

Bozo's Merry-Go-Round Music

Eric Beheim

In 1946, Hollywood-based Capital Records hired writer/producer Alan Livingston to develop a new line of Capital children's records. One of his initial creations was Bozo, a circus clown who would be featured in a series of storybook albums that allowed children to follow a story in pictures while listening to the records. The original voice of Bozo was Van DeBar "Pinto" Colvig (1892-1967), whose unique vocal talents have heard to good advantage on the soundtracks of numerous animated cartoons during the 1930s and '40s. Colvig is probably best remembered as the original voice of Walt Disney's Goofy. Released just as the first wave of Baby Boomers began to influence the sale of children's records, the Bozo albums became a small hit for Capital, selling over eight million copies during the late 1940s and early 1950s.



Figure 1. The record cover of *Bozo's Merry-Go-Round Music*, featuring two songs by a band organ, thought to be a Wurlitzer Style 165.

Around 1954 Capital released a Bozo "single" that consisted largely of authentic band organ music (Figure 1). Titled *Bozo's Merry-Go-Round Music*, each side opened with a brief spoken introduction by Bozo (Colvig) inviting young listeners to take a ride on his "merry merry-go-round." The ride itself started with Bozo ringing a bell (a practice also used by many amusement parks). Then came a complete band organ selection (Side A was *Our Director March* by Frederick Ellsworth Bigelow, and Side B was *Ciribiribin Waltz* by A. Pestalozzo).

After the ride ended, Bozo returned for a few closing words.

The band organ used for the recording was not identified, but since Capital Records was based in the Hollywood-Los Angeles area, one possible candidate is one of the two Wurlitzer 165 band organs in the area at the time [*organ identification provided by Fred Dahlinger—Ed*].

Bozo's Merry-Go-Round Music came out at a time when the record industry was undergoing a "battle of the speeds," with 78-rpm and 45-rpm both vying to be accepted as the dominant speed for recorded material that could fit onto a side of a single disk. As was the common practice at that time, it was released in both the 78- and 45-rpm speeds.

For many future fans of the "Happiest Music on Earth," this record might well have been the start of their collection of recorded band organ music—this writer received his copy as a reward for undergoing a trip to the dentist to have a bothersome tooth extracted.

That trip to the dentist must have occurred in late 1954 or early 1955 when I was eight going on nine. I first heard this record on the radio (one of the Cleveland radio stations had a local program for kids that came on during the lunch hour, and the host would sometimes play it). Even at that early age I was already a carousel and band organ fan, having grown up not too far from Puritas Springs Park, which had the old Luna Park PTC carousel that is now at Six Flags Over Mid-America in Missouri.

After the tooth was extracted, my dad took me to a record store that was close by to pick out something for my collection. While going through a stack of kids records, I found this particular one quite by chance and of course had to have it. I must have driven my folks crazy playing it over and over again after I got home. However, *Ciribiribin* was one of my mom's favorite waltzes, and *Our Director March* had been the fight song at the high school my parents had both attended.

There is some indication that Capital was considering additional volumes of Bozo's *Merry-Go-Round Music* as the two selections are designated on the record jacket as "Ride I." However, this seems to be the only ride that was ever issued.

Today, Bozo records are among the most sought-after of Baby Boomer collectibles. Fortunately, since so many of them were produced, a large number still survive in good, playable condition. One of the best sources for finding Bozo records are the on-line auctions sites such as eBay. If you missed Bozo's *Merry-Go-Round Music* on its original release (or allowed your copy to get away from you) it is still possible, with some daily on-line searching, to eventually find it again and recapture a few cherished memories from yesteryear. Happy Listening!

Most of the historical information on "Pinto" Colvig was found on line at <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0173418/bio>.

Eric Beheim is a long-time carousel and band organ fan who grew up not far from Puritas Springs Park in Cleveland, Ohio. During the 1970's and 1980's, QRS sold his manual on making player piano rolls from sheet music, using a drafting board system. He and his wife Pat live in East San Diego County.