

Organ Grinder Certificates

Ron Bopp

One of the ways to enhance the experience of grinding an organ as well as “spread the word”, so-to-speak, of the thrills of outdoor mechanical music is to let the viewing/listening public become part of the event. Of course, just turning the crank and enjoying the music that comes from the organ will bring a smile from a youngster, giving him something to appreciate it later is a bonus.

A review of current COAA organ grinder trends finds that many are getting the public involved and often it involves the handing out of a certificate as a memento of the event. At the time of writing this article the author had evidence of at least eight members doing this and their testimonies follow.

Bob & Marcia Ebert



Marcia and I let kids crank an organ and then give them an 8 ½" x 11" sheet of ivory-colored paper made up as a certificate (above) that says “Official Organ Grinder.” We write their name in it and then sign off as “Senior Organ Grinders.”

Anecdotally, there is madness to our method—as we like to keep the organs cranking and playing most of the day to entertain the folks who come by. Unfortunately, being well-seasoned members of the card-carrying AARP crowd, our elbows don’t hold up well for eight hours a day of cranking. So, our little scam is to give the kids a thrill, the parents and grandparents a greater thrill, and let them crank. On a good day, we hardly have to crank at all. And, the goodwill it builds for the hobby is immeasurable!

Gordie Davidson

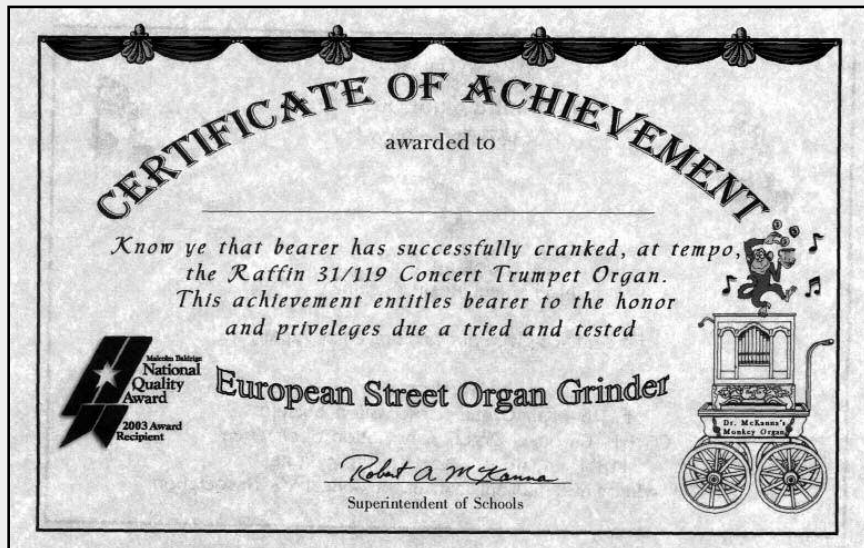


I have used these [certificates] for years as a promotion tool to get people involved in cranking the instrument. After a spectator(s) observes for awhile, I will intuitively ask if they would like to crank the Raffin. If affirmative, I position the person and turn the crank with them to get the general feel and tempo before releasing them on their own. I explain that if they finish the tune, they get a certificate. Once the tune and/or roll is completed, I present the certificate. This procedure is really beneficial as it 1) gets people involved, 2) gives me a break, 3) adds a touch of class and professionalism, 4) advertises my services, 5) sometimes results in the sale of a CD. On certain gigs, I try to anticipate what VIPs might be around to crank the organ and preprint their names on the computer-generated certificate. For example, I always generate a printed name certificate for the person who hired me. That person, in turn, can provide VIP names such as CEOs, managers, etc. The certificates look professional and cost about 15 cents each. This is a minimal expense with a tremendous return.



John and Nan Flint with a young organ grinder at a COAA rally in Findlay, Ohio.

Bob McKanna



Bob McKanna, a school superintendent with the Inverness, Illinois public schools relates that he finds children often dancing to the organ music. He takes his Raffin to PTA family nights and fun fairs. He gets not only the students, but their families and teaching staff involved, all of who receive a certificate (left).

This achievement entitles bearer to the honor and privileges due a tried and tested European Street Organ Grinder! . . . Gordie Davidson

Ted Guillaum



Bob McKanna supervises [*a pun*] a young organ grinder.



Ted Guillaum likes to hand out certificates (left) to unsuspecting, would-be organ grinders after they take a turn on the organ. Reading the certificate to the receiver often gets a good laugh from the crowd.

His certificate goes on to state: “. . . is qualified to play STREET ORGANS, MONKEY ORGANS, BUSKER ORGANS, or HARMONETTES in any genre of music be it Classical, Baroque, Traditional or Popular. In the style of Marches, Waltzes, Polkas, Gallops, Cake Walks and Ballads in any location where so ever they may be found. The LICENSEE has demonstrated tolerable ability and technique in producing happy, pleasing melodies with consistent tempo and appropriate harmony. **And** has exhibited the necessary stamina and fortitude required to withstand the abusive criticism of the general public and their petitions to “Move On!” and “Get a Job!”

Suffixes behind Ted Guillaums name are “OGE” (Organ Grinder Extraordinaire); “MMS” (Master of Mechanical Music) and “DMM” (Doctor of Mechanical Music).

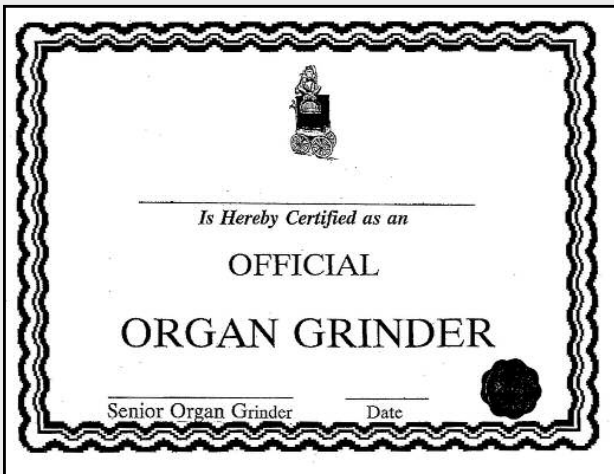


An entertainer (in German costume) is presented the certificate by Ted Guillaum at the Nashville Octoberfest in 2004.

Ted Guillaum reading the contents of his certificate to a new “graduate,” Sister Mary Mark Graf at the Christkindlmarkt in Ferdinand, Indiana.



Ed & Carol Ditto



Bill Waters helps a pair of bystanders play his Raffin street organ.



Mary Pollock

I carry a stool with me so that little people can stand and crank the organ. I also have the lid open so they can see the roll play. Sometimes they need help in cranking so either their parent or I do that. When they have finished I give them their certificate (below). I copied John and Nan Flint when they started doing it in 1987 with their 20-note Raffin.

Tom McAuley



I take photos with a Polaroid i-Zone camera that yields a small picture with a self-adhesive backing. I paste it on the left side of the certificate (left).

Most people that receive the certificate are quite proud of their accomplishment. Most tend to think that turning the crank and maintaining the tempo is a lot more difficult than they imagined. Everyone seems to enjoy the recognition of their big accomplishment.

