

## *A Pilgrimage to the Kring van Draaiorgelvrienden's (KDV) 50th Anniversary*

**Liz Barnhart**

The KDV is a Dutch society for the preservation of fair organs, street-organs, dance hall organs, orchestrions and other automatic musical instruments as well as their history and development.

We (Mike and Liz Barnhart) arrived in Amsterdam on Friday, May 28th, 2004. We were traveling with Frank and Shirley Nix for the purpose of attending the Kring van Draaiorgelvrienden's (KDV) 50th Anniversary. Our base for the 10 days in Holland was the small family operated Ouwi Hotel in Utrecht. From there we could easily drive to all the cities that were holding organ festivals. Parking is very expensive and almost impossible to find in Utrecht.

We had very little detailed information on the KDV activities and discovered early on that the KDV members familiar with their country already know where their organ festivals are always held so there are no maps or directions to the various venues. When asked for specific locations the answer was in general terms, such as, "across from the train station" or "in the park along the canal."

Several canal boats would pull up to the bank and people would come into the park to hear the music. The street, dance, and fairground organs and one Raffin trumpet monkey organ were fully enjoyed by the many people in the park on a beautiful sunny day. We spent the afternoon admiring and listening to the organs. Our conversations with the friendly organ people were mostly limited to smiles, nods, and hand gestures.



Figure 2. Hans van Oost, Frank Nix and Ron Schmuck in a lively discussion involving organs.

On Monday we went to Haarlem where we met up with Hans van Oost (**Figure 2**), the General Secretary of the KDV, and Maartin Van Der Vlugt whom many Americans know. The organ festival was held in a long narrow park between a busy street and a canal. About 17 organs were present representing many different European organ builders. Again, it was another warm and sunny day and we had a good time taking photographs of the organs and listening to them. At the conclusion of the day, we were invited over to the Kunkle Museum, now in its new building, where the playing of many organs continued.



Figure 3. The 52-key Veronica playing at the new Kunkle Museum building.



Figure 1. De Grote Gavioli as it appeared in Amsterdam on Dom Square next to the palace.

On Sunday May 30th, we drove to the northern city of Leeuwarden for the Great Organ Event. After driving around for awhile, we saw a circus sign and followed it hoping someone there might know something. At the circus booth was a fellow buying tickets for his family to attend the circus later that day. As luck would have it, he had traveled to the US several times and spoke good English. He used his cell phone to call his sister who happened to know about the organ rally, so he got in his car and led us to the park. Several hours later, we saw him there with his family. He had decided to find out what it was all about.

In Leeuwarden there were about a dozen organs, including *De Grote Gavioli* (**Figure 1**) situated in a grassy park along a

The museum has large dance organs and Dutch street organs arranged around the three sides of a single room with the middle filled with tables and chairs. In all there were about 10 organs in the museum. A well-stocked snack bar with a grill was enjoyed by everyone. The *De Grote Gavioli* brought over from York, England played in front of the building through a large open bay door. After *De Grote Gavioli* played for about an hour the relatively small street organ, the 52-key *Veronica*, was wheeled in by its young owner with the help of friends. Then the party really got rolling with singing and dancing to the music. It was great to see the line of people waiting to have their chance at turning the wheel, especially since so many were young people. They were having a good time with the small organ surrounded by a room full of larger organs standing silent. We are sure their fun was increased by the large amount of beer available.



Figure 5. Bob van Wely, the future technical director of the National Museum van Speelklok tot Pierement in Utrecht.

On Tuesday morning we met with the new museum conservator, Bob van Wely, who will be officially taking the place of the retiring Jan-Jaap Haspels at the Nationaal Museum van Speelklok tot Pierement in Utrecht. Jan-Jaap Haspels is being replaced by two positions, an administrator and Bob van Wely as technical director. Bob is a very personable young man and among his many talents, he can play the carillon. Bob told us that he played a carillon somewhere north of Cincinnati, Ohio, while on tour in

the US. He was not sure exactly where it was. The only carillon that we know of is in the Deeds Carillon Park in Dayton Ohio.

On Thursday we took the train to Amsterdam where there was to be organ playing in the square in front of the Royal Palace from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. Only *De Grote Gavioli* was there. Many people were around to enjoy the music as well as the street mimes that pretend to be statues. They were having a good day collecting coins from the onlookers. We also had the pleasure of talking with Andrew Pilmer and his wife who had come over to Holland from England.

Thursday we drove to Doesburg, a small town east of Arnhem that was having a street festival with the help of four organs, one of which was *De Grote Gavioli*. Even there we had to drive around to find the festivities. Rain showers dampened the activities; however, every one had a good time.

Friday afternoon we drove to Tilburg and found it was much larger than we expected. We drove around and around with the windows down trying to hear music. We finally, in



Figure 4. A 1960s photo of *De Grote Gavioli* showing the Waerts brothers in front of the organ. Photo: Maartin Van Der Vlugt

A history currently accompanying the organ is as follows.

The organ, an original 89-key G4 Scale Gavioli, built in Waldkirch circa 1906, is now owned by Nigel Myers and family from Rufforth, York. The organ was supplied new to Dresden Showman Carl Patty and sometime during the 1920's the organ was purchased by Dutch Showman, Reinhard Dirks, and was taken to Holland. Dirks used the organ in his Lunapark attraction and later in a set of dodgems. It was he who sent the organ to Carl Frei to have it rebuilt and extended.

After the war the organ was no longer used and it was purchased for preservation by Henri Bank and Theo van Zutphen who tried to interest the town of Haarlem in adopting it as a municipal organ. This plan failed and the organ passed into the hands of A & J Waerts of Assendelft who then sent it to the Perlee family for restoration. It was at this time that the organ acquired the name *De Grote Gavioli*, meaning The Great Gavioli. Further alterations were made and the front was decorated by Gils Perlee in his characteristic style. The Waerts brothers enjoyed great success with their newly restored instrument touring not only the Netherlands but also as far as Fountainbleu, France and Bremen, Germany.

The surprise sale in 1963 of *de Grote Gavioli* to England, following an advertisement in the showman's newspaper, *The World's Fair*, by enthusiast Derrick Londrigan, aroused strong feelings amongst the Dutch organ fraternity, many of who called for greater protection against the export of organs from their country.

When the organ was initially offered for sale within the Netherlands, a plan was formulated to buy it within a foundation or trust. Unfortunately the payment terms could not be met quickly enough, and the organ was sold to Arthur Mason, of Burnham Market, Norfolk. Even while the Gavioli was being loaded at the docks in Rotterdam, legal attempts were being made to prevent its leaving Dutch soil. Although unsuccessful, these efforts sowed the seeds for the subsequent protection which the Dutch Government affords today to a selection of historic mechanical organs in the Netherlands. The organ became the centerpiece of Arthur Mason's private collection, soon winning the hearts of British enthusiasts and a new circle of devotees was quickly formed. Shortly before Mr. Mason's death, the organ was sold to the Bygone Village at Fleggburgh, where it became one of the many attractions at this unique venue. However, its future became uncertain again in 1996 when the instrument was put up for sale.

Quick action enabled Nigel Myers to acquire it in July of that year. Following extensive restoration by A.C. Pilmer Automatic Music (Leasing) LTD and the building of a purpose built display, which was all completed in 1999, the organ has been heard at events all over England, including the famous Great Dorset Steam Fair. One highlight occurred in June, 2002, when the organ made a historic journey to the town of its birth, Waldkirch in the Black Forest, to attend the 7th International Organ Festival. For a short while the organ was played directly outside the former Gavioli factory, premises in Lange Strasse, the first time that it had been there in more than ninety years.



Figure 6. Maartin Van Der Vlugt of Tilburg.

frustration, decided to give up looking for organs and go eat lunch. On the way to lunch we came across *De Grote Gavioli* in a little town square. Some people just have lucky streaks. Maartin Van Der Vlugt was also there since his home is in Tilburg. He told us he would not be in Arnhem on Sunday because there was an organ festival in Switzerland that same weekend and he would be there with Fredy Kuenzle. We have met with Maartin on many occasions, but we have never seen or heard his organ.

Friday evening was the KDV celebration at the National Museum in Utrecht. Many speeches were given and enjoyed by the large crowd, but we just smiled politely since every word was in Dutch. Several people were interviewed for a radio



Figure 7. *De Schuyt*, a 105-key Carl Frei dance organ premiered at the KDV celebration in Utrecht.

broadcast about their work with organs and also four young men who had composed new music for organs. Each piece was played on the very large Carl Frei 105 key dance organ, *De Schuyt*, through a MIDI interface and the winners were announced. The competition was so close that the winners were awarded 2nd and 3rd places only. Evidently, in Holland they don't give a first place when the results are that close. *De Schuyt* was formerly a Mortier that has recently been restored and

placed on display. The bass of the organ was awesome to say the least. Even when no music was being played the thumping and breathing sound of the feeders was intimidating.

Ron Schmuck of Canada gave a short talk in English, which most of them didn't understand and he presented Hans van Oost, the KDV Secretary, the congratulatory plaque from COAA. Hans was chosen as the recipient since the KDV President doesn't speak English. Hans was somewhat caught off guard by his sudden appointment as the KDV representative. Following the ceremonies, everyone toured the museum where guides were available to play the many instruments, particularly the organs.

Sunday found us at the Openluchtmuseum (Open Air Museum) in Arnhem. The Openluchtmuseum is the Netherlands equivalent to the U.S. Henry Ford Greenfield Village in Michigan. It is a huge park with more than 80 buildings including houses, farm buildings, blacksmiths, a trolley barn, and windmills brought in from different parts of the country. The park has a collection of vintage trolleys that operate on a track that runs the length of the park. The park also has a vintage 1920 style carnival



Figure 8. The carnival at the Open Air Museum (Openluchtmuseum) in Arnhem.

setup (**Figure 8**) complete with rides, games, fairground organs, attractions, gypsy wagons (**Figure 9**), and food stands. The park represents a unique view of daily life and work in the Netherlands over the past 250 years. The occasion was the National Draaiorgeldag the premier KDV Organ Rally held at the park every year. Liz spent her time taking pictures of the many Dutch windmills on the property. The rest were busy



Figure 9. Mike and Liz Barnhart pose with a horse-drawn gypsy wagon.

checking out the more than two dozen organs from all over Holland, and of course, *De Grote Gavioli* from York, England. The organs were scattered all over the Park. The day was again beautiful and sunny. The other time we were at the park with Bopp's Bumbling Bruder Tour, it was pouring down rain with a few organs bravely playing under their protective tarps.



Figure 10. A Limonaire-type Dutch street organ.

One may wonder what is uniquely a Dutch street organ. The answer is obvious. Holland, being mostly reclaimed ocean bottom land, has the only cities with streets level enough for one or two men to push the heavily loaded organ carts around. Many of the Dutch street organs started out originally made in Germany and elsewhere by well-known builders as carnival style organs designed to attract large crowds. These

organs were too loud to play in narrow city streets. The organs were, by necessity, customized and soft-voiced by Dutch and Belgium organ builders to play sweetly, suitable for city dweller's enjoyment. Dutch street organs are characterized by their compact size for conveyance on a three-wheel pushcart or small open two-wheel trailer. A few trailers even had a small auxiliary gasoline engine attached to a steer-able wheel that could move the trailer around without being towed. The top and side panels of a Dutch street organ façade can be folded down and back to

facilitate storage and covering by a water proof tarp. The tarp is kept handy on top of the organ where it can be quickly unfolded to cover the organ in case of inclement

*Dutch street organs are characterized by their compact size for conveyance on a three-wheel pushcart or small open two-wheel trailer.*

weather, which happens quite often. The organs with figurines have brass rails to hold the tarp away from the fragile carvings. Dutch street organs are book-operated, pumped by a hand crank on a large flywheel. Most organs mounted on small trailers have a large auxiliary battery operated DC motor that can be belted to the flywheel.

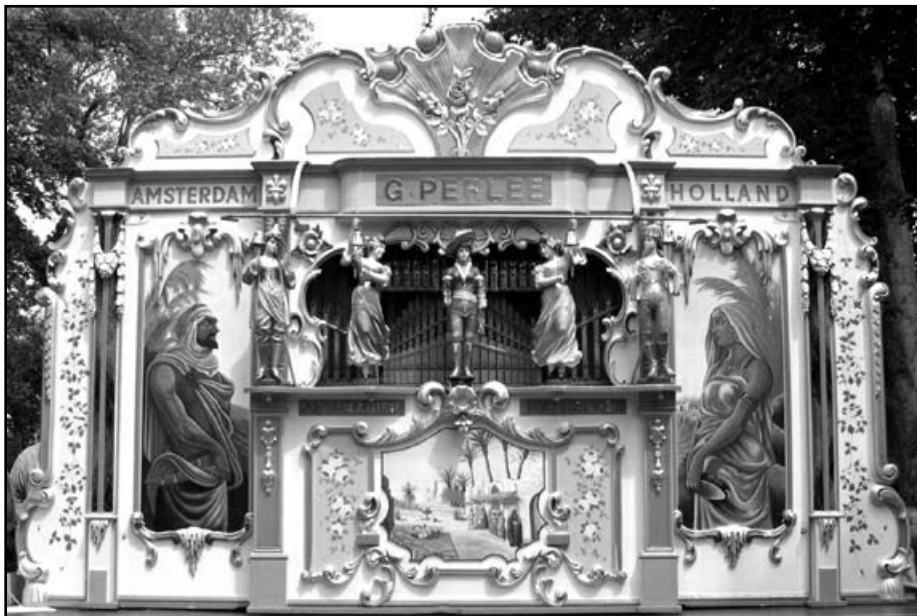


Figure 11. *De Arabier* (the Arab) is a 72-key Dutch street organ owned and converted by the Perlee company of Amsterdam. Originally it was a 1925 75-key Decap organ.

When the batteries are discharged, the belt is slipped off the flywheel and the organ continues to be played by the proven "Armstrong" method.

The reader may be disappointed by the lack of detailed information on individual organs participating in the KDV 50th anniversary celebration. Neither of us is qualified

to evaluate individual organs. We were there to look, listen, and enjoy the organs (**Figures 10 - 16**). Small, medium, or large each organ, vintage or new, in its own way was fantastic. The façades with their shapes, colors, and figurines were spectacular. Black and white photographs do not do them justice. With individually arranged book music each organ had its own personality that we could listen to for hours, but there was only time to take quick digital photographs and a short listen. Almost every organ operator offered CD and tape recordings. There were so many that we could only purchase a small sample.

On Monday we had an appointment to meet with the GSM (Gesellschaft für Selbstspielende Musikinstrumente e.v.) President, Ralf Smolne and their representative Walter Tenten in Germany so it was time to bid farewell to Holland and the KDV with its many Dutch street organs.

Photos by Mike Barnhart.



Figure 12. One of several Decap dance organs at the celebration.



Figure 13. A German Wrede fair organ (Hannover) owned by loved by Mr. Saedt.



Figure 15. A Model 36A Ruth fairground organ.



Figure 14. *Het Schip* is a recently-built Dutch street organ in the Limonaire style.



Figure 16. This is 54-key Bursens street organ, built in the 1920s. It is nicknamed *Pipo* after the famous clown of the 1950s. The lady on the side panels is the Dutch vocalist, Corry Brokken.