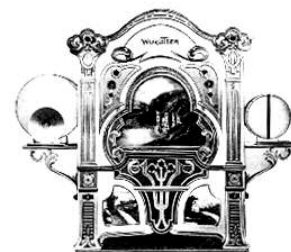




CAROUSEL ORGAN



The Official Journal of the
Carousel Organ Association of America (COAA)

*Devoted to enjoying, preserving and sharing knowledge of all outdoor mechanical musical instruments,
including band, fair and street organs, calliopes, and hand-cranked organs of all sizes.*

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Limonaire or Lemonade?

Rick Cooley & Arthur Prinsen

Fifteen years before I began collecting musical boxes, band organs, crank organs, etc., I was an “A” student in my college French class. In 1968, my first mechanical music collecting began with a player piano which was in terrible condition. Within six months, my wife and I had restored the player, inside and out. When finished, it sounded great. Over the following ten years, I became much more familiar with mechanical music and the fantastic instruments produced during the 19th and 20th centuries. I learned that makers such as Seeburg, Wurlitzer, Frati, Losche, Blessing, Nicole, Mermod, and many others, produced a wide variety of wonderful instruments. But when I first heard the name “Limonaire,” I dusted off my “rusty” college French and decided the correct meaning was “lemonade,” so perhaps a French “lemonade stand?”

In 1979 my family and I had the opportunity to travel throughout Europe with a one-week stay in Paris, France. We were typical tourists who visited the Louvre, Sacra Coeur, Napoleon's Tomb, the Arch du Triumph and, of course, the Eiffel Tower. Our two teenage sons immediately went to the very top while my wife and I were satisfied to stop one level below. As my knuckles turned white while gripping the outer rail, I tried to enjoy the magnificent view, the beautiful city of Paris. As I finally began to relax, I heard bright, sweet music throughout the tower coming from below. If it had come from above, I would have been convinced that I had “died on the tower and gone to heaven.” Since it was coming from below, I prayed that I had not died, for that direction was not my first choice after death.

As my family and I descended the Tower, the beautiful music became much “brighter” but was still very “European” and sweet. As we exited the elevator, it was there that we saw and heard our first French “lemonade stand,” a magnificent 56-key Limonaire organ. (Figure 1). This organ, with its great arrangements, did not have the strident sounds of some large pipe organs or the “heavy,” militaristic sound of a Bruder.

... continued on page 3

... continued from page 1 (*Limonaire Or Lemonade?*)

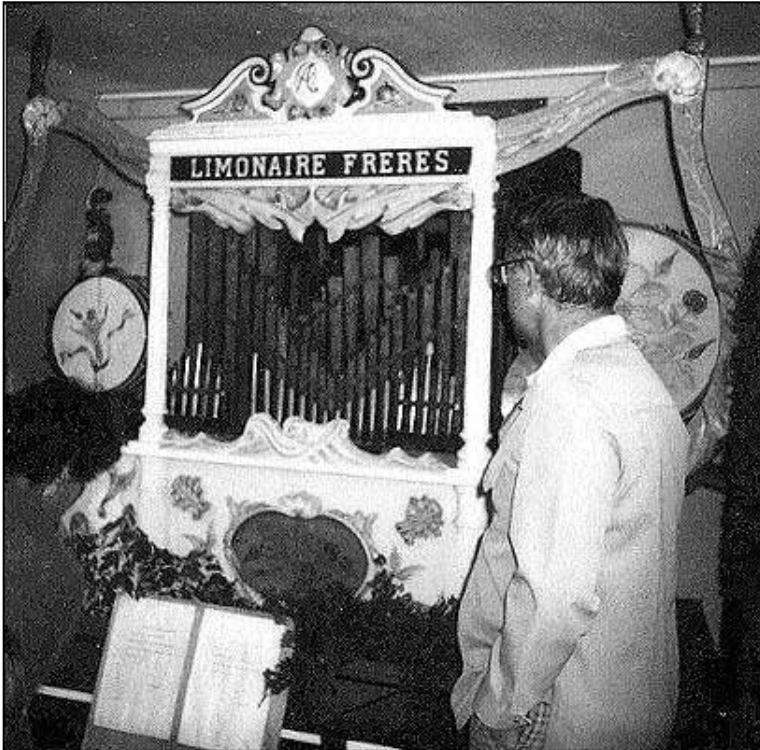


Figure 1. The author admiring a 56-key Limonaire, Paris, 1979.

The Limonaire, like Guy Lombardo's dance band of the 1940s, was producing "the sweetest music this side of heaven." Even the small key frame with only 56 keys produced a very full sound from the cardboard books of typically Parisian melodies. As I was finally dragged away by my family, the Limonaire was playing *Under the Bridges of Paris*. At that point, I was convinced that we would add a large Limonaire organ to our collection, "someday."

Since I knew little about the French Limonaire organs, I began to review available references on this wonderful-sounding instrument. The comprehensive mechanical music historical references available today make it impossible to summarize Limonaire's history without repeating facts previously published. As a philosopher once said, "there is nothing new under the sun." During my studies of the Limonaire organ I realized that this organ, although not well known in the United States, was once very popular in Europe.

As I contacted various "authorities" on the Limonaire, I received the following from Arthur Prinsen, Belgium, known around the world for his wonderful organ book-music arrangements. He provided a 1960's never-before published letter from the daughter of the founder of the Limonaire factory, as follows:

"The Limonaire family was originally from Baskian, a Province between France and Spain. Antoine Limonaire was a piano repairman. Some of the family members eventually married girls from Paris where they (all) became residents. Antoine lived on the Rue Des Petits, Champs No.20. It was a

rather large house for that period. After the war of 1870 (Antoine, by then, had passed away), Camille Limonaire, Antoine's son, went to work with his brother in the factory. Camille was an excellent musician. Every day when he went to work, he would pass an organ grinder playing his wonderful music in the street. One day, the organ broke down and the organ grinder asked Camille if he could repair it. Camille was only a piano specialist but promised to try to repair the organ. He was successful. It was at this point that Camille decided to start building barrel organs. The Limonaire family soon became the most famous organ builders in France. Their well known address was Avenue Daumesnil, Paris."

A summary of information in other references enlightened me even further. The Limonaire Organ Company was established in 1840 and initially produced only barrel-operated street organs. Later, they produced barrel orchestrions and band (fair) organs when the operations were moved to Paris. With the invention of the key frame and music book by Anselme Gavioli in 1892, organ businesses flourished. The Limonaire Company of Paris, France changed their wonderful organs and other instruments to use this new book music format.

Around the beginning of the 20th century, business problems and bad decisions plagued many of the organ builders of the day. For example, Gavioli attempted to market "at least one dozen" Residence Pipe Organs with 101 keys (90 keys from book music and 11 keys from the built-in keyboard). Only two of these instruments were ever produced, i.e., a prototype and one production instrument, both measuring over 12-1/2 feet high and 7 feet wide. Alas, the market was not ready for these high-quality, high-cost instruments, so no more were ever produced (the prototype is now in the author's collection; the first production instrument, based on the prototype, remains with the Gavioli family in Europe).

Gavioli then reorganized and emerged as "Gavioli et Cie," continuing to produce some of the finest band and fairground organs in the world. However, the demand for one-of-a-kind instruments sharply increased production costs and reduced profits for all organ builders, including Gavioli and Limonaire. Even so, at the 1900 Paris World's Fair, Limonaire displayed their model "1900" which was too elaborate and expensive for the market (**Figure 2**).

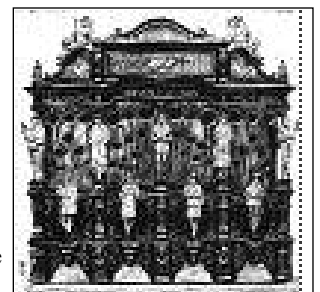


Figure 2. The Limonaire model 1900.

However, the model 1900 was successfully used for publicity and to enhance the image of the company until it was ultimately sold to a traveling carousel owner. In 1965, after years of neglect and surviving two world wars, it was purchased and restored by a Gavioli family relative. World War I created hardships for all organ builders and Limonaire temporarily closed their factory in 1918. Later, the Limonaire factory reopened and produced many more wonderful instruments in the 1920s.

My interest in the “sweet” sounding Limonaire organ was renewed about five years ago when I recalled my first encounter with one at the base of the Eiffel Tower. As I searched for information on the availability of these wonderful instruments, I again contacted Arthur Prinsen of Schoten, Belgium, for assistance. A review of any book music for European mechanical musical instruments reveals, among a few others, the world-renowned music arrangements of Arthur Prinsen. My listing suggested that Arthur is responsible for a considerable amount of all the book music arrangements produced in the past 50 years.

After making initial contact with Mr. Prinsen in my quest for a “large Limonaire,” he informed me that many of the original organs had survived and could be found throughout Europe. Obviously, the Limonaire has not become as “popular” in the United States as other makers such as Bruder, Frati,

Gasparini, etc. In addition, export laws throughout the world are increasingly “tough” as various countries seek to slow the departure of these “national art treasures” to other countries.



Figure 3. 60-key Limonaire from the Prinsen collection.

After months of negotiation, Arthur realized that we were looking for the best available Limonaire book-reading instrument. From his private collection, he eventually sold us a perfectly-restored instrument, a 60-key organ with an animated conductor and two beautiful bell ringers (**Figure 3**).

The instrument measures over 9 feet high, 10 feet wide and about 5 feet deep with the following key scale:

- 5 Basses, double
- 6 Reed Trombones
- 8 Accompaniment, double
- 14 Melody
- 10 Melody Flutes (24 melody - clarinets + violins + prestants-flutes double)
- 11 Counter Melody (Reed Saxophone)
- 1 Bass Drum
- 2 Snare Drum
- 1 Bandmaster
- 1 Triangle
- 1 Bell Ringers (2)
- 1 Wind Key

The Limonaire had an intricate system of blowers that originally operated at 220 volts and 50 cycles. Surprisingly, at my request these were successfully converted to 110 volts and 60 cycles in a Canadian electrical shop and work very well. When the key frame pulleys were resized to compensate for the increased speed caused by the 60-cycle voltage, the Limonaire became the centerpiece of our organ collection. We now have our very own French “lemonade stand.”

Arthur Prinsen

Arthur Prinsen was born in Antwerp, Belgium in 1933. At age nine he began private accordion lessons and soon mastered the instrument. At age 12, Arthur attended the prestigious Musical Academy of Europe to expand his musical abilities. By age 16 he was playing a variety of instruments in local bands, i.e., saxophone, Hammond organ and the Vibratone. In addition, this multi-talented musician played with many different dance orchestras as well as for radio broadcasts and studio recording sessions. Although very busy with his performance schedule, Arthur managed to attend a technical school to further hone his musical and business skills.

By 1958, Arthur had started his own shop for building/restoring organs for collectors around the world. Arthur's wife's uncle Arthur Bursens (of the world-famous Bursens organ builders) shared his detailed knowledge of the organ building business with Arthur. In addition, Arthur worked with various other organ builders, such as Leon DeCap, to perfect his organ building and restoration skills. To supplement this knowledge, Arthur also studied arranging under the skillful master Urbain Van Wichelen. In 1985, Arthur sharply reduced his schedule to concentrate on his “first love,” arranging, which he describes as his “real profession.”

Arthur has been extremely busy during his entire career. However, business has slowed a bit with the advent and acceptance of MIDI digital systems, which are being installed in many mechanical music instruments. Although “semi-retired,” Arthur currently has several years of work ahead of him with repairs, restorations, book music production, arranging, etc. Without his faithful wife, Paula, it would be difficult to complete the many orders he has received from collectors around the world. Arthur continues to have a role in the quality/quantity of mechanical music arrangements that millions enjoy today.



Figure 4. 49-key Limonaire.

Historical Province: The Limonaire factory only produced three of the 60-key organs. The one in our collection was built in 1923 for a European “Fairground family.”

It was used in and around Paris until the beginning of World War II. For safekeeping, it was moved to a warehouse in France where it remained untouched for 25 years. In 1965, it was acquired by the Lame family who used it with a large carousel to the delight of children, particularly in the vicinity of Bretagne, France.



Figure 5. 89-key limonaire



Figure 6. 45-key Limonaire Jazz Band-O-Phone.

The organ had been restored and kept in magnificent, original condition when, in 1992, it was acquired at auction by Arthur Prinsen. The organ was again carefully restored to “new” condition in France. Over 300 meters of music was then provided by Arthur. The organ was acquired by the author in the spring of 2000 and sent by ship's container to the United States.

*I dusted off my rusty college
French dictionary and decided the
correct meaning was
“Lemonade”*

Other available Limonaire instruments “found” during the search, include the following:

Figure 4. 49-key Limonaire

Figure 5. 89-key Limonaire

Figure 6. 45-key Limonaire Jazz Band-O-Phone

Acknowledgements:

The author gratefully acknowledges the contributions made by co-author Arthur Prinsen of Belgium, Ronald Schmuck of Canada, Joseph Schumacher of the USA and others. This article could not have been written without their valuable assistance.

Rick Cooley has a love of mechanical music, and along with his wife Betty, have a representative collection of instruments including band and fair organs as well as circus calliopes.