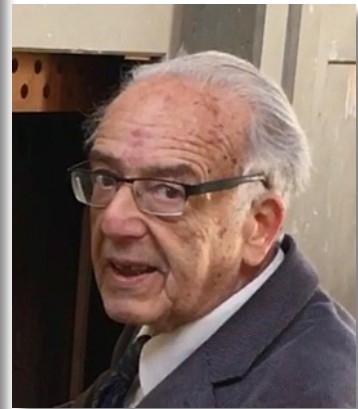


Steinmeyer Synagogue Organs



Paul Steinmeyer (1933-2019)

In September 2018 I received an invitation from Mr. **Paul Steinmeyer** (1933-2019) to visit the Förderverein Orgelbaumuseum STEINMEYER in Öttingen. He took me on a tour of the museum and also gave me a book: Steinmeyer orgeln - seit 1847 (1972). This book gives an overview of all organs this German family of organ builders built in that period. The thousands of organs in this book were built mainly in churches, concert halls etc., which makes the book a source of information about every Steinmeyer organ, including the year it was built (or repaired), the opus number, manuals, registers and location.

I once came across a summary of an article on the internet written by **Dr. Achim Seip**, organ expert in the dioceses of Mainz and Lumburg.

The title of the article: "*Synagogen organism of the Werkstatt Steinmeyer (Oettingen)*" was published on the website of Gesellschaft der Orgelfreunde e.V / Acta Organologica 30, in the magazine Acta Organologica 30, 2008. In this article Dr. Seip says that G.F. Steinmeyer & Co (Öttingen) built five synagogue organs in Germany and the Ukraine. These organs are also mentioned in the book which I got from Paul Steinmeyer, but obviously I had overlooked them.

Because I wanted to know more about these five organs, I immediately contacted Dr. Seip. He sent me a copy of the booklet in which the full article was published. For his research he had consulted archives in the Steinmeyer Museum in Öttingen and the Stadtarchiv München, among others.

I became even more curious and continued to search for information about the German-Jewish organ culture which Seip had mentioned in his article. On the internet I came across the names of researchers who had studied Jewish organ culture and researched it extensively.

One of these researchers, **Dr. Tina Frühauf**, a German-American musicologist and Adjunct Assistant Professor at Columbia University, New York. Her findings appear in the book *Orgel und Orgelmusik in deutsch-jüdischer Kultur* (2005).

The second researcher, **Matthias Havinga**, principal organ teacher at the Amsterdam Conservatoire and a concert organist. He carried out a study for his thesis for his master's degree at the Amsterdam Conservatoire and published his findings in a book entitled *Organ in Diaspora, a study of Jewish Organ culture in the Netherlands* (February 2008).

These two researchers give a picture of the liberal Jewish movement in Germany in the 19th and 20th centuries, which saw the introduction of the organ in synagogues.

According to Frühauf and Havinga, many organs were built during this period and their size became more and more 'ambitious'. Frühauf: "Many of the organs were built between 1848 and 1871 when Jewish congregations were enjoying the benefit of liberal German economic policies. The period also saw a large number of innovations in organ building as the organ developed into a synagogue instrument.

[v. Frühauf: The organ as a Jewish Religious Response to Modernity, 2020 - www.oxfordscholarship.com]

It was by no means exceptional for a synagogue in a big city to have an organ with three manuals and a free pedal, with multiple manuals on a sixteen-foot base, each manual having access to a large number of eight-foot registers and multiple reeds. The organs were generally built by the same builders, such as E. F. Walcker & Cie., Sauer and Rieger, who became known for constructing the largest church and concert organs. The number of synagogue organs built by E. F. Walcker & Cie. is particularly impressive.

[v. Havinga: The organ in the Diaspora, a study of Jewish Organ culture in the Netherlands, p. 14, Frühauf 2005 only 243 ff.]

Organ music

Tina Frühauf wrote that the introduction of the organ into synagogues marked the beginning of a new branch of Jewish music. This gave rise to a large number of arguments and discussions because the organ was seen by conservative Jews as "Christianisation of the service". People also wondered whether the organ could properly be played on the Sabbath and religious holidays.

"With the legitimization of the organ in the second half of the 19th century, its function also started developing and expanding. By then, the organist commonly played independently between cantorial solos and also in processions and recessions. Interludes served to introduce the congregation into the different moods of the service or to fill the silence during silent prayer. Thus, in the following decades, composers began to establish a specific style of organ music for use in the synagogue, mostly consisting of Jewish liturgical themes. At the beginning of the 20th century this repertoire evolved into a fusion of Western classical music, liturgical, paraliturgical, and folk melodies, eventually flowering into a form which could be performed at concerts as well as in the synagogue."

[Bron: <https://holocaustmusic.org/music/organ-music/>]

Composers of the 19th and 20th centuries who composed works for solo organ include Hugo Schwantzer (1829-1886) – ‘*Zur Einweihung der neuen Synagoge zu Berlin*’, David Nowakowsky (1848-1921) – ‘*Preludium voor orgel*, ‘*Zum Abend am Purinfest*’, Siegfried Würzburger ‘*Passacaglia en Fuga voor Orgel*’ and Max Wolf’s ‘*Prelude voor Orgel*’.

Well known **organists** included Hugo Schwantzer (1829-1886) organist and organ teacher in Berlin, Louis Lewandowski (1821-94), Moritz Deutsch (1818-92) and Martha Sommer (b. 1918) [[v. users.adam.com.au](http://v.users.adam.com.au)]

The disappearance of the organ

Frühauf: ‘The paradoxical flourishing and development of organ music (1933-1938) was forcibly ended by the destruction of the instruments on Kristallnacht, the night of 9-10 November 1938, when over 200 synagogue organs were destroyed. Some organs were preserved because they were sold to churches.’

Fortunately a number of synagogues still have organs.

Steinmeyer Synagogue organs

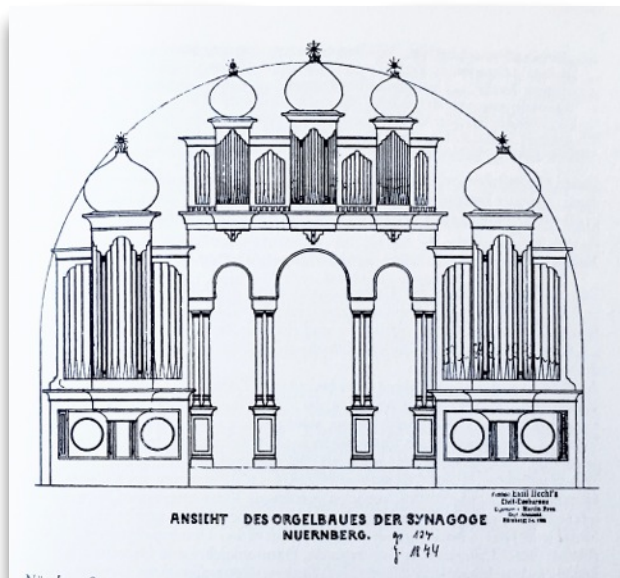


© Der Förderverein Orgelbaumuseum
STEINMEYER, Öttingen

Like almost all major German organ builders during this period, G.F. Steinmeyer built organs for liberal synagogue communities in the major cities of Germany and the Ukraine. He built his first synagogue organs in Nuremberg (1874), Odessa (1902), Berlin (1903), Munich (1929) and then a second in Berlin (1930).

Unfortunately none of these organs survive, but happily photographs of the organs in the synagogue in Prinzregentenstraße and the synagogue of the Jewish Reformgemeinde in Berlin have been preserved in the Abraham Pisarek collection, AKG images in Berlin. A drawing of the organ in the synagogue on the Hans-Sachs-Platz in Nürnberg is preserved in the Steinmeyer archive in Öttingen. A detailed description of the organs in the synagogues in Berlin, Munich and Nürnberg can also be found in Herman Fischer & Theodor Wohnhaas’ book, *Die Orgel in bayerischen Synagogen im späten 19. Jahrhundert*.

Steinmeyer Synagogue organ in the Hans-Sachs-Platz, **NÜRNBERG**



© Der Förderverein Orgelbaumuseum
STEINMEYER, Öttingen

In 1874, G.F. Steinmeyer, then 55 years old, built his first synagogue organ (op. 127 / II + 29) in the synagogue on Hans-Sachs-Platz, the most important synagogue in Nürnberg. This organ was rebuilt in 1911 by the Strebel company.

In **1938** the synagogue had to be demolished. The building was seen as a 'thorn in the side of the city government' because its Eastern style was seen as a 'stain' on the historic old town within the walls of Nürnberg. Gauleiter Julius Streicher, party secretary of the NSDAP in Nuremberg, ordered its demolition on 10 August 1938.

The synagogue's Steinmeyer organ was saved from demolition by being moved to

the Catholic Church of St. Karl-Borromäus in Nürnberg-Mögeldorf.

By the 1950s this organ was in a bad technical condition and could not be repaired, and so was replaced. In 1964 by a new organ built by Hans Steinmeyer (1964, op. 2083 / III + 33). "This organ was further expanded in 1983 to 42 stops by the Nürnberg organ builder Volkmar Krätzer. This made the organ one of the largest instruments in the Catholic churches of Nürnberg."

[v. Seip: Synagogengeln ... 2008]

Steinmeyer Synagogue organ in **ODESSA**

In the second half of the 19th century some 125,000 Jews were living in Odessa. In November 1901 the musical director and organist of the German Reformed Church in Odessa wrote to Steinmeyer saying that they had a hall which they used for meetings and which they wanted to furnish as a synagogue, but they feared that there would not be enough room for an organ. The musical director asked Steinmeyer (Johannes Steinmeyer, then 45 years old - G.F. Steinmeyer died in 1901) whether it was possible to supply a small organ (two manuals). Later, the President of the Self-Help Society of the Jewish Action Committee made a proposal to Steinmeyer to this effect. The organ was supposed to be ready for dedication on 1 August 1902, but the dedication had to be postponed because delivery of the organ was delayed. When eventually the organ was finished it was given the opus number 747 II + 16 plus 1 transmission. The name of the synagogue is not given in the Steinmeyer book.

On August 29, 1902, Steinmeyer received a letter from the committee confirming that the organ met all the requirements set out in the agreement. He was thanked for his excellent work.

“Trotzdem der Orgel im Saal ein akustisch ungünstiger Platz angewiesen ist, wirkt dieselbe bei einer Stimmenzahl von nur 16 Registern im Plenum doch mächtig, während die einzelnen Stimmen charakteristisch hervortreten und der Schwellkasten schöne dynamische Effekte erzielt. Die Herstellung der Mechanik (Bälge, pneumatische Leitungen etc.) zeugt von Solidität und Accuratesse, ebenso wie Spielart und Combinationen von angenehmer Präcission.”

“Although the organ in the hall was allocated an acoustically unfavorable position, it has a powerful effect with only 16 stops altogether, while the individual voices stand out characteristically and the swell box affords beautiful dynamic effects. The workmanship of the mechanism (bellows, pneumatic tubes, etc.) is a sign of quality and finesse, as are also the varied and pleasantly distinct combinations.”

The letter was signed by the conductor of the Stadtoperahuis, the organist of the Catholic Church in Odessa, the conductor of the Israelite Head Synagogue in Odessa and the music director.

It is not known what happened to this organ. Possibly the hall and organ were destroyed during the pogroms of 1905 and the 1918-1920 civil war.

[v.Seip: Synagogenorgeln ..., 2008]

Steinmeyer synagogue organ in the Johannisstraße, **BERLIN**



THE synagogue of the jüdischen Reformgemeinde in the Johannisstraße was built between 1853 and 1854.

The construction of a new organ was initiated by the conductor of the Jüdischen Reformgemeinde. Steinmeyer (Johannes, then 56 years old) subsequently submitted quotes for an organ with 2 manuals and 28 stops. This kind of large instrument was one of Steinmeyer's favourites. The quote for this instrument was dated 4 January 1912.

Steinmeyer delivered his first organ (op. 1175 / II + 28) to the Johannisstraße synagogue in Berlin in 1913. The organ had 28 stops spread over two manuals. Seip wrote 'The inside of the synagogue was destroyed, during the pogrom night of 9/10 October 1938, but apparently the organ was only slightly damaged. It was repaired in 1940, at which time the Steinmeyer firm attempted to buy the organ back from the Jewish cultural community. According to the notes of the synagogue board dated 13 October 1942, the organ had already been removed. No information is available about the current whereabouts of the organ.'

[v. Seip: **Synagogenorgeln ... 2008**]

Steinmeyer Synagogue organ in the Herzog-Max-Straße, MUNICH

THE synagogue in Herzog-Max-Straße, [Herzog-Rudolf-Strasse] was built between 1884 and 1887. It was the main synagogue in Munich, the religious centre of Munich's Jewish community.

In his article, Seip wrote: 'The synagogue was opened on 16 September 1887, the Rosh-Hashana (New Year) festival. In the same year, the Munich firm of März supplied an organ with 25 stops. Already in 1925 plans had been made for a new organ. The contract was placed on 19 April 1929 with the firm Steinmeyer, then under the leadership of Johannes (age 72). Unfortunately, the design of the organ was a slow process because of the need for several consultations with the organ builder. Steinmeyer completed the organ in October 1929 as opus 1505, but on 8 June 1938, five months before the Reichspogromnacht, Hitler personally ordered the demolition of the synagogue 'for urban planning reasons'. The demolition of the building started the very next day.

The synagogue's organ was removed and taken to St. Korbinian Church. In June 1938 Alfred Neumeyer, president of Munich's Jewish community, wrote in his unpublished memoirs: 'The precious organ, which had been acquired only a few years earlier, was taken over by the archiepiscopal ordinariat for a newly built church for a lower price than the initial sum paid to the organ builder. The gentlemen were grateful for the acquisition of the organ because they could no longer buy such an organ due to the lack of good material.

[v. www.alemannia-judaica.de/muenchen_synagogen.ht]

The treatment of the Steinmeyer organ made headlines in local newspapers.

Es ist eine Schande!

Die Judenorgel in der Sankt Korbinianskirche zu München

Aus München wird uns von zuverlässiger Seite gemeldet, daß die Orgel der ehemaligen Judensynagoge in München durch das Bischöfliche Ordinariat von der israelitischen Kultusgemeinde käuflich erworben worden ist. Kurz vor Abbruch der Synagoge wurde die Orgel durch die Expeditionsfirma A. Frank & Söhne in der Westendstraße 160 zu München nach der Korbinianskirche am Gotzingerplatz befördert. Das Gehäuse der Orgel soll durch die Firma Steinmayer in Oettingen i. B. käuflich erworben worden sein und von der gleichen Firma in der Korbinianskirche aufgestellt werden. Die Gläubigen, die sich nunmehr in der Korbinianskirche zur Andacht einfinden, werden also das sonderbare Vergnügen haben, Musik von einer Orgel zu hören, die bisher jahrelang in einer Synagoge gestanden ist. Die gleiche Orgel, die bisher die Haggesänge der Juden gegen die Nichtjuden begleitete, ziert nun eine christliche Kirche. Es ist eine Schande!

www.alemannia-judaica.de/muenchenhauptsynagoge

an organ that has stood in a synagogue for years. The same organ that used to accompany the hate songs of the Jews against the Gentiles now adorns a Christian church. Scandalous!"

[Source: From the magazine "Der Stürmer" no. 42/1938]

"Zur Geschichte der Münchner Synagogen, Stadtarchiv München, 1999, und dabei steht als Fussnote:" In der Kirche St. Korbinian (München-Sendling), the organ bei einem Bombenangriff in July 1944 zerstört". [Wikipedia]

The entire interior of the St. Korbinian Church including the synagogue organ were destroyed in a bombing raid on 12 July 1944.

Steinmeyer Synagogue organ in the Prinzregentenstraße **BERLIN**

THE 2,300 seat synagogue in Prinzregentenstraße in Berlin's Wilmersdorf district was built in between 1928-1930. It was one of the largest synagogues in Berlin.

'Outrageous! The Jewish organ in the Sankt Korbinianskirche in Munich.

From Munich we have been reliably informed that the organ of the former Jewish synagogue in Munich has been purchased from the Jewish community by the Episcopal ordinariat. Shortly before the demolition of the synagogue, the organ was transported by freight forwarding company A. Frank & Söhne in Westendstrasse 160 in Munich to the Korbinianskirche on Gotzingerplatz. The complete organ is said to have been purchased by the Steinmayer company in Oettingen in Bavaria and installed by the same company in the Korbinianskirche. The faithful, who are now in the Korbinianskirche for prayer, will find it strange pleasure to listen to the music of



[© akg-images gmbh, Berlin, Germany]

According to the notes: 'On November 1929, the construction committee of the Jewish community gave an order to Steinmeyer to build the organ. Steinmeyer (perhaps Hans Steinmeyer, age 41, then head of the company) signed the construction contract on 27 March 1930. The organ was due to be installed and ready for use on 1 May 1930, but delays occurred due to financial difficulties.

Finally Steinmeyer offered the municipality an organ with only 52 registers. Ultimately, the organ had 72 stops. It is in this synagogue that Steinmeyer built his largest synagogue organ (op. 1525 / II + 68) in 1930. Seip writes in his article on the 1930 Wolfgang Reinmann acceptance report that the organ was delivered three days early. Later that same day, organist Ulm from Berlin-Charlottenburg wrote of his special experience with the organ: "At the request of your Mr Albert Steinmeyer (56), with whom I spoke twice about the now completed synagogue organ, I am sending you the following report:

"The new Steinmeyer organ in the Bln-Wilmersdorfer synagogue is yet another milestone in German organ building. I was allowed to play the work for several hours and I must say that getting to know this organ was one of my greatest experiences of recent years. Albert Steinmeyer's intonation art once again celebrates true triumphs. If you wanted to indulge in details of this beautiful art, it wouldn't stop praising the ethereal beauty of the reed and their possible combinations. The entire work forms the basis of this proud construction and the extremely delicate Dolce 8 'of the II manual is a harmony of atmospheres !! The Vox humana is rarely heard. The enviable principal organists can expect unprecedented tasks and opportunities! Buyers and sellers can be proud of the success of this work! ps Gentlemen! I wrote the above report and wrote it down with satisfaction. I played Bach, Handel, Reger and other works on this beautiful organ. I must say that I couldn't dream anything better than playing on such an organ for the rest of my life! Or can this dream ever come true? - ps. I am happy that the Zehlendorfer voted for the Steinmeyer community center. "

[Source: Seip: Synagogenorgeln ... 2008]

Organists

Jospe, Erwin (1907-) was organist from 1928-1934 in the Prinzregentenstraße Synagogue. [Source: Remembering for the future: 3 Volume Set: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide]
Hugo, Leichtenritt (1874-1951), musicologist, was organist at Prinzregentenstraße Synagogue and occasionally composed organ music eg Orgelvorspiel, Toccata (1931).

A news report on the organ

“One of the most modern organs to be considered here was greatly influenced by the Orgelbewegung (if clearly no neo-baroque instrument!). Built by G.F. Steinmeyer of Oettingen as their Op. 1525, it was installed in the new Prinzregentenstraße Synagogue, Berlin, in 1930. The advisor was Prof. Wolfgang Reimann. One does not doubt his eminence but his knowledge of synagogue requirements was apparently not questioned and he specified an instrument considered ‘the best’ then available.

A competition was arranged in 1928, well ahead of time, to select the official organist. Forty applicants turned up for their first audition! This was reduced to fifteen for the second round, when three finalists were chosen. For the last trial, these three were required to play Bach's ever-popular Toccata and Fugue in d, a piece of their own choice, an improvisation on a given theme, and then to accompany a solo melody by the Cantor for which there could be no preparation. The position was awarded to Erwin Jospe, "though owing to my youth - I was only 21 - grave reservations had been expressed". He had been trained by Prof. Heitmann, organist at the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church and at the Academy for Church and School Music, Berlin. Jospe held the position until 1934. For some time near the end of this period, Werner Baer (see below) was an assistant organist, then from 1934 to 1938 the principal organist.

Both players found that fundamental sounds and expressive stops were the mainstays of their synagogue work, and that whenever the mutations and mixtures were employed the congregants generally complained!

The organ also had solo functions in the service, and the synagogue was also used for concerts, so that its many choruses were surely used on those occasions! Requiring more employment, Werner Baer became an assistant synagogue organist, and from 1934 to 1938 principal organist, at the Prinzregentenstraße Synagogue, with its large, modern Steinmeyer organ, as successor to Erwin Jospe, born in 1907, who occupied this position from 1928. Baer was eventually picked up by the Nazis and sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp. He managed to escape and fled to Singapore, where he taught at Raffles College and became Municipal Organist.

[v. <http://users.adam.com.au/ttruman/Jewishorgans.pdf>]

Many thanks to:

Dr. Achim Seip organ expert in the dioceses of Mainz and Limburg

Patricia Paymann, Bussum

David Aprahamian Liddle, concert organist and composer