

Passacaglia
Matthias Havinga

Review in: De Orgelvriend, Jan/Feb. 2013.

'The organ's friend' is the largest national organ journal for professional and amateur organists in the Netherlands.

Among the available (still fortunately considerable) assortment of organ CD's, some have a decidedly different character. For example, who has the courage to fill such a disc with over 64 minutes devoted exclusively to passacaglias, past and present? The highly talented Matthias Havinga has bravely taken on this challenge, with all the praise or criticism it might bring. The organ he performs on - a three-keyboard, Finnish instrument built in 1998 by Martti Porthan in the style of Silbermann - is also an unusual choice. The instrument has untempered tuning, designed by Timo Kiiskinen (pitch $a^1 = 465$). Porthan's opus does sound very penetrating, but above all very harmonious. Furthermore, the instrument proves to lend itself convincingly to the most diverse compositions. Havinga graduated *summa cum laude* in 2008, also obtaining degrees in piano and church music. He has won a number of awards and serves, among others, the Ronde Lutherse Kerk (Round Lutheran Church) in Amsterdam. As an organist, Havinga also works closely with the recorder player Hester Groenleer; their repertoire includes contemporary music. His performance on the organ can be described as very meticulous and conscientious, coupled with great emotional control and a dose of objectivity.

It is in Reger's *Introduktion und Passacaglia* that these qualities emerge in the most favourable way. Buxtehude's *Passacaglia* is beautifully performed, with modest variations in registration that are particularly appropriate to this work. Mendelssohn's *Passacaglia*, which he composed as a teenager, is distinguished by an 8-bar theme in 4/4 time (something unique) and is a striking homage to Bach's eponymous piece of organ music. A perfect jewel is the manualiter piece *Rondeau- Passacaille* by François Couperin, originally composed for harpsichord. Havinga's interpretation does full justice, in a most enjoyable way, to the splendid principals and melancholy-sounding flutes. Jan Welmers' composition from 1965 is a complete contrast to Couperin's charming and intimate piece. The organ work is not only brought suggestively into the spotlight; it also scintillates with its exciting harmonic formations, tone accumulations and whimsical-sounding and surprising *ff* contrasts. Just as exciting is the *Passacaglia in D* by Kerll with no less than 40 variations on a theme of only two(!) bars. Havinga's playing excels here in that he interprets the entire work in a way that is sober yet suggestive on just one warm-sounding group of principals. Also no less exciting is the sour-sounding *Passacaglia* of Dimitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) which, like Welmers' work, is psychologically well positioned in the CD's programme. This poignant piece of music functions as an interlude between two scenes in the second act of Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth*. The CD concludes with Bach's monumental *Passacaglia*. Arguments about the use of the stops may flare up occasionally, with some arguing 'rather too strict' and others 'rather too exuberant', but despite Havinga's devoted playing it is tiring to listen to Bach's piece - over a quarter of an hour on a 16-foot plenum!

The booklet looks very nicely put together, not least because of the clear explanation with sample scores in English. It is a pity that there is no Dutch translation. It would certainly be worthwhile to publish a second passacaglia edition, but this time with the works of Rudolph Escher, Henk Badings, Hans Kox, Ton de Leeuw, Peter Schat and others. And, of course... Hendrik Andriessen! The time is now more than ripe to devote some attention to these Dutch composers. / Kees Weggelaar