

An old organ lives again



The Swiss Reformed Church traces its roots back to 1519 when the Reformation came to Zürich by way of Ulrich Zwingli. After the early death of Zwingli in 1531, the Reformation continued. The French-speaking cities Neuchâtel, Geneva and Lausanne changed to the Reformation ten years later under William Farel and John Calvin coming from France.

The Zwingli and Calvin branches each had their theological distinctions, but in 1549 under the lead of Bullinger and Calvin they came to a common agreement in the Consensus Tigurinus (Zürich Consent), and 1566 in the Second Helvetic Confession.

The German Reformed ideological center was Zürich, the French speaking Reformed movement bastion was Geneva. A distinctive feature of the Swiss Reformed churches in the Zwinglian tradition is their historically almost symbiotic link to the state (cantons), which is only now in the current years gradually loosening.

Zürich Unterstrass Reformed Church is located north of river Limmat in the old city of Zürich and remains to this day a mainstay of the faith. The Unterstrass quarter is a busy part of Zürich and has a population of 19,921 in an area of just 2.46 km². In 1889, Swiss organbuilder Theodor Kuhn completed an organ with 24 stops for the Unterstrass Church. The organ reflected the tradition developed by his father, Johann Nepomuk Kuhn, who had died in the previous year and was the founder of the Kuhn Orgelbau firm. It characterised the deep tradition of German symphonic organs up to and of that time.

The handsome case of the organ can be seen in the historic photograph at left and the stop list is shown below.

The organ was dismantled in 1911 and transferred to western Switzerland. The church remodelled and installed a new

I. Manual	C - f'''	II. Manual ①	C - f'''
1. Bourdon	16'	1. Lieblich Gedeckt	16'
2. Principal	8'	2. Geigenprincipal	8'
3. Gamba	8'	3. Flauto dolce	8'
4. Dolce	8'	4. Salicional	8'
5. Gedeckt	8'	5. Aeoline	8'
6. Octav	4'	6. Voix céleste	8'
7. Flûte harm.	4'	7. Fugara	4'
8. Octav	2'	8. Flûte d'amour	4'
9. Mixtur 4f.	2 2/3'	9. Oboe	8'
10. Trompete	8'	Tremulo	
P. Pedal	C - d'		
1. Principalbass	16'		
2. Harmonikabass	16'		
3. Subbass	16'		
4. Floetenbass	8'		
5. Violoncello	8'		

① schwellbar

Koppeln II-I, I-P, II-P

5 feste Kombinationen

organ. Today the church interior looks quite different and the church grapples with many issues to make itself relevant to a changing cosmopolitan society in this part of the city.



The organ was transferred from Zurich Unterstrass to Valais, Switzerland, where it was installed in Eglise Paroissiale St. Sigismond, St. Maurice, in 1911. It was installed more or less unchanged. It was in 1953 that the disposition was amended. The Manual I Bourdon 16' was transposed to become a Clairon 4' and the Dolce 8' to a Gemshorn 8'. On the second manual, the Voix céleste 8' became a Flûte 2', the Aeoline 8' to a Prestant 4' and the Fugara 4' to a Plein-jeu 1 1/3'. In the Pedal, the Harmonica bass 16' was transposed to a Bourdon 8'



and the Violincello 8' to an Octave 4'.

In 1960/61, the swell box was removed and the whole neo-gothic front was destroyed. The façade layout was modified to make the rosette window visible.

The organ provided reliable service until 2001. Kuhn Organ Builders Ltd, the modern face of Kuhn Orgelbau, built a new organ for the church in that year and removed the old organ to storage.

The photo at bottom left shows the remodelled façade of the old organ before it was removed. The new organ for St Sigismond Church can be seen below.

For nostalgic reasons, the current proprietors of Kuhn Organ Builders wanted to restore the old mechanical action,



cone-chest organ built by their forefather.

The restoration work began in 2005 and embraced a thorough overhaul of the technical systems with the aim of returning the instrument to a new and functionally reliable condition. The changes to the stop-list which the organ underwent over the years were reversed through reconstruction, thus returning the pipework to its original condition.

The console, the mechanical actions and the cone chests were rebuilt with original parts and made fully functional. The materials are original to about 70 per cent of the whole instrument. Reconstruction of the corresponding pipes to original scales and design was possible and the finished organ of 24 registers on two manuals and pedal represents a very authentic instrument.

Unfortunately the neo-Gothic wooden case was no longer available and could not be reconstructed. Also the swell box for the second manual was missing. These two elements were intended to be inserted once a new location for the instrument could be determined and the construction of them would be designed



specifically for the new home of the organ.

The restoration of the organ was completed in January 2006. A tonal documentation of the instrument was produced during four concerts given in the Kuhn workshop in Männedorf, Switzerland.





The footprint of the reconstructed organ measures 7,200 mm x 2,450 mm, without the forward facing console. The height of the organ to the top of the longest front pipe is 5,600 mm. The organ could, of course, be taller if a replacement case were made for it.

This organ offered a unique opportunity to purchase an authentic instrument in German-Romantic style, which, after restoration, is in new condition. Descriptive documentation was circulated in the organ world to see if there would be any takers.

Above is the organ reconstructed with new pilasters to represent the potential casework in the Männedorf workshop.

In the course of the reconstruction the instrument was found to be in amazingly good condition, the high quality of the original workmanship clearly demonstrated. Pipework, frames and chests, seen in the photos on the preceding page, are all substantial and true. The restoration of the organ included all of the key desk walnut facings, finials, stops and keys also seen on the last page.

In 2016, after almost 10 years, this remarkable organ has woken from its deep slumber. Kuhn Organ Builders has carried out an extensive reconstruction to the neo-Gothic front, so that the visual appearance of the organ, too, will be enjoyed in its original beauty.

By a very happy chance the Kuhn organ of 1889 has found a new home in the Kunst Klang Reformed Church Auf der Egg (“on the egg”, which is a small hill) in Wollishofen, south Zürich, just up from the beautiful Zürichsee lake. Kunst Klang means art and sound, and this church draws crowds of people, particularly children and young people, to experience both. The Kuhn organ joins other organs in the church to celebrate the fact that you are never too old to give pleasure and praise!

Bruce Duncan

Photos and information from Kuhn Organ Builders Ltd





Kunst Klang Kirche
Auf der Egg
Wollishofen, Zürich

