

“De Drei Kransen” (The Three Wreaths) A Look into the Dutch Street Organ World

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During the Musical Box Society International convention in Orlando, Florida in 2004, I visited the collection of Bill and Cindy Hall (in St. Cloud, Florida). Special attention was given to the Dutch street organ, *De Drei Kransen* or The Three Wreaths, which is also known as the *Mortier of Minning* (named after the man who rebuilt it as a street organ after many years of dance organ use).



Figure 1. Jaap Minning working on a part of a keyframe in his workshop, located within his house. The front window of the house had to be removed every time an organ was brought in for repair or removed afterwards.

De Drei Kransen has an interesting history. It started life as a big Gavioli barrel organ, indicated by the large hole at the left side of the case that is now covered. In the early 1900s the firm of Mortier rebuilt it to book operation—playing the old 80-key scale (eight basses, 10 accompaniments, 22 melody and 18 countermelody). This scale included 18 registers which encompassed cancel, swell shutters, tremolo, bass and snare drums, wood block and cymbal. The organ has 338 pipes.

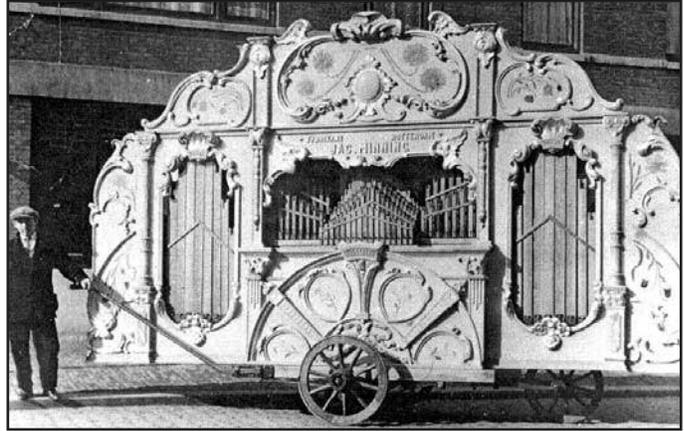


Figure 3. Jaap Minning proudly presents his first organ *de Grote Blauwe* (the Big Blue). It is shown here with its second front. The organ, is now in the Kunkels Collection in Haarlem.

It is not known where the organ was used as a street organ, but we can be sure that it came to the southern part of Holland, where many organ rental agencies had their business. In the mid-1930s the organ was bought by Jaap Minning (1893 - 1964) and transformed into a street organ. Jaap Minning entered the street organ business in the early 1920s (Figure 1), maintaining the organs of the R.M.I.O. (Rotterdamse Maatschappij in Orgels: translated as “Rotterdam Company of Organs”). One of their organs was the old Gavioli now known as *Jupiter*, owned by the Haarlem Kunkels Museum (Figure 2). [see “The Eventful Life of a Centenarian, an Attempt to Reconstruct the History of *JUPITER*” by Cornelis, Ruijgvoorn in issue #18 of the *Carousel Organ*—ed]

Minning developed himself as an organ builder and produced his first organ around 1930. The organ was called *de Grote Blauwe* (The Big Blue), now also part of the Kunkels Collection (Figures 3 & 4).



*Amsterdam is not the only city in Holland with a tradition of street organs. Rotterdam played an equal and important as well.
... M.v.d.V.*

Figure 2. This faded photograph shows Jaap Minning sitting at the left with the little girl leaning on his knee. The three organs in the background were the organs of the R.M.I.O. (see text). From left to right the *Harmonium-Koeningsberg*; a DeVreese organ, the *Mandolin* and an old Gavioli organ now known as the *Jupiter*.



Figure 4. *de Grote Blauwe*, Jaap Minning's first organ, now presents with a front from an old Mortier organ (placed by the Peerlee firm in the past).
Photo: Ron Bopp



Figure 7. A large crowd stands around this Bursens organ owned by the rental agency of Theo Denies from the Hague. It was presented in Rotterdam by Theo de Leur, standing at the right of the flute-harmonic. This organ still exists and is called the *Sater*. It is currently in a Japanese collection.

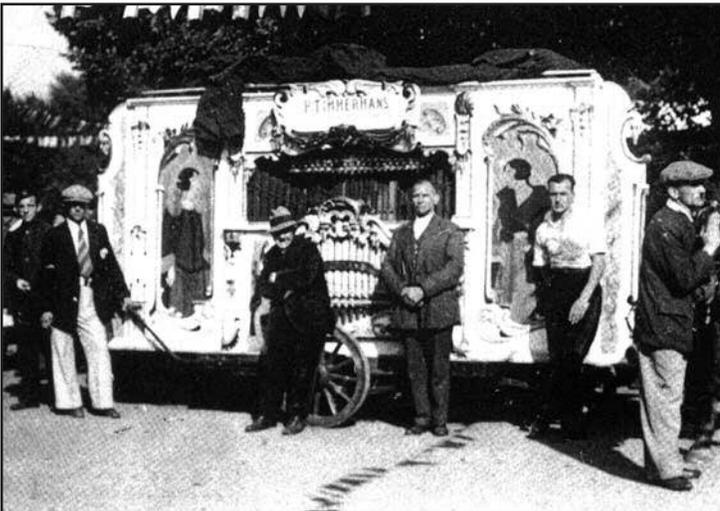


Figure 5. Theo de Leur, nicknamed "The Pimp," shows off the latest Decap streetorgan, called the *Schapenkop* (the SheepHead). He is standing at the left. The organ burned in the fire at the warehouse of the rental agency of Decap, representative Piet Timmermans in Rotterdam, in 1936.

The Gavioli/Mortier was rented out to the well-known and popular license holder, Theo de Leur. Theo lived in the red light district of Rotterdam, and because he was always wearing nice clothes, along with hat and tie, the organ was nicknamed *The Pimp*. He used to rent the latest and newest street organs and always drew a large crowd (Figures 5 to 7).

The music the organ played consisted of arrangements of the famous Carl Frei, and was specially made for this organ, including some of his own compositions. In the late 1930s music was made by the Perlee firm of Amsterdam (Perlee's arranger was Piet Maas).

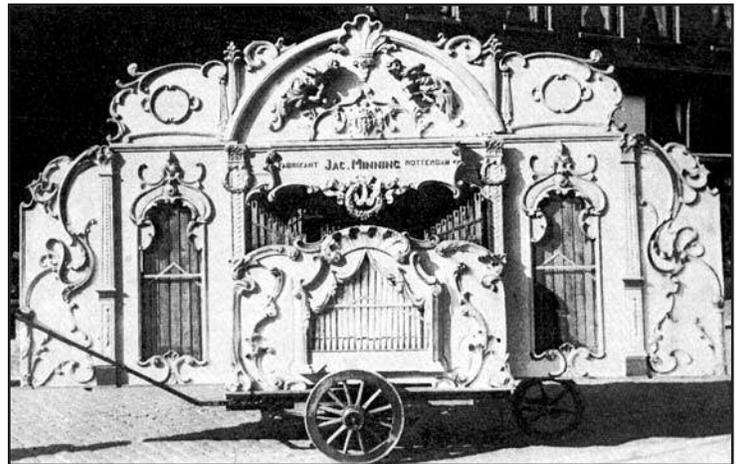


Figure 8. The Mortier from Minning as it played for the first time on the streets of Rotterdam. The name *De Drie Kransen* occurred later.



Figure 6. Before Jaap Minning built the *Grote Blauwe*, he rebuilt a 57-key Gavioli and tented it out to Theo de Leur (right). At the left stands another "oldtimer" in the Rotterdam street organ scene, Piet de Bruijn. He operated organs for a very long time and some of his sons, still do today as well.

The Gavioli/Mortier went out of sight after World War II for a long time and was again discovered in the mid-1970s. It was in the ownership of Frans van der Vin, a dealer whose reputation was not so good. The organ was in bad condition, but was sold nevertheless to a Tilburg (Holland) organ enthusiast named Piet Netten. He ordered Martin Minning, son of Jaap Mining, to totally restore the organ.

In the early 1980s Piet Netten sold the organ to the holiday park Pony Park Slagharen (Figure 9), where several organs were lost after a large fire (a style 38 Ruth and a 101-key Mortier were two of those). However, the Gavioli/Mortier needed an operator to feed the books in the key frame, and that was a problem for the park management. In short time all the park's organs were traded in for 105-key Decap organs (fitted with Hammond organs), which played automatically.



Figure 9. *De Drei Kransen* at Pony Park Slagharen. The writer is standing at the left.



The Gavioli/Mortier, along with another Mortier organ, *The Golden Lion*, and a Koenigsberg organ, *The Barometer*, was sold to the collection of Tilburg collector, Alois Schwagen. By this time the organ had been named *De Drei Kransen*. The rest is well-known history as it was sold to Arthur Prinsen, who then sold it to Bill and Cindy Hall (Figure 10). The music, fortunately, is of the old repertoire, which is a thrill for me as well as my American friends to enjoy.

All photos by the author except where otherwise noted.

Figure 10. *De Drei Kransen* as seen in the Bill and Cindy Hall organ collection.

Photo: Ron Bopp

Maarten van der Vlugt lives in Tilberg, Holland and can be seen at many international meetings as well as the rallies in Holland. He is an avid historian of the Dutch street organ and the Belgium dance organ as well.

Correction . . .

A misspelling of the band organ tuner in "Band Organ Adventure" occurred in issue #36 of the *Carousel Organ*. The correct spelling should be Chris **Feiereisen**.