

Small Organs — Big Rally

Walter Moore

What do you take to the Band Organ Rally when you don't have one? You take your small organs, organettes, a folding table and chair. My first experience with a big Band Organ Rally was in 1996 at the State Fair of Texas in Dallas. The Sun Belt Chapter of MBSI and the Texas Chapter of AMICA were given a performance contract by the fair management to be a part of the 1996 State Fair on October 19, 1996.



Figure 1. The 39-note double-reeded Manopan was made in Leipzig, Germany by Euphonika Musikwerke from the late 1880s to early 1900s. The organette plays cardboard or metal loops. Each note has two reeds tuned to the same pitch except the four lowest bass notes which are tuned an octave apart. The double reeds produce a full, rich quality music. A 39-note triple-reeded Manopan was also made and is very rare.

Living in Dallas got me the job of organizing the big event. The State Fair of Texas in Dallas is over 100 years old and was a rather small fair until 1936 when the Texas Centennial was held in Dallas to celebrate the 100th birthday of the state of Texas. Since 1936 the State Fair of Texas has grown to be the largest state fair in the United States. We were most pleased to be invited to show the fair visitors band organs and all kinds of small musical instruments.

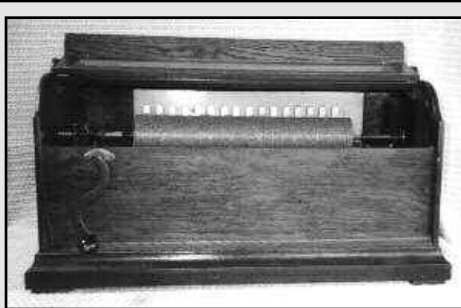


Figure 2. The 32-note Grand Roller Organ was made in the 1880s and the early 1900s by the Autophone Company in Ithaca, New York. It plays a 13" roller with between 2000 and 4000 pins in each roller. A relatively few of these machines were made and are avidly sought by collectors. The 13" rollers are also difficult to find. It is an excellent machine with lots of volume.

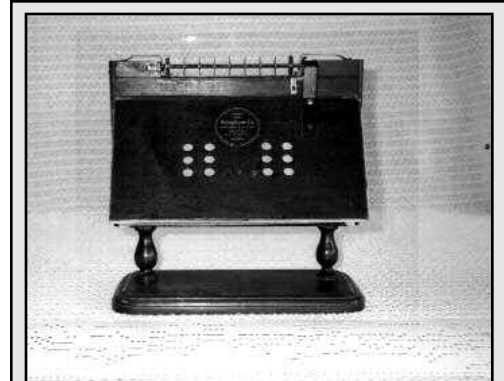


Figure 3. The 22-note Autophone was first patented by H. B. Horton in 1871 and by 1878 was being manufactured by the Autophone Co. in Ithaca, NY. The machine plays a paper valve cardboard strip. The music strip is moved across the reed harp by a ratchet arm which is activated by squeezing the bellows. The paper strip has "timing" holes on both side edges and, as the bellows is squeezed, suction is created, the timing holes "ratchet" or pull the paper across the harp, and the reeds sound as the arranged holes cross the reeds. The timing holes allows the organette to play both quarter notes and eighth notes.



Figure 4. The 24-note Ariston was made by Paul Ehrlich in Leipzig, Germany, and was one of the most successful of the German organettes. From 1885 through the early 1900s hundreds of thousands of these machines were sold. The machine plays a cardboard or metal disc which rotates over the key frame. All the valves are open unless the disc holds them shut. Rod linkage operates the valves from the keys. The machine plays the music as the holes in the disc go over the keyframe opening the reed valves. The music is titled in German, French and English.

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off copies of the roll for sale, he noticed that it was becoming nice and fat in its finished form, and so he cut down on tune length as he neared the end of the perforating process. Tune 1 demanded shortening, as did some of the others. But I didn't need to cut the length of tune 5 at all. In order to compensate for the significant cuts I made in tune 1 and tune 2, I decided to interpolate one of David's four new tunes between original tunes 1 and 2 and another of his four between original tunes 2 and 3. The remaining two new Stumpf tunes I assigned to the developing roll's end, as tunes 9 and 10.

To test out this plan I inserted 2 1/2 minute's worth of blank paper between the cut-down versions of tunes 1 and 2 and a similar section of blank paper between cut-down tunes 2 and 3, following tune 3 with tunes 4, 5, and 6, cut or not as necessary. Then I played and recorded the result. The tempos were good. So I mailed the roll to David Stumpf at his request so that he could calculate from examination of the roll the proper tempo of the four

tunes he had scored and was now ready to punch out in roll form. Right after Christmas David mailed me the finished 10-tune roll.

I spent the next month tweaking the result, notably adjusting the cadence of a couple of David's arrangements and putting more variety into the register and percussion patterns of the original six T.R.T. tunes. I also found it advisable to correct the generally faulty register-change patterns in the T.R.T. tunes. Too often the *declenche* (general cancel) perforation came on too early and not in combination with the new register settings, the result being that notes that should play were muted by the *declenche*. An experienced master-maker like Ralph Tussing should have seen this problem and avoided it. This suggests to me that the masters for this roll may have been made by Gordon Tussing, who has told me that he did work with his dad in the T.R.T. organ shop occasionally.

The final version of ten-tune roll 6720 went off for recutting on Jan. 26, 2002, insured for \$1,000.

Photo credits: Author

Matthew Caulfield, a well-known expert in the field of Wurlitzer Style 165 rollography, spends a lot of his spare time with the Seabreeze Carousel and its new organ, built from the ground up by Johnny Verbeeck.

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Figure 5. The 20-note Gem Roller Organ was manufactured by the Autophone Co. in Ithaca, NY. The machine plays a small wooden roller with the music arranged spirally with rows of small pins that open the metal valve levers as the roller rotates. The music lasts 43 seconds as the roller turns three rotations to the right and then returns to home position. Tens of thousands of the Gem organettes were made in the 1800s and early 1900s. Sears Roebuck Co. listed the Gem for \$3.25 in their 1902 catalog.

phone (Figure 3) has to go to the fair. It is a rare sight to see a cardboard strip with holes in it playing music while squeezing your hand. Now I can pick instruments from my collection until the van is full. For example: an Ariston (Figure 4), a Gem Roller Organ (Figure 5), a Concert Roller Organ, a Musette Organette (Figure 6), a 14-note McTammany organette, and an Edison Gem Phonograph. When the van is full then I'm off to the fair!

I organized events and participants to bring their band organs, pushcart organs and organettes. Dwayne Steck, who owns and operates rides at the fair, worked with the fair management on plans for our participation at the event. When it was time to go to the fair I had to decide which instruments to take. I couldn't take them all. I had made a pushcart for my 39-note Manopan (Figure 1) and 32-note Grand Roller Organ (Figure 2). These I would take to the fair and as many other organs that would fit in the van. The 22-note Auto-

We set up the small organ display on tables outside the most popular exhibit building, the Automobile Building. All the spectators who went through the automobile building came by our display. The most fun was watching the young kids, their eyes big as saucers, and their endless questions. "How does it work?" "What makes it play?" "Can I turn the Crank?" "Where did you get it?" etc., on and on.

The band organs were placed throughout the midway of the fair and everyone could hear the music and see the instruments. Pushcart organs of various kinds roamed the fairgrounds to everyone's delight. The 1996 band organ rally was a great success and plans began immediately for a 1997 band organ rally. It is no surprise that the fair management is inviting us back on September 27 - 29th of 2002 for a bigger and better band organ rally and plans are being made to have a great show and a lot of fun.

Photo credits: Author.



Figure 6. The 16-note Musette was made by the Aeolian Organ and Music Co. of New York in the mid-1880s. The machine has a 16-note tracker bar with 16 small pneumatics which open the pallet valves to the reed chamber. These early pneumatic organettes led to the development of the pneumatic system used in player pianos and other automatic musical machines.

Walter Moore is a long time member of the Sunbelt Chapter of the MBSI and is a well known restorer of organettes. Walter, his wife, Jessie and son Charlie make "new music for old players" under the name of *Honor Rolls*.