

Julius Vander Beken Organ Builder—A Short History

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Biographical Details¹

Julius Bartholomeus Vander Beken² (Figure 1) was born in the Penitentenstraat (Penitent Street) No. 3 in Grammont on 3rd April 1868; he was the son of a carpenter (Vitalis) and his mother's name was Joanna Ceuterick.

In 1873, the Vander Beken family moved to Laken (where the Royal Palace is) but before 1887, they returned to Grammont, where they went to live in the Lessensestraat. But in

the same year, they moved again—this time to Schaarbeek; however, they came back to Grammont already in 1888.



Figure 1. Julius Bartholomeus Vander Beken (1868-1948)



2. Helena and Julius, pictured on medallions that are still a family possession.

On 24th August 1889 Julius marries Helena Vander Beken (Ca. 1869, Grammont³) (Figure 2), and they move into a house in the Buizemontstraat No. 107 in Grammont. According to official documents from the year 1900, the Vander Beken family then lives in the Wijngaardstraat (Vineyard Street) No. 30, where Helena runs a fish shop. Eventually, in 1909, the family leaves Grammont for Petit-Enghien⁴, where Julius starts his own organ factory in the Rue du Viaduc (Viaduct Street) No. 49. Julius dies in Enghien⁵ on the age of 80 on 18th April 1948; he had (at least) three children (Jeanine, Suzanne and Victor⁶) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Vander Beken family photo, ca.1910; we don't know anything about the people in the back row; in the front row, we see: Jeanine, ?, Julius, Helena, Victor and Suzanne.



Figure 4. Hooghuyts factory staff, probably ca.1885; the young Julius Vander Beken is the 3rd from the left on the second row; on his right is Louis Hooghuyts.

Julius Vander Beken as an organ builder

The first trace of Julius Vander Beken as an organ builder is to be found in his wedding act of 1889. He started his career in the famous firm of Louis Hooghuyts where he was responsible for (a.o.) the construction and intonation of pipework (Figure 4). On 7th September 1897, Vander Beken goes to London, where he became responsible for the assembly of barrel organs ordered by Chiappa & Sons from Hooghuyts; Chiappa & Sons ordered several such organs, but they usually came without a façade, which Chiappa supplied themselves⁷. One invoice for a barrel organ reads as follows in Figure 5.



N^o 54. Chiappa en Zonen tot Londen.

Commande. Concept 79 toetsen model n^o 1.
 18 trompetten, 19 clarinetten, 16 fluit w.
 Twee kleine mangetrommen en 6 pilastert.
 26 Januarij 1896
 Zijde kasten met Romeine Caizen en Cimballes.
 Een draayende Hoop van Houtkornen.
 Sordinaire Rotterden geplaatst al boven in de kast.
 Monton met 5 reflecteurs en 5 lampen.
 de twee Cylinders 80 maten valde.
 met een balustkast.

Overeengekomen prijs 180 pond.

Ontvangen op rekening een wissel op zicht
 te waarde van twintig pond Sterling
 den 26^{de} Januarij 1896.
 Louis Hooghuyts

Ontvangen een wissel op zicht te waarde van
 honderd en zestig pond Sterling in volle
 voldoening. Den 23^{de} April 1896.
 Louis Hooghuyts

geloofd de.
 23 April
 1896
 L^o

Figure 5. A copy of an original invoice from the author's archives: N°54, 26th January 1896; signed n° 282; delivered on 21st April 1896: Chiappa & Sons in London

Order: an organ with 79 keys, model N°1. 18 trumpets, 19 clarinets, 16 small flutes. Case with inlaid wood and 6 columns. Side cases with bass drum, snare drum and cymbal. Six revolving copper columns. 5 common figures, mounted in the upper part of the case. Façade with 5 mirrors and 5 lamps. Big barrel with 80 measures of waltz music.

With packing case.

Agreed price: 180 pound.

Received on account a bill of exchange with a value of twenty pound sterling on 26th January 1896.

(Signed:) Louis Hooghuyts.

Received a bill of exchange with a value of one hundred and sixty pound sterling as a full payment on 23rd April 1896.

(Signed:) Louis Hooghuyts.⁸

In 1909, Julius starts his own organ factory in Petit-Enghien. Judging from the number of remaining Vander Beken instruments, it seems reasonable to suppose that he didn't build many organs. Julius' experience in the Hooghuyts factory did leave an unmistakable influence in his instruments, since the construction, disposition and sound of his organs clearly resemble those of Hooghuyts organs, although they are a little less refined. Julius built barrel organs (Figure 6) as well as book organs, and in this last category, he built fair and dance organs (Figures 7, 8 & 9), just like Hooghuyts. Vander Beken also undertook reparations and modifications of existing organs, which seemed to have been a major source of income in those days for organ builders, since lots of owners had their organ



Figure 6. 44-key barrel organ as seen at "Invisible Musicians"—an exposition in Brussels in 1999. The sound of the organ resembles that of a small Bacigalupo. (It is unknown to me who the owner of this organ is; since a lot of instruments of the exposition were once part of the collection of Henri Triquet (Paris), it might have come from there too.)



Figure 7. Vander Beken fair organ, then in possession of the Bolland family, who used it on the fair in their caterpillar.

changed from a barrel to book mechanism. In many cases, he replaced the original builder's name with his own⁹. It is unknown when Vander Beken actually stopped building organs, but I think we can safely say that it was before 1935.



Figure 8. Vander Beken fair organ; in front of the organ, we see Jeanine, Victor and Suzanne, Julius's children. The sign on the background reads: "J. VANDERBEKEN / Fabricant d'Orgues Mécaniques / [...] cartons perforés." The illegible part of the sign behind the façade undoubtedly mentioned something like "à cylindres."

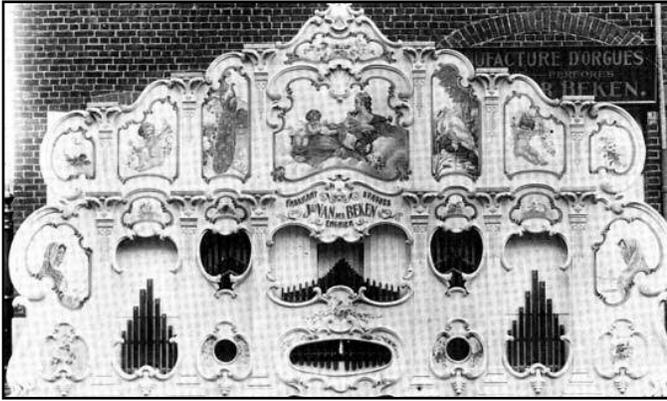


Figure 9. Vander Beken dance organ; notice that the sign on the background only mentions “cartons - perforés” and no longer “à cylindres,” which means that this picture was probably taken some years after the previous one.

One thing that remains unclear, is the question of whether Vander Beken arranged music himself: according to some information, Vander Beken got his barrels and books from someone else and put his name on them, but others say that Vander Beken was a skilled music arranger. It seems reasonable to suppose that the last hypothesis is the correct one, since Vander Beken delivered music books for other organs than those he built himself; it seems unreasonable to me to suppose that Vander Beken took orders from e.g. a Mortier organ owner and then ordered books from someone else (Figure 10). This doesn't mean, of course, that others didn't arrange for Vander Beken organs: in this context, we must mention Edgard-Georges Hooghuyts, who arranged some books for the Vander Beken organ now in the collection of Jef Ghysels (cf. infra) and —according to a working list—also pinned at least two barrels for Vander Beken organs¹⁰.

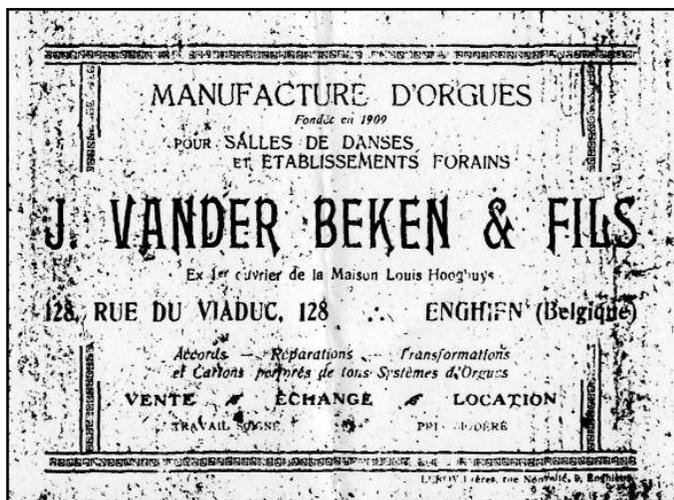


Figure 10. J. Vander Beken book label.

Remaining Vander Beken organs

As suggested above, only a small number of Vander Beken organs has survived the past century. The following list is merely a starting point, and provides only basic information :

1. 44-key barrel organ, current owner unknown (see **Figure 6**).

2. 61-key fair organ in a swing mill, owned by the Hulster family of Liège. Eventually, the attraction was severely damaged by a fire, but the organ escaped major detriment. The instrument is still in possession of the Hulster family, and has a collection of rare books, arranged by a.o. August Schollaert and the rather unknown Belgian arranger August Schelstraete, **Figure 11**.



Figure 11. Vander Beken fair organ of the Hulster family. The owner had the habit of striking off titles of new books, to avoid that other organ owners would order the same book—which explains why this organ has so many rare books in its repertoire.

3. 64-key fair organ owned by Jerry Doring; the organ was restored in 2000 and the owner fitted a new façade (The instrument was offered for sale last year, but it is unknown whether it was actually sold; and, if so, who became the new owner.) **Figure 12**

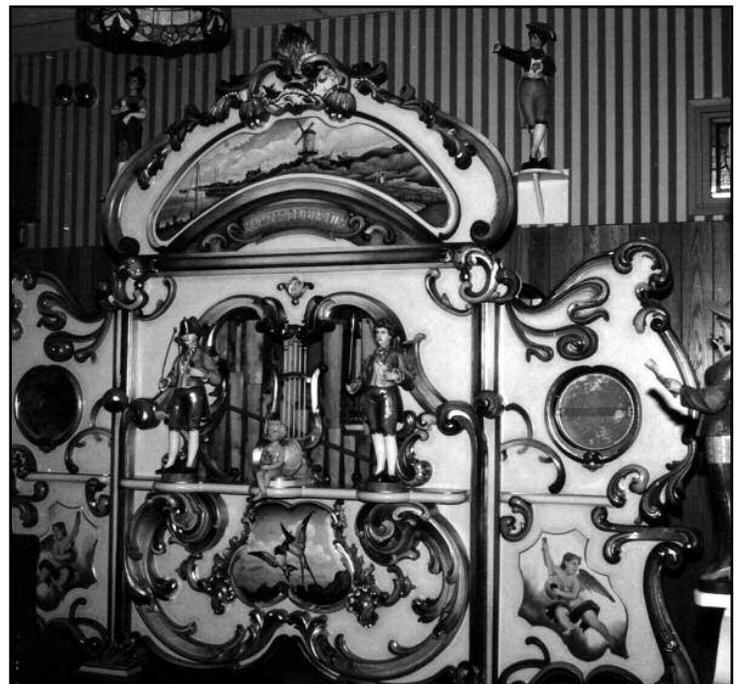


Figure 12. Vander Beken fair organ of Jerry Doring, with the new façade.



Figure 13 (left). 60-key Vander Beken organ of Jef Ghysels, with a new façade.

Figure 14 (right). Detail of the (heavily varnished) pipework of the fair organ of Jef Ghysels.



4. 60-key fair organ of Jef Ghysels; the organ was bought without a façade, and the current owner built a new one.
Figures 13 & 14

5. 49-key fair organ, now playing in the carrousel of the Dufaux family in Annecy (FR); this organ was previously owned by Modeste Foulon (Huy-B) and was modified to play on the 49-key Limonaire scale (**back cover**)

6. 67-key Vander Beken of the Perlee family (**Figure 15**); this organ was offered for sale in a MacKinnon catalogue of the early 1970s (which erroneously mentioned that the organ has 62 keys), but has remained in the possession of the Perlee family. It is one of the very few Vander Beken organs that wasn't rebuilt and that still has its original façade. Note that the façade mentions "J. Van der Beken *et fils*—fabricants à Enghien" which suggests that Julius's son(s?) was (were?) active in the *manufacture* too.

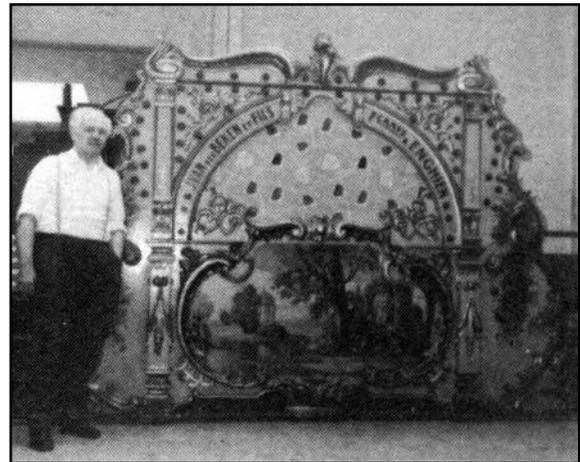


Figure 15. Gijs Perlee with his 67-key fair organ; the organ has lots of books by August Schollaert.



Figure 16. The same organ as on photo 7—after several rebuilds and modifications. The name "Louis Hooghuis" on the façade is completely incorrect.

7. 67-key fair organ owned by Chris van Laarhoven (**Figure 16**); this is the same organ as on photo 7; it was offered for sale in the 1960s by Oscar and Leonard Grymonprez in *Het Pierement* (the journal of the Kring van Draaiorgelvrienden) and was bought by Mr. Bonewit from Amsterdam, who gave it the name "Amstelstad." Afterwards, the owner had it rebuilt by Gossling in Hilversum, who built a new case for it and put a bourdon register in it, so it acquired a street organ sound. In 1969, the instrument was sold to Mr. de Boer from Purmerend; then to Mr. Walter from Hoorn; after a while, it was purchased by a car museum in Westzaan, but eventually it was bought by Dries Neleman, who completely rebuilt the organ—that changed the whole character of the instrument. It was in this condition that the organ became a part of the collection of Chris van Laarhoven (although it has been for sale for a while now).

8. A 49-key fair organ in the *Musée de la vie wallonne in Liège*; the organ is not on display, but is kept in a storage room. It is very probably a rebuilt Limonaire organ, and has some original Vander Beken books.

To this list should be added a 67-key Vander Beken organ, once owned by Emile Baude (Gent-B), but is unknown where this organ has gone now. Perhaps we should also list the 84-key fair organ owned by Raymond Beardow: this organ was featured as a “Van der Beeck” organ on two Decca LP^{12s}, but since I don't know of any other organ builder named “Van der Beeck,” it could well be that it was originally a Vander Beken instrument (the sound certainly supports the hypothesis that it was built by Vander Beken).



Figure 17. Julius with (one of) his son(s) in front of one of his instruments; the style of the façade is reminiscent of some 87-key Gaviolis—in fact, the organ might well be a rebuilt Gavioli.

Unfortunately, this is, indeed, a very short article: Vander Beken is one of those organ builders about whom we have very little information. Even about his instruments, there's little to say, since most of the remaining organs have been rebuilt in the course of time.

I sincerely want to thank Philippe Vander Beken (grandson of Julius), Lambert Jamers, Fred Dahlinger, Ron Bopp, Marc Hooghuys, Jan-Kees De Ruijter and Tom Meijer for providing additional information and pictures.

Notes

1. The majority of the information in this section was taken from the excellent book by S.Godfroid, *Muziekinstrumentenbouw te Geraardsbergen van de 15de eeuw tot heden* (Music instrument building at Geraardsbergen from the 15th century to present day,) Geraardsbergen, 1986, 198-199.
2. The official spelling of the family name is in two words: Vander Beken; but as it appears, Vander Beken spelled his own name as Van der Beken, Vanderbeken etc. (compare with the confusion about the correct spelling of the name Decap, with variants like De Cap, De cap, etc.).
3. As far as we know, Helena was not directly related to Julius, although in those days, it was not entirely unusual that (distant) family members married each other.
4. This is the French name for Lettelingen, which is situated about 12 km southeast of Grammont.
5. The French name for Edingen.
6. As appears from Figure 2, there is an “unknown” child between Jeanine and Julius; since the boy is seated in the front row, among the other Vander Beken family members, it seems logical to suppose he was also a child of Julius and Helena; however, the youngster doesn't return on Figure 8: did he die at a very young age?
7. One could wonder how many barrel organs on old pictures with a Chiappa façade are actually Hooghuys organs.
8. In the archives of the author of this article, there are copies of four invoices for orders by Chiappa & Sons; the description of the organs is the same every time, but prices vary slightly. It seems reasonable to suppose, however, that Chiappa & Sons ordered more than four organs, since Vander Beken stayed in London for three years, and it would have been quite costly to send someone over to London for the assembly of only four organs.
9. One example is a 73-key fair organ owned by the Rorive family of Quaregnon (B); it was originally built by Hooghuys but enlarged by Vander Beken.
10. One barrel was pinned in 1928 for a 50-key barrel organ; the other dates from 1929 and was for a 44-key barrel organ, owned by Charles Hooghuys, son of Louis Hooghuys.
11. The author gladly invites anyone able to provide additional or new information about these organs, to do so—with many thanks in advance of course!
12. Decca ECS2082 *Carousel Van der Beeck, Come to the Fair* and Decca ECS2085 *Van der Beeck Organ, Marching and Waltzing*; some books on these LPs were clearly arranged by August Schollaert (e.g. the *Valse nuptiale*).

Björn Isebaert lives in Zottegem, Belgium, just a few miles from Grammont. Last Year, he received his doctorate in Latin and Greek, and now he's a teacher at a secondary school. His real passion (apart from his girl friend, Marleen) is mechanical music, especially Hooghuys organs.