

The Bill and Cindy Hall Organ Collection

Ron Bopp

A trip to Bill and Cindy Hall's collection of organs is like a trip to a candy store; no, maybe more like a trip to a chocolate candy store. There are no all-day suckers, no taffy, and no jaw-breakers—just chocolate candy. And in this case, there are no musical boxes or phonographs or nickelodeons to divert our attention—just large organs to enjoy. Bill and Cindy have a wonderful room laid out with tables and chairs for light refreshments, all nestled between five large street, fair, dance, and Dutch street organs (Figure 1). After a recent trip to Europe with the Bumbling Bruder Tour the Hall organ room is similar in layout and content to several of the organ collections seen on the tour.



Figure 1. A panoramic view of the Hall collection complete with table and chairs for groups to enjoy the organ music.

49-key Prinsen

The first organ encountered is a newly constructed organ by our friend, Arthur Prinsen, of Belgium (Figure 2). This is the sixth of seven of such organs built by Arthur and it is a 49-key



Figure 2. The new 49-key Prinsen organ fitted with a Marengi facade.

organ (it sounds “much larger”). The organ contains 116 pipes that operate with two registers (Figure 3). The organ was built in 2003 and is married to a Marengi façade that Bill bought on ebay seven years earlier. Interestingly, the façade, when located, was fastened to a wall in an antique shop in New Hampshire. To make this a good match Arthur took measurements

of the façade and built the organ to line up with it perfectly. I had chance to listen to two Prinsen books, *Dacapo* and *Flick Flack*, both of which demonstrated just what the organ could do (Figure 4). Bill was impressed with the craftsmanship of the organ, and I must admit, I was as well.



Figure 3. A close-up of the facade reveals the pipe ranks and organ figure.

Figure 4. Behind the Prinsen organ the competed book emerges from the key frame.

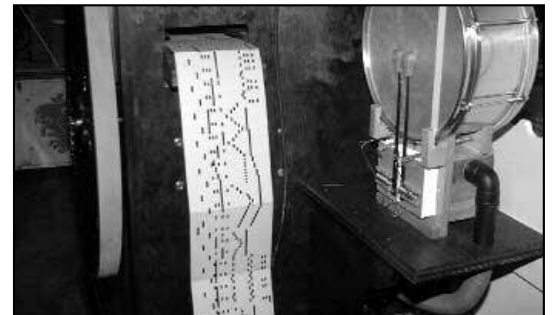




Figure 5. *de Drie Kransen*, an 84-key Dutch Street Organ. The organ originally was an 80-key Gavioli barrel organ but converted later to play 84-key books.

84-key Dutch Street Organ

The next organ I viewed was *de Drie Kransen* (“The Three Wreaths”) (Figure 5). This was originally a Gavioli barrel organ, produced around 1890. It is the oldest organ in the collection and played with 80 keys. The organ was converted to the 84-key system (book-operated) in 1924. In the 1950s the organ was retired (from playing at fairs, concerts and skating rinks) to an amusement park in Holland. It displays an altered Mortier façade and it was restored by Arthur Prinsen in 1986. The organ was then brought to America to be featured in the Hall collection. The organ has 11 registers and the pipework (338 pipes total) includes 197 violins, 23 stopped flutes, 18 open flutes, 23 trumpets, eight bass trombones and bass flutes and nine bass pipes (Figure 6).



Figure 6. An interior view show many of the 338 pipes featured in this organ.

Bill has a lot of Prinsen arrangements (Figure 7) for the organ, especially Christmas music. Because of this he does a lot of bookings between November and January including appreciative arts and crafts shows, mechanical gardens, and family-oriented gatherings.

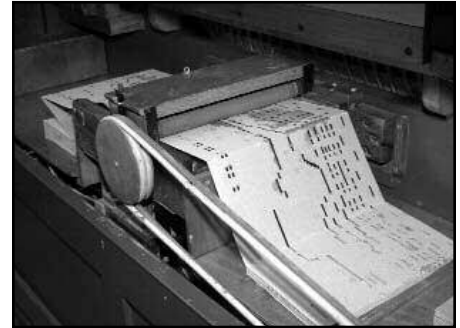


Figure 7. The Dutch Street Organ uses a keyed style key frame powered by the typical (French) leather rope arrangement.

84-key Mortier Dance Orchestrion

The next organ is a Mortier organ displayed in a neat trailer designed by Carl Frei (Figures 8 & 9). More on the trailer story to follow. The organ is a 84-key dance organ that was previously converted from a Mortier orchestrion by Oscar Grymonprez (and according to Bill, was one of Oscar’s favorite organs). The organ features a façade circa 1939 (Figure 10).



Figure 8. An 84-key Mortier dance organ housed in a German-style trailer.



Figure 9. A name plate on the back of the organ identifies it as one built for Carl Frei in 1953.

This organ has 335 pipes including jazz flutes, violins, saxophones, trumpets and has 12 registers (plus the accordion). Bill states that some collectors are interested in trading for the organ in order to convert it back to an orchestrion but of course, he isn't interested. He obtained the organ in a 1990s trade with Wayne Edmundson (Florida).



Figure 11. Inside the German-built trailer one can appreciate the wood slat sides and the curved roof.

The trailer has an interesting history as well—it originally had a Carl Frei organ in it (**Figure 11**). The trailer was a Cumberland Valley carnival trailer that needed work every year (it was beat up pretty well after every season with the carnival). Because of that, the “carnies” were tired of loading and unloading the organ so a deal was made with Bill: if he could find them a similar trailer that would be easier to upkeep they would trade, and so they did. The trailer is of typical German design with curved upper sides and a lifting roof

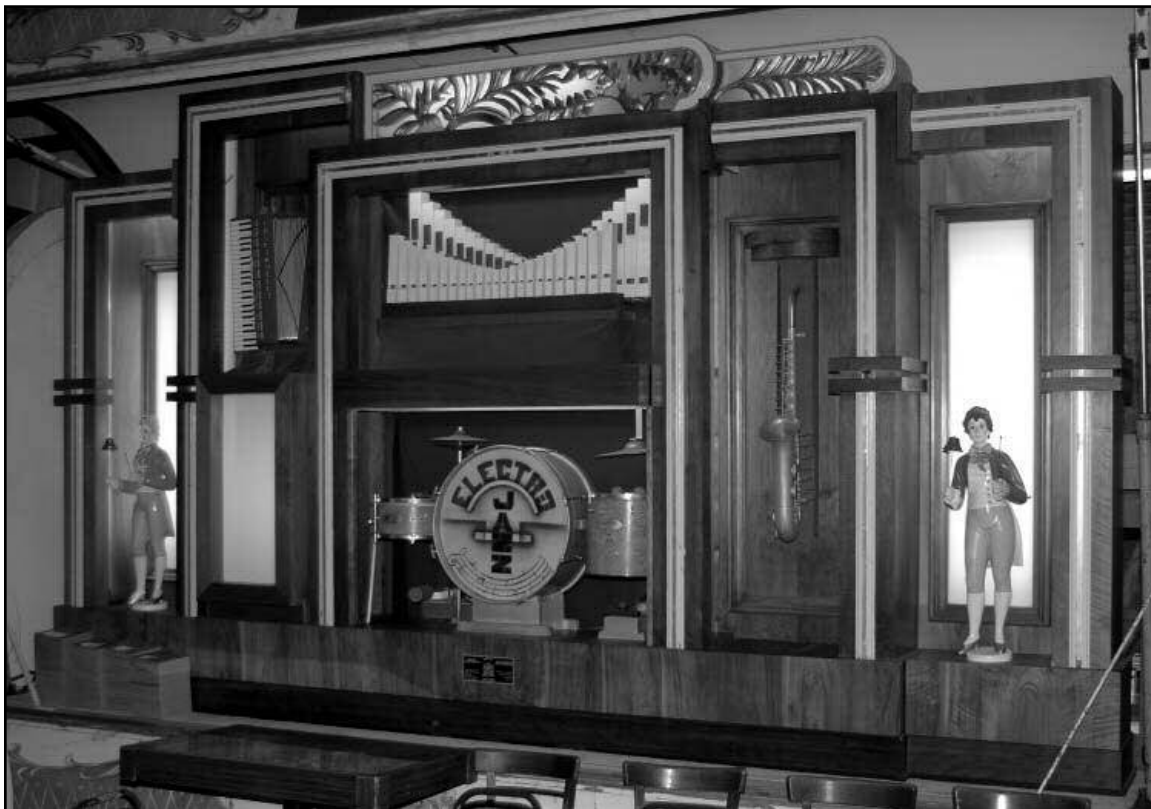


Figure 10. 335 pipes on 12 registers are included in this dance organ along with the usual percussion.

121-key Mortier Café Organ

This classic Mortier Café organ is #1092 and was built in 1939 (Figure 12 & back cover). It was changed over by the Decap factory to a dance organ with an art Deco façade. The organ features 20 registers and has saxophone, jazz flute, trumpet, bassoon and trombone pipes as well as four accordions (Figure 13). The pipes behind the accordions are false pipes. Bill states that the organ needs more restoration but has hesitated since the entire façade needs to be removed to accomplish this.



Figure 12. The 121-key Mortier Café organ is quite large with its 20 registers and four accordions.



Figure 13. A close-up of the facade reveals the many trap effects.

Displayed with the organ is a photograph taken in the 1950s (Figure 14) which depicts a Mr. Charles Hart (from St. Albans, England) and Mr. Bill Walker inspecting the organ. It was named the “Atlantik” at that time but recognizable by some of the same scrollwork.

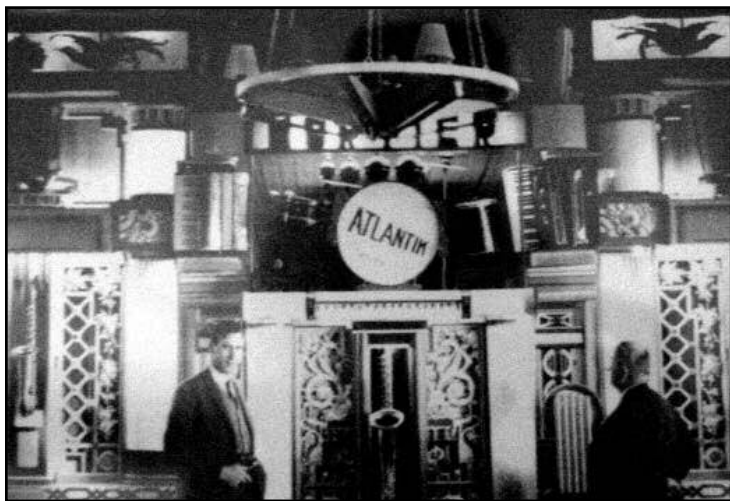


Figure 14. A 1950s photograph reveals the organ as the “Atlantik.”

The organ had been imported into the United States by a Howard Furman around 1971. He had bought the organ from a traveling show (which featured six organs) in the French speaking portion of Belgium. The organ had been moved on a weekly basis prior to being imported. At that time the organ was named “The Atlantik.” Mr. Furman had the organ displayed in an abandoned gas station. The organ was on a platform

in an otherwise dirt-floored room and automobile parts; used radiator hoses were scattered around and on it.

Bill learned of the Furman-owned organ through “snow birds” from Pennsylvania. On one visit it was mentioned there was an organ for sale in Pennsylvania. Months went by until a late-night communication revealed the organ was for sale. Mr. Furman had died and the family had wanted an unrealistic price for the organ. More months passed, as did several attempts at negotiations until Bill made the deal: he would pay for Mr. Furman's daughter's college tuition in exchange for the organ.

89-key Gavioli Organ

This is an 89-key, G-4 Gavioli fairground organ with 619 pipes, making it quite loud (Figure 15 & 16). The organ was obtained through Fredy Gerer (Munich) in 1996. Fredy had advertised the organ in 1995 with the story that Mr. Hofbauer, maker of hand-cranked cart organs, had wanted to build a large organ that played by book, MIDI and keyboard. Hofbauer obtained the 89-key Gavioli organ to use as a pattern—the new organ was about $\frac{3}{4}$ completed when Mr. Hofbauer suddenly died. For some time this 89-key Gavioli sat outside the Hofbauer factory (Figure 17) until exported to the states. The organ in the photo revealed green-clad figures (originally gold).

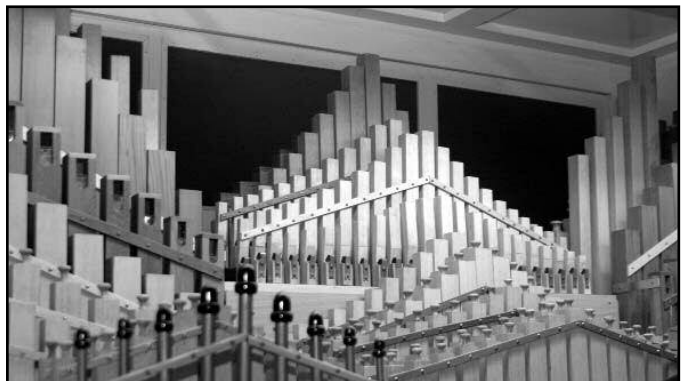


Figure 15. Some of the 619 pipes of Bill and Cindy Hall's 89-key Gavioli fair organ.

The organ came over shipped in a crate filled with Mercedes automobiles. It was and still is on the original trailer. There was not much G-4 music available for it so Bill has had show tunes as well as Broadway musicals made by many different noteurs including Johnny Verbeeck, Arthur Prinsen, Tom Meijer, Andrew Pilmer and the Dean family (England). On my visit I had chance to listen to this organ extensively and I must say that it does excel with show tunes.

Interestingly the organ has had a keyboard put on next to the organ chest behind the façade, which was added by the Hofbauer firm. It is hard to play the organ with the keyboard but perhaps it would help with tuning? Also of note is that the MIDI system does not make the organ play to its full potential, as do the cardboard books.

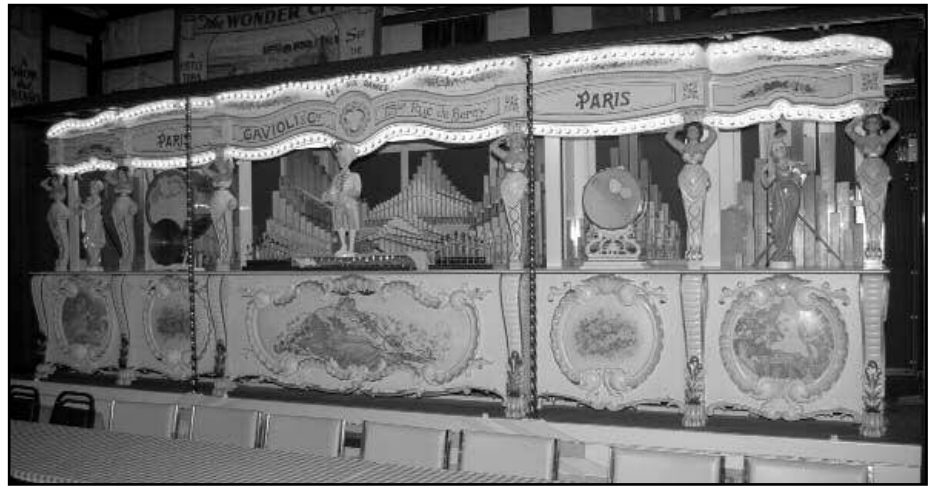


Figure 16. The 89-key Gavioli Fair organ obtained from the Hofbauer firm.



Figure 17. A vintage photograph showing the Gavioli organ as it appeared in Germany.

About the Halls

Bill became involved with organs by seeing a Carl Frei organ at his home town Allentown (Pennsylvania) Fair. At the time it was owned by the Happy Land Shows (it is now owned by Herb Brabandt). Then he heard about a dealer named G. W. MacKinnon. A 52-key Gasparini organ was in one of MacKinnon's catalogs and, after borrowing \$3,000 to buy it, he owned his first organ (in 1959). Of course, no music came with it so he soon became friends with Arthur Prinsen and ordered new music.

Bill and Cindy met through a mutual relationship between their bosses (**Figure 18**). She worked at Old Orchard Beach, Maine, where there was a nice band organ on the carousel on the pier. Eventually they met; he found out she was interested (in him and band organs); she found out he had a band organ (and was interested in her); and in six months they were married.

About the organ-collecting hobby Bill noted that he has "tried to have a representation of all types of European organs: fairground, street organ, dance and café organ." And Cindy noted that "women that don't share their husband's hobbies are stupid—it (the shared interest) gets you out of the house; organs

can get you to Europe; and most of the places you go, there are men. What else could you want—and they are more interesting to talk to."



Figure 18. Bill and Cindy Hall pose in their organ room.

Conclusion

The Hall collection is one that serious lovers of large organs won't want to miss. The organs sound (and look) great and the enthusiasm of Bill and Cindy spills over so that it is not hard to enjoy the visit.

The author wishes to thank Arthur Prinsen and Fredy Gerer for their proofreading efforts (and additional input), and Bill and Cindy Hall for their cooperation and information regarding their collection.

All photographs provided by the author.

Ron Bopp has collected many band and fair organs in the past and currently enjoys his 52-key Gebr. Bruder. He and his wife, Mary Jo, have attended many organ rallies over a 26 year span.