



Mathis Orgelbau AG CH-8752 Näfels

Einsiedeln, Benedictine Monastery



The name Einsiedeln derives from a certain Einsiedler Meinrad who retreated into solitude in the forest and was slain by robbers in 861. The sites where he lived in the dark woods came to be revered. A capitular from Strassburg named Benno settled here in 910 followed by Eberhard, also of Strassburg. Eberhard founded a convent into which he initiated the hermits of the dark forest to the monastic life style according to the dictates of Saint Benedict.

The first church was dedicated in 948, destroyed by fire in 1031 and rebuilt in the years 1031 to 1039. The basic shape of this house of worship remained until the Baroque and served as a foundation for all later constructions.

In addition to its extensive construction legacy the historical pilgrimage church of Einsiedeln has a long history of organs. It was a fundamental element of the the Benedictine order to celebrate mass with elegant pageantry, of which excellent organs were an essential part. This tradition continues to be cultivated by today's convent sovereigns.



The Portable Positive Organ in the Festvall Hall

The origin of the portable Positive Organ in the Festival Hall of the Benedictine Abbey is not known. Deducing from its outward appearance and size, it probably comes from the Lake Constance area, perhaps from Appenzell. The peculiar characteristics of the mostly anonymous organs from Appenzell are organ shutters and front pipes in three straight flats with horizontally arranged lips. The Einsiedeln instrument is in many ways similar to a Bommer organ in the Library Hall of the monastery in Fischingen from around 1727-28. This suggests that it could also have been built by Johann Jakob Bommer from Weingarten or by one of his teachers or students.

The instrument was greatly changed from its original form in 1980. Among others the front was rebuilt, the keyboard modernized with new normal sized keys and an altered compass, and the original wedge bellows with pump handle in the front of the case replaced by an organ blower with schwimmer bellows.



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In addition the original specification of the organ consisting of Copel 8, Flöte 4, Principal 2 D-c'' in the front, Quint 1 1/2 and Octav 1 with short octave C to c'' were reduced to four stops: Gedeckt 8, Principal 4, Gedeckt 4 E-d' sharp in the front, and Octave 2 with compass E to c''. The size of the wind chest was adapted to accommodate the new pipework and one of the five original metal stop levers was taken out of operation. The original wooden pipes were reused in the modified instrument whereas the original metal pipes were all replaced by new factory produced ones.

Both the Bommer organ mentioned above in the Library Hall of the monastery in Fischingen as well as a similarly constructed Appenzell home organ of 1785 owned by the Swiss State Museum in Zurich were used as models for the restoration and reconstruction of the Einsiedeln portable positive organ.



Upon restoration this instrument has once again become a fine example of regional small organ building craftsmanship as it was practiced in Switzerland in the 18th and early 19th



centuries in Emmental, Toggenburg and in the cantons of Zurich, Appenzell, and Graubünden. Since Zwingli's teachings banned organ and instrumental music from the church, organ playing often moved into rural farm houses where regional types of house organs with differing front displays came into being. Since many such small organs have been lost in the course of time there are only a very few extant Appenzell models, whereby there are about 50 existing examples of historical Toggenburg organs. Whatever the local origin of the Einsiedeln instrument, it is important that it exists as a restored representative of a past time with an authentic organ sound.

Günter Lade

