

COAA 2006 Knoebels Amusement Resort Rally
- Tim Wagner

Subject line – *Colorful Band Organ Rally*

Colorful music machines from around the world are gathering at one of the finest traditional amusement parks in North America. A century of self-playing mechanical pipe organs will serenade guests at Knoebels Amusement Resort in Elysburg, PA from June 9th thru 11th. Brightly painted, carved facades, jovial organ grinders and powerful fairground organs in a vibrant setting offer a highly visual event. Enthusiastic experts for interviews are available to comment on this highly unique event.

Thus read the email pitch accompanying the press releases that I sent to 51 media outlets in 5 states to solicit publicity for COAA's Knoebels rally. Drafting publicity materials, researching & contacting media outlets, preparing photos and lining up spokespersons added a lot of work to single-handedly producing this band organ rally. However, the hard work paid off as our members repeatedly heard that guests were visiting Knoebels specifically for the organ rally. Hooray! Newspapers in nearby Sunbury and Shamokin, PA published articles, as well as The Morning Call in Allentown, PA. Well-known regional reporter Mike Stevens from WNEP-TV in Scranton produced a colorful TV news story that aired several times on Friday and Saturday in effort to bring folks out to the rally. Ron Bopp & Bruder, Dave Wasson & Trudy, Will Markey & Moxie Girl, Bill Griswold & Das Eichhörnchen (Kevin and Linda Sheehan's organ), and David and Kathy Kananen with their Pell organ made screen time on-air.

110 COAA members and friends representing 18 states converged on Knoebels for our second rally in this jewel of a park. 16 large organs and 26 grind organs took shelter amidst the hemlock trees to delight guests at every turn as they strolled throughout the park. Entering the park through the pine grove, Friday morning guests were greeted by smiling Ted Guillaum and his Raffin 20/40 grind organ. Falling victim to his occasional monkeyshines and sing-alongs, guests enjoyed singing, cranking and laughing along, often receiving a certificate of "Certified Organ Grinder" for their hard work. Responding to questions about his monkey, Ted offers a "picture", eliciting many laughs as guests look into a framed mirror! Enjoying his hijinks from the nearby COAA registration table, I had the good fortune to receive a helping hand from local COAA member Paul Simington from nearby Sunbury. Paul graciously assisted with registering COAA members throughout the weekend, even enlisting the services of his sister Mary. Not only did Mary help us out and register for the rally, but so did Paul's brother Dave. How's that for family!

Arriving guests also received a warm musical greeting from Beth Ann and Mark Mitchell with their Raffin reed organ, and several other grinders. Dan Wilke entertained and informed a constant stream of interested guests with his Hofbauer and Raffin reed organs. Unraveling a music roll helped guests to understand how the music is produced. With the imposing Giant Wheel as a background, Ron & Mary Jo Bopp's 52-key Gebruder Bruder organ presented guests with their first taste of fairground organ music. Many new tunes trumpeted across the midway this year. Their sales table helped spread COAA awareness and offered park guests and COAA members unique organ related souvenirs. On the far side of The Loaf (a building shaped like a giant loaf of bread), John Ravert, Sr., was set up with three organs in a rented truck. A custom built trailer to house the organs had not been delivered to John prior to the rally, as planned. Eager to share his collection, including a recently rebuilt Wurlitzer 153, John rented a truck for the rally. A home-built Wurlitzer 105 replica and a North Tonawanda 146 brass trumpet organ filled out the trio. Plans now called for delivery of the new trailer directly to the park, where John would transfer the organs. A COAA rally first? Stay tuned.....

Speaking of COAA rally firsts, this rally did feature a COAA first: grind organ concerts! In line with COAA rally guidelines, which call for the host to try and offer something unique, I organized a series of grind organ concerts to take place in Knoebels throughout the weekend. The buy-in from our members was outstanding. Nearly every organ grinder attending the rally volunteered to participate. Providing an opportunity to highlight COAA grind organs and help spread the word about our organization, I scheduled five concerts throughout the weekend. A shaded corner by the stone lighthouse, flanked by park benches, offered a visible, heavily trafficked area to entertain park guests. On Friday afternoon I took to the microphone, introducing COAA, our purpose and our grinders: Kathy Kananen with a Pell 20-note, John Van Dorn with a Prinsen 31-key, Carl

Cavitt with a Jager & Brommer 20-note, Alice Bogert with a Raffin 31/84, and Jan Kast with a Raffin 20/31. Each grinder talked a bit about their instrument, then played a song. We went through the line-up twice, allowing our grinders the opportunity to pick a couple songs that show off the instrument and arranger's skill. Guests really enjoyed the concerts, showing great interest. In fact, each concert had standing-room only attendance! Our organ grinders put their best foot forward, providing good entertainment and a friendly face on COAA.

Despite our friendly faces, Mother Nature greeted the rally with a cool reception. Friday stayed mostly cloudy and cool all day with a few showers thrown in for good measure. John Ravert, awaiting his new trailer, took advantage of the rental truck's hydraulic lift by lowering the Wurlitzer 153 to the ground so he could better exhibit it and bring the other two instruments into view and playing position. The occasional showers however, forced a few trips of the 153 back into the truck. Kevin and Linda Sheehan had Das Eichhörnchen, their hand-cranked 64-key Elbert Puer street organ, set up by the Pioneer Train station. They sure hadn't planned on the showers chasing their street carted organ back into the trailer. One shower was particularly memorable. Our 6PM grind organ concert featured Nick Rosica with a Castlewood 20-note, Carol Ditto with an 1893 Symphonia 20-note organette, Paul Senger with his home built 20-note John Smith busker, Howard Kast with a Hofbauer 37/64 and Mark Mitchell with a Raffin 20/40 reed organ. Despite threatening skies, "the show must go on", so we began the concert. Halfway through, "raindrops keep falling on my head", and everyone else's. In true show business spirit, Carol kept cranking the antique Symphonia as other grinders covered their instruments. The audience wasn't leaving, and Carol wasn't quitting, so Jan Kast and Ted Guillaum borrowed a plastic tarp and suspended it over Carol and the organ so she could finish her song. What teamwork! What a sight! The audience and grinders rewarded the end of the performance with kudos and a great round of applause. Indeed, the show did go on, thanks to the great support (literally) of COAA member spirit.

Darkness could not dispel the rally spirit Friday evening. Several members gathered in the hospitality room, the "COAA Chat Room", at the hotel for further conversation and friendship. Dave and Darlene Wasson took the initiative to stock the hospitality room with snacks and refreshments for all. Bumbling Bruder Tour photos and Trudy photos were shared, Pitman chests were discussed, and laptop music arranging was demonstrated.

Cool gray skies covered Knoebels Saturday morning as I arrived early to meet Joe Hilferty. Joe was toting a Wurlitzer 125 brass trumpet organ atop the bed in his truck. One of three brass trumpet organs at the rally, this one was available for purchase. We placed the organ under a shady overhang on the Lazer Tag building, surrounded by tall pines. Nearby, the wailing wolves of the Haunted Mansion did not deter David and Darlene Wasson from placing Trudy out front. A newly added cowbell and wood block perfectly accompanied Dave's newly cut Herb Alpert & Tijuana Brass roll. Around the bend, Leroy & Betty Schumacher enjoyed their shady corner along the Arcade. Music from their Wurlitzer 146-B organ blended beautifully with the exhaust from the nearby Funnel Cake stand. Covered boardwalks in front of the General Store and Fascination game building provided a safe haven for many of our organ grinders. Harold and Fran Wade, Wallace and Norma Venable, Nick Rosica, Jackie Smith and a host of others enjoyed the opportunity to crank out tunes regardless of the fickle skies. Leanna Knoebel crooned while she cranked her Raffin 20/40. Joe Muscato, Knoebels PR man, rally liaison and Leanna's husband, also cranked the organ he gave to Leanna as gift. Nestled under cover of the Shootin' Shack, Bob and Marcia Ebert played their 20/66 Organ Supply Industries organ along with their 20-note Stüber grind organ. They had a great view of the ongoing construction of Knoebels newest attraction, the Flying Turns. A gravity-powered bobsled ride utilizing a wood trough instead of tracks, this Flying Turns is the first to be built in 70 years. The amusement industry and roller coaster enthusiasts eagerly anticipate a 2007 opening.

Dubious clouds threatened our Saturday afternoon grind organ concert. Despite this, Ted Guillaum's steamboat style ballyhoo attracted crowds to our gathering spot. COAA brochures were offered as I spoke about our organization. Entertaining the listeners were Dick Nash with a small Carl Frei grinder, Burl Updyke with his home-built busker 20-note, David Kananen with a 25-note Pell book organ, Dick and Alice Bogert with a Hofbauer 37-note organ and accompanying Tanzibar accordion, Larry Beverly with a Raffin 20/31 and John Van Dorn with his 31-key Prinsen. Alice's description of the dancing bear (Tanzibar) accordion was most interesting. Their duet was a real crowd pleaser! David Kananen featured a seemingly endless big-band book on his Pell. As he tired of cranking, Dick Bogert quickly took over. Well, this started a line of COAA volunteers

to help crank through the book, myself included. The audience enjoyed our display of teamwork. Mike Knudsen contributed a quarter atop the organ for our services. We all found this pretty amusing. He then took a turn at the crank and took his quarter back. Even more amusing! Setting up for this concert, Dick Nash had "car troubles" when the front wheel of his three-wheel organ cart broke off. A temporary fix brought him through the concert. Afterward, a borrowed coaster wagon made an effective tow truck for Dick's broken cart. Truly a Kodak photo moment!

The Happiest Music on Earth finally parted the clouds, spilling ample sunshine across Knoebels. Mirroring John Ravert's triplet of organs on the east side of the park, Dave and Pat Rohe displayed their triplet of organs on the west side. Between the Phoenix roller coaster and log flume ride, guests enjoyed music aplenty from Rohe's 46-note Artizan "A" and 46-note Wurlitzer 146A organs, flanking a 43-note Niagara 180 brass trumpet organ. This North Tonawanda triad makes for a great historic collection. Around the corner by the Carousel Museum, Carl and Sharon Curtis presented the perfect accompaniment. Guests leaving the museum walked into the sweet sounds presented by their Stinson model 29 organ. Its lovely sound is matched by the beautiful curtained setting of the organ in its trailer. **Nearby, Mary Lou and John Van Dorn plied their 20-note Hofbauer and 31-key Prinsen organs.**

Having a few minutes to spare, I finally made my way to the patriotic organ display of Carl and Kathy Cavitt. A blue tent canopy extending from their trailer covered the Patriot, a custom-built organ playing Wurlitzer 125 rolls. Musica Magica, a red, white and blue 20-note Jager & Brommer organ complimented the Patriot and a life-size dancing Uncle Sam figure! While Kathy's friendly orangutan puppet charmed the children, Carl's "bad monkey" puppet spit on folks! And speaking of monkeys, you had to see Wil Markey's display to believe it. Ever the entertainer, Wil always has something up his sleeve! Fronting his large trailer, containing the exquisitely painted, impressive sounding 67-key Gebruder Bruder organ, was the ever-popular and mysterious Moxie girl, drinking her never-diminishing glass of Moxie. But holy simians Batman, what's that? Sitting atop a TV tray was the head of a simian, which twisted and jawed in time with the music! I didn't know whether to laugh or run away screaming! It was creepy and funny at the same time. Wil and Regina also brought their vintage Moxie car, a rare pleasure, which delighted all. By the way, did you know that Wil's Bruder was built for the 1939 New York World's Fair?

Sitting comfortably in front of the Crystal Pool, Pete and Jill Hallock tended Katie-Sue, their 56-key Gebruder Bruder organ. With drop-downs on all 4 sides, the trailer allows unobstructed views of the beautifully painted façade. Mark Chester stopped by with three Wurlitzer 165 rolls to try out on the Bruder. Elsewhere, Gene and Marlene Robedeau cranked their 20-note Fischer organ. Enjoying their second Knoebels rally, Neil and Debbie Smith entertained with a 20-note Hofbauer. As 4PM neared, our next batch of organ grinders assembled for a concert. Roger Wiegand's stovepipe hat almost outsized his Castlewood 20-note organ. Joining the line-up were Bob Ebert with his 20-note Stüber, Dan Wilke with a Raffin 20/40 reed organ and the Hofbauer 20-note, Harold Wade with a Raffin 31/100 and Wallace Venable with his red & white striped coat and home built John Smith 20-note busker organ. Once again, our grinders and their instruments charmed the large audience. COAA brochures were going fast. After the concert, it was time for all to assemble and enjoy a delicious barbecue chicken dinner, compliments of the Knoebel family. COAA gifts were presented to our hosts and "thank you" remarks were offered. Mealtime signaled the turning point in my day, where I could begin to relax. Afterwards, coaster wagon and lawn chair in tow, I headed for some exclusive listening time at Das Eichhörnchen. Kevin and Linda Sheehan were drawing much attention with their fine instrument. With Bill Griswold as relief grinder, Kevin enjoyed some leisure time. Kristen Forlenzo enjoyed the playful spirit of Linda's hand puppet "shock monkey" attacking unsuspecting grinders. Seeing a bright red trailer in the distance, I went to investigate. Sure enough, John Ravert's ship had come in. Sporting his trio of organs, the shiny new trailer had arrived late Friday night. The exchange was made under cover of darkness, after the park had closed. That's dedication!

As dusk approached many COAA members gathered to participate in or listen to the "COAA band" accompany Trudy, David Wasson's versatile hand made 98-key concert organ. Joining Trudy were Dave Wasson and Mike Knudson on Euphoniums, Darlene Wasson playing clarinet, Marcia Ebert and Leanna Knoebel playing flutes, Tom Billy on trumpet and Roger Weigand on Tuba. Park guests and COAA members alike enjoyed the combined concert of man and machine. With glowing park lights beckoning, it was time for some serious riding

after the concert concluded. 14 members gathered for a bumper car session, declaring it a "smashing" success. Many members enjoyed catching rings on the Grand Carousel (accented by 3 organs) and pitch-black rides into the woods on the Pioneer Train. Dan Wilke and I couldn't resist taking Ted Guillaum on his first roller coaster rides in 30 years. With the Phoenix flying, and the Twister running out of control, Ted insisted we were trying to kill him! Back at the hotel, the hospitality room was chock full of members enjoying some decompression time after a fun-filled day at the park.

Sunday dawned bright and clear. Though many members traveled home with their instruments, a good sampling of organs remained to entertain the public. Leanna Knoebel and her Raffin 20/40 fronted the tree-shaded Miniature Golf course. Paul Senger and his John Smith busker organ joined her company. Our afternoon grind organ concert was the final one for the rally. In addition to providing ballyhoo, Ted Guillaum joined the concert cast with his Raffin 20/40. Joining him were Mike Knudsen and his Raffin 31/84, Dan Wilke and his 2 organs, Leanna Knoebel with her Raffin and Paul Senger with his John Smith busker. A full audience enthusiastically enjoyed the performances while draining us of brochures. When Ted was up at bat, he recounted a brief history of the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair followed by an audience sing-along, complete with lyric sheets. In his introductory remarks, Mike Knudsen humorously explained his enjoyment at being at Knoebels, where the "K" is pronounced, just like it should be in his last name. Point well taken! Mike entertained guests with two of his own compositions. The concert ended with an impromptu organ grinder duet between Beth Ann Mitchell and Ted Guillaum grinding Raffin 20/40 organs. Leanna kindly offered her instrument to allow this performance. Warning of no rehearsal and no promises, the duo performed capably, delighting the audience. In fact, an encore duet also received great applause. As some of the audience dispersed, Mike Knudson took the opportunity to demonstrate the technical alteration he made to his Raffin by having it play from a palm pilot. As he cranked to provide air pressure, the palm pilot controlled the valves. Magic! It sounded great. Park guests thought so too. In fact, a new audience had gathered to listen to several of the grind organs that remained at the stone lighthouse. Later I learned that Ted and Leanna played all afternoon for interested guests. The folks just kept coming! What a great "problem" to have! A final gathering in the hotel's "COAA Chat Room" Sunday evening found us enjoying a viewing of the televised rally news story. A nice ending to a great rally.

As fate would have it, we were blessed with the timing of this rally. Only seventeen days later, Knoebels Amusement Resort was flooded, along with many areas in Eastern Pennsylvania. Chest-high waters raced through the park causing much damage and evacuations. The location for our grind organ concerts, adjacent to the creek, was completely submerged. Timing is everything!

As I write this article three months after the rally, fond memories return. The many hours of work to organize the rally had paid off. Everyone had an enjoyable time. Knoebels Amusement Resort makes a wonderful place to host a rally. They provide a friendly, shaded setting that is historically appropriate for band organs, and large enough to properly separate the many instruments. I would like to thank Joe Muscato and the Knoebel family for inviting COAA back to their fine park and making us feel at home. Their hospitality is greatly appreciated by all. I'd like to thank Bud Dugan and Dee, of Knoebels security staff, for their valuable assistance in helping me place the organs. Jim Martini and the electricians also deserve thanks for running power to our instruments. And last but not least, I'd like to thank the COAA members and friends who supported this rally. Your attendance makes the rally happen. Your music entertains us all. Your enthusiasm builds friendships, and your passion assures a future for the hobby.