

# Recovering a Lost Accordion

by Niek van Uden

**You** don't lose your accordion every day. In fact, I hope you never do, for retrieving a lost instrument is a painstaking bit of work, involving nerve-racking telephone calls with little hope of ever succeeding at all. Thanks to the help of an attentive lady I was able to recover my small buttonbox. This is what happened.

**The** daily life of a musician involves a lot of traveling, in my case always with public transportation. Thursdays are especially stressful. Teaching in one village, finishing by the end of the afternoon, after which it involves a bus ride, a train ride and another hour bus ride to reach the other end of the province by 8 pm to direct an accordion orchestra.

**One** particular Thursday I'm in the train, my small accordion in a backpack propped up in the luggage rack. While I'm on the phone with my girlfriend, I notice the slow speed of the vehicle: another train is delaying us but as we're nearing station, I see my bus still at its stop outside.

**I rush** from the train and hurry down the stairs but, alas, the bus is gone already. A few calls later I'm able to take another bus halfway and there an orchestra member picks me up. As I walk from the bus towards the waiting car half an hour later, I suddenly realize: I have lost my backpack.

**Panic** ensues. What to do? As I reach the location of the rehearsal, the phone number of the national railway service is tracked down. Of course, we find out quickly, the lost property department closed fifteen minutes ago, at 8 pm. Every other phone number of the company is tried, but no one answers.

**The train** station is called; no one's there. After several failed attempts, I realize I have to give up search until the morning. We play our pieces that evening, but during the rehearsal my mind often wanders back to the moment I forgot to reach above me and take my instrument with me. As the Dutch say (roughly translated): "rushing haste can be such a waste."

**The following** morning I arrive at the station early. After asking about the accordion, I have to fill in a form and make inquiries by phone later that week. I jot down name and address, describe the instrument, return

the form, go home without much hope. Would somebody find it and return it? Sell it? Dump it?

**After** the weekend, I call the department of lost property. A kind lady tries to help me, but she's unable to relocate my form in her system. At last, we're able to track it down: my form describing the lost accordion is listed among "other string instruments", its status still "missing".

**Many** a call is made in those weeks, but every time I get the same answer; "No sir, I'm sorry, we've been unable to find your instrument, maybe you can call again next week?" My frequency of calling slowly drops, from every day to every week, to not at all. Hope of recovery seemed vain.

**I sent** out some emails to colleagues, to international websites, to look for the instrument, but although I received a lot of response with goodwill and help, none gave me the relieving message. Then the miracle happened. On my way to a festival, again by train, I'm called by a student of mine. He tells me he knows who found my instrument. What had happened?

**The day** I lost my instrument, he had given me a leaflet: a local brass band was looking for some players and being a professional musician I might be able to help them. Consenting to his request, made as I was already leaving, I put the leaflet in a pocket of the backpack, as it was closest at hand.

**The lady** who took the backpack as she left the train, found this leaflet and called the number on it. But the brass band knew nothing about lost accordions; not even one of their trumpets was missing. The phone call reached my student as well, but he didn't know my instrument was lost and so never asked me about it. It was not until he spoke with another student who had heard about it that he was able to make the connection.

**All** of this could have been a lot easier if the railway company had cooperated. It turned out that the lady had taken the instrument at the final station of the train. The station was in a small town, and no office of the railway services was located there.

**The next** morning, as I was filling in the forms at another station, she reached the station of a bigger city nearby and offered it to an employee, but he refused to take the backpack, saying they were not some service where everybody could dump their stuff. As a result, it took weeks before

I could locate her instead of a match of the returned instrument with my form within days.

**Fortunately**, all ended up well. As you can see in the picture, I can play my buttonbox again.

**You** won't catch me rushing from a train without it: instead of putting it in the luggage rack, I now find myself a quiet spot and play while I travel to the next stop. It's far too dear to me not to use it.

Niek van Uden