

Painting Organ Façades

Jetse de Boer



Figure 1. The author working on the facade of *De Melodijn*.

As long as I can remember I was always interested in mechanical organs. As a young boy I made an organ by constructing a box with an old curtain placed over it and I would pretend to play it even in the rain. I was living in Leeuwarden (north part of Holland) where some street organs were playing: including the 90-key Carl Frei *De Hagenaar*, the Gavioli *De Zwarte Dorus*, a 72-key Anton Pleur organ called *De Twee Rozen*, a 90-key Carl Frei organ called *de Gouwe*, and *De Fruitschalen*, a 67-key Steenput organ. At the time of the annual fair there were always some of these organs present. Usually they were built in Germany and included those made by Wellerhaus, Ruth, Richter and sometimes a Belgian organ such as a Decap. The Wellerhaus organs were very popular in the north of the Netherlands.

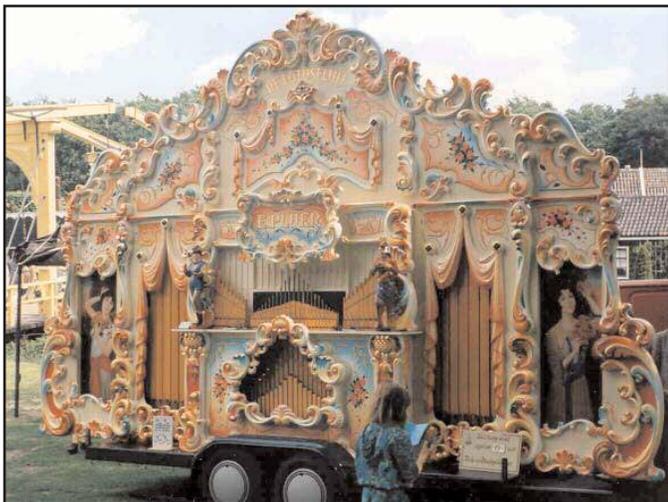


Figure 2. Painting is complete on *De Lotusfluit*, an 80-key Elbert Pleur organ.

The first time I worked on a real organ was in the early 1960s. Before that I had made a few organ models. The first organ that I completely painted was a 72-key street organ, *De Blauwe Krans*. Later it was renamed *De Martinistad*, a nickname for the town of Groningen where the organ was then playing. When the organ was complete and playing for the first time I went to see it and my work, but it was the worst painted organ I had ever seen. I didn't want to even approach the owner. It was clear that I needed to learn more about painting before painting another façade.



Figure 3. *De Melodyn* finished and playing at Pleasure Park in De Diefeling, Netherlands.

It has now been over 40 years since that first painted organ—I find there are always new approaches to improve my work. Whether the results are good or bad in my opinion, there have always been organ owners and/or builders who have asked me to paint an organ. I have painted organs for Henk Veenigen, Anton and Elbert Pleur, Perlee and many others. Painting was not my profession as I painted only as a hobby. Sometimes I think it has turned into my profession though, as I have painted every evening and every Saturday. My work is now backed up for two years.

I have painted many new organs for Henk Veenigen (Figures 4 & 5), some of which have been sold to Japan. Most of these have a windmill theme painted on the front. It is usual for the organ owners who have asked me to paint to say “paint it the way you want to—and make it nice!”

Most organs are decorated in pastel colors but I have painted a couple in a black basis color. I usually start with a white color primer. The part of this painting hobby I like the least is removing old paint from a façade. After the white primer is applied (sometimes a second coat is needed with sanding in between) I spray in different colors, wet in wet,



Figures 4 & 5. *De Engele kast* after painting by the author in 1975 and after a 2nd painting in 2009. Organ is owned by Henk Veenigen.

in a two-component paint. After that I can start the more intricate decoration work. I always use synthetic paint for this part. I use old oil paint for the paintings and the flowers. All of these paintings are then covered with a transparent coat to protect them against the rain and dust.

In addition to painting organ façades I have painted many new organ figures (Figure 7), some made by Peter Smiesing. He has figures on organs worldwide. When painting the faces on the figures I refer to women's booklets on the application of applying make-up. My hobby has been an ever-changing palate of color, a learning experience, and the opportunity to work on wonderful organs.



Figure 6. *Het Kleine Juweel* showcases carvings by Albert Timmermans.

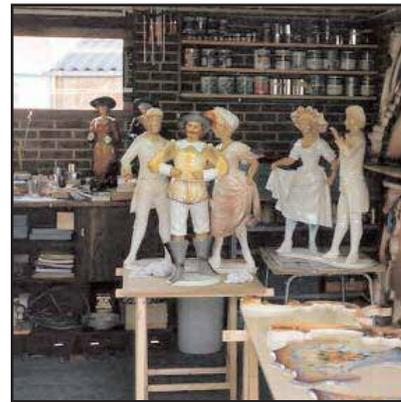


Figure 7 (left). Organ figures by several carvers awaiting painting.



Figure 8 (below). Two Richter organ figures after painting.

When there is space on the flatter portions of the façade I draw some curls on transparent paper with charcoal, turning it 180 degrees to use for the opposite side of the façade. Using another color a shadow effect can then be applied.

Earlier in my painting career most of the work was on older façades but now there have been many new organ fronts that need painting. The newer work includes carvings by Albert Timmermans who lives in the village of Staphorst. His carvings on organs includes: *De Lotusfluit* (Figure 2), *De Melodijn* (Figures 1 & 3), *Het Kleine Juweel* (Figure 6), and *Das Eichhörnchen* [This organ was featured in an article by the owner, Kevin Sheehan, in issue #39 of the *Carousel Organ—ED*]

I live with my wife, Grietje, in a small village called Jirnsum. It is in the north of Holland near the town or Leeuwarden. I started to paint organs as a hobby in the 1960s. I am a 20-year member of the De Kring van Draaiorgelvrienden (KDV).