

LeLudion's "Credit Card" Organ

Eve Chaillat

LeLudion, manufacturers of Limonaire organs and the Orgues de Barbarie have announced a new form of music media for their newly-announced line of organs. The organ is a 32-key organ with two stops (flutes and bourdons), double bases with a total of 57 pipes. The organs feature bellows as do original street organs but the music is controlled by

a memory card (which also controls the stops) instead of the traditional barrel, book or roll. The card is very similar in size and shape to a common "credit card."

Members in the News!



Military band in a box

Ken Vinen's restored Wurlitzer a hit with crowds at Canada Day celebration

By Brian Shypula
Staff reporter

Few people outside of generals can boast having a full military band at their beck and call.

Ken Vinen is an exception. He has one right under his roof, ready to crank out a rousing march or two on demand. That's when you're most likely to find the John Street resident outdoors. It's simply too loud inside.

"I'm sure a few of my neighbours have wondered 'What's he up to now,'" he said laughing yesterday, a day after debuting the Wurlitzer Military Band Organ at the Canada Day festivities downtown.

The Wurlitzer is the latest addition to the sizable collection of museum-quality music machines collected by the bed-and-breakfast operator.

"It's meant to be played outdoors. You can't bear to play it inside a building," he said.

"It's meant to attract people — and it sure did," he added. For starters, it's a beautiful antique with its highly polished oak veneer and exposed brass pipes. It also packs quite a musical punch, easily filling Market Square with full, clear sound.

Run on electricity, it features 26 brass pipes and 75 wooden pipes and weighs in at well over 300 kilograms.

"They called it a military band because of the 'voices' of the pipes," the owner explained. "It has trumpets and trombones, and it has piccolos and flutes and flageolets and violins. And of course it has the percussion — snare drum, bass drum, cymbal."

Like a player piano, the military band reads music from a paper roll perforated with holes.

The Wurlitzer company of North Tonawanda, N.Y., made about 200 of the organs in the early part of the last century. The particular model painstakingly restored by Mr. Vinen was a No. 125, which was used to provide music at small arenas and carousels.

He bought the machine in very rough shape in Quebec last year.

Although he can't prove it yet, he suspects it was used at Montreal's famous Belmont Park. The amusement park built in the 1920s was once owned by Charles Trudeau, father of former Canadian prime minister Pierre Trudeau. It shut 20 years ago.

"We've been doing a lot of detective work," he said.

Wurlitzer company records show Mr. Vinen's model was shipped to a Montreal distributor in 1924. Belmont Park opened in 1923 and in 1924 installed a carousel made by the Philadelphia Toboggan Company.

"We have this coincidence but we haven't got any photographic evidence showing the organ on that carousel," he said.

Mr. Vinen finished the "total, right-down-to-an-empty-box restoration" just three days before the Canada Day outing. It's the second one he has restored. The other, 30 years ago, belonged to an agricultural society in Ontario.

Seeing and hearing one is a rare treat because only about 40 are known to exist, and fewer yet are in working condition.

"It was an exciting day for me," Mr. Vinen said. Although he would like to continue showing the Wurlitzer, he isn't sure he can. There is a huge amount of work involved in transporting the hefty machine, he said.

The city centre committee picked up the moving costs for the Canada Day event it sponsored.



Figure 1. Philippe Crasse is surrounded by two LeLudion employees, David and Elian, who are holding the newly-designed memory card. The organ shown is the 32-key Baladin à colonnes organ.

The purpose of this type of card is to miniaturize memory and to make it as interchangeable as the cardboard book or roll. The card is easy to engrave and the cards can be in four, six or 12 minute increments (12 minutes equals 44 meters of cardboard book). Therefore, it is very convenient for classical music such as that composed by Bach, Mozart or Strauss with large tunes (and long chain perforations which make traditional books/rolls unstable).

An advantage of the music is that the customer pays only for the arrangement (artistic part of the work). It is easy to make up a tune list, customized for each customer. There are 1800 tunes available and the available tunes can be found on LeLudion's web site (www.notre-repertoire.com).

Another "advantage" of this type of music-playing media is that the music is not automatic but rather fluctuates according to the cranking of the street organists—i.e. cranking slowly will produce slower music and faster will produce, yes, faster music. The traditional MIDI system does not allow for this ability to add inflection.

There are four styles of organs featuring this card playing system. The one in Figure 1 is the Baladin à colonnes organ which retails currently for 8,400 Euros.

Eve Chaillat (and husband Philippe) have produced several small street organs of high quality. The two of them have been involved with organ production for 30 years.

Stratford resident Ken Vinen stands next to the newest addition to his collection, a Wurlitzer Military Band which he brought to the Canada Day celebration in Market Square. Build in 1923, the instrument contains 200 pipes and runs on paper rolls similar to a player piano.

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