

## The Magic World of Showman's Models

by  
Clarry Atkinson

**M**y love of pipe organs began with visits to Blackpool Tower (520 feet tall) and Ballroom, Blackpool, Lancashire, where I fell in love with the three manual Wurlitzer Theatre organ, played at the time by Reginald Dixon. To me, nothing produced music like this magnificent instrument. In the late fifties band organs on fairgrounds were very thin on the ground and the ones I saw were in such a bad state that they did nothing for me.

I then obtained a 10" long-play record of the Carousel Bequart, a Hooghuys organ owned and displayed by Albert Bequart of Belgium who traveled with his beautifully-maintained Hooghuys organs in very ornate carousels. This fired up my enthusiasm for the band organ. Unfortunately at this time there was nothing to be had in the way of recordings so I followed the theatre organ.

In the early 1980s I made about eight models of the Wurlitzer consoles, which were received quite well (Fig. 1). These were all modeled after the Blackpool Tower Wurlitzer which I loved so well.



Figure 2 The Grand Carousel Organ and caravan has 80 pipes and is five feet wide; three feet tall and 18 inches deep.

About 10 years ago I decided to go for something different which I could exhibit on rallies (I had not the funds to purchase a real organ). I decided to build a simplified model of a gypsy caravan and install a freelance model of a band organ, which incorporated my own ideas of design. The enthusiasm that I received on my first outings astonished me. The organs were not real but attracted people more than the real thing.

Figure 3 The Atkinson's Showvan organ which has 180 pipes. It is now rallied by a couple around the Cueshire area.



Figure 1 The Wurlitzer theater organ modeled off the Blackpool Tower organ. This model was made in the early 1980s.

By this time recordings of band organs began to appear and my enthusiasm moved back to the band organ. I made a series of models such as the Polyphone, barrel piano, calliope on a circus display (or parade wagon) and a band organ trailer with a showman's steam traction engine.



The enthusiasm shown did wonders for my ego and I really felt proud that my humble efforts received such acclaim. My first one was sold and went to the USA (bought by Ripleys of Orlando, Florida). After this I made one each year but I was never able to retain one longer than 12 months. The second one went to Western Australia and two went to Ireland—the remaining four remained in the United Kingdom.



Figure 4 The Grand Gavioli is 5 feet and 6" wide; 3 feet tall; 18 inches deep with approx. 160 pipes.



I no longer have one, as I am now 66 and lack the energy to produce them. None have been accurate models of real organs but rather products of my own interpretation of band organs. While these organs are wooden models, the music is provided by tape system with speakers. I now occupy myself by painting and have recently finished repainting an early carousel horse (fiberglass but quite old). I also make chests and panels which I decorate in fairground style.

Figure 4 (above) is the Wurlitzer organ displayed at the Fleetwood Tram Festival in 1977. On the right (Figure 5) is the back view of the same display unit.



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Clarry Atkinson is enthusiast of mechanical music who lives in Briercliffe area of Burnley in the United Kingdom. Although his models are non-playing he provides music by tape player.