

Joseph Raffin Celebrates 40th Anniversary

Tom Griffith

Visitors from all over Europe and the United States converged on Orgelbau Raffin located in Uberlingen, Germany, on June 2nd and 3rd to celebrate with Joseph Raffin his 40th Year Anniversary in business. Visitors, other than those from Germany, were from Holland, Norway, Switzerland and Hal O'Rourke (Raffin's American representative) and myself from the United States.



Figure 1. Jan and Angeline Abels' Dutch organ, *De Admiraal*, is a 56-key Cor Perlee organ.

Visitors were somewhat incongruously greeted by a Dutch band organ owned by Jan and Angeline Abels of Holland outside the entrance to the Orgelbau Raffin (Figure 1); however, Mr. Raffin soon began the festivities by relating his company's history and introducing his family and employees. He related how, after completing his master training in Ludwigsburg and successfully completing his master examination in Stuttgart, he set up business in 1960 and with his brother-in-law began to produce boats, small furniture and kitchen cabinets. Subsequently, the necessary equipment was acquired for building church organs and organ parts were delivered to domestic and foreign organ builders.

Early in the 1970s he was prevailed upon to restore a barrel organ which initiated his interest in developing and building small organs. His initial efforts resulted in the production of 13 organs in 1977. Today Raffin organs range from the small 20-note mini pipe organ with 20 wooden and 10 metal pipes to large 31-note concert trumpet organs which can accommodate up to 124 wooden, reed and metal pipes. In 1988, recognition of his contributions resulted in Mr. Raffin being awarded the "Oscar Europe" at ceremonies held in Rome, Italy.

An observant listener could see Mr. Raffin was making his presentation from notes prepared and written on a 20-note roll. The presentation included, from time-to-time, pieces played on a variety of Raffin organs. One such piece was the synchronous playing (duet) of "Michaela" with Rafael Ensinger, one of his sons-in-law now associated with the business (Figure 2).

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Figure 2. Joseph Raffin (left) and his son-in-law, Rafael Ensinger, playing "Michaela."



Figure 3. Joseph Raffin playing his new "Country Organ." This is a 68-note organ with 401 pipes and 15 registers.

After relating the Orgelbau's business history, guests were led to a basement room where the latest Raffin creation, a 68 note, 15 register, 401 pipe drehorgel was unveiled (Figures 3 & 4). Later this instrument was jokingly referred to as a "Country Organ." Rolls were hand cranked with air for the pipes is provided by an electric blower and registers electrically controlled. Mr. Raffin played several pieces demonstrating the organ's capability, ending with the ubiquitous "Alt Kameraden" played with the style, spirit, gusto and excitement only he can provide.

Other Raffin innovations and developments were presented during the day. One was the much-rumored digital music system. Indeed, it exists and is now offered on all Raffin products other than the 20-note mini. The system is uniquely designed and installed to permit either conventional rolls or digital music to be played on the same instrument. Digital music is available from Raffin utilizing a cartridge encoded by them or may be input via a MIDI port. Another development was the announcement that a very limited number of 20-note reed organs will be produced in the near future to further commemorate the 40th anniversary. This model was the first produced by Raffin and discontinued several years ago. While only a few are in the United States, they are very popular in Europe and England and can still be seen at rallies there. It was observed only 12 cases had been constructed and set aside for this production run.



Figure 4. A rear view of the "Country Organ."

Tom Griffith is street organ enthusiast who not only plays but also has built his own 31-note street organ.