

# The Organs of the Hofkirche Lucerne

Information concerning the history and design of the organs in the Collegiate Church of St. Leodegar, Lucerne

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### The Walpen Organ

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# The Great Hof Organ

## Historical overview

1640-1650

New organ after fire destroyed the church in 1633, built by Hans Geisler, organ builder from Salzburg, incorporating the monumental facade with the open 32' rank, II/P/48; case by Niklaus Geisler, Lucerne

1820

Enlargement of the organ gallery, the choir organ is taken out of use

1858 – 1862

Modification and enlargement by Friedrich Haas, who afterwards became resident in Lucerne, IV/P/70 including «Fernwerk», cone chests

1898 – 1899

Modifications and change to pneumatic system by Friedrich Goll, Haas' successor in the company.

1972 - 1977

New organ built by Th. Kuhn Organ Builders AG, Männedorf, V/P/81. The case and 56 old ranks from Geisler and Haas are incorporated into the organ. The choir organ in the gallery balustrade is reconstructed.

2001

Three free reed ranks from Haas, with their distinctive accordion-like tone, are integrated into a separate swell box in the «tone chamber» of the Fernwerk.

2015

The new Echo Organ is built on the north sanctuary gallery incorporating pipes from both Haas and Goll, II/P/20 (of which 13 are old). The slider motors in the main organ are replaced by magnets, modernisation of the electric systems, new combination system with touchscreen and MIDI-based control system.

Paintings of the organ builders Hans Geisler and Friedrich Haas hang like epitaphs on the back of the two columns beneath the organ gallery.

## Spatial sound features

The great Hof Organ with the Echo Organ incorporates four sound sources in various positions in the church:

- The first, nearest to the listener is the **Rückpositiv** (choir organ) in the balustrade of the organ gallery.
- The second incorporates all ranks in the large **organ case on the gallery**.
- The third is the historic **Fernwerk** («distant» organ) built by Friedrich Haas in the attic of the church. The pipes stand above the main organ. The sound from the Fernwerk emanates through the «tone chamber» and the large ceiling rosette in the middle of the church into the nave.
- The fourth is the **Echo Organ**, which stands on the north sanctuary gallery.

These four components of the Great Organ incorporate 111 stops with a total of 7500 pipes from the organ builders Geisler (17th century), Haas (19th century), Goll (19th/20th century) and Kuhn (20th/21st century).

In addition to these pipes are three effect stops, namely:

- The rain machine in the Fernwerk
- The Zimbelstern in the Rückpositiv and
- The «Bättruef» in the Echo Organ which is reminiscent of a sung alpine blessing.

This organ installation presents the organist with a gigantic orchestra with which he not only selects tone colours and pitches, but also the position in space from where the sounds are produced. These sounds have a particular charm in that 70% of the pipes are historical.

We can enjoy a sense of surround sound in the Hofkirche in a manner, which is, in Switzerland, only possible here. The Society of Organ Friends of the Lucerne Hofkirche speak of a «tremendous sounding organ arena ».

The substructure of the Great Organ with the rich wood carving (1650) and the console (1977)

## Fernwerk

The realisation of the Fernwerk (distant organ) was very important to Haas and it was intended that it should contribute significantly to the fame of the organ. In order not to jeopardise its realisation for financial reasons, he wrote: «If it is agreeable to you I can offer the following proposition: I will build this division for you and will cover the expenses myself which can then be paid back gradually through the proceeds of the organ concerts. In the meantime I would ask for a small amount of interest on the capital, which I have lent. Please would you be so good, my honourable Sir, as to pass these thoughts on to the appropriate source. »

View from the « tone chamber » into the Fernwerk – in the foreground on the left-hand side is the rain machine (wooden drum with metal cladding).

The console in the Fernwerk for presentations and maintenance.

The swell box in the «tone chamber» with the free reed ranks (2001)

## **Echowerk**

The Echowerk is part of the Great Hof Organ and is situated on the north alter gallery (on the left-hand side above the sanctuary), behind the Walpen organ. The Echowerk is built inside a cube made of glass and wood (maple), designed by the architect Andy Raeber in collaboration with Claude Lardon, Kuhn Organ Builders AG. The arrangement of the individual panels is based on the structures of three pieces of music. These are compositions by Johann Georg Benn (the younger), Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Wolfgang Sieber, being works which have a direct connection to the Great Hof Organ and its over 350-year history.

The Echowerk is played from the console on the main organ gallery, from a great distance away. Gaining more control over the sound is ensured with the aid of monitor loudspeakers. Out of the 20 stops in the Echowerk 13 of them originate from the 19th century and 7 are new. Through multiple use of the individual stops and additional effect stops the organist has 27 options. Details of these can be found in the « Specification » section.

The first section of the Echowerk primarily includes the gentle, purer sounds. The second section is comprised of the stops Alphorn and Streicherhorn, which give the Great Hof Organ more power. A third group is made up of the Pedal stops. The case is designed as a swell box.

The Echowerk – inside the case is the first section and the Pedal stops, in front of the case the second section, left in the picture are the « Sennschellen » (tubular bells).

View amongst the pipes of the Echowerk – in the foreground are the pipes Euphonium 32' and Sousaphone 16'

## **Appraisal**

In his final evaluation of the new Great Organ in 1977 Prof. Josef Bucher wrote in the booklet for the inauguration: «through removing some of the unrepairable typically Romantic stops built by Haas, for example the free reed stop Clarinet or the Violin bass 16', the organ has become less Romantic.» This sentence suggests a certain regret over the loss of these stops. Fortunately these ranks of pipes were carefully stored in the attic of the church and clearly documented. The Clarinet, for example, a rank of high-quality workmanship, has now been incorporated among the functioning organ pipes for almost 15 years. The ranks which had remained lying in the attic have now been integrated into the «organ arena» of the Hofkirche as part of the Echowerk. These organ pipe gems, which are over 150 years old,

are indeed best preserved when built into a functioning organ. In this manner, the Echowerk fulfils not only a musical function but also serves its duty in historical preservation in the best possible way. And thanks to the modern case made of wood and glass these valuable pipes also facilitate practical demonstrations.

The sounds of the Echowerk stops are of the finest quality. In the 1970's these had not yet come back into fashion following the so-called «Organ movement». For the rediscovery of these tone colours it simply took another 10 to 15 years. The renaissance of these tonal aesthetics and the knowledge that such ranks were stored up in the attic inspired the Hof Organist Wolfgang Sieber to vehemently and persistently commit himself to the goal of incorporating these pipes into the organ once more. It took over ten years for this vision to become reality. The society « Pro Echowerk » provided the finances purely through sponsoring. Fundamental work in networking, communication and building up trust in the project was achieved in great part due to the efforts of the society's chairman and promoter of culture in Lucerne Walter Graf.

As an appraisal of the Great Hof Organ in 2015 it is appropriate to turn to the words of Bucher once again, which have now increased in their justification: «The Hof Organ is a rare synthesis of the work of three organ builders from various historical periods. Haas had already chosen the path of a synthesis. He did not destroy, but instead restored, reconstructed and continued along a path ; he combined south-German-Italian and French, Baroque and Romantic elements according to the knowledge available at that time. Kuhn and the team of advisors carried on this path according to the increased knowledge and technical developments of our time. [...] All criteria have been fulfilled in order to carry the name Lucerne as a town of the organ out into the world ». <sup>1</sup>

## **Organ model**

For the tour of the organ systems during presentations there is a model organ constructed by Kuhn Organ Builders AG (2014) on the outside of the «tone chamber» of the Fernwerk. This demonstrates the function of the slider wind chests and cone chests in a clear and understandable fashion.

## **Spiritus Rector of the «Hofkirche Organ Arena »**

Wolfgang Sieber in front of the new Echowerk

Together with numerous musicians from various branches of the music scene, Wolfgang Sieber presented over 5000 listeners with pure musical enjoyment at the «Echo Organ Festival» from 30th October to 7th November 2015 which included the inauguration service and 22 concerts and presentations. Enthusiasts and specialists were delighted by the manifold possibilities opened up by the «organ arena» and by the convincing quality of the concerts on offer.

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# **The Walpen Organ**

## **History and design**

The story of the restoration of the Walpen organ is the story of a unique rescue project. This exceptional chancel organ in the Hofkirche Lucerne was built by Thomas Silvester Walpen (1802-1857) in 1842 and is the only one of his organs still in existence. The instrument was originally fitted with a purely mechanical key and stop action, which was replaced by a pneumatic system in 1941. The result was that this valuable instrument became prone to technical faults, which rendered it unplayable for many years.

What is special about the Walpen organ is its unusual and refined double function thanks to its two alternatively facing facades, each with its own manual. Besides the magnificent main facade (1st manual), which faces over Mary's Alter directly into the side-nave, with its sound emanating into the main nave, there is also a choir pipe facade facing and sounding into the gallery.

However, only around ten years after Walpen built the original organ he was forced to alter and reposition it. It was criticised that the intentionally quieter 2nd manual sounded louder than the stronger 1st manual from the console, which was disadvantageous to the organist. Apparently the true finesse of the design had been misunderstood.

## **Restoration 2003**

The aim of the restoration carried out by Kuhn Organ Builders AG was to restore the double function of the organ to that which the builder had originally intended. The instrument was repositioned exactly to where it had stood in 1842. The preservation of the pipes to their condition in 1853 was, however, given priority over returning them to their former condition, since this was not satisfactorily documented in complete detail. This meant that the tonal alterations made by Walpen in 1853 were retained. The components built into the organ for the pneumatic system were removed and replaced by a mechanical key and stop action in the style of the time of the original organ. The wedge-bellows system could be reconstructed and is a major factor in enabling us to now experience the original sound intended by Walpen.