

The Van Covelens organ in the St. Laurenskerk Alkmaar

History and description

Specification

Hoofdwerk	Bovenwerk	Pedaal
8 stops	4 stops	1 stop
Doof 8'	Quintadeen 8'	Trompet 8'
Holpijp 8'	Fluit 4'	
Koppeldoof 4'	Octaaf 2'	
Openfluit 4'	Octaaf D 1'	
Sifflet 1 1/3'		
Mixtuur 2-6 st'		
Scherp 3-6 st		
Trompet 8'		

Compass manuals: FGA-g²a²

Compass pedal: FGA-c¹, lade zonder cis en gis

Manual coupler: BW+HW B/D

Pedalcoupler: Ped+HW

Tremulant, Ventile

Pitch: a¹=427Hz

Temperament: Mean tone

Wind pressure : 68 mm

History and description

1511	built by: Jan van Covelens
1545	Borstwerk added by: Claes Willemsz
1551	addition of a Pedaaltrompet by: Allart Claesz
1625	restoration and alterations by: Jan Jacobsz van Lin
1630	new wind supply by: Levijn Eekman
1651	restoration and alterations by: Jacobus van Hagerbeer
1703-1704	restoration by: Johannes Duytschot
1894	restoration and alterations by: L. Ypma & Co
1939	restoration and alterations by: H.W. Flentrop
1994-2000	restoration by: Flentrop Orgelbouw

With the latest renovation by the organ builder Flentrop, the almost five centuries old Van Covelens-organ has again been restored to its former splendour. The unique instrument stands at the beginning of the Dutch organ-building history. It was built in 1511 by Jan van Covelens as a one-manual organ with eight stops. Van Covelens spread the pipe work of these stops over an upper and lower chest. The lower chest contains the so called "Principael", consisting of the Doof, Koppeldoof, Mixtuur and Scherp. The composition of the "Principael" is related to a Blockwork. A striking element is the principle to double the ranks: the higher the position on the manual, the more the doubling. On the lowest tone F the "Principael" has seven pipes while on the highest a² 17 pipes speak. In a contract of 1525 Van Covelens characterised the sound of the "Principael" as "liefflick ende scharp

van geluyt" (sounding lovely and sharp) . The lower chest also contains the Trompet. The three flute stops, Holpijp, Openfluit and Sifflet were placed on the upper chest, which were directly conducted off the lower chest with lead conduits.

Van Covelens' pupil Claes Willemsz expanded the organ in 1545 with a Borstwerk of two (or three?) stops. This Borstwerk, situated directly behind the keyboard, sounds in the church as an Echo. The present Quintadeen was placed by Claes Willemsz.

The Pedaaltrumpet was probably added in 1551 by Allart Claesz., son of Claes Willemsz. He placed this stop in a case on the right side of the organ which gave the organ an asymmetric outward appearance. The resonators and blocks of this Trompet are still original. It seems that this expansion was in line with the style of Van Covelens. For his organ in Franeker Van Covelens gave the following hint about the use of a Pedaaltrumpet: "soe zal dit werck hebben een vol pedaal, dat men mach speelen die trompetten int principael werck". The Alkmaar Trompet appears to function surprisingly well in smaller ensembles with the Doof and Koppeldoof.

The Fluit 4' and Octaaf 2' on the Borstwerk of the present organ were added by Jan Jacobsz. van Lin, an organ builder from Utrecht. Between 1625 and 1994 the conic Fluit on the Hoofdwerk replaced Van Covelens' Openfluit. During the latest restoration it became apparent that this stop hindered an optimal use of the flute combinations. Problems with wind stability and mixing led to the decision to place this Fluit on the Borstwerk and, by doing so, to reconstruct Van Covelens' flute trio.

Between 1639-1646 the Van Hagerbeer family built a new large organ in the west end of the church. This new instrument was probably one of the reasons why the Van Covelens' organ survived all these centuries. The small organ was since that time especially used when the large organ was not usable. Jacobus van Hagerbeer renewed in 1651 the frontprestant (Doof) of the small organ. It is very probable that he built a new manual for the Borstwerk.

As of 1640 the congregational singing in Alkmaar was already supported by the organ! This fact probably explains the addition of a split manual coupler by Johannes Duytschot in 1685. However, it is doubtful whether this addition increased the power of the organ in light of the echo character of the Borstwerk.

In 1703-04 Duytschot again worked on the organ. The gallery on the right dates from this time. The pedal board, today still extant, also comes from Duytschot. Cornelius van Herk, who inspected the organ, commented in 1704 about the function and nature of the small organ: "...het Orgel in staat gebracht is om onder het Kerkgezang, als ook naa het selve, gebruikt te kunnen worden; doch moet met discretie en voorzigtigheyd, en niet met swaare geluidenen volle grepen behandeld worden" (the organ could be used during congregational singing, or on its own, but should be treated with discretion and caution, and not with heavy sounds and full touch).

The small organ did not remain untouched during the 19th century. During this century the instrument lost many of its double ranks. A large restoration took place in 1894 by the firm Ypma. Shortly before the second world war, H.W. Flentrop repaired the small organ.

Starting-point for the latest restoration was to bring back the organ to the situation of 1651.

Scrupulous research of the old pipework and dismantled windchests supplied so much information about the original situation that during the course of the restoration process plans were adjusted in favour of the Van Covelens concept. The Hoofdwerk was as far as possible restored to the situation of 1511.

The work on the organ comprises the repair of many double ranks, the reconstruction of the Openfluit and the Sifflet and the construction of three new wedge bellows. For the dimensioning of these bellows the description of Gerardus Havingha in his "Oorspronk en Voortgang der Orgelen" (Origin and Progress of the Organ) of 1727, was of great value.

Present specification, with dates of the pipework:

Hoofdwerk (II)

Doof 8'	1-2 st.	1651
Holpijp 8'		1511
Koppeldoof 4'	1-3 st.	1511/2000
Openfluit 4'		1511/2000
Sifflet 1 1/3'		1511/2000
Mixtuur 2-6 st.		1511/2000
Scherp 3-6 st.		mainly 2000
Trompet 8'		2000

Borstwerk (I)

Quintadeen 8'		1545
Fluit 4'		1625
Octaaf 2'		1625
Octaaf 1'D	1-2 st.	2000

Pedaal

Trompet 8'		1551/2000
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