

16TH INTERNATIONALES DREHORGELFEST

(A Party for Organ Grinders given by Organ Grinders)

July 5-7, 2002

Berlin - Kopenick

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For many years my European organ-grinder friends told me if I was going to attend one of their small organ festivals it should be the International Small-Organ Festival in Berlin. The Berlin Festival is held every two years and is sponsored by Internationale Drehorgelfreunde, Berlin e.V. When asked why this particular festival should be one I should make the effort to attend, their response invariably was “Because it’s Different.” WOW—indeed it was.



Figure 1. Brauerie’s draft horses pulling a beer wagon.

The International Small-Organ Festival is held each year alternating between Thun, Switzerland and Berlin. Having previously attended the Festival in Thun (reviewed in Issue 13 of this Journal)



Figure 2. Burgemeister (Mayor) Ulbricht cranking an organ during the parade.

I was expecting much the same organizational format I experienced there, and usually in the United States, with organs distributed throughout the central part of the city each playing for interested passer-by’s. Not so in Kopenick, which is a major suburb of Berlin.

The Festival was financially supported by the Brauerie-Berliner Burger Brau, one of the oldest breweries in the Berlin area and began on a Friday evening with a social

hour and dinner served in the Brauerie’s dining area. After the dinner there was a welcome by the Burgermeister of Kopenick, Dr. Klaus Ulbricht, and introduction of all guests. During the social hour, dinner and afterwards there was an obvious real effort to make all guests feel welcome and part of the Festival.

Saturday morning participants assembled bright and early to march with their organs in a parade held on the main street of Kopenick. There were some 120 instruments registered for the festival and most participated in the parade. The parade was led off by a team of the Brauerie’s draft horses pulling a wagon with a full load of wooden beer barrels (Figure 1); and terminated, appropriately, at the Brauerie where all assembled in the Beer Garden for a lunch consisting of appropriate foods and refreshment. Burgermeister Ulbricht initially led the parade, stopping from time to time to crank an organ (Figure 2). He was replaced for a period of time by Ursula Blomeier, a



Figure 3. Ursula Blomeier in the parade—this time a wheelchair has replaced her donkey.



Figure 4. COAA member, Hal O'Rourke, cranking a Niemuth 45er.



Figure 5. Parade participants cranking and pushing through the parade route. Most of those 120 registered participated in the parade.

famous for leading a donkey along the streets while pushing her organ. Several years ago, because of the infirmities of age, she gave up leading the donkey and now has a little dog that sits/lies on top of her organ.



Figure 6. Orgelbaumeister Axel Stuber demonstrating his 31er while enjoying a drink.

every shape and configuration. Obviously, a great many of the organs presented were “Berlin Style Organs” as opposed to “Southern German Style Organs;” and, this was a good opportunity to understand and appreciate the differences between them.

After the presentations the group moved from back up the parade route to the Cristophorus Church where a drehorgel concert featuring classical music was presented. The church was filled to overflowing, much beyond what any fire marshal in the United States would allow. It was standing room only with the crowd overflowing onto the sidewalk in front of the church. The concert featured several well-known builders and arrangers presenting old and new pieces on their very impressive organs. Rene Bolzern-

long-time member of the Berlin Drehorgel Friends who was given loud and long applause by the crowd lining the parade route (Figure 3). In years past Ursula has been a regular participant in both the Thun and Berlin International Festivals and was

During and after the lunch participants were invited to individually ascend a stage and play their organs for the crowd. Many accompanied themselves with song, or were accompanied by another person; and, sometimes the crowd joined in as well. The organs presented included the products of Holl, Bacigalupo Bruder, Frati, Bruns, Niemuth, Stuber and, of course, ubiquitous Raffins of

Ehrensberger, a classical tenor from Switzerland, sang *Ave Maria* and *Wolgalied aus Zarewitsch* accompanied by a 20er Baker. During Rene’s vocal presentations the assembled crowd joined in with him resulting in an impressive experience, to say the least.

Sunday’s activities consisted of what was essentially a “Picnic In A Park” in Kopenick with the organs scattered about the park’s grounds with their owners playing them on a very informal basis. It was a great opportunity to get to know the “Drehorgel Friends” as well as meet and speak with the legendary organ builder Rudolf Bruns (Figure 7), Axel Stuber (Figure 6)

now the foremost builder of “Berlin Organs” and Ian Alderman, today’s outstanding arranger of classical music for small organs. It was a privilege indeed to attend the festival which was coordinated from beginning to end, without a flaw or disruption, by Christa Hohnhauser



Figure 7. Orgelbaumeister Rudolf Bruns pushing one of his 45ers in the parade.

(Figure 8). This Festival is another well-earned jewel in her crown.



Figure 8. Berlin Drehorgelspieler and festival organizer, Christa Hohnhauser, playing her Raffin 31er and singing at the Sunday picnic.

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