

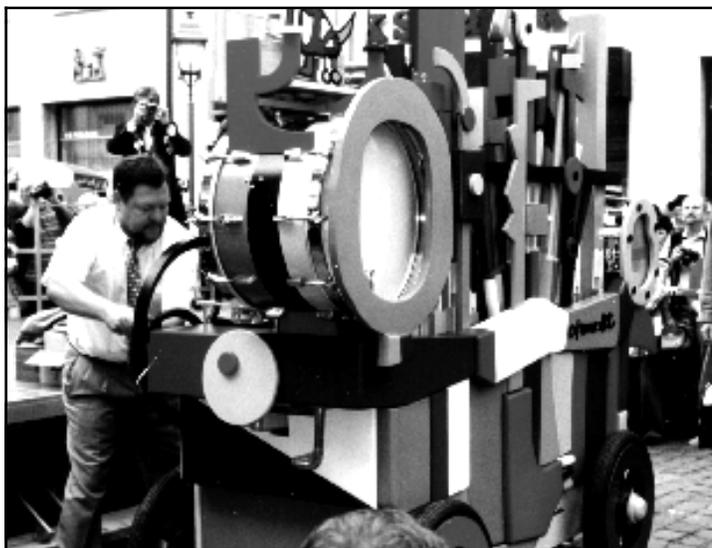
## The Tradition in Waldkirch and A Review of the 200 year Orgelfest

By  
Wolfgang Brommer and Peter Scherle

**T**he city of Waldkirch, Germany, has been considered the capital city of mechanical organs for more than a century. The history of some of the great organ builders has been well documented; however, there are some others about which we know little or nothing. Such names as Bruder and Frei are well known, names such as Martin are not.

Among the most intriguing aspects of the Martin brothers, Joseph and Martin, is that they both took their lives on the same day, the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 1837. By that time the inheritance of their father, Mathias Martin (1759-1825), had long since been wasted by them. Mathias Martin had amassed a considerable fortune building organs in Waldkirch, but his skill as a craftsman was only passed onto the eldest son, who had passed on a dozen years before. Rumor had it that he had been poisoned, but this was never proved. The two younger brothers were not blessed with successful careers as were their father and older brother. Some of Mathias Martin's instruments can still be heard in churches in the Breisgau area around Freiburg.

Mathias Martin had moved, lock, stock and barrel, to Elztal in 1799, at which time the village was still a part of Austria. He wanted to get away from the dioceses of Strasburg, where he had his workshop. Nobody knows why he moved, but it is suspected that his excellent reputation as an organ builder was damaged when he fathered the child of an unmarried middle-class daughter.



Richard Leibinger, Waldkirch's Mayor, was the first to officially crank the 1999 Jubilee fair organ. This 43 key, hand-cranked and book-operated organ was made especially for the town of Waldkirch.

The scandal surrounding the Martins would have ruined Waldkirch's reputation as an "organ building town" had it not been for one Ignaz Bruder, a journeyman bricklayer, watchmaker and self-educated man from the harmersbach valley who had moved to the small town of Waldkirch in the Black Forest in 1834. Here the patriarch amassed a dynasty of organ builders to build barrel and fair organs. It was from here that such organs made their triumphal march around the world. For a hundred years the citizens of Waldkirch lived well from the proceeds of this small but impressive industry. Then in 1937 this happy state came to an end as phonographs and radios dealt the deathblow to organs and orchestrons. Apart for a handful of jobs — today there are about 20 such jobs again — all were lost to the popularity of these new entertainment devices.

Yet, in spite of all this travail, the city of Waldkirch celebrated in 1999 the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of organ building. Without Carl Frei, and his son Carl, Jr., the memory of Mathias Martin, the first organ builder in town, would have been lost forever. But, as it was, the organ building and orchestration workshops of Bruder, Ruth, and Weber were so significant that the renowned rivals Gavioli and the Limonaire Brothers from Paris and Berlin actually set up branches in Waldkirch!

The Freis, along with the descendents of Ruth and Bruder, were among the small number who continued making their living principally from the repair and restoration of older barrel organs. Waldkirch owes much to them for preserving the art of organ building. Carl Sr., kept the tradition going until his death in 1984 as did Carl Jr., who died in 1998. The new instruments that they built, and those they restored, have preserved not only the instruments but also the skills and knowledge in this nearly lost artcraft. And, of course, they saved some precious instruments from extinction.

The most important of the techniques that the Freis preserved — and still in practice today — operates by means of perforated rolls in place of pin rollers. This is based on the invention of the French textile manufacturer Joseph-Marie Jacquard (1752-1834), famous for the Jacquard fabric with its bold, patterned weave. Beginning in 1805 Jacquard operated his looms with perfo-

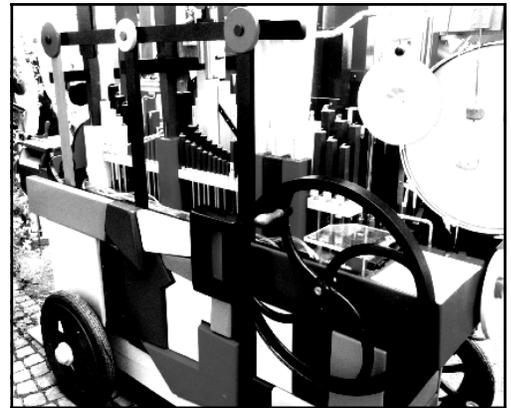
rated cardboard, the forerunner of the perforated strips (otherwise known as “books”) used in the operation of mechanical organs and, much later, such perforated strips, or cards, were utilized in the first generation of electronic computers.

The 1999 Jubilee, celebrating the bicentennial of organ building in Waldkirch, was an astounding success, but not without a price. The cost was well in advance of 200,000 German marks (\$104,000) just for the design and construction of a new fair organ, which was the centerpiece and the logo for this celebration. The design of the organ came from the painter Otmar Alt who made headlines three years ago with his Advent calendar in the 24 windows of the Baroque town hall in the village of Gengenback, Germany. The Waldkirch municipality set only one condition for its support: all four organ-building workshops, Jager & Brommer, Paul Fleck and Sons, Wolfram Stutzle, and Rainer Pitt, were to work on the project together. When the brightly-colored organ, the only one of its kind, was unveiled on the market place at the Marien fountain on the opening of the 6<sup>th</sup> International Organ Festival in June, 1999, the public acclaimed it as a huge success. The city mayor cranked out *Rosamude* and Dave Brubeck’s *Take Five* as the opening tunes.

Donations were the main source of funding for this project and interested supporters, organ fans and others alike, contributed to the success of this effort. As further evidence of the enthusiastic support of this celebration, Waldkirch’s Friends of the Barrel Organ, a loosely-defined group of organists, raised and collected the money to buy a figured organ from Xaver Bruder, a son of Ignaz Blasius Bruder, for the town’s imposing organ collection in the Elztal Museum. Almost overnight, the group drummed up the purchase price for the 150 year-old signed barrel organ, and a bit more to begin the restoration. All in all, well over 50,000 marks (\$26,000) was raised. The state of Baden-Wurtemberg will contribute the rest to complete the restoration. The citizens of Waldkirch still haven’t given up hope that the state will also help them to purchase the Jan-Carlson organ collection, which is going at a very reasonable price. For this project they need 12 million marks (\$6,282,000). The Minister of Science, Klaus von Trotha, and Michael Sieber, the State Secretary from the Ministry of Education and the Arts in Stuttgart, have shown an interest as well.

Waldkirch offered the 50,000 visitors to the 6<sup>th</sup> International Organ Festival plenty of variety and entertainment. The jubilee year event was launched by an organ recital in the Evangelical Church which was filled to overflowing. The composer Adrian Oswald from Rottenburg contributed a premier of *Go, Tell it on the Mountain*. The local newspaper, the *Badische Zeitung*, wrote: “Adrian Oswald’s specially-composed piece elegantly managed to bridge the gap between various musical demands. The fragmented dialogue at the beginning brought out the best in the contrasting traditions of barrel organs and church organ without sacrificing itself to them. Those elements of the gospels which stand diametrically opposed to the nature of the hurdy-gurdy — dynamic liveliness, spontaneity and improvisation — were delegated to the singing auditorium and the jazzing organist and local choirmaster, Thilo Frank.”

*“Waldkirch Sounds Good.” It certainly does!*



The back of the Jubilee organ reveals even more pipes and the hand crank.

Wolfgang Brommer and Peter Scherle, Waldkirch, Germany, played an integral part in the 200 year celebration

### Style 38 Ruth Moves to Holland!

In a story reported on the KDV (Kring van Draalorgelvrienden) web page (Oct. 24, 1999) Hans van Oost Noted: “Recently, Mr. Vader of Kolhorn in Holland managed to fulfill a long-cherished wish: the purchase of a Ruth style 38 fairground organ. This great instrument, built in 1908, was new to Mr. Klings Bioscope Show, and played for decades in Sweden, in the ownership of Mr. Ericsson of Stockholm. About 10 years ago the organ was sold to Mr. Maier in Switzerland, who proudly presented it at the Waldkirch festivals of 1993 and 1996. The instrument was recently serviced by Mr. Fleck of Waldkirch. We expect that the *Swedish Ruth*, as we like to call this magnificent instrument, will be present on the main events in the Netherlands during the coming years.”

This is of interest to the editor as well as many COAA members as we had chance to see this wonderful organ on our Bumbling Bruder Tour in June, 1999. The organ and trailer are perfectly detailed and make a most spectacular appearance.

