

## The LeLudion Story

Eve Crasse

### The Beginnings

The story of LeLudion started with the crossing of the paths of two people with a passion for mechanical music. The place was the first district of Paris - a chance meeting in front of an antique dealer who specialized in organ clocks. Both students were interested in the same type of music - one was enchanted with fairground music and the merry-go-round and the other was fascinated with the mechanism that made this wonderful music.

Several years passed before realizing the workshop as it is known today but the chance meeting was the start. Being able to teach the craft of mechanical music as well as working with great customers all added to the experience over the last 25 years.

The craft of mechanical music? In France there was no formal school, not even for organ building. You had to learn from retired professionals. Today it is different in that there is a unique school near Strasbourg (in the eastern part of France) where the apprentice can find good teachers.

### The Birth of LeLudion

Philippe and Eve Crasse began the business of LeLudion in 1976 with Eve specializing in antique toys and Philippe restoring mechanical musical instruments. The field of restoring is best learned from the masters some of which included organ styles by the Limonaire firm and organettes from Jerome Thibouville (the two most popular companies seen in the French market). As work for the business came in, Philippe would compare the styles and mechanisms of these organs with each other.

Why the name of LeLudion? It means Cartesian diver and brings together both Philippe and Eve's passions. As an old toy, it could be a very simple or a very sophisticated item. It could



Figure 1. The 27-keyless "Baby" street organ in a painted case.

have been made by a grandfather for his grandson's enjoyment or a divining machine by the fairman's hands, following the movement of a figure's wand - up and down. The Cartesian diver seems to answer the public's question.

### Cartesian Diver

Best described as a toy for the junior high school laboratory, it is simply a near-floating object in a closed plastic bottle that dives and rises according to pressure on the bottle. It involves physical forces of weight, pressure, gravity, vacuum and water.



Figure 2. The Maestro organ fitted with trumpets, tin flutes and bourdons. The organ, decorated with Spanish views, is fitted on a neat cart.

During those earlier years our vacations were dedicated to visiting collections and museums all over Europe including Utrecht, Rudesheim, Waldkirch, Seeven, l'Auberson and so on. At that time it was also easier to assemble a collection of mechanical instruments including fair organs, music boxes and so on. This provided a way to show our customers the wonders of these instruments as well as enjoying them ourselves.

Naturally, the hope of an organ restorer is to build his own instrument and in 1984, Philippe was able to do just that—a 24-note organ made in the style of Thibouville. One year later, production of these organs in the LeLudion workshop began.

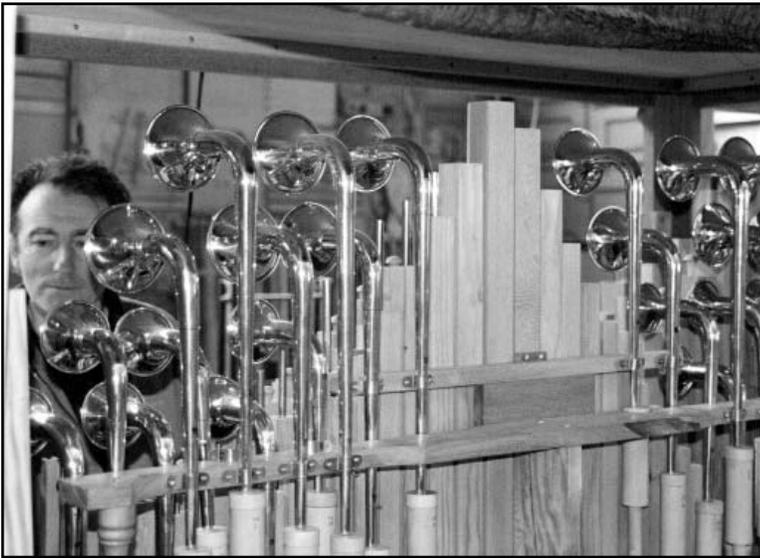


Figure 3. A view inside the 64-key concert organ as tuning progresses.

At first, the LeLudion workshop produced three models: a “bird organ” (serinette); a 35-key fairground organ (similar to the Limonaire) and a 24-key street organ. It was at that time that we were asked also to build a “kit” organ, one that the customer could do himself (a surgeon friend had made the first request—one that was to help him escape the tensions of work and relax). This became a difficult request because some builders could follow instructions and build a satisfactory organ while others seemed to have trouble following instructions. Other restorers had warned us that we were giving away “all the secrets.”

As time went by we had wonderful opportunities to expand. A fairground ordered a 64-key organ with brass trumpets to use for a merry-go-round; a private club, owned by a poker player, wanted an organ to provide contemporary music for singing at private parties; and lately, a café in the northern part of France desired a Mortier dance organ. All this work required more workers and we progressed from two to, now, eight workers.

#### A Main Concern - Book Music

From 1990 to 1992 we worked out a plan to create our own book music for the organs we produced. Was it possible to create an organ without music to play on it? Of course not! Obstacles encountered were the unavailability of book makers (three existed in France but were too busy to help) as well as the lack of familiarity with using the computer to help punch the cardboard music. At first it was necessary to spend more time with the arranging portion of providing music and less with the actual punching. We enlisted the help of Michel Amirault and Richard Legardeur, local musicians who were available to arrange.

Utilizing the help of a data processing expert we designed a prototype computerized cutting and punching machine. After

two years of experimenting (and spending a lot of money) it worked great. There was little software on the market at that time but around 1992 there seemed to be an explosion of music arrangers and bookmakers, most however interested in making music for their own organs. After this time there seemed to be many new tunes available.

LeLudion's 20th birthday was celebrated in October 1996 with a three-day street fair where many organ owners, some from as far away as Belgium and Spain, helped celebrate. This festive occasion has been preserved on a CD.

In keeping with the LeLudion philosophy, we have advanced our organ-building techniques over a large range of organs, both key and keyless. Our fair organs are designed in the polyphonic type—which means that each pipe and each rank must receive enough wind without having compromise with other ranks. Bellows units (or blower) were conceived with this principle.

Also, the wind channels are made large enough to accommodate the number of pipes. We enlarged the instrument composition with an increased numbers of pipes (double basses and accompaniments) operated with automatic stops.



Figure 4. The fairground organ *Le Superb*, a 35-key Limonaire-type organ playing with a carousel.

The smaller street organs use the standard 27-keyless system (even in the busker organ, the Piccolo) which allow for accompaniment of the performer. In Germany the 20-note organ is more popular (often without accompanying singer) but our models, especially the larger 32-key Maestro model is capable of extremely fine musical shading and variety of playing musical selections. Certainly some readers will remember the impromptu concerts given at the previous Chicago and Seattle MBSI conventions.

Eve and Philippe Crasse's history is noted in this interesting story of LeLudion. They continue to make organs in the south of France as well as attend many organ rallies on the Continent.