

The Denis D'Or "Golden Dionysis", Václav Prokop Diviš . Czech republic, 1748



Václav Prokop Diviš (1698 – 1765)

The Denis D'or, the "Golden Dionysis", was an early one-off keyboard instrument built by the Czech theologian and pioneer of electrical research Václav Prokop Diviš (1698 – 1765). Described as an 'orchestration' because of its ability to imitate the sounds of wind and string instruments, it is often described as the first electronic musical instrument, yet, due to lack of detailed historical documentation and conflicting contemporary reports this claim remains uncertain.

Several accounts describe the instrument as an electro-acoustic instrument where the strings are vibrated using electro-magnets: " In 1730 the Moravian preacher Prokop DIVIS generated sound by electromagnetic excitation of piano strings . He called his invention Denis d'or " (Schiffner 1994 , p 62) and "His experiments were based on the electromagnetic excitation of piano strings , but could not prevail despite initially considerable interest to the public ." (Harenberg 1989, p 26 quoted in Ruschkowski 1983, p 347) yet this seems unlikely as the relationship between electricity and electromagnetism only became understood as late as 1820.

Other accounts suggest that the Denis D'Or was an elaborate joke whereby the performer could be electrocuted at will by the inventor

Denis d'or , an electric "Mutationsflügel" with one pedal , created in 1730 by the Moravian preacher Prokop Diviš of Prendnitz in Znojmo This instrument was 5 feet long and 3 feet wide, with 790 strings . However, the suspension and the tautening of the numerous metal strings were much more elaborate. The ingenious mechanism, which had been worked out by Diviš with painstaking mathematical accuracy was such that the Denis d'or could imitate the sounds of a whole variety of other instruments, including chordophones such as harpsichords, harps and lutes, and even wind instruments. An untimely anti joke was that the player of the instrument could receive an electric shock whenever the inventor wanted.

(Reallexicon der Musikinstrumente, Curt Sachs1913, p 108)

Denis D'or named by Procopius Divisz , pastor Prendnitz in Znojmo in Moravia , in 1730 he invented keyboard instrument with pedals, which is the time that efforts in the area of instrument making became almost a caricature . The instrument was 1.57 meters long and 0.95 meters wide , and had a reference of 790 strings that could be tuned in three-quarter hours to 130 notes. This instrument allowed , among the sounds of almost all known string and wind instruments were represented , and even also loose jokes such that the player were given an electric shock as often as the inventor or owner wished. Apparently only one copy of this instrument was made which was purchased by the prelates of Bruck, Georg Lambeck

(Mendel 1872 , Vol.3 , p.110)

Diviš charged the strings of the instrument with a temporary electrical charge in order to somehow "purify and enhance the sound quality" leading to the instrument being described as an "electronic musical instrument" (Johann Ludwig Fricker after witnessing the Denis D'Or in 1753) . However, with intricate practical jokes in the salons of the nobility being fashionable at the time of the construction of the Denis D'or, it seems likely (and also taking into account the historical development of electro-magnetism) that the instrument was just one of the many proto-electrical gimmicks of the Baroque and Rococco period rather than a serious contender for the title of the first electronic instrument.

Sources:

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