

*L. Hooghuys, Geraardsbergen: The History of a Belgian Family of Organ Builders**

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During the AGM of the French association A.I.M.M. in 2010 in Paris we had the pleasure to visit the Musée des Arts Forains, where we were musically welcomed by a 63-key Hooghuys which was on display right behind the entrance.

It has a rather unusual pipe layout (the pipes having been set in order, the longest being on the left and the shortest on the right) **Figure 1**. This pipe layout (without alternating the pipes based on their height) is even unusual for Hooghuys organs in general; there is one other specimen with such a layout, LH520, owned by Frank Lythgoe in the UK.

But let's return to our subject. The awareness of the name "Hooghuys" is definitely less than those of Limonaire, Gavioli, Gasparini, Mortier or Decap. So, I will try to give you some more information about this Belgian family of organ builders (originally, they were manufacturers of church organs). In their mechanical organs, one can indeed find transmission systems with small bellows just like in church organs (see also the article in *Musiques Mécaniques Vivantes* 52, 4th trimester 2004).

Thanks to the wonderful cooperation of Mark Hooghuys, the youngest son of Romain Charles Hooghuys who has provided me with lots of data and documents, and with the help of personal documents that I have been collecting for almost 50 years, as well as the translation of several texts of other Dutch-speaking authors like Stéphane Godfroid, I hope to enlighten you a bit on what some people call the "Rolls Royce" of mechanical organs.

According to research results, the roots of the Hooghuys family lie in Wormer (currently in The Netherlands). Gerrit Simon Hooghuys, baptized at Wormer on 1st January 1754 (his birth date is unknown)



Figure 1. LH576 in the Musée des Arts Forains, Collection of Jean-Paul Favand, in Paris.

moved from Middelburg (NL) to Bruges (B) in 1806. "Gerrit" is used as a diminutive—especially in The Netherlands—for the name "Gerardus" (Gérard). An advertisement found in a local journal from Bruges announces the following (translated from Flemish):

"GERARDUS HOOGHUYS, Organ builder, has the honor

to inform the public that he has come to live in this town Brugge in the Vlaemingstreet near the Vlaemingbridge; he charges himself with the building of new organs, and the repair of old ones, all at moderate prices."

Why did Gerrit Hooghuys set up his business in Bruges? This can be explained by the fact that the last of the local organ builders, Dominicus Berger, had recently

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died. The Van Peteghem-family, who were active as organ builders in Gent (the provincial capital of Eastern Flanders), worked only sporadically in Western Flanders and due to the French domination, they were forced to limit their business to the city of Gent.

When churches were reopened in 1802, there is a new market for church organ builders. Gerrit Simon Hooghuys died in Middelburg on 24th January 1813. It is unknown who taught him the trade of organ building.

Simon Gerard Hooghuys, the eldest son of Gerrit Simon, was born in Middelburg on 14th February 1780. He died in Bruges on 21st October 1853.

Only very few instruments of the above-mentioned manufacturers—Gerrit and Simon—are still in existence.

Louis Benoit Hooghuys, third son of Simon Gerard Hooghuys, was born in Bruges on 21st March 1822. He set up his organ building business ca.1845. His craftsmanship certainly reached a very high standard, and his manufacturing technique definitely showed a thorough knowledge. His organ concept was based on a transition of the late baroque organ to a more sober, pre-romantic instrument. This allowed one to play baroque compositions as well as romantic ones on Hooghuys church organs, which is a quite rare characteristic.

A comparative study of the disposition of the organs built by Louis Benoit shows that for him, the mixture of soft registers was more important than the contrast between powerful and expressive ones.

So, Louis Benoit can be considered as one of the last important organ builders in the south of the Netherlands.

After him, the mechanization will be one of the reasons for the decline of the quality of the organs. A lot of Louis Benoit's instruments have been preserved. Louis Benoit died in Bruges on 16th April 1885.

François Bernard Hooghuys, the fourth son of Simon Gerard, was born in Bruges on 15th September 1830. In 1855 he was an apprentice in the workshop of his brother Louis Benoit. In 1859, he built a new organ for his own account for the church in Sint-Job Puivelde near Belsele, Belgium.

In 1869, François Bernard Hooghuys moved to Geraardsbergen (B) where he started to work for Charles Anneessens, a church organ builder whose firm is in full expansion. He died in Geraardsbergen on 30th November 1888.

Louis François Hooghuys, first son of François Bernard Hooghuys, was born in Bruges on 14th May 1856. In 1873, Louis François was active as a woodworker, probably for his uncle Louis Benoit. One year later, he was, just like his father, working for the church organ builder Charles Anneessens in Geraardsbergen—a job he continued for about six years. Having brought his knowledge on church organ building to perfection, he started, being an enterprising man, his own business under the wings of his father and in cooperation with his younger and older brothers, Franciscus Louis (1858-?) and Edouard Joseph (1862-1925).

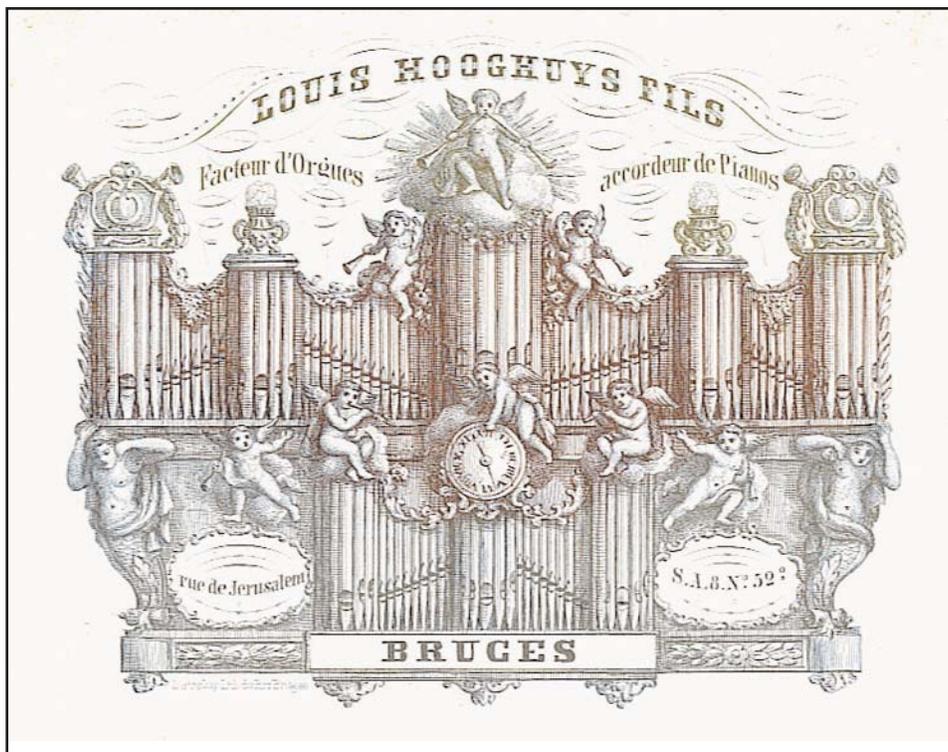


Figure 2. A porcelain postcard or "Vignette."

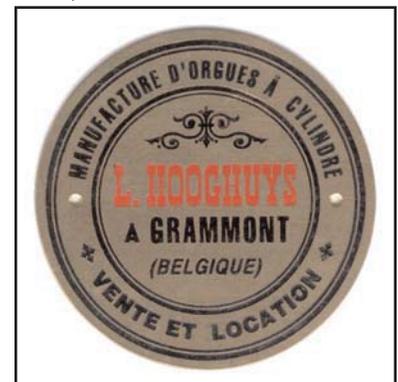


Figure 3. A bronze nameplate of Louis Hooghuys.

He decided not to continue the church organ building business but switched to mechanical organs. It was in 1880 that was established the "Manufacture of Mechanical Organs Louis Hooghuys." So, this was one of the oldest enterprises in this field in Belgium. **Figure 3**

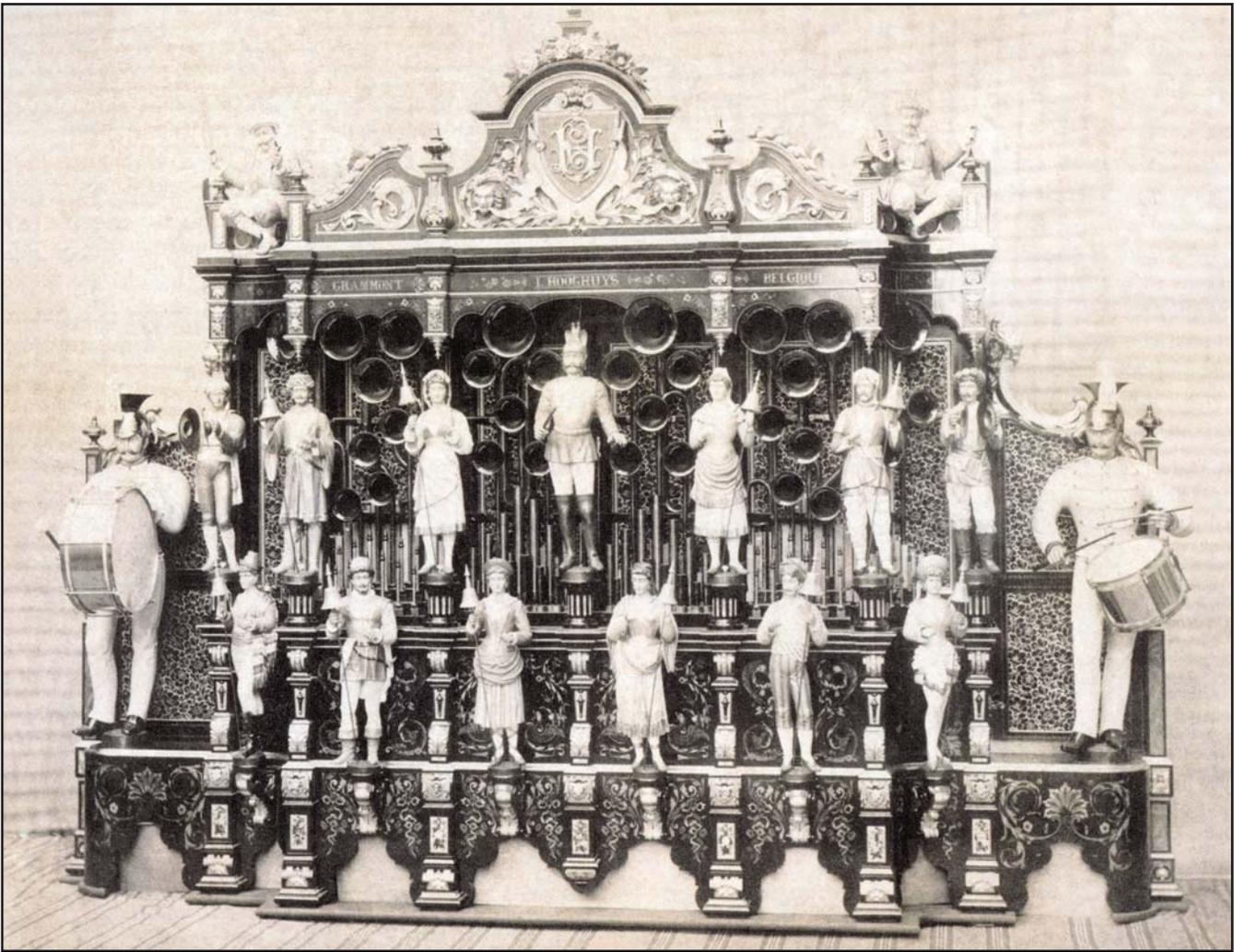


Figure 4. An organ manufactured by Louis Hooghuyts (details unknown).

In the beginning, Louis Hooghuyts only manufactured small cylinder organs (**Figure 5**), but gradually his production evolved towards large, impressive organs with drum-playing figures and large bass drums as well as life-sized moving figures playing bells (**Figure 4**).



Figure 5. A 33-key Louis Hooghuyts cylinder organ "Ginnette" owned by Mark Hooghuyts.

In 1896, Louis Hooghuyts perfected a keyframe (**Figure 6**) for cardboard books, which is a combination of the German technique with "Tonstufen" (in which the air escapes through holes in the cardboard or paper rolls), and the French system with keys, as used by Gavioli, Limonaire, etc. This combination of the two techniques allows for a very fast and accurate 'reading' of the music pattern in the cardboard.

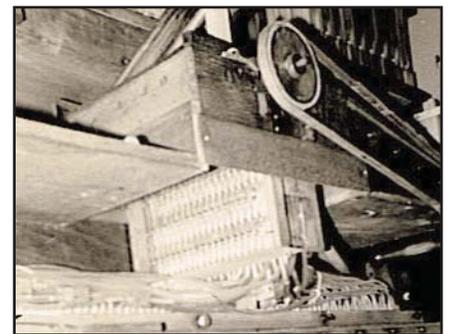


Figure 6. Details of the keyframe of LH518 "Senior" Hooghuyts.

Compared with other organ builders, Louis Hooghuyts built only a small number of instruments. The construction of a new instrument was only started after careful consultation of the client and his wishes; moreover, Louis



Figure 7. Louis Hooghuy.

Hooghuy's benevolence also played a role: he didn't want to build just anything! Clients always had to pay a small advance.

There was never any mass production in the Hooghuy's firm. Every part of the organ was made by hand in his workshop, which also explains why no two instruments were ever identical. Louis Hooghuy's always searched for the best combination and disposition, and so every instrument was a true masterpiece.

The pinning of the cylinders and, later on, the punching of the cardboard books was always done in the factory itself. In the beginning, Louis Hooghuy's did these jobs himself but from 1888 onwards, he received help from his brother Edgard Georges Hooghuy's (1873-1958). The arrangements are characterized by a very fine and delicate notation, ideal for the organs. Gradually Edgard started to arrange for his own account. From about 1920,



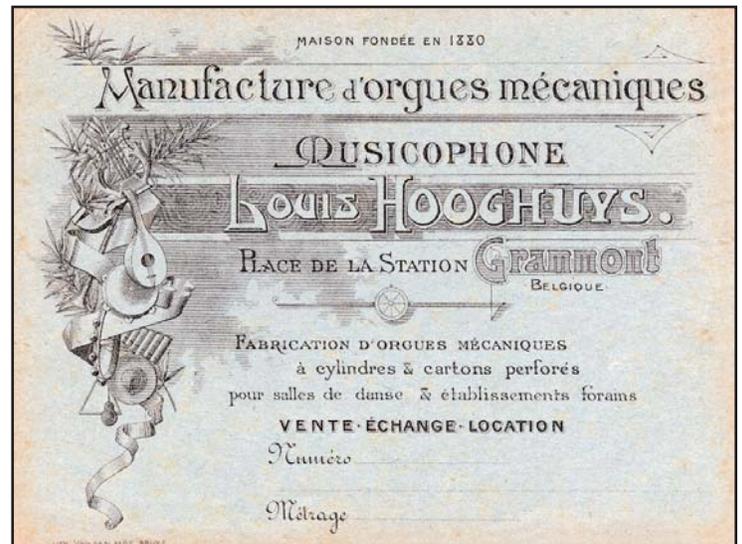
Figure 8. A hooghuy's stamp.



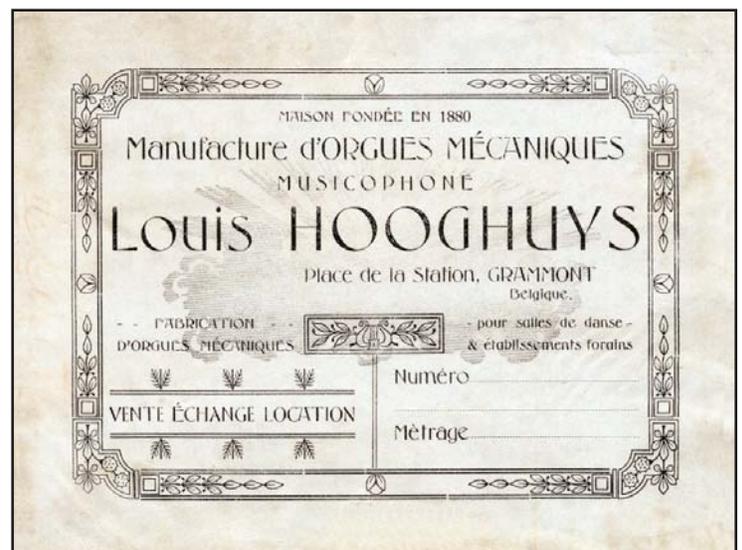
Figure 10. A Hooghuy's nameplate for gramophones.

Victor Valère Hooghuy's—the second son of Edgard, 1904-1978—is also involved in the punching of the books.

Hooghuy's didn't only sell organs, he also rented them. He set up a hire purchase system, which allowed the renters to become the owner of the instrument after having paid for the hire of the instrument during a certain period. This procedure was quite standard among showmen and dance hall owners. The main business of building and selling organs was extended towards the sale or rental of pianos, harmoniums and even phonographs.



Figures 11 & 12. Book Labels of Louis Hooghuy's.



The Hooghuys firm was blooming until the end of the WWI. Before 1914-1918, the organs were more or less manufactured to some standard models. After this period, the market had become more difficult and instruments had to be built at a cheaper rate, always with the final price in mind.

It's hard to tell how many instruments were actually built by Louis Hooghuys, because during WWI the factory was occupied by the Germans and a large part of the factory archives have become lost.

Louis Hooghuys died on 16th November 1924. After his death, business was more or less stopped. Part of the reason for this was the disagreement between his two sons, Charles and Edmond, but also the fact that Louis had remarried with a woman who was 28 years younger than him, and his relation with a young lady to whom he bequeathed part of his property. All this led to a rapid decline of the once successful business.

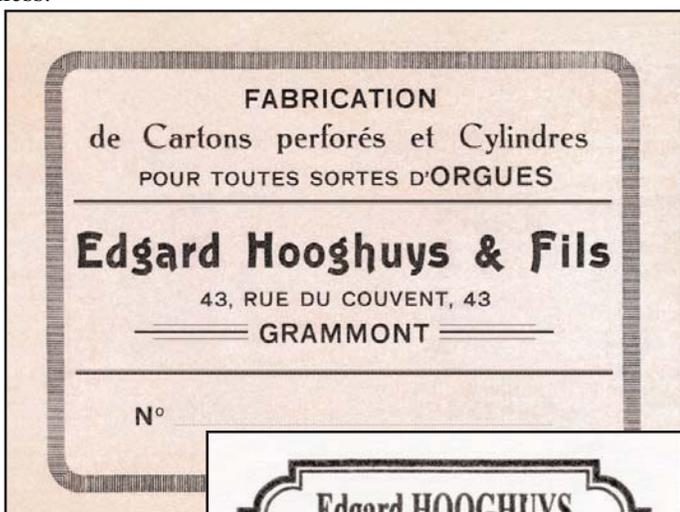


Figure 13 (above). Book label of Edgard Hooghuys.

Figure 14 (right). A stamp of Edgard Hooghuys.

It's worth mentioning that after Louis' death, Edgard started working entirely for his own account. From 1929 onwards, he was assisted by his son Victor.

Charles François Hooghuys was born in Geraardsbergen on 15th April 1878 as the eldest son of Louis François Hooghuys. He was primarily responsible for the tuning of instruments in his father's workshop. He also carried out small reparations in situ on instruments delivered by his father.

After the remarriage of his father in January 1914, he left the factory and set up his own business for organ repairs. He dies on 14th March 1951 in Geraardsbergen.

Edmond François Hooghuys, the third son of Louis François, was born in Geraardsbergen on 7th May 1882. Just like his younger brother, he became active in his father's business from a very young age. Like his father, he soon proved to

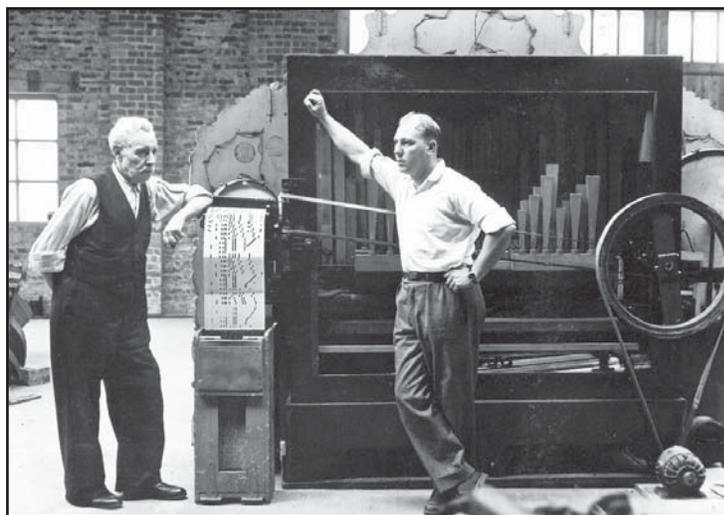


Figure 15. Edmond Hooghuys and Albert Becquart.

be a very talented musician. He composed hundreds of tunes for piano which were arranged for organ by Louis Hooghuys and August Schollaert (see below).

He repaired many (primarily mechanical) musical instruments, and also sold new instruments including pianos, violins and mandolins, as well as gramophones. In a printed advertisement, we note that he was also an agent for electrical orchestrions manufactured by Hupfeld.

In 1921, Edmond François became the leader of the local brass band. Under his leadership, the band underwent a splendid evolution. New musicians needed to have followed at least three years of tutelage before they could actually join the band. Edmond also was the principal of the music school of the city of Geraardsbergen for a long time. He died in Beloeil, Belgium on 17th June 1963.



Figure 16. (Romain) Charles Hooghuys carrying out minor repairs to LH518 "Senior" in Heist-aan-Zee.

(Romain) Charles Hooghuys, the only son of Charles François, was born in Geraardsbergen on 22nd July 1901 (Figure 16). After having followed (with much success) courses of apprenticeship in piano and harmony, he specialized in the arrangement of cardboard books. Soon he developed his

own style, with much attention paid to countermelody and harmonization (see also *Musiques Mécaniques Vivantes* 52, 4th trimester 2004).

(Romain) Charles never worked for his grandfather Louis François, but the labels and stamps on the books he produced bore the name of his father, Charles. When he was still alive, he told me that he didn't like his first name "Romain" and preferred to be called "Charles." This might explain why the labels he used at the end of his life mention the name "R.Charles HOOGHUYS".

Judging from the stencils now in possession of his son Mark, most of his arrangements date from the period 1921-1931. In 1930, he started to sell beer for a brewery of Aalst (B).

During 1930-1931, Romain's arrangements were punched by his uncle Achilles Edgard Hooghuys.

Let's not forget that this period was a period of economic crisis during which business certainly must have been difficult. In 1944, (Romain) Charles opened a bookshop in a village near Geraardsbergen. He also was an organist at that time. During these difficult times, he did many jobs simply to survive.

After WWII the real decline of the organ world began. Jukeboxes started to appear and it was a true black period for organs. Many were destroyed, used as firewood and the most 'lucky ones' were exported to the USA or England.

Two years after the death of his father, (Romain) Charles left the region of Geraardsbergen and went to live near the Belgian coast. He lived in different villages, but ended his life in Bruges, the city of his ancestors. (Romain) Charles continued to arrange for his own organs (he had preserved three of them) until 1978.

On 8th November 1989 he was hit by a car on pedestrian crossing and subsequently died on 15th December 1989. His wife died on the day of his funeral.

aware of the qualities and musical capabilities of his friend August, who was a band leader and conductor of a symphonic orchestra. August made thousands of high quality arrangements for fair and dance organs of tunes that were popular in the 1930-1950 era, ranging from marches and waltzes to overtures and operetta selections.

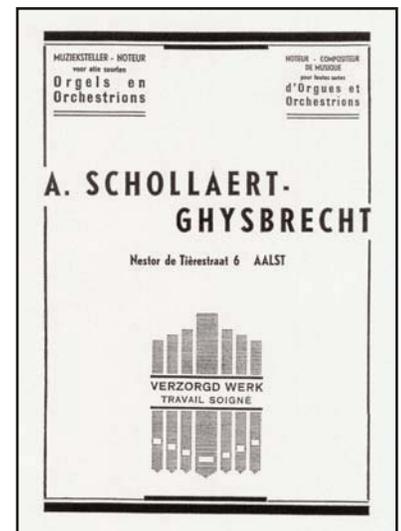


Figure 18. A book label of August Schollaert

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- www.gazotube.com: Romain Charles Hooghuys and the Condor Dance Organ
- Other Hooghuys-related videos are also available on YouTube.



Figure 17. Mark Hooghuys.

Mark HOOGHUYS, the youngest son of (Romain) Charles, was born on 12th October 1945 (Figure 17).

Although Mark trained in harmonization as well as woodworking he has never been professionally active with mechanical organs. He did help his father with repairs/improvements to the instruments the latter owned. Now that he is retired, he carries out a lot of reparations to and maintains many Hooghuys organs.

In this Hooghuys family history, we definitely have to mention August Schollaert (1893-1958) (see also our article *Musiques Mécaniques Vivantes* 70, p.33-35). Most enthusiasts will probably know his name, as it can often be found on books with Belgian organs (Figure 18). August Schollaert was a very good friend of Edmond Hooghuys; the latter soon became

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