



▲ Simon Hebeisen (at the keyboard) and Thomas Murray-Robertson work on a practice organ for a private residence

# Work in progress

**Katelyn Emerson** considers the power of small in the Lucerne workshop of Orgelbau Goll.

WORKSHOP PHOTOS BY KATELYN EMERSON

**I**t's so *powerful* is often given as the reason why people love and play the pipe organ. The 'king of instruments' can be undeniably powerful, and Orgelbau Goll's well-known instruments in Memmingen (IV/62, 1998), Hanover (IV/64, 2009), and another 100-odd locations that have received new instruments in the last four decades offer thundering power as well as musical whispers – and everything in between.

Two of several recent projects at Goll's historic Lucerne workshop, however, seek to utilise a simpler specification and exclusively softer flues to serve organists' practice. These fully enclosed, three-stop *Kammerorgeln* (chamber organs) are the youngest of five such 'siblings' that the firm has crafted; one of the earlier instruments, constructed in 2019, is in Salzburg's Universität Mozarteum, and the remaining two, both built in 2016, are in private homes.

Fifteen years ago Goll's managing director, Simon Hebeisen, travelled with an organist colleague who was looking for a second-hand house organ. After visiting nearly a dozen of these instruments, they both knew that none were what this organist sought for his home: as simple and budget-friendly an instrument as possible, while still being elegant and meticulously designed.

For Hebeisen, 'the idea for these practice instruments was in my head ever since, but >



## Orgelbau Goll – how it all began

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▲ Founder Friedrich Goll, and his grandson Friedrich (r), the third generation of directors, who succeeded his father Paul in 1955

The 12th child of farmer Jakob Friedrich Goll and nurse Anna Maria, Friedrich Goll was born in Bissingen an der Teck, now part of the state of Baden-Württemberg in southwest Germany, in 1839. He took to organ building early in life, beginning in the trade by working for his elder brother, Christoph Ludwig Goll, from the age of 14-18. In 1858, Friedrich left Germany to travel and study in France, with Joseph Merklin, and, briefly, England. He settled in Switzerland in 1863, working for the famed German-Swiss organ builder Friedrich Haas, whose factory, founded in 1838, had been in Lucerne since 1859. In 1868, aged 28, Goll took over the Haas workshop and founded his own company, overseeing the transition from mechanical to Goll-patented pneumatic actions, expanding the company to approximately 70 employees, and building nearly 130 new instruments in just the first decade of the 20th century.

Goll's sons, Karl and Paul, became partners in 1905 and the company was renamed 'Goll & Cie'. Their successful tenure, before and following their father's death in 1911, included moving the workshop to Horw, in the southern part of Lucerne, and culminated in the 1924-26 expansion of Friedrich Goll's III/50 Opus 12 (1876-77). This instrument, which is housed in the Klosterkirche Engelberg, remains Switzerland's largest organ to date: four manuals and 135 stops, expanded to 137 stops during a renovation by Orgelbau Graf in 1992-93.

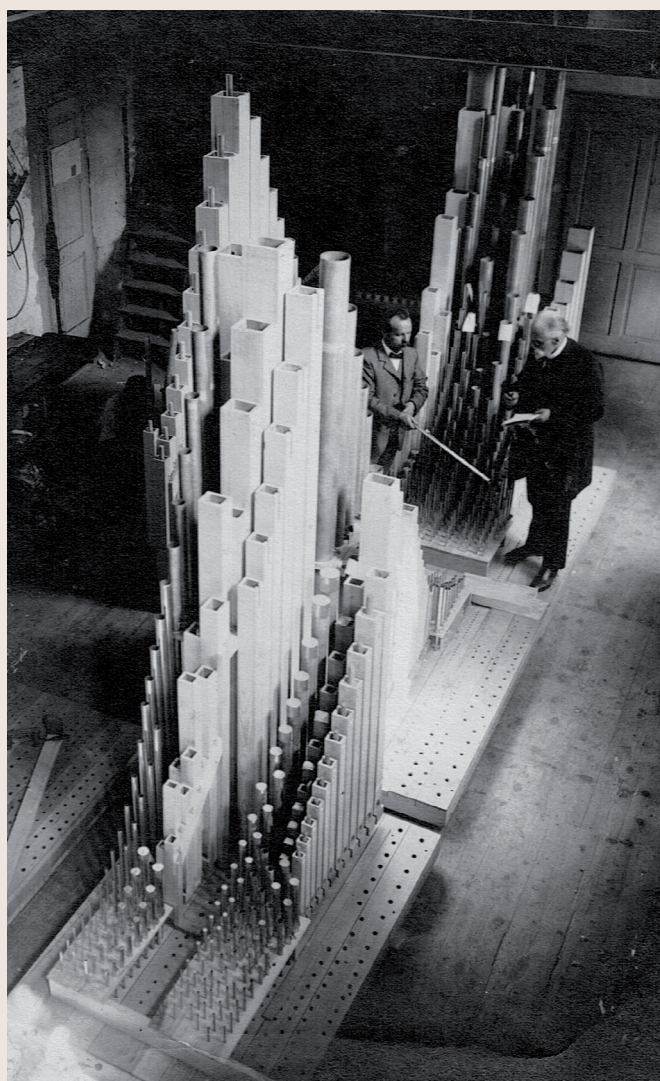
In 1928, Paul Goll and Wilhelm Lackner, respectively technical director and voicer, founded the 'new' company as a stock corporation. In the 1930s, the factory relocated to the plot of land where it still stands today, occupying two buildings just south of the train station and old town, on what was then the very edge of Lucerne. Friedrich, Paul Goll's son and the third generation of Golls to lead the workshop, succeeded his father upon his death in 1955, but Friedrich's own sudden, tragic death in 1971 resulted in yet another re-founding.

In 1972, Beat Grenacher, tonal director and voicer, and Jakob Schmidt, designer and architect, took over Orgelbau Goll, transforming it into the company that exists in Lucerne today. Such renowned organs as those of St Martin's in Memmingen (IV/62, 1998) and the Französische Kirche in Bern (IV/61, 1991) are just two of the many admirable instruments that the firm produced under Grenacher and Schmidt.

When Schmidt passed away in 1998, Simon Hebeisen, who had apprenticed with Goll 10 years earlier and had since travelled and studied interior architecture, was called back by Grenacher to join as partner. When Grenacher retired from the day-to-day running of the workshop in 2009, Hebeisen became sole managing director, overseeing the 15 employees and facilitating the 2018 vertical expansion of the erecting room to allow for the construction of larger instruments, while retaining the original historic walls.

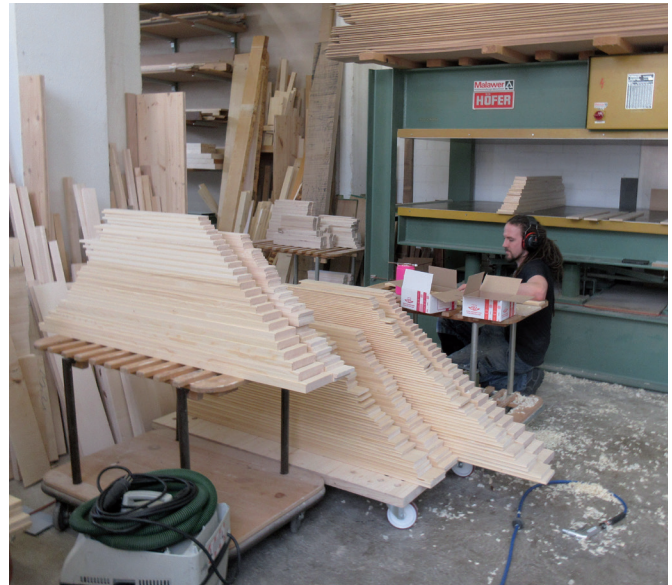
Goll's current projects include installing and voicing their portion (49 stops) of the new 206-stop, tripartite instrument for Mainz Cathedral (DE), the remainder of which will be completed by Rieger Orgelbau soon thereafter; a new organ of 74 stops for the Marktkirche in Clausthal-Zellerfeld (DE) to be held within the original 1759 Johann Georg Eggert façade; and an unusual project for the St Laurenzen-Kirche, St Gallen (CH), where the existing 1979 Kuhn instrument will be integrated into a new conception, with additional parts on three galleries, and a new freestanding, mobile console.

▼ The Lucerne workshop of Goll in 1915, with (l) Karl Goll and (r) Carl Locher, a famous Swiss organist and composer of that time



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▲ Thomas Bremgartner (l) and Luca Troxler (r) work on pipes for the firm's next big project, a completely new IV/74 organ for the Marktkirche in Clausthal, Germany, to be housed in a 1759 baroque case by Johann Georg Eggert

◁ other new instruments took priority.' Rather than a small-big practice organ that seeks to be a 'concert organ in miniature' through a (small) myriad of flue and reed stops, as is more common, he envisaged three unique and beautifully voiced 8ft stops, one on each of the two manuals and pedal. Of course, Goll has created 'concert organs in miniature' before, including for the Stuttgart Musikhochschule (III/35, 1998); the 100-person concert hall at the Zurich University of the Arts (III/31, 2014; see *Choir & Organ*, March/April 2015); and a second instrument for the Salzburg Mozarteum (III/11, 2019).

Cementing a proposal for any music school's new instruments is never simple. When officials for the Lucerne Musikhochschule began their process, they followed the legal requirement to ask all European builders if they would like to submit proposals for new organs for the new building. Of the 25 firms that indicated interest, a total of five – from Switzerland, Germany and France – were selected for more detailed submissions. Hebeisen observes with a wry smile, 'With such a choice, the Swiss can often be ruled out' due to their significantly higher price tags. However, while the German Freiburger Orgelbau Hartwig und Tilmann Späth was selected to build a III/20 instrument, the Swiss builders were not ruled out. Reflecting an admiration of this company and its instruments, professors and local organ-

lovers set about raising money, resulting in an extraordinary gift for the Musikhochschule students: not one, but *two* new organs for the 2020 autumn semester: the Späth organ, and a new two-manual practice organ by Goll – the slightly taller of the two practice organs in Goll's erecting room at the time of my visit. Measuring 2.6 metres high by 1.76 metres wide, the instrument was moved into a practice room within the Musikhochschule's brand-new Lucerne-Kriens site in August, in time for the semester's beginning.

The slightly shorter twin (only 2.3 metres tall) of the Musikhochschule organ will settle

in a private music room that is slightly larger than the Musikhochschule's practice rooms.

The two instruments sound similar, although their tonal finishing will distinguish them in their permanent homes. The three flue stops already sing beautifully. On the first manual, the Bourdon 8ft speaks with the more prominent articulation so often enjoyed in the onset of a Gedackt, and has a silvery tone that fills even the large erecting room without nearing the overwhelmingly pure. Contrast this with the golden colour of the second manual's 8ft Suavial, a sweet Geigen-Principal-like stop that perfectly walks the ▷

▼ (l) Goll has devised pedal 'risers' for children; (r) bespoke keycheeks are a Goll trademark





▲ Managing director Simon Hebeisen: his experience in interior architecture has had a decisive influence on the firm's casework

◁ line between full string and small diapason. This stop is as smooth in the onset as the Bourdon was articulate, which results in an impeccable combination when manuals are coupled by the hitch-down lever to the right, above the pedals. In a near-miracle of voicing, either stop can accompany the other for solos, supported by the focused fundamental of the pedal's slightly wider 8ft Flûte. The eight lowest pipes (C-G) of the Suavial are shared with the pedal, the first four of which are Haskelled, and the pipes move from slots in the bass to cone-tuned in the treble. These pipes stand on a regular toeboard, which rests on the tables of a 'sliderless' slider soundboard.

Each rank of pipes is constructed from a different alloy: Bourdon 8ft with higher lead (94%), the Suavial with more tin (70%), and the Flûte in between (40% tin). Goll has its own pipe shop, but when larger or a high quantity of pipes are required for new instruments, a local Swiss pipemaker lends his expertise to the firm, and Killinger Pfeifen in Freiberg am Neckar supports Goll's reed production.

Hebeisen's experience in interior architecture influenced the subtle and understated exterior of the organs, making them as subtly unique as the final aural results will be. The maple cases feature groove-textured panels interesting to both eye and hand, which are continued in the vertical

swell shutters that hide the pipes when the boxes are closed. This attention to detail extends to the bespoke key cheeks, which feature an inlaid wood pattern that is inspired by the unique architectural features of each instrument's destined home and is always personally designed by Hebeisen himself. The manual and pedal compasses are slightly limiting, at 58 and 30 notes respectively, justified by saying that the uppermost notes are not needed for such small instruments.

Looking under the hood reveals arguably the most thoughtfully designed parts of these little instruments. Typically, two-manual tracker organs have one pallet box behind the other, with the first manual's pallets and action accessible behind the music desk and the second manual's via rear panels. To enable these practice organs to remain against a wall even when action maintenance is being performed, Goll has placed the pallet box for the second manual below that of the first so that both actions are equally accessible simply by removing the music desk and one large faceboard.

Another notable distinction, easily discovered through trying out the smooth yet decisive key action, is how Goll compensated for what, in most small tracker practice organs, is a common complaint for many organists. When trying to work within a limited space and needing to supply wind to only a single rank of pipes that demand little, the natural tendency of many organ builders is to make as small a pallet as is needed, resulting in minimal – or just about no – pluck, and precious little resistance once the key is depressed. These 'lie detector' actions teach an organist to be extremely precise and minimal in movement, but it is rare to encounter an organ, even one just slightly larger, with such sensitive action, begging the question 'for what is one practising?'

In Goll's *Kammerorgeln*, the chests are a little wider than key-scale, with a small rollerboard distributing bass notes as required. However, throughout its compass the rollerboard also facilitates a mechanical advantage whereby the key action enters the roller arm close to the pivot point and exits the roller arm, headed to the pallets, slightly farther from the fulcrum. In the treble range, the same principle is implemented using a small rocker. Functionally reversed, this technique is often used in large organs to reduce key weight for

the player. In this case, however, increased resistance is a welcome advantage.

The legend of Swiss engineering and attention to detail feels brought to life in every inch of these Goll *Kammerorgeln*, which sound as exquisite as their composite pieces look and require a budget of some CHF150,000 to own. The power of even a small, three-rank instrument – particularly in its capacity to enable concentrated practice and finger-training – is undeniable. The gorgeous colours coupled with receptive and firm action offer an organist the opportunity to grow their own power over even the most intimate aspects of their playing. ■

*Holding degrees from Oberlin, Toulouse and Stuttgart, Katelyn Emerson is based in Illinois, USA. She gives concerts and teaches throughout the USA, Europe, and Asia.*  
[katelynemerson.com](http://katelynemerson.com)

▼ The Lucerne *Kammerorgel* installed in the new building of the Musikhochschule



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