the Rims Symposium consisted of demonstrations, concerts, lectures, a church service, socializing, and networking. The invitees included Harald Vogel, Winold van der Putten, Kees van de Linde, Cor Edelks (paper read in absentia), Susanne Bühling, Winfried Dahlke, Jankees Braaksma, Tomas Flegr, and myself. Themes ranged

Walter Chinaglia demonstrates his positive organ emulating van der Goes (photo: Jos van der Giessen)
around gothic pipe-making, wind pressures, voicing, registration, performance practice, the problems and advantages in the anachronous use of tuning slides in modern copies of early organs, the towering figure of Arnaud de Zwolle, medieval organ design (cases, windchests, specifications, keys), the Blockwerk, surviving literature, touch sensitivity on portatives, the use of bells with medieval organs, Pythagorean tempering, and much more.

Time simply ran out. The richness of thematic material, available expertise, the many discussions by-products, and the ravenous cultural, intellectual, and musical hunger of all gathered together for this event turned out to be quite overwhelming for the organizers. Some speakers and players had to seriously curtail their offerings. Frustrating though this was, it should be no enduring problem as long as the need for more is acknowledged.

Thus it was that, on Saturday afternoon, September 8, 2012, momentarily lacking a program, I turned to Jos van der Giessen and asked, “When does this finish?” Even the fascinating unachieved double session by Koos van de Linde (Netherlands/Germany) ranging from Arnaut de Zwolle to the much-discussed Utrecht Nicolaikerk organ restoration was not fully done. Three more speakers were impossibly scheduled in the 30 minutes before the close at 4:30 pm. My question was intended to be “When does this session finish”—but the response fittingly, amusingly, and intentionally misinterpreted it, running up the spirit which had been engendered by all the 2012 events: “Never, I hope!”

For the phenomenologists, at least four medieval organ events in around four months—Basel, Netherlands, Rhede, Sion—must be something of a landmark for 2012.

Immediately following the Rhede Symposium, on Sunday, September 9, after the closing church service in Buxum, a further concert was held in Groningen’s De Oosterpoort Concert Hall. Arranged for the organizers. Some speakers and players had to seriously curtail their offerings. Frustrating though this was, it should be no enduring problem as long as the need for more is acknowledged.

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constant”—that can produce this effect. Essentially all early scaling practices do to varying degrees, but the more scaling practices employed, the more open the tonal choices, and the more open the potential confusion they cause in interpretation. Similarly, early conical metal pipe-forms could well have increased in time, allowing lower bass ranges and even more “pigeon’s egg” figures Derived, then diameters apparently became wider.38 A “Copel” wound with tinfoil, suggests that this tendency could be reduced to a single, sweet foundation rank must have been very alluring, whether for accompaniment or contrast.

Blockwerk registrations were some- times recommended for pieces played for accompaniment or contrast. Whether for accompaniment or contrast. Whether for accompaniment or contrast. The facility of the larger Blockwerks to allow pipes, alloys? Constant or variable scaling? Pitches equivalent to A440, A466, A520 or something else? And where to place the “wolf”? A520, lead pipes, early Pythagorean tempering, and constant scaling certainly seem to work very well. But are our criteria correct? The experience of beautifully pure major thirds from Renaissance mean-tone tempering, or major thirds ranging from pure to mistuned in the circular temperings of the Baroque era, is very enticing to impressionistic musicians travelling back from an accustomed equal tempering. Yet the sober reality is that pure thirds were sometimes expressly avoided, e.g., by Bach using remote keys with dissonant thirds to represent crucifixion, or even just sheer doggedness as with Thomas Roseingrave’s self-proclaimed love of F–G♭ rather than F–A♭, in his deliberate choice of an extreme minor sonority. Was the Pythagorean “wolf” sought out in like manner, or studiously avoided by these earlier musicians? Probably it was avoided if the evidence of modal transpositions is taken at face value—but even here there are questions that need working through. In any case, there is no significant evidence in medieval music for an Affektenlehre and Figurenlehre: that was the culture of Bach, Handel, and Roseingrave.

The Sion organ: possible original appearance without the added pedal pipes behind (Photoshop alterations by David Rumsey)

Winold van der Putten explaining his 1999 Rutland (l) and 2010 Rumsey (r) positive organs (photo: Jos van der Gassen)
A sequel?

Thus, there was a consensus that intel-lectual and musical exchange should not simply vanish after this flush of medieval organ symposia during the European summer of 2012. Several events are already known to be foreseen. Of considerable interest will be a major symposium planned for the Amsterdam Orgelpark. June 6–8, 2013. A sequel would also mark the passing of an era. Through the summer of 2012, the Ars nova Europae, with its musical and cultural focus on the medieval organ, has virtually all been consumed to a portative, with a few exceptions. The passing of the Ars nova Europae will be a cultural loss. But, the passing of the Ars nova Europae will be a cultural loss.

Epilogue

The standing ovations in Groningen mentioned above had something of a cathartic feel to them, reflecting the exegesis of medieval organbuilding and musical performance that has taken place over the past several decades, especially in the events described above. Winold van der Putten’s organs were at all alone in this, but he and his work were at the center of two of these conferences. His 1999 realization of the copy of the Rutland Psalter organ was an important trailblazer. This instrument was featured at the Iliano conference, along with some portatives for Jankees Braksma and his group, Super Lubarum. These were prototypes for most of what has followed as van der Putten and others investigated, experimented, and cracked the codes of medieval organbuilding and voicing. His recent constant-scaled ranks for myself and the Rims instrument were essayed only after much investigation and experimentation. In their own way, they alone deserved their rightful share of those standing ovations. Medieval organ organ building of this kind now seems set to be one of the next “revolutions” in the performance of music—not least in portatives where, oddly enough, it remains relatively untried.

Acknowledgements

(*) Seemingly the only images currently available: taken here from Stein Johannes Kohne, Norsk orgelkultur—Instrument og miljø frå mellomalderen til i dag, Det Norske Samlaget, Oslo, 1999.

Thanks to John Liddy, Jos van der Giessen, Marc Lewon, and Elizabeth Rumsey for their helpful with this article, and to all who contributed photos and good advice. My apologies to Walter Chinaglia for not writing more about his organ di Chiaia article since allocation just became too acute and this instrument really belongs to a slightly later epoch than the one mainly under discussion here. A fuller report on it can be seen at http://www.davidrumsey.ch/Chiaia.htm.

Notes

1. Some details are available at www.davidrumsey.ch/Medieval.php.
5. www.organa.it.
9. Anonymous of Bern(e) or Codex Bern, Anonymous of Bern(e), etc., excerpt Die Freilehn etc./orgue des/organ de/organ.
14. Rahbee is also interesting for a wolf at G♯/B♭ for me in 2010 is capable of playing in a variety of windchests. This book is also available for free online: www.orgelmakerij.nl (photo: Jos van der Giessen).
15. Wolf A♯/E♭, C♯/F♭ and F♯/A♭ choices (not yet built 2012) would further increase these options with van der Giessen (op. cit., p. 5) for example claims that most of Bernicles seems to lead so strongly (and e.g., not to wood)?
16. Lindley, "Das Buxheimer Orgelbuch (Das I. und II. Diskant-klavier.)", section V, and Volume III 1619, section 7: "Das I. und II. Diskant-klavier (p.33)."
18. With a B–G♯ temperament—seen as part of windchests. This book is also available for free online: www.orgelmakerij.nl (photo: Jos van der Giessen).
19. See Peter Williams, ed., The Organ Yearbook #33 (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1989).
20. www.orgelpark.nl/pages/home.html
21. 17. www.hydraulis.de
22. 18. Remains of a hydraulis were excavated in 1992. This reconstruction has since been toured. See Peter Williams, ed., The Organ Yearbook #33 (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1989).
25. 21. The Organ, From the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment (London: British Library Add.
26. 22. See also www.davidrumsy.ch/technologie.htm.
27. David Rumsey about to play the Rysum organ Sunday September 9, 2012 (photo: Jos van der Giessen).
28. 23. These is a current interest on the subject by Mark Lindley can be found online at http://independent.academia.edu/MarK/Lindley/
29. 24. With a B–G♯ temperament—seen as part of windchests. This book is also available for free online: www.orgelmakerij.nl (photo: Jos van der Giessen).
30. Jean Perrot is sourcing this from Th. Gérold, La Ménagère au Moyen Age (Paris: Champion, 1932), p. 419.
32. 26. With a B–G♯ temperament—seen as part of windchests. This book is also available for free online: www.orgelmakerij.nl (photo: Jos van der Giessen).
33. 27. www.orgelpark.nl/pages/home.html
34. 28. "Das I. und II. Diskant-klavier." The music, apart from open fifths and octaves, seems often enough to occur with the near-pure diminished fourths (really diminished fourths) on A, C♯, F♯, A♭ and B as opposed to the four (from a G♯–E♭ wolf tuning) quasi-major thirds on B, C♯, G♭ (see also note 33). This awareness in interest in the potential adaptation of Pythagorean/B–G♯ tempering—such as part of a transition to meantone—e.g., on more accommodatingly or even fortuitously for me in 2010 is capable of playing in a variety of windchests. This book is also available for free online: www.orgelmakerij.nl (photo: Jos van der Giessen).
36. 30. See J.G. Töpfer, "Das Buxheimer Orgelbuch (Das I. und II. Diskant-klavier.)", section V , and Volume III 1619, section 7: "Das I. und II. Diskant-klavier (p.33)."
37. 31. See J.G. Töpfer, "Das Buxheimer Orgelbuch (Das I. und II. Diskant-klavier.)", section V , and Volume III 1619, section 7: "Das I. und II. Diskant-klavier (p.33)."
38. 32. See www.davidrumsy.ch/technologie.htm.
40. 34. As noted, e.g., by Markovits in "Das I. und II. Diskant-klavier." The music, apart from open fifths and octaves, seems often enough to occur with the near-pure diminished fourths (really diminished fourths) on A, C♯, F♯, A♭ and B as opposed to the four (from a G♯–E♭ wolf tuning) quasi-major thirds on B, C♯, G♭ (see also note 33). This awareness in interest in the potential adaptation of Pythagorean/B–G♯ tempering—such as part of a transition to meantone—e.g., on more accommodatingly or even fortuitously for me in 2010 is capable of playing in a variety of windchests. This book is also available for free online: www.orgelmakerij.nl (photo: Jos van der Giessen).
42. 36. E.g., see www.davidrumsey.ch/index.php.
43. 37. www.orgelpark.nl/pages/home.html
44. 38. See www.davidrumsy.ch/index.php