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From Roodepan to a historic German concert tour

DANIE VAN DER LITH

FROM the streets of Roodepan in Kimberley to the churches that shaped the life of Johann Sebastian Bach, internationally acclaimed South African organist Theo van Wyk is preparing for what could be one of the most significant chapters of his distinguished musical career.

Van Wyk, who was born and raised in Kimberley, has been invited to present a series of solo organ recitals in Germany during August this year. The prestigious tour will see him perform on some of Europe's most celebrated historic pipe organs in churches associated with Bach and other legendary composers, while introducing international audiences to South African organ music.

For the Northern Cape, the invitation is a moment of pride. Van Wyk's musical journey began in Kimberley, where he grew up in Roodepan and attended Roodepan Primary School before completing his schooling at Floors High School.

His passion for the organ was sparked while attending services at the Pescodia New Apostolic Church, while his early talent was nurtured by Roodepan organ teacher Monty Pearce. From 1990, he continued his studies under Peter Black at St Cyprian's Cathedral in Kimberley before leaving the city in 1993 to pursue tertiary studies.

Today, the Kimberley-born musician is recognised as one of South Africa's foremost concert organists and serves in the School of the Arts in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria.

FOLLOWING IN BACH'S FOOTSTEPS

Van Wyk's German recital tour will begin at St Jakobi Church in Lübeck, home to the legendary organ associated with composer Dietrich Buxtehude. It was to this church that a young Johann Sebastian Bach famously walked more than 400 kilometres to hear Buxtehude perform during the celebrated Abendmusik concerts.

Van Wyk will then present a week-long series of daily recitals during the Eisenach Market Concerts 2026 at the historic Georgenkirche in Eisenach, the church where Bach was baptised in 1685. The performances will be presented on the historic Georg Christoph Sterzing (1696) / Schuke (1982) organ.

The tour continues to St. Simplicius Stadtkirche in Bad Salzungen, where Van Wyk will perform on the celebrated 1909 Wilhelm Sauer organ. Designed, examined, approved and inaugurated by the renowned German composer Max Reger, the instrument remains virtually unchanged since Reger himself performed on it more than a century ago.

His final recital will take place at the world-famous St Thomas Church – the Thomaskirche – in Leipzig, where Bach served as Thomaskantor from 1723 until his death in 1750 and where the composer's remains are buried.

According to the historical performance records from the host churches, Van Wyk is expected to become the first South African organist to present full-length solo recitals at the Georgenkirche in Eisenach, St Simplicius Stadtkirche in Bad Salzungen and the Thomaskirche in Leipzig.

"It is a particular honour to represent South Africa in these internationally renowned musical centres and to contribute to the continuing artistic legacy of these historic churches," Van Wyk said.

SHOWCASING SOUTH AFRICAN MUSIC

A defining feature of the tour will be the promotion of South African music. Van Wyk's recital programmes will include works dedicated to him by South African composers, alongside the world premieres of three newly commissioned compositions: Trinity Meditation by Lance Phillip, Flurry! by Christo Jankowitz and Fire Wind by Miles Warrington.

The concerts will also feature works by Henk Temmingh, Gerrit Olivier, Alexander Johnson and Surendran Reddy, providing European audiences with an opportunity to experience the richness and diversity of South African organ music.

Beyond the scheduled performances, Van Wyk has also been invited to visit and perform on several historically significant organs across central Germany at venues closely associated with Bach's life and career, offering him a rare opportunity to experience the musical landscape that shaped one of history's greatest composers.

Reflecting on the invitation, Van Wyk said he was profoundly grateful for the opportunity to represent both the University of Pretoria and South Africa on some of classical music's most revered stages.

For Kimberley, however, the tour is also a reminder that world-class talent can emerge from local communities. From learning the organ in Roodepan and at St Cyprian's Cathedral to securing invitations to perform in churches associated with Bach and Buxtehude, Theo van Wyk's remarkable journey has taken him to some of classical music's most revered stages.



Kimberley-born organist Theo van Wyk is set to become the first South African organist to present full-length solo recitals at three historic German churches.

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