

The Pilgrims' Chorus in the Lower Rhine

Aldo J. Baggia



Sint Jan's Kathedraal, 's-Hertogenbosch

Niederrhein (Lower Rhine) is a small part of Westphalia that borders the Dutch cities of Arnhem and Nimegen, which had great importance in the Second World War because of their strategic locations as entrances to Germany. They are dealt with at great length in the well-known film, *A Bridge Too Far*. They are also culturally important because of their relationship with the towns of Niederrhein. Linguistically, one sees the relationship in the fact that the Dutch language is readily understood in the towns on the immediate border. It is very common for Dutch people to shop in a town such as Kleve, which is on the border, rather than in Holland, because the prices are better. It is normal to see the parking lot at the City Hall in Kleve with half of the cars having Dutch plates. When crossing into Holland, such as we did when going to 's-Hertogenbosch to see the famous organ at Sint Jan's Kathedraal, we saw very few cars besides our own with German plates.

The cathedral at Den Bosch is a magnificent gothic structure that dates from 1220, and the grand organ, III/48, with its Coptic oak case, dates from 1617, although it was not ready for use until 1622. Franz Symons, a carpenter from Den Bosch, and Georg Schysler, a sculptor from the Tirol, were responsible for the beautiful case. After work by various builders, the organ, which has 3,000 pipes, was completely restored in 1984 by Flentrop. The choir organ, II/29, by Verschueren, was installed in 1985. A recording by Jacques van den Dool shows the grand organ to very good effect in pieces by Bach, Reger, Messiaen, de Grigny, Guilmant and van den Dool.¹

Before going to Niederrhein, I tried to

buy a guide book of the area in a large bookstore in the city of Bamberg. In the travel section, there were hosts of books dealing with what seemed to be every conceivable area of Germany, but, to my surprise, there were no guides of Niederrhein. I inquired at the desk and was told that there were no guides of Niederrhein because it was not a tourist area. I found this hard to believe, but had to accept the reality of the situation. Later, I did find a few guide books when I arrived in the city of Kleve, which, as mentioned previously, is right on the border with Holland. The whole area has towns that are quite similar, with an emphasis on pilgrimage churches (*Wallfahrtskirchen*) that serve as a common touch. The churches tend to be very large with good-sized organs and are the focal points of the towns.

Kevelaer

Kevelaer is the most famous pilgrimage place in Niederrhein, and its Marienbasilika has the largest organ in the area (IV/128). The town was bombed during the war, but not everything in the town center was destroyed, and the main street leading to the tower of the basilica looks as though it had not been touched for hundreds of years. The Marienbasilika organ originally had 124 stops, and additions were made in 1926, bringing the total to 131. At that time it received electric action, and a four-manual movable console was built. In the last days of World War II, the echo organ was destroyed, leaving the instrument with 110 stops. A restoration by Seifert in 1977 brought the organ of 10,000 pipes to its current total of 128 stops.² The sound is quite dramatic because of the excellent



Seifert & Sohn IV/128, Marienbasilika, Kevelaer (copyright 2006 by Christoph Martin Frommen/Aeolus)

acoustics that really enhance the power and majesty of the instrument. The recording mentioned in the endnotes features works by Reger, Liszt, Reubke (*The 94th Psalm*), and Karg-Elert. The airy quality of the sound is clear and leaves nothing to be desired.

Seifert & Sohn IV/128 Marienbasilika, Kevelaer

Unterwerk (I)

16'	Pommer
8'	Principal
8'	Großgedacht
4'	Octave
4'	Koppelflöte
2'	Oktavlein
2'	Querpfeife
1 1/3'	Spitzquinte
	Sesquialter II
	Scharff IV
	Cymbel III
16'	Cor anglais
8'	Hautbois
	Tremulant

Hauptwerk (II)

16'	Principal
16'	Bordun
8'	Principal major
8'	Principal
8'	Fugara
8'	Flaut major
8'	Gamba
8'	Gemshorn
8'	Gedacht
8'	Quinteviole
8'	Doppelflöte
5 1/3'	Quinte
4'	Octave
4'	Hohlflöte
4'	Fugara
4'	Flauto
4'	Seraphon-Octave
3 1/3'	Terz

2 2/3'	Quinte
2'	Octave
2'	Flöte
1'	Octavin
	Cornett IV
	Mixtur V
	Scharff V
	Rauschquinte II
16'	Tuba
8'	Trompete
4'	Feldtrompete

Oberwerk (III)

16'	Gedacht
8'	Principal
8'	Doppelgedacht
8'	Rohrflöte
8'	Flaut harmonique
8'	Quintatön
8'	Seraphon-Gamba
8'	Cello
8'	Dolce
8'	Vox angelica
4'	Octave
4'	Rohrflöte
4'	Violine
4'	Flaut dolce
2 2/3'	Nasard
2'	Octave
2'	Piccolo

Schwellwerk (IV)

16'	Terz
	Progressio III
	Mixtur IV
	Octavcymbel III
	Scharff V
	Rauschpfeife II
16'	Fagott
8'	Trompete
8'	Clarinette
4'	Schalmei
2 2/3'	Lieblich gedacht
2'	Principal
8'	Geigenprincipal
8'	Konzertflöte
8'	Gedacht



Main street leading to the Basiliika in Kevelaer

8'	Aeoline
8'	Vox coelestis
8'	Quintadema
4'	Gemshorn
4'	Traversflöte
4'	Octave
4'	Nachthorn
2 1/2'	Quintflöte
2'	Flautino
2'	Superoctave
1 1/2'	Terzflöte
1 1/2'	Quinte
1'	Sifflöte
	Mixtur V
	Carillon III
	Terzymbel III
	Paletta III-VII
16'	Tuba
8'	Trompete
8'	Krummhorn
8'	Vox humana
4'	Clairon
4'	Celesta
	Tremulant

Pedal
32' Contrabass
32' Untersatz
16' Principalbass
16' Octavbass
16' Salicetbass
16' Violon
16' Subbaß
16' Gedachtbass
10 1/2' Quintbass
8' Principal
8' Baßflöte
8' Dulciana
5 1/2' Quinte
4' Fugara
4' Octave
4' Flöte
2' Clarine
Mixtur VI
Hintersatz V
32' Bombarde
16' Positiv
16' Trompete
8' Trompete
8' Fagott
4' Clairon

Normal couplers
Crescendo
2 free combinations
Pedal combination
3 Tutti
Electropneumatic action

Source: Psallite CD 60131. *Romantische Orgelmusik (an der großen Orgel der Marienbasilika zu Kevelaer – Orgelbau Romanus Seifert & Sohn)*

Next to the basilica there is the Kerzenkapelle (the candle chapel), which has an outside collection of hundreds of candles that have been left by pilgrims. It includes an organ, II/28, which was originally installed in 1843, and rebuilt and cleaned by the firm Seifert & Sohn, which had moved to Kevelaer during the construction of the new organ for the Marienbasilika in 1906.³

The pilgrimages in honor of the Blessed Mother date from the middle of the seventeenth century, and the Kerzenkapelle was built during the years 1643–45. By the second half of the century there were from 18,000 to 20,000

pilgrims on feast days, and today Kevelaer is known as the largest pilgrimage center in northwestern Europe with over one million visitors per year.⁴

The organ of the parish church of Kevelaer, Sankt Antonius (III/42), was also built by the firm of Seifert & Sohn and dates from 1987. It has 2,915 pipes and benefits from the excellent acoustics of the church. This church was badly hit during World War II, but has been completely rebuilt in a manner that shows off its pre-war splendor.⁵

Xanten

One might wonder why a large cathedral was built in Xanten, a small town with the unusual name beginning in "X," but its history is quite telling. In 15 B.C., the Romans built a large military camp called Castra Vetera I. This lasted until 69–71 A.D., when it was destroyed and replaced by Castra Vetera II. North of the military complex, a civilian settlement was planned and created in 105 A.D., with the name Colonia Ulpia Traiana, through the good graces of the emperor Marcus Ulpius Trajanus. At the time, this was a fairly large area only 23 hectares smaller than the Colonia that was the provincial capital, known today as the city of Köln (Cologne).⁶

In October 1933, professor Walter Bader discovered two graves located in the present-day crypt that date from the years 348–350 A.D. They were identified as Christian soldiers in their thirties, who subsequently became the symbol of the strong faith of the people in this area.⁷ Martin Ahls indicated that the name "Xanten" is, in effect, a derivative from "Ad Sanctos," which means "next to the saints." He went further to answer his own question as to why a cathedral was built in this rather remote town on the Lower Rhine:

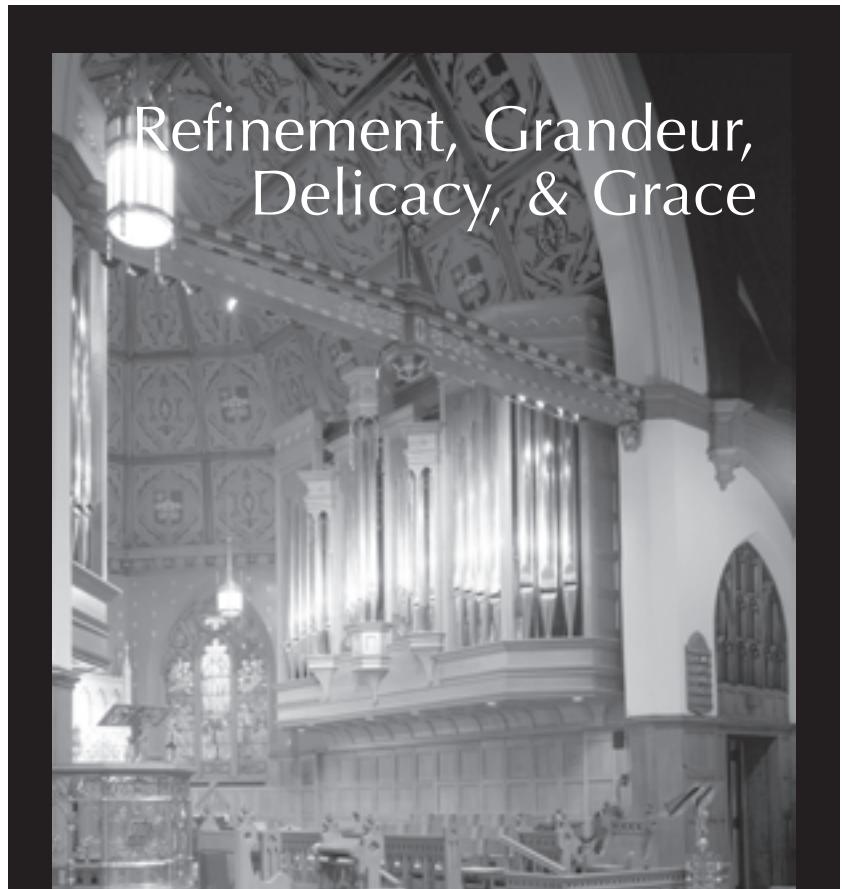
This question is answered when we go into the crypt. Although it is the most recent part of the cathedral, built after the excavations made in our century, it contains the very core of its history: the tomb of two Christians who were slain in the fourth century. This tomb of the Holy Martyrs is the center and the starting point of religion on the Lower Rhine and at the same time it is the key that helps us understand the construction of the cathedral and of the town: Here people wanted to pray and to live—next to the Saints. History gave the Martyrs a name: Viktor—the victor even beyond death.⁸

After the war, it was decided to add urns filled with ashes from the concentration camps of Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, and Dachau as memorials to all who suffered from the atrocities of the Nazi regime.⁹

The cathedral can be seen from afar, inasmuch as it is such a large edifice. The organ, III/45 with 3,293 pipes, is the largest that the cathedral has ever had and was built by Seifert & Sohn of Kevelaer in 1973–1975.¹⁰ The instrument has a free-standing case on the floor in the



Seifert & Sohn III/42, parish church, Sankt Antonius, Kevelaer



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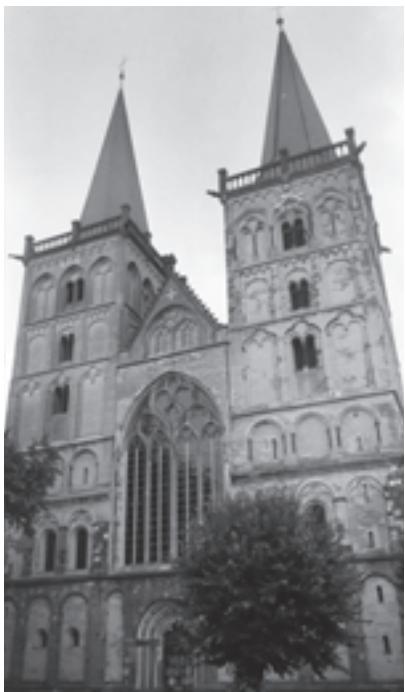
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Dom St. Viktor, Xanten

back of the church and can effectively play the repertoire from Bach through Messiaen. The symbolic nature of the cathedral is of paramount importance to the citizens of the town, and the restoration that was done after the severe damage of World War II fits in well with the original construction work. A curious aside is that Xanten is featured in the *Nibelungenlied* and was supposedly the birthplace of Siegfried.¹¹

Seifert & Sohn, III/45
Dom St. Viktor, Xanten

Hauptwerk

16' Praestant
8' Prinzipal
8' Rohrflöte
4' Oktave
4' Koppelflöte
2' Superoctave
Kornett V

2' Mixtur V
Cymbel III
16' Trompete franz.
8' Trompete franz.
4' Clairon

Schwellwerk

8' Holzflöte
8' Viola da gamba
8' Schwebung
4' Venezianerflöte
2 2/3' Nasat
2' Querflöte
1 1/3' Terz
1' Schwiegel
4/7' Septime
1 1/3' Mixtur IV
16' Basson
8' Hautbois
Tremulant

Rückpositiv

8' Metallgedacht
4' Prinzipal
4' Rohrflöte
2' Gemshorn
1 1/3' Quinte
Sesquialter II
Scharff V
8' Cromorne
Tremulant

Pedal

16' Prinzipal
16' Untersatz
10 2/3' Quintbaß
8' Oktavbaß
8' Rohrpommer
4' Choralbaß
4' Spitzgedacht
2' Nachthorn
5 1/3' Rauschwerk IV
2 2/3' Hintersatz V
16' Posaune
8' Trompete
4' Schalmei

Constructed 1973–1975
45 stops (3,293 pipes)
Mechanical key and stop action
Normal couplers, 3 free combinations, Pleno,
Tutti

From the liner notes of Psallite CD 60161

Kleve

If one looks at a map, one can see how the towns of Niederrhein are interrelated; the concept of so many pilgrimage



Rieger III/45, Stiftskirche St. Mariä Himmelfahrt, Kleve (courtesy Rieger-Orgelbau GmbH)



Stiftskirche St. Mariä Himmelfahrt, Kleve

churches makes sense. Kleve, right on the Dutch border, suffered as much as the Dutch cities of Arnhem and Nijmegen, the largest cities on the Dutch side. This area represented one of the Allied entry points into Germany, and it is quite clear that the towns on the German side suffered tremendously because of this.

A small book that was published in Kleve in 1964 alludes to one of the biggest problems the people in this area had.¹² According to the author, "the British and Canadian troops advanced without having the slightest understanding of the many-sided problems a people living under a dictatorship had, and therefore on German soil they saw every German as a Nazi."

The organ of the Stiftskirche or St. Mariä Himmelfahrt, III/45, was built by the Austrian firm Rieger in 1991 and is primarily used to accompany congregational singing during Mass. However, a recording by Martha Schuster playing romantic and post-romantic works shows what heights the organ can achieve.¹³ The case, as one can see, is quite modern. Kleve is known in legends as having a relationship with Lohengrin, who is certainly well known because of Wagner's opera. A modern fountain in the pedestrian zone of the city shows a swan pulling at Lohengrin. The symbol of the city is the Schwanenburg (the Swan's castle), which dominates the city along with the towers of the Stiftskirche nearby.

Rieger III/45
Stiftskirche St. Mariä Himmelfahrt, Kleve

Positif (expressive) (II)

8' Principal
8' Bourdon
4' Octave
4' Flûte douce
2 2/3' Nasard
2' Doublette
1 1/3' Tierce
1 1/3' Larigot
1' Plein jeu IV
8' Trompete
8' Clarinette
Tremulant

Récit Expressif (III)

16' Quintaton
8' Flûte traversière
8' Viole de Gambe
8' Voix célest
4' Flûte octaviante
2' Octavin
III Carillon (2 2/3' + 1 1/3' + 1')
16' Tuba magna
8' Trompete harmonique
8' Basson-Hautbois
8' Voix humaine
4' Clairon harmonique
Tremulant

Pédale

32' Soubasse
16' Contrebasse
16' Soubasse
8' Basse
8' Bourdon
4' Flûte
32' Contrebombarde (ext)
16' Bombarde
8' Trompete

Mechanical key action
Electric stop action

Kalkar

Very near Kleve lies the small town of Kalkar, which profits from a quaint setting. The Nicolai Kirche's intricately cut wood carvings make up much of the decoration that surrounds the different altars, as well as the elaborate casework of the organ (Seifert & Sohn, III/34). The first organ of the church dated from 1457, and from 1684 there was a baroque instrument. That was replaced in 1867–72 by a two-manual and pedal organ of 30 stops by the Rheinberg builder Bernhard Tibus (1815–1896). The Cologne



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Grand Orgue (I)

16' Montre
8' Montre
8' Flûte harmonique
8' Salicional
8' Bourdon
4' Prestant
2' Doublette
2' Fourniture IV
1' Cymbale III
8' Cornet V
16' Bombarde
8' Trompete
4' Clairon



Dom in Wesel



Marcussen & Søn III/54, Wesel Dom (courtesy Marcussen & Søn)



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the rebuilding was done over the span of many years, i.e., from 1947 to 1994, with the support of the Willibrordi-Dombauverein (Dom building association). The intent was to bring back the medieval nature of the Dom.¹⁵

The steeple stands high over the center of the town, and the only drawback is the fact that most of the windows are of plain glass. I don't know what the situation was before the bombing, but there is no question that stained glass would have been extraordinary. It would have created a remarkable image in the interior or because of the height of the windows. The organ, built by Marcussen & Søn of Denmark in 2000–2001 (III/54), is a very impressive instrument in a freestanding position in the west part of the church, and the case is striking. The acoustics are very good, and two recordings feature the instrument in repertoire from Buxtehude, Pachelbel, Bach, and Mozart through Franck, Mendelssohn, Reger, Brahms, and Messiaen. I found particularly impressive the Reger *Introduction and Passacaglia in D minor*, Boëllmann's "Carillon" from *Douze Pièces*, and *Dieu parmi nous* by Messiaen.¹⁶

Marcussen & Søn III/54 Wesel Dom

Hauptwerk (II)

16'	Prinzipal
8'	Oktave I–III°
8'	Hohlflöte
8'	Rohrgedacht°
8'	Gambe
4'	Oktave I–III°
4'	Spitzflöte
2 2/3'	Quinte
2'	Oktave I–III°
2'	Waldflöte
	Hintersatz VI–IX°
	Scharf VI–VII
16'	Trompete
8'	Trompete
8'	Spanische Trompete

Schwellwerk (III)

16'	Rohrpommer°
8'	Salizional
8'	Voix céleste
8'	Rohrflöte
8'	Quintatön
4'	Prestant°
4'	Flöte octavante
2 2/3'	Nazard
2'	Octavin
1 1/3'	Tierce
	Plein jeu V–VII
16'	Basson°
8'	Trompete
8'	Vox humana
8'	Oboe
4'	Clairon

Rückpositiv (I)

16'	Bordun°
8'	Prinzipal



Klaas III/38, Liebfrauenkirche, Bocholt (courtesy Kantorin Irmhild Abshoff)

8' Spitzgambe°

4' Oktave°

4' Rohrflöte

2 2/3' Nasat

2' Gemshorn

Cornet II

Sesquialtera II°

1 1/3' Quinte

Mixtur V–VI

16' Dulzian°

8' Cromorne

Pedal

32' Untersatz°

32' Prinzipal°

16' Subbaß

8' Oktave

8' Spitzflöte

4' Oktave°

2' Nachthorn

Mixtur V°

16' Positiv

16' Fagott

8' Trompete

* all or partially made from pipes of the previous organ by Walcker

Bocholt

A very short distance from Wesel lies the city of Bocholt, which is in Westphalia but just outside the geographical limits of Niederrhein. The Liebfrauenkirche has a magnificent Klaas organ, III/38, from 1979. I had been in touch with the Kantorin, Irmhild Abshoff, before going to Germany, and I knew something of its features from a recording that was issued in 1996 to commemorate 95 years of the parish's work. When I arrived in Bocholt, the Kantorin was good enough to demonstrate the organ. There is no question that this is an extraordinary instrument capa-

ble of playing the entire repertoire for the organ. The recording opens with Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in G major*, BWV 541, and the organ has a true baroque sound. The Kantorin also plays Karg-Elert's *Choralimprovisation für Orgel* "Nun danket alle Gott," which really shows the power and majesty of the instrument. It would be difficult to look for more. Bernhard Ratermann plays Franck's *Choral No. 2 in B minor*, and here *fonds d'orgue* passages effectively contrast with a powerful reed-dominated tutti.¹⁷

Klaas III/38 Liebfrauenkirche, Bocholt

Oberwerk (I)

8' Holzgedacht

8' Gamba

8' Unda maris

4' Principal

4' Traversflöte

2' Waldflöte

1 1/3' Larigot

2 2/3' Sesquialter II

2/3' Scharff IV

16' Basson Hautbois

8' Cromorne Trompete

Hauptwerk (II)

16' Quintade

8' Principal

8' Holzflöte

8' Gemshorn

4' Octave

4' Koppelflöte

2 2/3' Quinte

2' Superoctave

8' Cornet V

1 1/3' Mixtur IV

8' Trompete

4' Trompete

Brustwerk (III)

8' Rohrflöte

4' Blockflöte

2 2/3' Nasard

2' Principal

1 1/3' Terz

1' Sifflet

8' Vox humana

Pedal

16' Principal

8' Subbaß

8' Octave

8' Spielflöte

4' Tenoroctave

2 2/3' Rauschpfeife IV

16' Positiv

8' Holztrompete

6 couplers, 2 tremulants, 6 adjustable combinations
Mechanical key action, electric stop action

One could continue to visit other instruments in the area, but it is clear that this area is fairly typical of what one finds in Germany. The organ history in Germany is a long one and emphasizes the importance of music in the country. ■

Notes

1. Information on the cathedral and organs is from leaflets available at the church; liner notes of a recording (CD03122001) by Jacques van den Dool on STH records, Holland (2001); and Berg Wisgerhof, *Orgeln in den Niederlanden*, Edition Merseburger, Berlin GmbH, Kassel, 1992, pp. 93–99.

2. The information on this organ comes from four sources: a) Liner notes of the recording *Romantische Orgelmusik*, Psallite CD 60131, which includes recordings made in 1969 and 1981 by Rosalinde Hass and Wolfgang Stockmeier; b) Notes by the organ firm of Romanus Seifert & Sohn in 1969 as part of the above recording; c) Göttert & Isenberg, *Orgel Führer Deutschland*, Bärenreiter-Verlag, Kassel, 1998; and d) Kevelaer, *die Orgelwerke von St. Marien und die Kirchenmusik*, pp. 12 and 14.

3. Cf. Kevelaer, *die Orgelwerke von St. Marien und die Kirchenmusik*, Verlag Schnell & Steiner GmbH, Regensburg.

4. Cf. Rolf Purpar, *Reiseführer Niederrhein*, Grupello Verlag, Düsseldorf, 2003, p. 108.

5. Pfarrkirche Sankt Antonius, Kevelaer, Kunstverlag Josef Fink, Lindenberg, 2000, p. 24.

6. Ibid., pp. 208–209.

7. Reinhard Karrenbrock and Holger Kempens, *St. Viktor zu Xanten*, Propsteigemeinde St. Viktor, Xanten, 2002, p. 23.

8. Liner notes of Psallite Recording 60161, *Orgel und Glocken des Xantener Domes*, Wolfgang Schwering, organ (translation by Rigo Ottitsch), pp. 12 and 13.

9. Reinhard Karrenbrock and Holger Kempens, op. cit., p. 23.

10. Liner notes of Psallite Recording 60161, p. 10.

11. *EyeWitness Travel Guide to Germany*, Dorling Kindersley Publishing, Inc., 2001, p. 375.

12. *Niederrheinisches Land im Krieg*, Wilhelm Michels, Boss, Druck und Verlag (translation by Aldo J. Baggia), p. 142.

13. Organum Classics 200073, Dupré, Messiaen, Guilliou, 2000.

14. cf. Günther J. Bergmann, *Kalkar der Stadtführer*, Mercator Verlag, 2002, p. 33. Cf. Holger Brülls, "Die ehemalige Kalkarer Tibus-Orgel und ihr von Heinrich Wiethase entworfenes Gehäuse," in Hans Peter Hilger, *Stadtpfarrkirche St. Nicolai in Kalkar*. Information provided by Jan Szopinski, Cantor, St. Nicolai Kirche, Kalkar.

15. Rolf Purpar, op. cit., p. 200.

16. Almut Rößler an der Marcussen-Orgel im Dom zu Wesel, Motette 13071. *Glocken und Orgelmusik im Dom zu Wesel* (es spielt Hanns-Alfons Siegel), Psallite 60311.

17. 95 Jahre Pfarrei Liebfrauen – Organisten des Münsterlandes zu Gast an der KLAIS-Orgel der Liebfrauenkirche, Bocholt.

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