

Henk Veeningen's Draaiorgels (A Collection of Street Organs in Holland)

Henk Veeningen

My collection of mechanical organs began in 1965 when I bought my first organ, the 57-key Gavioli (*De Adelaar*). I was previously interested in this organ because, as a child, I would listen to the organ which came to my neighborhood in a small fair (once a year).



Figure 1. Louis Van Deventer in the 1960s. Photo: Dan Slack archives.

not my intention to become a fulltime organ builder. Fortunately I had the technical advise of Mr. Van Deventer, who answered many of my questions (Figure 1). His teaching was so good that I soon became a professional organ builder (Mr. Van Deventer had no children and no one to follow his business so he sent clients to me).

In the 1960s and 1970s it was not difficult to buy old organs which were in poor condition—it seemed that no one except me would buy them. I bought everything that I could and stored them in my workshop, which in 1977 was moved to the building in De Wijk (Figure 2).



Figure 2. A windmill close to the town of De Wijk.

I was born on a farm and raised to take over my father's farm. The first time I saw or heard a street organ was when I was 16 years. My mother had taken me to the city of Meppel to buy some shoes and I became fascinated upon seeing a street organ.

I then became more interested in the mechanical organ—in the 1960s there were only a few people in Holland that took care of them. I saw it as my duty to do something for this organ (and soon, others) but it was

At first it was just a hobby but after maintaining them for over 40 years the collection has built up to what it is now. I will present each organ to you with some history and specifications of each organ. I hope that you will be able to come and see the organs in person as that is the best way to enjoy them.

De Klinkhamer

This organ was originally an old Gavioli organ that was rebuilt in the 1920s by a Belgian organ builder named Henry Daneels (Figure 2). He used the popular 90-key Mortier scale when he rebuilt the organ and did so because there were a lot of arrangements made for this particular scale. Before World War II, Mr. Klinkhamer imported the organ to Holland (he used it at one of his fairground attractions). At this time he reduced the facade by four meters in length and two meters in height from the original size.



Figure 2. *De Klinkhamer* as seen at one end of the Veeningen organ museum. This street organ plays with 90 keys.

After a traffic accident he stored the organ at his house and it stayed there until 1973, when Mr. Klinkhamer died and his family sold all of his organs to me. The organ was in poor condition and already had woodworm damage but a complete restoration stopped these wood-attacking (and eating) animals. At that time I removed the Jazz-Flûte register and installed a Bourdon-Celéste register.

In the 1960s and 1970s it was not difficult to buy old organs which were in poor condition—it seemed that no one except me would buy them.

Specification:

23 note melody (with the following registers: Violin-Piano, Violin- Forte, Bourdon, Unda Maris, Carillon, Flageolet, Hobo and Flûte Harmonique)

20 note countermelody (Vox Celeste, Cello, Baritone, Flûte 8 and Trumpet)

12 note accompaniment

12 note bass

Percussion: bass drum, snare drum, woodblock and triangle.

De Adelaar (“The Eagle”)

The purchase of this organ in 1965 started my organ collection (Figure 4). The organ is now a 57-key Gavioli. The organ had been stored in a shed and was in very bad condition. With the acquisition of this organ I began professionally to build organs and at this time I got a lot of help from an older organ builder, Mr. L. Ch. van Deventer. This organ was built around 1895 and it is one of the oldest original book-operating organs in Holland.

Specification:

17 note melody (Clarinets)

18 note Piccolo

10 note accompaniment

6 note bass (Trombones) like Gasparini.

Percussion: bass drum and snare drum.

Swell shutters for expression



Figure 4. *De Adelaar*, a 57-key Gavioli organ, is the organ that started the Veeningen collection of organs.

De Engelekest (“The Angel Case”)

This is a 56-key organ built by Limonaire Freres in Paris about 1910 (Figure 5). At that time it was already a popular organ, and by 1913 a recording (78-rpm record) had been made of it.

The original facade had three figures looking like angels—this is how the organ obtained its name (“The Angel Case”).



Figure 5. *De Engelekest*, or “Angel Case,” is a 56-key Limonaire organ.

The organ had always played in the streets of Amsterdam or Rotterdam. After the rebuilding (with bourdon pipes) in 1928 by Carl Frei it again became well known. During World War II the organ was lost but was recovered in 1968 when I bought an entire collection of organs from Mr. Stelleman in Eindhoven.

I restored the entire organ and made new bourdon pipes (the old ones were lost). At that time I also made a new facade from another old Limonaire facade. The original façade (with the angels) was sold to an American collector together with another organ.

Specification:

22 note melody (Violin and Bourdon)

10 note accompaniment

8 note bass

Percussion: bass drum and snare drum.



Figure 6. The 52-key Wellershaus was originally a barrel organ but later converted to the 56-keyless book system.

56-keyless Wellershaus

This organ was built in 1908 as a 52-key Gebr. Wellershaus barrel organ (**Figure 6**). During the next 20 years it was converted to a book-operating fair organ, as were so many similar organs. My teacher, Mr. L.Ch. van Deventer, has converted, to this date, 28 Wellershaus organs to use the book-playing system (spanning a long career of more than 50 years as an organ builder), **Figure 7**.



Figure 7. Behind the snare drum wing of the 56-key Wellershaus is the key frame and endless book arrangement.

I bought the organ in 1982. Prior to my purchase the organ was stored in an old farmer's shed, where a lot of woodworm damage had almost consumed the whole organ. At the time of my restoration and reconstruction I decided to rebuild it on the 56-keyless system (this type of organ-playing system was very popular, especially in the northern part of Holland). The original façade was lost and I installed a Gebr. Bruder façade in its place.

Specification:

- 20 note melody (Violin and Violin-Forte mixture)
- 12 note counter melody (Trumpet)
- 11 note accompaniment
- 4 note trombone
- 3 note bass
- Percussion: bass drum and snare drum

De Notenkraker ("The Nutcracker")

This 52-key Gasparini organ is one of the few of its type which have survived intact through the years (**Figure 8**). Originally there were about 80 such organs in Holland but today, only four or five are left—the others have been sold, rebuilt, exported or worse yet, burnt and destroyed in Amsterdam during World War II.

When I bought this organ it had been stored in a ship which was sunk. Therefore, the organ was really "under water." From 1988 to 1989 I restored and reconstructed this organ back to its original condition. The façade is assembled from three different Gasparini facade parts.

Specification:

- 20 note melody (Violin and Clarinet)
- 11 note Piccolo
- 10 note accompaniment
- 7 trombone (bass)
- Percussion: bass drum and snare drum



Figure 8. *De Notenkraker*, a 52-key Gasparini restored after much water damage.

Fрати & Co, Berlin

Fрати & Co in Berlin originally built this organ about 1880 as a barrel organ (**Figure 9**). In the 1920s it was converted to 58-key Wellershaus book operation. I bought this organ in 1985



Figure 9. The Frati & Co. organ, with an earlier conversion to the 58-key Wellershaus book system.



Figure 10. *De Phoenix*, a 89-key Gavioli, originally a “Military Orchestra” but later converted to a dance organ.

from the Dutch Ministry of Agricultural Business. They had not used this organ for a couple of years and the organ had been stored outside in the open air, without any cover. The condition was very poor and most parts could not be used any more. I decided to rebuild the organ to a 59-keyless system and I used the scale of the German factory of Limonaire.

Specification:

- 18 note melody (Violin and Violin-Forte)
- 18 note countermelody (Trumpet)
- 9 note accompaniment
- 6 note bass
- Percussion: bass drum and snare drum

De Phoenix

Gavioli built this organ around 1905 (Figure 10). At that time there were problems between the factories of Gavioli and Th. Mortier. Mortier used some patents of Gavioli and the judge declared that Mortier should receive each year 12 Gavioli organs from Gavioli. This organ is one of those in that series and is the same as the Aalster Gavioli in the museum in Utrecht.

These organs were not really dance organs but built in the style of Gavioli as a military orchestra. In the beginning 20th century a Belgian organ builder named Arthur Behiels rebuilt this organ to make it more suitable for a dance hall. Around 1930 the organ was sold to Mr. R. Klinkhamer a fairground man and collector of organs. The organ did not play at that moment and this situation remained until 1990.

During the time that Mr. Klinkhamer owned the organ it was stored in the kitchen and when I bought it in 1973 it was very damaged. The wet climate had destroyed all the glue and most pipework was broken. I began a full restoration and reconstruction in 1986 (Figure 11) and this job was finished in 1990. After this the whole facade (what happily was complete) had to be repainted. The famous Dutch organ painter Jetse de Boer did this and it took 6 ½ years of his free time to do this job.

The scale of the organ is 89 key system G4.

Specification:

- 21 note melody (Violin and Clarinet)
- 16 note Piccolo
- 20 note counter melody (Baritone)
- 10 note accompaniment
- 8 note bass
- 8 note Trombone
- Percussion: bass drum and snare drum



Figure 11. A close-up of the central figure details the work of the Dutch organ painter, Jetse de Boer.



Figure 12. *De Luchtensteiner*, a 90-key organ playing the Carl Frei scale, was built in 1981 by Mr. H. v. d. Berg and myself.

***De Luchtensteiner* (“The Luchtenstein”)**

This organ was built in 1981 by Mr. H. v. d. Berg (who was working with me at the time) and me in my workshop (Figure 12). We constructed this organ using the 90-key Carl Frei scale system. This scale is the most popular in Holland, and organs of this type have always been very popular. We widened out the scale with eight trombones, which could play on separate keys, and we added some more pipes that usually were not used in this type of organ.)

*The first new instrument built at our workshop in Luchtenstein, therefore the name *De Luchtensteiner*.



Figure 13. Details of *De Luchtensteiner* and its beautiful facade.

Specifically, the baritone on counter melody is unusual and some special technical adjustments make the organ play very clear and full, especially in the forte parts of the music.

The façade is made from parts of an old Koenigsberg organ (Figure 13) and embellished with newly constructed scrolls from the workshop of the well-known woodcarver, Albert Timmerman. Originally I played the organ outside at rallies, fairs and markets but 10 years ago I stopped doing this because I needed time for building new organs for the Japanese market.

The scale is 92 keyless system (the basic scale is a 90-keyless Carl Frei but extra registers and trombone pipes on their own notes in the scale equate to a 92-keyless system).

Specification:

23 note melody (Violin, Bourdon-Celeste, Violin-Celeste, Uniflute, Biphone and Flageolet)

18 note counter melody (Unda Maris, Biphone and Baritone)

18 note accompaniment

8 note bass

8 note Trombone

Percussion: bass drum and snare drum

A. Ruth & Sohn (70-key barrel organ)

This Ruth organ is one of the oldest organs made by Ruth. The serial number is 2520 and very special, as the cranking wheel is on the left side. I have never seen this and also never heard about a similar organ.

I bought this organ in 1971 from an antique dealer in East Germany. The organ is now fully restored in its original state (it did play a little bit, but the condition needed a fully restoration). In 2001 I started this job and now it is finished. The condition of the barrel, however, is very bad and to become more musical (and to have more fun with the organ) we decided to add digital equipment, so the organ can now play in two different ways—by barrel and by computer.

The scale is different from later Ruth organs—the older ones have no violin pipes. The different ranks of pipes can play by sliding tracker bars on or off. The organ has 18 trumpets and 13 piccolos and the normal bass, accompaniment and melody pipes.

Ed Hilger (Kastanienallee 34 Berlin)

When I bought this 44-key barrel organ in 1973, it was totally disassembled and in a very poor condition. It had been stored for years in a very wet house. The restoration is not complete but I hope that next year it will have its place back in the museum.

The organ has stopped flutes, violins, trumpet pipes and piccolo pipes.

Mortier Dance Organ

At the moment this organ is in the workshop of the museum for a full restoration and reconstruction (Figure 14). I bought this organ in 1968 together with five other organs from a colleague who was going out of business at the time. Two-thirds of the parts were missing and will have to be reconstructed. Even



Figure 14. A 84-key Mortier dance organ awaiting restoration.

most of a new façade will have to be made as only 30% of the original remains.

The organ has serial number 669, which is a very low number and more likely than not there are parts from Gavioli in this organ.

The scale is 84-key with 23 melody notes, 20 counter melody, 10 accompaniment and 8 bass notes. I have planned to install the following registers: melody: Violin-Piano, Violin-Forte, Unda Maris, Bourdon-Celéste, Baxophone and Flageolet; counter melody: Voix Céleste, Baritone, Cello, Flûte 8 and Cello-grave.

I hope to complete the organ in 2004-2005.

Summary

My collection represents a lot of time and effort to bring the organs back to life but it is an effort that I enjoy. I enjoy presenting the collection to groups (Figure 15) and individuals interested in outdoor organs and those interested in preserving the Dutch street organ heritage.

Moreover street organs in Holland still suffer under the image of a “bagler” instrument. In Holland the public always identifies the mechanical organ as the instrument that is used for bagling (collecting) money on the streets.



Figure 15. Henk Veeningen presenting his collection to the public.

Moreover, street organs in Holland still suffer under the image of a “bagler” instrument. In Holland the public always identifies the mechanical organ as the instrument that is used for bagling (collecting) money on the streets. I like to explain that there many more aspects to this type of instrument than that—if we don't tell the story, it will fade in a few years.



Figure 16. The entrance to Henk Veeningen's collection of organs is boldly marked with this sign.

I find that when you tell a good and interesting story, along with the beautiful music, that people are still interested. A lot of times I find that people will tell me how exciting it was to hear and see the instruments and to continue on.

The museum (Figure 16) and the instruments have the support of my wife, Thea, as well. As long as I can continue to promote street organs and their music I will do it. It started as a hobby and so it will end.

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Henk Veeningen lives in De Wijk, The Netherlands with his wife, Thea. They have been collecting and restoring Dutch street organs for over 40 years.