

Play It Again, Gaviman . . .

Het Kunkels Orgel

When you mention dance organs, the builders that readily come to mind are Mortier, Decap and Arburo. They gained enduring fame because some instruments remained on location until the collector movement commenced in the 1960s. The concept of a “dance organ” is actually about two centuries old, going back into the early 19th century, when small cylinder-operated devices served to accompany the activity. The larger orchestral-type dance organs, with between 59 and 89 keys, became quite popular shortly after the turn of the century. Marenghi outlasted Gavioli and as the fairground organ market waned began to manufacture elaborate dance organs in sizes over 100-keys. With a multiplicity of tonal registers, they were intended for expansive public establishments.

The foregoing discussion serves to introduce the organ to be enjoyed on the subject of this review, the famous *Het Kunkels Orgel*. This unique machine should be of increased interest Americans because a comparable instrument was once in the US and in a few years a similar organ will be coming to the states, following restoration.

The Kunkels organ started life in 1909 as an enormous dance organ in the Keizershof, one of numerous large and exquisite dance halls operating in Antwerp, Belgium. Three different organs served the Keizershof. This one had an elaborate façade featuring multiple heroic figures. Many enthusiasts, unknowingly, have had their picture taken beside these nudes when they have visited the Jeff Ghyssele collection. This organ replaced an earlier Marenghi, but a Mortier then displaced it in the early 1920s. The big Marenghi went into other ownership and storage until a late 1928 fire destroyed the three dance organs of the Kunkels-van Bergen firm. They commissioned Carl Frei, Sr., then carrying on his work in Holland, to fabricate a suitable replacement. He did so, utilizing the former Keizershof Marenghi as the basis, augmenting and customizing it with his own tonal concepts. The resulting 112-key organ met with great favor. After nine years of service the organ was again retired and stored. In 1958 it was acquired for preservation in Haarlem, Holland where it is the showpiece of the Kunkels Organ Foundation collection. Two extensive restorations of the organ have since been accomplished, with recent labors specifically undertaken to return it to nominally the Marenghi-Frei configuration. The organ is in excellent playing condition. The recording pays full tribute to the considerable capability of this magnificent instrument. It is certainly deserving of the often mis-applied “concert organ” status.

The disk includes sixteen compositions aggregating almost 71 minutes. Most of the tunes are heard on few other organs and many of them will be entirely new to American listeners. Arrangements by Carl Frei, Sr., Jan Kees de

Ruijter, Marcel van Boxtel, Tom Meijer and Gerard Razenberg are included. *Acclamations* by Emil Waldteufel, Jaime Texidor’s *Amparita Roca*, Ludovic Gavioli’s *Paris to Rome* galop and selections for Delibes ballet *Coppelia* provide ample opportunity for the arrangers to demonstrate both their skills and the considerable organ resources. Only three of the tunes from an earlier cassette were repeated on this entirely new production. During a June 2005 visit to the foundation’s hall, the organ clearly demonstrated the quality of music that is accurately captured on this recording. It’s one to be enjoyed by both casual listeners, new to the field, as well as highly discriminating veterans. Overall, it sets a fine standard for presentation for other equally capable organs. You can envision some of the grandeur of Belgian dance halls, as well as later Dutch fairground operations when you insert this disk into your player.



The disk comes in the standard jewel case. A 12-page, illustrated, bi-lingual (Dutch and English) booklet accompanies the disk, providing several images of the instrument, a detailed history and a specification of the pipework and percussion.

The disk can be ordered by sending twenty (20) Euros in an envelope to Kunkels Organ Foundation, Mr. C. H. J. Ruijgvoorn, Watermuur 50, 1991 JR Velsbroek, THE NETHERLANDS. If you enclose your e-mail address, you will receive a confirmation as to when your CD is shipped. Additional information about the Kunkels organ and the other Haarlem instruments owned by the Kunkels Organ Foundation can be found at the website <http://draaiorgelmuseum.org>. The members of the Kunkels Organ Foundation can be justifiably proud of the work that they have carried out in recent years, including the relocation of the premises to another venue. This excellent recording is a fine tribute to their dedication. Finally, the Kring van Draaiorgelvrienden should receive credit for having made the recording possible (www.draaiorgel.org)—the CD is also available from them.

Fred Dahlinger, Jr