

PRACTICE ROOM

THE INSTRUMENTS YOU PLAY AT HOME

17. Martin Butter, Ridderkerk, Netherlands

Martin Butter works as an organ builder for Henk van Eeken but is also active independently as a maker of exquisitely crafted keyboard instruments, including harpsichords, virginals, spinets and organs for continuo and practice use, writes *Chris Bragg*.

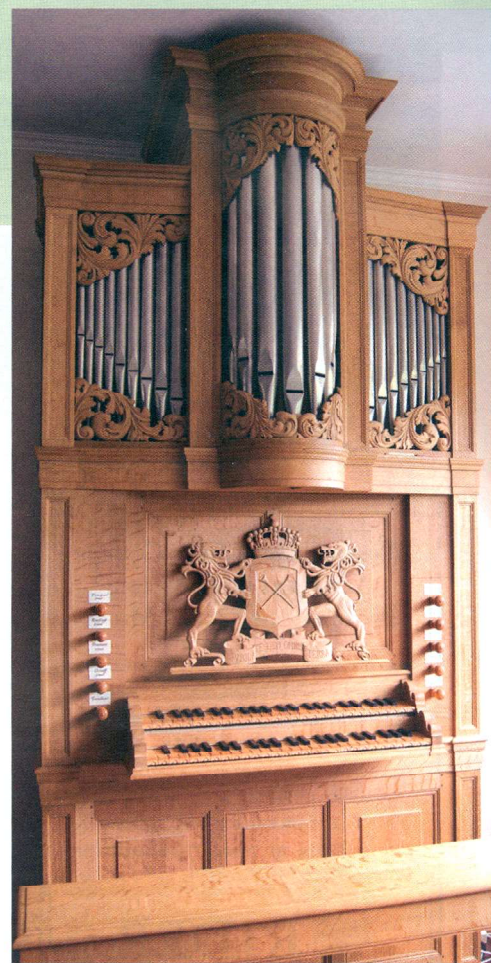
Butter's own house organ reflects his credo: 'Before you can call yourself an organ builder you must have years of experience of working with the material and you must have made a number of instruments entirely yourself.'

With the present house organ, completed in 2007, this is quite literally the case. Butter cast the pipe metal himself (on sand in the workshop of Van Eeken) and made every other part of the instrument himself, including the richly carved music desk, the pipeshades and the calligraphy on the stop labels. The keyboards have naturals covered with boxwood and sharps covered with ebony. Given his background as a pupil and employee of Van Eeken, who essays historical northern European organ-building styles according to the principles of 'process reconstruction', it is unsurprising that this instrument is designed specifically for renaissance and early baroque music. The tuning is quarter-comma meantone, with a slight variation whereby the E flats are tuned as D sharps, while the keyboard compass extends only to c3. The case is made of quarter-sawn vintage Slovenian oak and is based on the Rugwerk case of the Waalse

Kerk in Amsterdam (Nicolaas Langlez, 1680) and the cases of the Severijn organ (1650) at the St Martinuskerk in Cuijk.

The metal pipework has a high lead content (83 per cent) – the case pipes are taken from the Praestant 4ft. Much data was utilised from the surviving positive organs by the mid-17th-century Nuremberg organ builder Nicolaus Manderscheid, including those housed in the museum at Skara, Sweden and, remarkably enough, in the Museum of Liverpool. The wind is provided by a single wedge bellows in the base of the organ. The two manual divisions share a single soundboard, with pallet boxes at both the front and the rear. The specifications of the manuals themselves evoke something of the traditional Dutch Hoofdwerk/Bovenwerk aesthetic, with the Principal chorus on the first manual, and the flutes and (eventually) imitative reed on the other.

While not practical for every organist's study requirements, Butter's organ is an astoundingly rewarding and delicate piece of craftsmanship with a sound which seduces the listener's ear in a tacitly charming manner, providing a telling warmth even in the lounge of a modern terraced house. The oak Praestant 8ft is an especially clever touch, reminiscent of the Arp Schnitger examples found on the Brustwerks of his largest organs. It provides a more colourful counterpoint to the 8ft stopped wooden flutes found on this and on other such organs, and blends particularly well with other instrumentalists.



▲ Martin Butter carved the music desk himself, and did his own calligraphy for the stop labels

Butter's great achievement here is in the creation of a profoundly musical instrument which rises far above the prosaic rugged efficiency of many examples of the genre. Moreover this organ is a spectacular example of the singular, yet multi-disciplinary creativity of a world-class artisan, reflecting a deep understanding of the work of historical craftsmen with a dizzying degree of panache. ■
www.martinbutter.nl

Martin Butter's house organ, Ridderkerk Martin Butter (2007)

Lower manual

Holfluyt	8	oak, the largest 7 pipes in the lower case.
Fluyt	4	bass in oak with pierced stoppers, treble 83% lead
Nasard	3	bass in oak with pierced stoppers, conical treble pipes, 83% lead
Cromhorn	8	prepared for

Upper manual

Principael	8	from tenor F. Oak with pearwood facings.
Roerfluyt	8	Oak with pierced stop pers. Bass octave from Holfluyt.
Praestant	4	C-A oak. B flat-b1 in façade, remainder on windchest
Octaeff	2	bass octave from oak, remainder 83% lead

Manual compass: C, D–c3 (48 notes)

Pedal compass: C, D–d1 (26 notes)

Pedal coupler to I or II

Tremulant to both manuals

Tuning: modified $\frac{1}{4}$ comma meantone. Wind pressure: 46mm