

## Mikey's Band Organ Adventures

### Mikey Mills

I am Mikey Mills, and I'm sure you will realize that I love band organs. My first band organ adventure began in 2001. My parents loved amusement parks, so when I was just three years old, I took a trip to Knoebels and Hershey Park. Both of them had stunning carousels and band organs. This was the first time I heard a live band organ! I smiled and danced and knew I loved this music. A year later, I went to Dorney Park in Allentown PA. I enjoyed listening to the Wurlitzer 153 band organ on their Dentzel carousel. They played my favorite band organ roll (13166), the march roll for the 150 scale. Even though they only played that roll, I didn't mind!



Six years old and riding the carousel at Dorney Park with a Wurlitzer 153 band organ playing.

In 2004, I went to Kings Island, north of Cincinnati, while visiting relatives. As soon as I heard the Wurlitzer 157 on the carousel, I knew that was my favorite organ! In 2005, I was thrilled about moving to Kentucky knowing I'd be near Kings Island. I loved hearing that beautiful organ! In summer 2006, I was excited knowing I would hear the organ again, but was heartbroken when I saw the organ had been turned off. Unfortunately, in 2007 the organ was removed. I still hope someday Kings Island will restore their organ, and I will hear that beautiful music again.

When I was 11, I discovered something wonderful after watching a video—that band organ rallies exist! I couldn't wait to go to my first rally! In June, I went to my first rally in Gallipolis, Ohio. I was excited when we pulled up in our car and heard all that beautiful music. It was a blast and everyone was so nice! I saw some organs that I didn't even know existed. I also met Larry Kern who gave me two CDs and a pin of his organ. In August, I went to the

Waynesville rally and had a great time seeing all the organs there. On Sunday, I met Organ Grinder Ted and sang *Trink Trink Brudelin Trink*. That was surely a summer to remember!

At Christmas in 2009, I got the best gift of all, a COAA membership! I couldn't wait for the rallies in 2010. In March, we vacationed in Chicago, and I went to Silver Beach in Michigan and heard their North Tonawanda playing 150 rolls. What really excited me is that it was playing my favorite roll, roll 13166! Also I went to Grand Rapids Public Museum and saw a Wurlitzer 157. I was overjoyed!

When summer began, I couldn't wait to go to all the band organ rallies. I went to Lake Winnie and had the time of my life! I met Ron and Glynn Keisler and the Southern Rose, a gorgeous Ruth model 33A, but I can't forget *Rosebud*! I also met Pauline Leonard and John Ashworth. They were extremely nice and taught me how to change the rolls and operate the great North Tonawanda Military band organ. I really liked the crank organ and *Trudy* concert. Even though it rained most of the time, I didn't mind.



Mikey and Kay Bode at the crank organ concert at Lake "Winnie."

Then it was time for Knoebels—I hadn't been there since 2003! When we arrived on Friday, we went straight to the carousel, and I rode it at least twice. My dad got the brass ring! The Frati organ was playing one of its few rolls. It reminded me of my second trip there. Both times it played *I Love a Parade*, but that roll never grows old! Saturday was the big day though! When we got there I went straight to Pauline's North Tonawanda. I was very glad she and John

could make it! I was honored that Ed Ditto let me play his crank organ during the concert. I went all around Knoebels, but still managed not to see everything! I also met two other young band enthusiasts, Alex and Ian. We had a great time going from organ to organ listening to all the wonderful music.



Playing Ed Ditto's crank organ at Knoebels.

Sandusky was next! It was great to see all the band organs again and some new ones too. I enjoyed talking with all the COAA members. They have some great stories to tell! Dave Mahr brought his Raffin organs which I had fun cranking. Also, Ron Bopp's organ was interesting and fun to crank! It was great to meet him since he wrote one of my favorite books, *The American Carousel Organ*.

In August, my summer ended with a bang! With help from some great people (Aaron Mueller and Marty Persky) that I met at an MBSI rally, I got to see the most wonderful collection of automatic musical instruments ever at the Sanfilippo Collection. The band organs were in pristine condition. I saw some beautiful instruments including an original Wurlitzer 180 playing 180 rolls, the Euclid Beach North Tonawanda, and a great 110 Key Gavioli that sounded better than ever. After the tour, I got to sit around the band organs and talk with Mr. Sanfilippo about why band organs are such wonderful musical instruments. Mr. Sanfilippo was extremely nice and even let me ride the carousel. I had a tear in my eye when I left that collection and it inspired me even more to try to someday get as many band organs restored as possible and let everyone hear "The Happiest Music on Earth." It will be hard work, but it would all be worth it, every single bit of it!

That's my band organ story.