The Pilgrims’ Chorus in the Lower Rhine

Niederheim (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 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 Niederheim. I inquired at the desk and was told that there were no guides of Niederheim 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 (Wällfahrkirchen) 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 Niederheim, 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. The sound is quite dramatic because of the excellent 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-Ellert. The airy quality of the sound is clear and leaves nothing to be desired.

Sint Jan’s Kathedraal, ‘s-Hertogenbosch

A Bridge Too Far. They are also culturally important because of their relationship with the town of Niederheim. Linguistically, one sees the relationship in the fact that the Dutch language is readily understood in the towns of Niederrhein. 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 (Wällfahrkirchen) 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.

Seifert & Sohn IV/128, Marienbasilika, Kevelaer (copyright 2006 by Christoph Martin Fromm/Aeolus)
During 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. Martín Alís 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 martyrs a name: Viktor—the victor even beyond death.

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. The cathedral can be seen from afar, magnificent as it is such a large edifice. The organ, III/42 with 3,263 pipes, is the largest that the cathedral has ever had and was built by Seifert & Sohn of Kevelaer in 1973–1975. It includes an organ, II/28, which was originally installed in 1843, and rebuilt and cleaned by the firm Seifert & Sohn, and subsequently became the symbol of the strong faith of the people in this area.

The pilgrimages in honor of the saints. “Ad Sanctos,” which means “next to the saints. History gave the town: Here people wanted to pray and to live—next to the Saints. History gave the tree 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.”

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 splendour.

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 Ulpi Traiana, through the good graces of the emperor Marcus Ulpi Traianus. 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). 

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. Martín Alís 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.

The 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.

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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 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’ Prinzipal
8’ Principal
8’ Rohrflöte
4’ Oktave
4’ Koppelflöte
2’ Supremace
Pedal
16’ Subbaß
16’ Positiv
8’ Oktave
4’ Positiv
2’ Positiv
8’ Oktave
4’ Positiv
32’ Rückpositiv
16’ Clavien
8’ Koppelflöte
4’ Koppelflöte
2’ Supremace
Kornett V
Klimek

If one looks at a map, one can see how the town of Niederhein is interrelated, the concept of so many pilgrimage churches makes sense. Kleve, right on the Dutch border, suffered as much as the Dutch cities of Arnhem and Nimr- gen, 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 town on the German side suffered tremendously because of this. Kleve is known in legends as hav- ing a relationship with Lohengrin, who is certainly well known because of Wagner’s opera. From the liner notes of Psallite CD 60161

Positif (expressive) (I)
8’ Principal
8’ Bourdon
4’ Octave
4’ Flûte d’echasse
2’1⁄2 Nasard
2’ Doublé
1’1⁄3 Tierce
1’1⁄3 Larigot
1’ Plain de IV
8’ Trompette
8’ Clarion
Tremblant
Récit Expressif (III)
16’ Quintaton
8’ Flûte traversière
8’ Viola da Gamba
8’ Voci celesti
4’ Flûte octavienne
2’ Octavin
III Carillon (21⁄2 + 11⁄2 + 1’)
16’ Tibia marquis
8’ Trompette harmonique
8’ Bassin-Hautbois
8’ Voci humana
4’ Clarion harmonique
Tremblant
Pédale
12’ Sousbasse
16’ Contrebasse
16’ Sousbasse
8’ Basse
8’ Bourdon
4’ Flûte
4’ Cornemuse (est)
8’ Trompette
Mechanical key action
Electric stop action

Very near Kleve lies the small town of Kalkar, which profits from a quaint setting. The Nicolaikirche’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 1694 there was a baroque instrument. That was replaced in 1867–72 by a two-manual and pedal organ of 30 stops by the Rieter-Orgelbau company. The Cologne

Stiftskirche St. Mariä Himmelfahrt, Kleve (courtesy Rieter-Organbau GmbH)
architect Heinrich Wiethase designed a late-gothic case that is still in use today. Holger Brülls writes about this organ and the subsequent ones in an article cited below. One notes the influence of Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, and the Dombauinspektor (cathedral building inspector) Friedrich Schmidt praised the organ for its workmanship. The placement of the organ varied from the west tower to the south portal, where it is currently situated. The instrument was replaced in 1904 by Franz Tibus, but retained the Wiethase case. The two-manual and pedal organ on pneumatic cone chests was in line with German organ building of the late romantic years. In the late 1960s, Seifert & Sohn (Kevelaer) built an electric-action slider chest three-manual and pedal organ of a neo-baroque character and retained the Wiethase case. The organ has 2,450 pipes. It received some additions in the year 2000 during the course of interior renovation work in the church; two octave couplers and a new stop Trompette-harmonique 8′ were added. Jan Szopinski is the Cantor of St. Nicolai Kirche. Typical of the towns in the area, near the main square there is a picturesque windmill that was converted into a restaurant.

Wesel

Driving directly west from Kleve, one encounters the city of Wesel, which has a very large Protestant cathedral (Dom) in the city center. The destruction during the war was substantial, and it is sad to see the pictures on display in the interior. It is a church of enormous scope, and

MAY, 2008 25


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the rebuilding was done over the span of many years. It is dated from 1947 to 1949, with the support of the Willibrordi-Domhau-
verein (Dom building association). The intent was to bring back the medieval nature of the Dom.13

The steeple stands high over the cen-
ter 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 situa-
tion 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 interi-
or because of the height of the windows.

The organ, built by Marcussen & Son 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 Bus-
tehude, Fuxelbel, Bach, and Mozart through Franck, Mendelssohn, Reger, Brahms, and Messiaen. I found particu-
larly impressive the Reger Introduction and Passacaglia in D minor, Boellmann’s “Cartillon” from Donzé Pâques, and Dieu parmi nous by Messiaen.14

Marcussen & Son III/54 Wesel

Hauptwerk (II)

16’ Principal
8’ Oktav
8’ Flûte en Ut
8’ Rohrflöte
8’ Gamba
4’ Oktave I–III
3’ Quarte
2’ Quinte
1’ 2/3 Quinte
2’ 8’ Wallflöte
1’ 8’ Hintermann VI–IX
1’ 8’ Schalmei VI–VII
10’ Trompete
8’ Trompete
8’ Spanische Trompete

Schwellwerk (III)

16’ Prinzipal
8’ Salicional
8’ Vio-Silber
8’ Rohrflöte
8’ Quartenflöte
4’ Prinzipal*
2’ 8’ Flöte ostonante
2’ 2’ Naturale
2’ Oktav
1 1/3 Tierce
4’ Florn: p=V–VII
1’ 8’ Bariton
8’ Trompete
8’ Vio-Humana
8’ Oboe
4’ 2/3 Quarte

Rückpositiv (I)

10’ Cordon
8’ Gedächtnis

Klaas III/54 Liebfrauenkirche, Bocholt

Oberwerk (I)

2’ Gedächtnis
8’ Gamba
8’ Oktave maris
4’ Principal
4’ Traversflöte
4’ Waldflöte
1’ 2/3 Larigot
1’ 8’ Sesquialter II
3’ Schalmei IV
16’ Bariton Hautbass
8’ Cromorne Trompete

Hauptwerk (II)

16’ Oktav
d’ 8’ Prinzipal
8’ Gesimphon
2’ 8’ Octave
2’ 2/3 Keppelbasse
2’ 8’ Quinte
2’ 2/3 Supratenor
2’ 16’ Oktave
4’ 8’ Trompete

Notes

1. Information on the cathedral and or-
gan is from leaflets available at the church;
liner notes of a recording (CD10122801) by Jaques von der Deul on STH records, Hol-
land (2001); and Berg Wierigfeld, Orgel in der Niederrhein, Edition Mensenber, Ber-

2. The organ on this organ comes from four sources: a) LINER NOTES OF THE REC-
ORDING FROM BOCHOLT, WAGNER STUDIES CD03122001, von der Deul on STH records,
CD 60311, which includes recordings made in 1968 and 1991 by Raimund Pohle and Wiel-
and Stockmueller; b) Notes by the organ firm of Romman Schott & Sohn in 1969 as part of the above recording; c) Gottert & Innsbruck, Orgel Führer Deutschland Edition Münsters, 1999, and d) Kessel, the organ
forschung von St. Marien und die Kirchenmusik, pp. 13 and 14.


7. Reinhard Kastenbeck and Holger Kempenkamp, St. Victor zu Xanten, Propsteiege-
samte des Xantener Domes, Bärenreiter-Ver-


10. Carl Scharf, Orgel in Niederlanden, Bärenreiter-Ver-


12. Niederrheinisches Land im Krieg, Wil-
helm Michels, Boss, Druck und Verlag, transla-
tion by Aldo J. Baggio, p. 142.

13. Organos Claves 2006/2, Dupé, Musi-


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

16. Euphonia Town Guide to Germany, Durin

17. Niederrheinsketter Land im Krieg, Wil-
helm Michels, Boss, Druck und Verlag, transla-
tion by Aldo J. Baggio, p. 142.

18. Organos Claves 2006/2, Dupé, Musi-


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

21. Euphonia Town Guide to Germany, Durin

22. Niederrheinsketter Land im Krieg, Wil-
helm Michels, Boss, Druck und Verlag, transla-
tion by Aldo J. Baggio, p. 142.

23. Organos Claves 2006/2, Dupé, Musi-