

Students Study Organs in Netherlands Tour

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STUDENTS STUDY ORGANS IN NETHERLANDS TOUR

Dordt group plays 24 organs—many world-famous—in 10-day trip.

The Netherlands organ study tour was developed to provide a life-changing opportunity for organ students, says Dr. Carrie Groenewold, associate professor of church music and organ. She, Professor of Language Studies Dr. Leendert van Beek, and a group of Dordt students spent 10 days traveling to cities such as Amsterdam, Gouda, Haarlem, Groningen, and Dordrecht to play 24 historic organs.

For students like Jake Thorsteinson, the tour was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

"Playing and hearing beautiful, historic organs touched by the fingers of phenomenal musicians for 10 days straight was a no-brainer, not to mention the added benefit of exploring the Netherlands in all of its beauty and having a personal connection with the Netherlands being the birthplace of my grandparents," he says.

"Our tour group performed on some world-famous organs, such as the Müller organ at St. Bavokerk in Haarlem, which was played by Handel, Mozart, Mendelssohn, and Liszt, among other famous musicians," says Groenewold. "It's hard to put into words how beautiful these organs are; every stop is incredibly gorgeous, and the students explored new ideas for registration (the combination of stops for any piece), guided by the resident organists."

The benefits of the tour are manifold, she adds. "The students learned to listen in new ways, to compare and contrast the instruments we played, and to become more confident in choosing registration."

There were more large organs on the tour, but also smaller organs in smaller churches, some of which were quite unique, such as the one in Oosthuizen that dates back to the mid-16th century, says van Beek.

Students learned the art of organ improvisation from Dutch organists, including participating in a masterclass on improvisation led by organist Sietze de Vries.



For 90 minutes, students played the Christian Müller organ at Haarlem's St. Bavokerk, which was packed with tourists.

PHOTO SUBMITTED

by the Amsterdam Bach Ensemble in that space, with origins dating back to the early 13th century, was truly fantastic," says Groenewold.

In addition to immersing themselves in all things organ-related, the tour group was able to experience Dutch culture and heritage.

"We visited historic landmarks, such as a medieval castle, the city of Dordrecht, the Delftware factory, and the Corrie ten Boom house," says van Beek, who is also an avid organ player. "Some students of Dutch ancestry were able to find locations where their grandparents or great-grandparents were born. We were able to drive through some of their ancestral towns and make stops."

"From generation to generation" took on an entirely different meaning for Thorsteinson when the tour group stopped at St. Bavokerk in Haarlem where his grandmother was baptized.

"I saw my Oma's family name on a list of office-bearers for the church under the year 1641," he recalls. "Playing and hearing the organs, though, was incredibly special. It was surreal knowing that my ancestors once heard the organ that I played, and they worshipped the same God that I do."

It's hard to explain how powerful and sobering it is to experience generational faith, Thorsteinson says, but those moments encapsulated "the mystery and delight of a God who is loving and faithful."

For Karli Vanden Brink, a junior music education and organ performance major, the tour inspired her to keep playing. "It inspired me as a musician when I played in the large cathedrals and how the organ filled the space. I was challenged with adapting to the many different organs. This trip was one of the most inspiring experiences I've had as an organist and musician. As a future music educator, it also reminded me to never stop learning and to teach the importance of music."

SARAH MOSS ('10)

“I was in awe of the way they played so freely, without the constraint of printed sheet music.”

— Isabel Munson

"What really inspired me was seeing how most Dutch organists are highly skilled at improvising," says Isabel Munson, a junior organ performance major. "I was in awe of the way they played so freely, without the constraint of printed sheet music."

The students even worked together to provide music at a Pentecost Sunday service at a Reformed church. "The final event of our tour was attending Pentecost Vespers at the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam. Experiencing Bach's Pentecost Cantata