

## Kuhn to build the new Tonhalle organ in Zurich

### A noble task

At the request of its committee of experts (Fachgremium), the Kongresshaus-Stiftung Zürich has instructed Kuhn Organ Builders Ltd to build the new organ for the Tonhalle. The Tonhalle in Zurich is ranked acoustically as one of the best concert halls in the world. In 1988, a new organ was installed, but for various reasons the orchestral expectations were never fulfilled. Complete renovation of the Tonhalle has now provided the occasion to fundamentally improve the organ situation. The new organ is being totally financed by private funds, and is scheduled to sound for the first time when the renovated hall is reopened in the late summer of 2020.

"We are very enthusiastic about this order", says Dieter Utz, President of the Board of Directors (Verwaltungsrat), "and greatly value the trust placed in us by the committee of experts."

The committee is composed of experienced authorities on concert organs, and includes Prof. Peter Solomon, Zurich, Christian Schmitt, Stuttgart, Prof. Martin Haselböck, Vienna.

### Experience in the building of concert organs and years of association

Some of the arguments that were decisive factors in placing the order with Orgelbau Kuhn are:

- Comprehensive competence in building concert hall organs and proven expertise at important international organ venues
- Comprehensive production in Switzerland, thanks to the firm's own tin workshop and excellent infrastructure
- As business partner, association with the Tonhalle for over 135 years
- Competence in maintaining organs and closeness to customers

### Terms of reference for the new Tonhalle organ

With approximately 70 speaking stops, the new organ is to fulfil the following tasks:

- Interaction with the orchestra, as solo or accompanying instrument
- Interaction with choruses and soloists
- Use as a versatile solo instrument, including for modern music.

### Schedule for realizing the new Tonhalle organ

In a demanding procedure, the organ is now at the planning stage: Possibilities for the exact position and size of the case will be clarified, details of the design established and the sound concept agreed. There will then follow 6 months for production of plans for the execution, 12 months for manufacture of the organ parts in our workshops, 3 months for erection in the hall and 4 months for the final voicing.

As soon as we know definitely about the position of the organ, the design of the front and the specification, details will be posted on our web site at [www.orgelbau.ch](http://www.orgelbau.ch)

## **The organ in the concert hall**

The main job of the organ is to interact with a large symphony orchestra. The orchestra is an unbelievable body of sound, subtly diversified. Not only its power, but also the variety of tone colour and shades of every degree of power, fascinate listeners and musicians alike. To enable the organ to become a valued partner of the large orchestra it must have adequate possibilities at its disposal to differentiate between tones. Only thus can an organist adapt perfectly to the orchestra in every situation.

## **The old, 1988 organ**

Various expert opinions were produced about the existing organ, built by Kleuker/Steinmeyer. The question of renovation in several stages, and of the building of a new organ, was adjudged equal and was evaluated by means of various criteria of quality. Out of 14 criteria, in the case of extensive renovation of the old organ, eight were assessed "good". For five criteria it would attain a "satisfactory". The most important criterion, the suitability of the organ for use with the orchestra, can in any case only achieve an "unsatisfactory".

The organ will have to be removed before the concert hall is renovated. Removal and re-installation, and simultaneous renovation of the organ, as described in the previous paragraph, would incur expense in the range of CHF 1.25 million. A new instrument of similar size and fittings would cost only twice that amount. At this point, it must be noted that a new organ incurs considerably less in maintenance charges.

If the old organ had to achieve "good" with all 14 criteria this would be the technical equivalent of a new organ and the production of some new pipes, which then would no longer be financially advantageous.

## **Merits of preserving the old, 1988 organ**

Although the organ is not a protected monument, the merits of preserving it have been properly clarified. On the one hand, there is the specification concept of Jean Guillou, Paris, and on the other, there is the design of the front by architect Hans-Rudolf Zulauf, Mettmenstetten.

With regard to the sound aspects of the organ, Dieter Utz states as follows: "Jean Guillou's specification is not equal in concept to the task of being a soloist with the orchestra and an accompanist to the orchestra. There is no capability of differentiating the sounds in the range of the foundation stops. On three manuals, the organists merely have the choice between a powerful and a less powerful labial fundamental stop. However, to achieve this a concert organ must be provided with from four to six stops. The possibility to differentiate sounds was unfortunately sacrificed in favour of a number of nice extravagances. Retaining this specification in the Tonhalle would be inconsistent with the main task of the organ's suitability for an orchestra."

Theoretically, H.-R. Zulauf's case could be re-used, possibly with a new organ. In the course of the investigation it will become apparent whether in the course of renovating the hall of the Tonhalle the space on the orchestral platform can and should be improved. This would call preservation of the case into question. Since the organ was brought forward from its niche, which was done in 1927, the topic of putting it back into the niche has resurfaced again and again. Advocates of this idea argue that it would produce better acoustics for the orchestra, and improved use of space on the orchestral platform. At present, this plan is hindered by structural obstacles that have nothing to do with the organ, and the possibilities of which are under examination.

### **Retention of the old, 1988 organ**

A new location for the existing organ is the subject of an active search. Negotiations are in progress between the Kongresshaus-Stiftung Zurich and interested parties. Jean Guillou's concept of the specification would thereby be saved for posterity. This would be a win-win situation for two locations. Re-erection of the organ in another place invalidates discussion about the merits of preserving the old organ. Kuhn is not involved in removal of the organ.

### **Previous organs in the Tonhalle Zurich**

- 1872      Nepomuk Kuhn builds a mechanical cone chest organ with 31 stops in the German Romantic style for the old Tonhalle.
- 1895      The organ is transferred by Theodor Kuhn to the new Tonhalle, the front and specification are modified slightly. \*
- 1927      Orgelbau Theodor Kuhn AG moves the front 2 metres forward. Considerable expansion of the specification to 71 speaking stops, at the same time conversion to pneumatic membrane chests, the style now being under French influence.
- 1939      Installation of electric actions, expansion to 76 speaking stops and a new remote console by Kuhn.
- 1988      New organ by Kleuker/Steinmeyer based on a specification by Jean Guillou. In advance, dismantling, storage, and later re-erection of the old Kuhn organ with pipes dating back to 1872, of 1895 and the later conversions in Neumünster Church in Zurich by Kuhn.
- 1998      After a 10-year interval Kuhn once again takes over care and maintenance of the Tonhalle organ.

\* By the way: You can read on page 60 of our company history "Die Orgelbauer – Das Buch zur Geschichte von Orgelbau Kuhn 1864–2014" about how the Kuhn organ of 1895 with the Tonhalle orchestra meant introducing Parisian voicing (435 Hz for a').

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