

Orgelbau-Meister Hofbauer

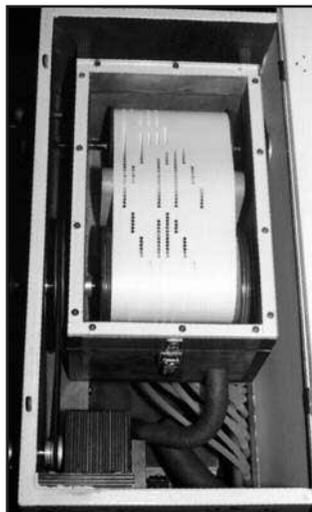
Fred Gerer

Carl Heinz Hofbauer was born on June 30, 1927, in Mindelheim Allgäu (Swabian area of Germany). He started graduate school there and continued his schooling in Augsburg and Munich, Germany, and later in Switzerland. After the start of World War II his family moved to Goettingen, where he attended the senior high school and graduated in 1945. Then he started his studies in science at the University of Goettingen. His father, Carl Hofbauer, had organized a pipe organ building company in Mindelheim in 1923 that he continued in Goettingen (Figure 1). In the 1950s Mr. Hofbauer, senior became very ill and his son had to support his work. He received the traditional organ building training from his father and graduated in 1955 as master of organ building. At 28 years of age he was the youngest organ builder master in all of Germany!



Figure 1. An early Hofbauer pipe organ made for the home.

In 1974 Carl Heinz Hofbauer took over the company from his father, since he was full of innovative ideas. He came up with the idea to have a second branch of organ building in his company. He introduced the do-it-yourself kits for smaller pipe organs, which were sold to small churches that could not afford a big pipe organ. These organs were built in such a way that they could be expanded into larger organs, as money became available. His self-building organ kits were so easy to build that church members could order them and put the organ together themselves. Many church organists also ordered these do-it-yourself kits and built their own organs to practice in their homes.



Figures 2 & 3. A completed do-it-yourself 20-note Hofbauer kit organ. On the right is an interior view of the pressurized roll box.

Photos: Dan Wilke.



Figure 4. A 20-note flute clock built by the Hofbauer organ company. The organ portion operates from an especially designed 15-tune computer cartridge.

Photo: Ron Bopp



Figure 5. A 20-note Harmonipan hand organ in the collection of the late Harvey and Marion Roehl.

Photo: Ron Bopp.

He then realized that there was a new and growing demand for crank organs and started the production of do-it-yourself crank organs—I bought one myself at that time (Figures 2 & 3). Also his company produced flute clocks (Figure 4). Soon was the production of the roll-operated crank organs (from 20 keys to 45 keys) and later, microchip-operated organs became the center production of the company while church organs were still produced (Figure 5).



Figure 6. A beautiful 33-note Hofbauer organ made in the style of Bacigalupo.

Hofbauer studied extensively the mechanism and workmanship of Bacigalupo organs, both barrel and roll-operated. Today these Bacigalupo-style barrel and roll-operated organs are still being produced at personal request of customers (Figure 6). In 1980 Hofbauer produced the chip technology for crank organs because he felt that the guidance system of crank organs should be modernized to present the current technological level. This enables the crank organ to store the finger playing of organists on microchips and use them to produce music that had not been able to be produced with barrel or roll operated systems in the past.

Percussion and bell systems could now be added easily (Figure 7). Many organ players, equipped with the new microchip system, could team up to form an orchestra (Figure 8). This became the new specialty of the Hofbauer Company and many crank organ orchestras have formed and have played all over Germany and Europe, even up until today.

It has become a standard tradition in Germany that famous orchestras and singers performed with these crank organ orchestras. Most famous of the yearly concerts are the singers and musicians of the Semper Opera House in Dresden. I have performed with my 43-key Hofbauer organ with members of the Bavarian Symphony Orchestra and for the Mozart Festivals in Salzburg (two years ago). In 1980 a famous German actor received a crank organ for his 60th birthday and that presenta-

tion was in the evening news on German television. It sure promoted sales, especially those of the Hofbauer company.



Figure 7. A 38-note (with 76 pipes, percussion and additional glockenspiel) Harmonipan organ in the Trager Collection.

Photo: Ron Bopp

Mr. Hofbauer always tried to emphasize classical music in crank organs, i.e. he wanted to elevate the street organ to a fully accepted musical instrument that could play in churches and concert halls. I have played in many churches including the complete Holy Mass in the famous church of Meran, South Tyrolia, Italy. The church priest remarked in his sermon that “Jesus said that you should praise the Lord with cymbals, trumpets and trombones” and he added, “if monkey organs would have existed in those days he would have included them as well.”

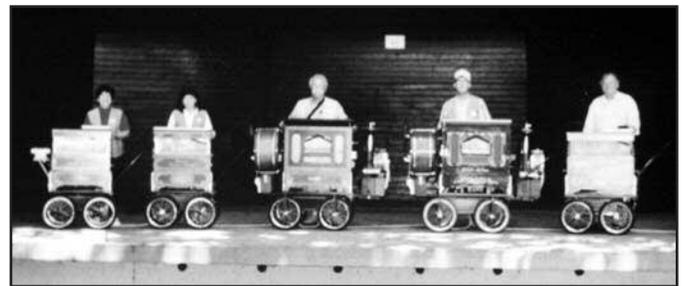


Figure 8. A slightly out-of-focus photo depicts Fred Gerer (right) and COAA members Joan Haughawout, Mary Jo Bopp, Ron Bopp and Past COAA President, Terry Haughawout playing a Hofbauer orchestra on stage in Waldkirch, Germany in 1996. The organs were linked by way of electronic cord and only one organ controlled the music arrangement while the others added additional volume.

Mr. Hofbauer was always supported by his wife, Edeltraud, who operated the music production as well as the financial side of the company. Carl Heinz Hofbauer died on August 28, 2000. His wife Edeltraud took over the company and continues the production of all crank organs and pipe organs as in the past. Hofbauer organs are sold over the world.

Information provided by Mrs. Edeltraud Hofbauer was used in addition to my personal experiences with the company.

In the 1970s Fred Gerer saw a Hofbauer organ playing and purchased a do-it-yourself kit to build a 20-key, roll-operated Hofbauer Organ. He realized the growing demand and has built/purchased Hofbauer organs for resale. He resides in Tutzing, Germany, not far from the Munich beer gardens and has a second home in Santa Cruz, California.