



Cees van der Poel

Repute and Renown
Five Schnitger Organs
in Groningen

Introduction by Hans Fidom

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Hans Fidom

Main Features

Northern European organ building of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is one of the richest traditions in the history of instrument making. In the world of Early Music, this tradition is still one of the crucial points of reference for instrument makers. Within this tradition, in turn, the work of Arp Schnitger (1648-1719) is the undisputed benchmark. Without exaggeration one can say that the importance of his work is similar to Rembrandt's work for painting or Bach's oeuvre for music.

Arp Schnitger followed his predecessors, as was necessary in the economy of his time, which was governed by the guild system. But he also managed to develop major innovations within this framework and boost quality, not only in terms of the sound and technology of his organs, but also in relation to the organization of his workshop, which provided organs all over Europe. It is a distinctive feature that Arp Schnitger was able to offer his employees a high degree of initiative and simultaneously organized his supervision in such a way that his organs were immediately recognizable as Schnitger organs, both in terms of sound and appearance.

Schnitger perfected the sound concept of the baroque organ, as Bach perfected the baroque organ repertoire. The "Hamburger Prospekt" ("Hamburg Façade") was the starting point for this concept: each division of the organ (each manual division and the pedal) has its particular position in the room, whether side by side, or above or below each other. The divisions form a self-contained unit, but the differences of the individual divisions are designed to complement each other convincingly and to come together to form a whole.

Schnitger's quality became the guiding principle for the development of his followers, including his son Franz Caspar. The Schnitger tradition shone so powerfully that it inspired even other organ builders, for example, Christian Müller, the builder of the famous organ at Haarlem. Even today organ builders like to work according to Schnitger's principles, especially since the Schnitger conference in the Aa-Kerk in Groningen in 1969 – an event that can be seen as a starting point of historicizing organ building.

Cees van der Poel
Arp Schnitger

Arp Schnitger enjoys cult status with many organ enthusiasts. His work exerted and exerts a significant influence on organ builders and organists. What makes his instruments so inspiring, even across subsequent stylistic changes?

Arp Schnitger was born in 1648 in Schmalenfleth, a small village on the river Weser, in the county of Oldenburg. He learned the craft of a carpenter with his father and at eighteen he became apprentice to his cousin, the organ builder Berendt Huss in Glückstadt. From 1677 he worked independently as an organ builder. His reputation became quickly so well established that he was awarded the prestigious contract to build an organ with sixty-seven registers in St. Nicholas, one of Hamburg's five main churches. This enormous project, carried out in the years 1682 to 1687, caused Schnitger to settle in Hamburg, where he married Gertrud Otte, with whom he would have two daughters and four sons. Two of them, Johann Jürgen (Georg) and Franz Caspar followed later in the footsteps of their father. From Hamburg, Schnitger and his staff worked on about one hundred seventy organs, both existing and new ones. His work in Germany ranged from East Frisia in the West to Berlin and Stettin (now Szczecin/Poland) in the East.

By way of effective design and many employees, Schnitger was able to manufacture a large number of organs. His many employees carefully implemented proven concepts that were standardized to a certain degree. Schnitger must have possessed great organizational skills and a well-developed business sense. Operating with conscientiousness and persuasion he won the trust of potential clients. He managed to get a number of organ building privileges in Northern Germany, thus strengthening his position.

Schnitger also earned his spurs outside Germany, delivering organs to England, Portugal, Russia, and Spain. He made his entrance into the Netherlands with a contract from the Groningen city council to renew the organ in the Martini Church. The organ builder Jan Hellman had died in 1690 while working on the same task. In 1692, after half a year's work, Schnitger delivered the improved instrument. This work consolidated his reputation, and more opportunities in the city and province of Groningen were soon to follow.

In the Netherlands thirteen Schnitger organs have survived to the present day in more or less their original condition, and the vast majority of them in Groningen. At the end of 1718 Schnitger was invited to negotiate on the construction of a large new organ in St. Michael's Church in Zwolle. Although he was awarded the contract, the wintry trip to Zwolle, however, was disastrous for the seventy-one year old master, as it has been said. He died in July 1719 and was buried in the church of Neuenfelde.

His sons, Franz Caspar and Johann Jürgen, completed the construction of the organ in Zwolle. In 1724, Franz Caspar received an order to modernize the organ in the Grote Kerk of Alkmaar, so that Hamburg organ building continued to take root in the Dutch Republic. After his death in 1729 his widow married the organ builder Albertus Anthoni Hinsz, who now represented the Hamburg tradition in Groningen. When Hinsz died in 1785, his stepson Franz Caspar Schnitger Jr. (1724-1799) and Heinrich Hermann Freytag (1759-1811) continued the Hamburg-Groningen organ building tradition. The direct line of tradition died out in 1863, when Hermann Eberhard Freytag, son of Heinrich Hermann Freytag, abandoned his work as an organ builder. In the decades after Arp Schnitger's death, his master journeymen brought their influence to bear in the Dutch Republic. Among them are Christian Vater, Rudolph Garrels, Johan Radeker and Matthias Amoor. Even later organ builders emerged from the Hinsz tradition, setting the tone.

This sketch may illustrate that the appreciation of Schnitger's instruments is based on the very large number of organs, which he built and worked on, and on the widely disseminated influence, which he exercised over his sons and other followers. At the same time his work had a distinctive style and was of high quality.

The Schnitger Organ in the Church in **Uithuizen**

The church in Uithuizen probably already had an organ in the sixteenth century, which the organ builder rebuilt between 1630 and 1634. At some point The Hon. (Jonkheer) Mello Alberda and the church wardens decided to have a new organ to be built in the church at Uithuizen. They wanted to do business with the organ builder Arp Schnitger, and for the case work they envisaged the cabinet maker (Ebenist) Allert Meijer (1654-1724). Meijer and Schnitger had previously worked together on several occasions in organ projects.

Schnitger made two designs for Uithuizen – of which the second was the more splendid – and gave a cost estimate, which again was reaffirmed on July 17 1699 by the pastor, by a church warden, by Unico Allart, and Willem Alberda. The organ should cost 1600 Carolus guilders, the organ case and the organ loft 900 Carolus guilders. The foliage and the carvings of the organ are very similar to those of the pulpit and the baptismal font of the church – both works by the sculptor January Jansz. de Rijk (1661-ca. 1738). It is therefore very likely that De Rijk worked as a subcontractor of Meijer. The instrument had eight stops on two manuals, the Manuael (Great) and the Rughposityf (Rückpositiv). Furthermore, there was a Pedael (pedal). Schnitger built one stop more than specified in the cost estimate. The instrument in Uithuizen was the largest organ that he built for a village church in the Dutch Republic. Four wedge bellows 8 by 4 ½ feet provided the wind. The pedal wind chest and its pipes were placed in a separate case behind the main case.

In 1745 Frans Caspar Schnitger Jr., a grandson of Arp Schnitger signed a receipt for the maintenance of the organ during one year. At that time he worked with the organ builder Albertus Anthoni Hinsz, who had continued Frans Caspar Schnitger Sr.'s workshop in Groningen since 1732. In 1747 Hinsz made major repairs in Uithuizen, but in 1784 extensive work was required. Although Hinsz received the contract, but died in March 1785 during work. His staff repaired several worn and damaged parts of the organ. An important change was the replacement of the manual keyboards. But the organ builders modernized the organ even more: Schnitger had built the lowest octave of the manual keyboards as the so-called short octave – for contemporary concepts this appeared not to be adequate. Hinsz's journeymen built new keyboards with a complete bass octave. They did not build, however, pipes for the added four upper keys, but rather combined them simply with the same keys an octave higher (tenor octave).

In 1794, the church was greatly expanded. An organ often suffers from work in and around the church, and this will not have been different in Uithuizen. In 1800 the Lohmans, organ builders from Groningen made a large repair, and thirty years later another intervention by a Lohman-descendant followed. The pedal wind chest had warped, and damaged pipes had to be replaced.

The ravages of time did not exert the most influence, but rather man and his changing tastes. In 1854 the churchwarden asked organ builder Peter van Oeckelen (1792-1878) from Harenermolen (south of the city of Groningen) to submit a proposal to modernize the organ. This was necessary, because a more fundamental sound was wanted. Van Oeckelen made two new wind chests for the Manuael with space for the pipes of the missing tones. As a consequence, the key action had to be partly rebuilt. To create space for all of this, Van Oeckelen widened the lower part of the case in order that it corresponded to the upper part. All in all, these were indeed drastic measures, but in this case quite a lot of Schnitger work was preserved, not least because Van Oeckelen reused a lot of old material in the renovation.

After the Second World War, the tide turned. The relatively well-preserved organ in Uithuizen had its share in the growing appreciation of Schnitger's oeuvre. It became an international celebrity – a development to which broadcasting and music recordings contributed significantly. After the restoration of the church between 1972 and 1977 the need for a considerable organ restoration became urgent. The organ builder Bernard Edskes restored the organ between 1981 and 2001 in several steps. The point of departure for the restoration was the situation in 1784/85. The main case got its original shape back, the wind supply was returned to its original condition, the Manuael was provided with a new wind chest, and changes of the specification were reversed.

Specification (spelling according to the stop labels from 1700)

Manuael (I., CDE-c³)

Praestant 8'

Holpyp 8'

Octaav 4'

Spitsfluyt 4'

Quint 3'

Superoctaav 2'

Siflet 1 1/2'

Mixtuer 4-5 st.

Trompet 8'

Vox Humana 8'

Rughposityf (II., CDEFGA-c³)

Praestant 4'

Holpyp 8'

Quintadena 8'

Holpyp 4'

Sesquialter 2 st.

Octaaf 2'

Woudfluyt 2'

Quint 1 1/3'

Scherp 4 sterk

Dulciaan 8'

Pedael (CDE-d¹)

Bourdon 16'

Octaav 8'

Octaav 4'

Mixtuer 4 st.

Nachthoorn 2'

Basuyn 16'

Trompet 8'

Cornet 2'

Accessories and Couplers

Coupler: Manuael + Rughposityf (shove coupler)

Tremulant (for the whole organ)

Afsluyting Manuael (shut-off ventil Hauptwerk)

Afsluyting Rughposityf (shut-off ventil Rückpositiv)

Afsluyting Pedael (shut-off ventil pedal)

Exhaust valve

Calcant

Pitch: One semitone above normal (a¹ = 466 Hz)

Wind pressure: 67 mm water column

Temperament: 1/6 comma

The Schnitger Organ in the Church in **Nieuw-Scheemda**

The instrument, which Schnitger built probably in 1695 for the church of Nieuw-Scheemda had seven and a half stops. It is a small organ with a simple façade, therefore very well suited to determine what is typical for Schnitger.

The lower and upper case with the front pipes are of equal width. The keyboards are placed in the lower case's center: The pedal keyboard is on the floor and the manual keyboard with the music stand is located above the pedal. On both sides of the console are the stop knobs in vertical rows. The lower case has a cornice of three layers: First, the architrave, followed by a flat central part (frieze) and a crown molding. It follows the upper case with the pipe front which is divided horizontally into five sections: The central tower, with a polygonal base normal for Schnitger's style, and left and right four flats (Schnitger arranged the intermediate flats almost always in two levels, separated by a molding). Above the pipes another cornice, which in Nieuw-Scheemda does not appear so heavy as the cornice below the pipes. The central tower goes through the upper cornice, typical for Schnitger. Also typical for him is the layout of the pipes in the tower and fields: Seven pipes in the central tower, nine pipes in the intermediate fields. The number of pipes (of the visible pipes) is therefore so high that almost a complete stop can be accommodated in the façade.

The largest pipe of a segment is almost always to be found in the middle, alternately flanked by smaller pipes. Due to the different foot lengths and the alternating placing of the odd number of pipes, the pipes mouths, the labia, form the letter V. Even the carvings on the tower and the pipe flats display are V-shaped in Nieuw-Scheemda. Finally there is a central axis of symmetry, which coincides with the middle pipe of the middle tower. These strict lines are in contrast with the lush carvings, which consist predominantly of plant and leaf imitations. Particularly striking are the corpulent trumpeter angels of the side wings, which are also characteristic of the carvings in Uithuizen and in the Aa-Kerk in Groningen. The carvings on the case, above the flats, are somewhat on the large side. The crown-like ornament on the middle tower is frequent in Schnitger's work.

Schnitger was awarded the contract for organ building in Nieuw-Scheemda in 1695. We know this from Schnitger's own records in his estate. These records were cited in 1853 and 1854 by the organist and publicist Siwert Meijer from Groningen in a series of articles, in the music journal *Caecilia. Algemeen muzikaal tijdschrift van Nederland*. Unfortunately, the documents, that were available to Meijer, have probably been lost since. It is not known in which year the organ in Nieuw-Scheemda was built and archival sources from the church are no longer extant.

The instrument got a wind chest, fitting ten stops, but Schnitger built only seven. The bass octave of the keyboard was designed as a short octave with the tone sequence C, D, E, F, G, A, B flat and B. Schnitger built a pedal board without its own stops, which is appended to the manual keyboard (pull-down pedal). The prototypical organ case he used was, in principle, even suitable for a larger instrument with two manuals and a single wind chest for both divisions. This reflects Schnitger's efficient working methods, in which prototypes and a certain degree of standardization were of importance, factors that greatly promoted his production.

Before the twentieth century, the organ underwent several repairs and renovations. In 1968 the Swiss organ builders Metzler & Söhne and Bernhard Edskes reconstructed the original state. They kept the front pipes from the nineteenth century. A wedge bellows replaced the horizontal bellows, and the wings 1817/1818 were removed. In 1988 Bernhard Edskes corrected the intonation, temperament, and wind supply. The restoration of the church in 2008 provided a reason to clean the organ.

Specification

Manuaal (CDEFGA-c³)

Pedaal (CDEFGA-d¹), pull-down

Praestant 4'

Accessories

Holpijp 8'

Tremulant

Quint 3'

Pitch: One semitone above normal
(a¹ = ca. 466 Hz)

Octaaf 2'

Wind pressure: 64 mm water
column

Fluit 4'

Quintadena D (treble) 8'

Temperament: Modified meantone

Mixtuer 3 st.

Trompet 8'

The Schnitger Organ in the Church in **E e n u m**

Schnitger received in 1704 the order to build the new organ in the church of Eenum. In contrast to the self-contained positive in Nieuw-Scheemda he built here an organ that forms part of the balustrade: The façade and the gallery balustrade form a unit.

The façade in Eenum displays essentially the same structure as the façade in Nieuw-Scheemda. One difference between the two instruments concerns the front pipes in the lower case in Eenum. Schnitger repeated here simply the middle part of the prototype for the top case – except for one detail, namely the number of pipes in the middle segments: The pipes of the upper and lower cases are of the same size. The pipes in the upper case are placed in a semicircle, and therefore more pipes fit there than in the lower case, in which five pipes are placed in a straight line.

The two-storey structure of the façade may appear to suggest that the instrument has two manual keyboards. But this is not the case. Schnitger made a windchest with ten stops. The one and only manual keyboard is located on the rear of the case and has a short octave in the bass, like in Nieuw-Scheemda. None of the front pipes in the case speaks (organ terminology for "sounds") – they are used for decoration only.

In 1845 Petrus van Oeckelen worked on the organ. He enlarged the case to install inter alia additional wind chests for the previously missing tones C sharp, D sharp, F sharp and G sharp in the bass octave of the manual keyboard. Therefore Schnitger's old windchest was spared. The high and bright sounding stops Quint 3', Woudfluit, Quint 1 1/3', Sesquialter, and Scherp were removed to achieve a fundamental sound. Van Oeckelen reused part of the removed stops in new stops. The tops of the pointed towers were decorated with vases in classical style, and the extension of the lower case was camouflaged by extending the carvings on both sides of the case. Only in 1910 did the organ builder Jan Doornbos from Groningen replace Freytag's bellows with modern horizontal bellows.

After the church had been restored, the organ builders Gebr. Reil from Heerde (south of the town of Zwolle) worked on the instrument in 1986 and 1987. They removed the extensions of the lower case and reconstructed Schnitger's specification. The short octave was recovered. The Freytag pedal and the vases on the pointed towers remained in place, and the organ case and the carvings were liberated from later layers of paint. The organ in Eenum is one of the best-preserved Schnitger instruments in the Netherlands.

Specification

Manuaal (CDEFGA-c³)

Pedaal (C-d¹), pull-down

Praestant 4' Holpijp 8'

Holpijp 4'

Quint 3'

Woudfluit 2'

Octaaf 2'

Quint 1½'

Sesquialter 2 st.

Scherp 4 st.

Trompet 8'

Pitch: One semitone above normal (a¹
= ca. 466 Hz)

Wind pressure: 62.5 mm water column

Temperament: Meantone

The Schnitger Organ in the Church in **Godlinze**

The organ in Godlinze was built in 1704, the same year as the organ in Eenum. The case is a work by Allert Meijer and Jan de Rijk made the carvings and the decoration on top of the case. The trio of Meijer-Schnitger-De Rijk worked together on a number of organs in the province of Groningen.

Schnitger chose the same structure for the case as in Eenum, but with one difference: The lower case is narrower than the upper case. The gallery balustrade extends to the outer pipe fields of the case. The slightly protruding bar below the lower case emphasizes the same width.

Both in Godlinze and in Eenum two columns with Ionic capitals and smooth columns were placed below the organ. The corpulent, blowing angels at the side wings are also to be found in Uithuizen and Nieuw-Scheemda.

The case in Godlinze originally housed an instrument with two manual keyboards and sixteen stops. The two-piece front mirrored therefore an organ with two divisions. Hinsz and his employees removed the second manual during the work around 1783 and the lower case got the same width as the upper case. Before panels with carvings had been mounted between the pointed towers and the balustrade. Hinsz made a new windchest for the remaining manual division and filled out the bass octave (previously: short octave). In the treble he expanded the keyboard compass with two tones to d^3 . The Vox Humana was placed on the new windchest, and some pipe work of the former lower manual was reused. The result is an instrument matching contemporary taste.

Jan Doornbos from Groningen modernized the organ in 1919 and greatly altered the key action and the stop action.

In 1985 the organ workshop Gebr. Reil from Heerde restored the organ, which had been in very poor condition. As a point of departure one chose the situation at the time of Hinsz in the 1780s. The keyboard has been relocated to the back of the case, key action, stop action, and wind supply have been reconstructed true to style as well as stops which had been removed in 1919. The case was freed from later layers of paint.

The twin organs of Eenum and Godlinze came simultaneously into existence and underwent restoration at the same time by the same organ builder. Both organs have evolved in their own way; their characteristics were retained during the last restoration. Besides being a portrait of ancient times they have also become a mirror image of our sounding cultural heritage.

Specification

Manuaal (C-d³)

Praestant D (treble) 16'

Praestant 8'

Holpijp 8'

Octaaf 4'

Fluit 4'

Quint 3'

Octaaf 2'

Speelfluit 2'

Sesquialter 2-3 st.

Mixtuur 3-5 st.

Trompet 8'

Vox Humana 8'

Pedaal (C-d¹), angehängt

Pitch: One semitone above normal
(a¹ = 466 Hz)

Wind pressure: 67 mm water
column

Temperament: 1/6 comma

The Schnitger Organ in the Aa-Kerk in **G r o n i n g e n**

Organ history is often intertwined with the fate of a building, but rarely so much and almost bizarre as in the case of the Aa-Kerk. In this case everything had to do with the tower. In May 1671 lightning struck high up in the wooden construction of the tower, which burned down completely. The fire destroyed a large part of the church interior, including the organ. In 1675 the new construction of the tower was already completed.

The first organ of the Aa-Kerk was probably built around 1470, and was renewed by the organ builder de Mare (I) in 1588. Theodorus Faber began in 1656 to work on a new, larger organ that replaced the earlier instrument. The new organ was planned to have three manual divisions and independent pedal. After Faber's death in 1659, the City Council called Andreas de Mare (II) to continue the work, but he came into disrepute during the work because of amorous adventures. He ended up in prison and was expelled from the city in 1663. In 1662 the City Council appointed instead Jacobus van Hagerbeer for the completion of the instrument. He delivered the organ finally in 1667, but four years later the fire in the tower, mentioned above, destroyed the organ.

The restored Aa-Kerk from 1675 had initially no organ. Almost twenty years later, in April 1694, the City Council signed a contract with Arp Schnitger. He was expected to build a new organ with thirty-four stops on three manuals and an independent pedal. According to the publicist Siwert Meijer, who had access to Schnitger's handwritten notes, the latter was very satisfied with his work in the Aa-Kerk. The organ was in 1697, on the occasion of the examination, in every respect a fine instrument. Unfortunately it was granted only a short lifespan: On April 12, 1710, the tower from 1675 collapsed. For the second time the Aa-Kerk had lost an expensive, relatively new instrument.

Shortly after completion of Schnitger's organ in the Aa-Kerk, probably in 1699, the Groningen city government enquired of Schnitger about the repair of the organ in the Academie- or Broerenkerk (Academy Church or Church of the Brethren). Schnitger handed in two cost estimates, of which the more expensive one was chosen. It stipulated an organ with two manuals and independent pedal. The instrument was supposed to cost 2575 guilders and Allert Meijer was commissioned for 2100 guilders to make the new organ case.

Jan de Rijk was won over to work on the carvings – He was the sculptor who among others worked on the organs in Uithuizen and Godlinze. The organ in the Broerenkerk was completed in 1702. The instrument had thirty-three stops in the Hauptwerk, the Rückpositiv, the Brustwerk, and the Pedal. In the eighteenth century, Hinsz worked several times on the instrument. He added a coupler between Hauptwerk and Rückpositiv to increase the volume of the sound. Other work pertained to recovery from wear and tear, to cleaning, and to polishing of the front pipes.

In 1815, the Academie- or Broerenkerk became Catholic. The Schnitger organ was put to good, new use in the Aa-Kerk, which had been without an organ for more than a century. The organ builder Johannes Wilhelmus Timpe (1770-1837) from Groningen moved it to its new position, but the instrument was only altered externally: The sculptor Anthonie Walles (1790-1845) from Groningen made new, very high, crowning statues and vases on the cases of the Hauptwerk and the Rückpositiv.

Fifteen years later followed the first substantial change to the organ. Timpe altered the bright baroque sound by changing or replacing high stops. He removed Schnitger's Brustwerk and built instead a Bovenwerk (Oberwerk) with fashionable stops. Petrus van Oeckelen from Harenermolen brought the organ up-to-date. He moved the wedge bellows and increased their capacity. The Hauptwerk got new windchests with more notes in the bass octave and more stops (thirteen instead of nine). Van Oeckelen made two new windchests for the pedal with three additional stops and the missing pipes for C sharp and D sharp in the retained old pedal. He did all this to enhance the sound of the organ and to make it sound more fundamental. For this purpose the case of the Hauptwerk was changed and the tracker action and the console were renewed. Furthermore Van Oeckelen changed the specification of Rückpositiv and the Oberwerk.

In 1893 Jan Doornbos (1847-1925) from Groningen repaired the organ besides the regular maintenance work. Later his son Klaas (1888-1951) performed this kind of work. 1919/1920 the old wedge bellows had to give way to a modern magazine bellows with feeders. The construction of a swell box around the Oberwerk in 1924 and the installation of the register Voix Céleste were stylistically drastic measures. With these interventions the organ was removed further and further from the state in 1815, when it had been moved to the Aa-Kerk. Not long after, the interventions of the 1930s displayed a tendency to try to return to the old state, even to the state at the time of Schnitger, by means of specification changes.

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