

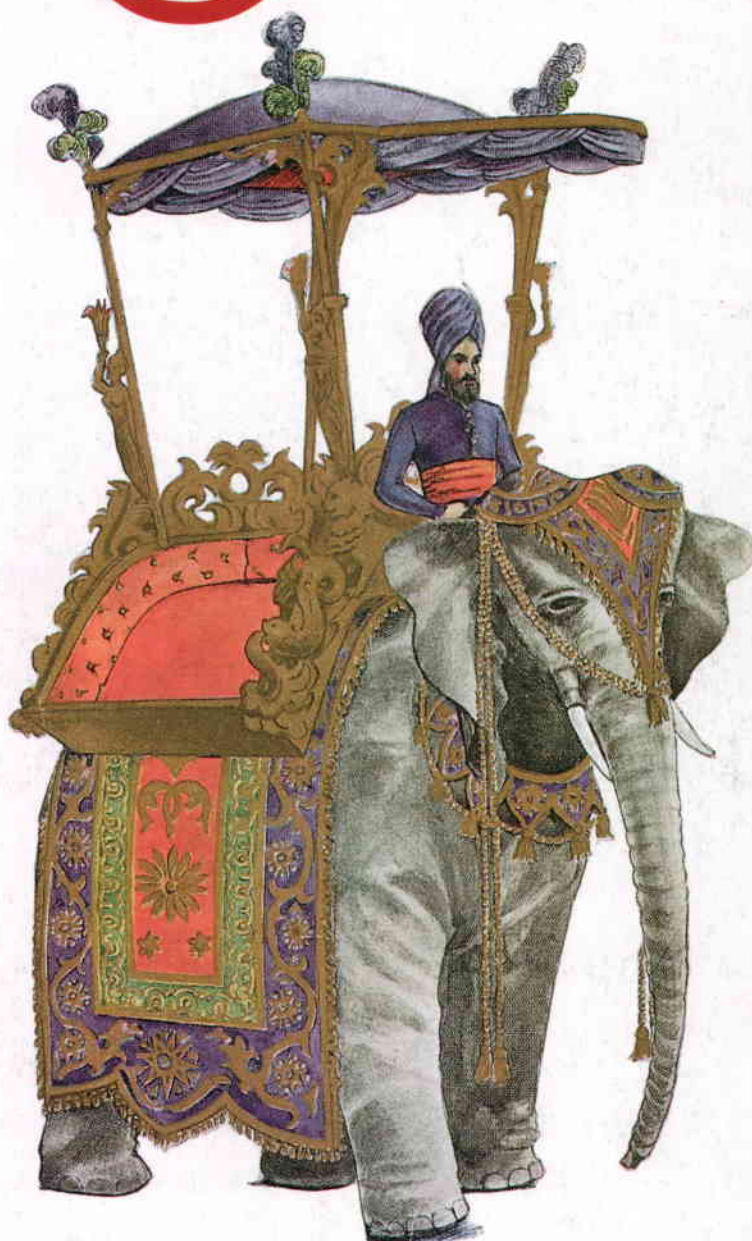
# The Music Box

An International Magazine of Mechanical Music

Volume 15 Number 7

Autumn/Fall 1992

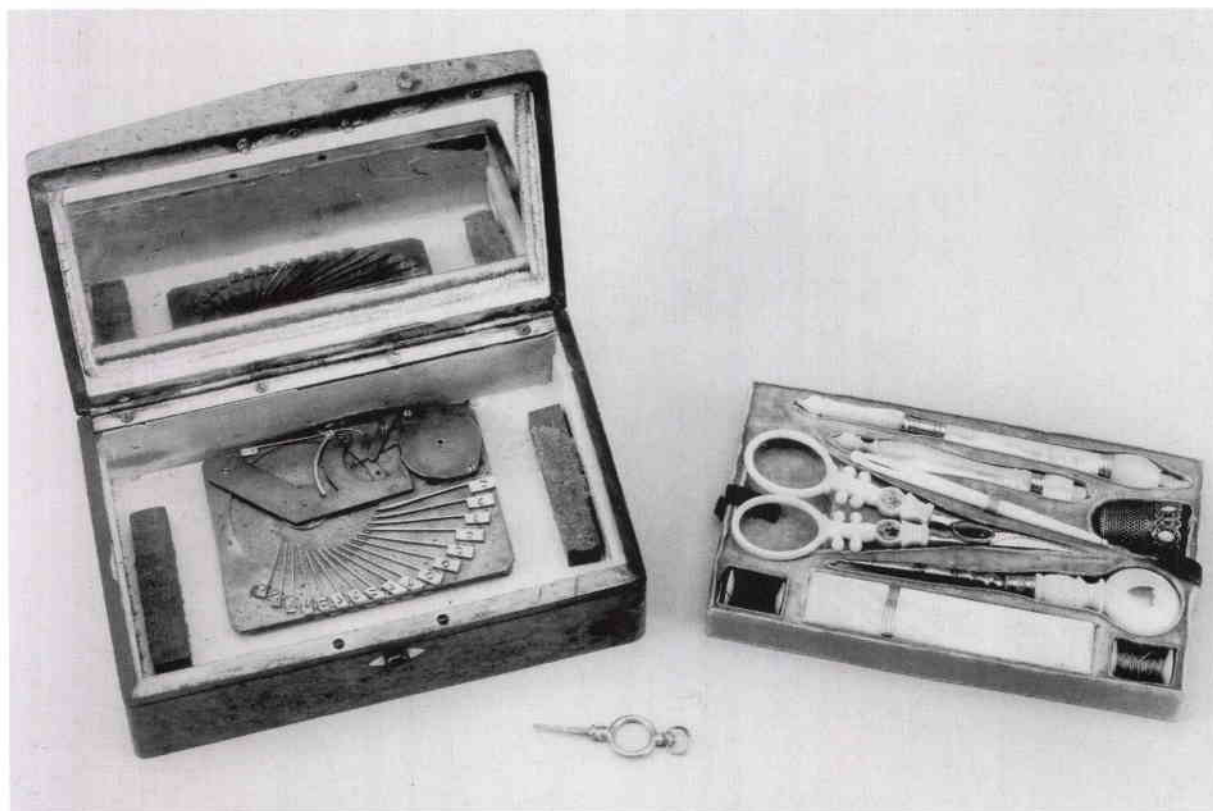
Edited by Graham Whitehead



**Inside**    **The Robot Walking Elephant**  
**Man versus Machine**

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# The Music Box

An International Magazine  
of Mechanical Music

The Journal of the  
Musical Box Society  
of Great Britain.

Volume 15  
Number 7  
Autumn/Fall 1992

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### Front Cover:

Musical Box Society of GB member Tim Trager's amazing piece of  
lifesized automata - The Robot Walking Elephant.

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## SOCIETY TOPICS

### FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

**Autumn Meeting and Organ Grind,  
25th - 27th September,  
1992, The Gonville Hotel,  
Gonville Place,  
Cambridge CB1 1LY.  
Tel: 0223 66611**

The Gonville Hotel, situated in the heart of one of England's most beautiful cities, provides an ideal venue for a Society meeting. Full, modern facilities offered, with plenty of parking space. Single, double and triple rooms available, with no extra charge for single rooms. A maximum of two children under 10 per family accommodated free if sharing their parents' room, with only the children's meals extra.

Hotel package:

Dinner, bed and breakfast Friday 25th and Saturday 26th September, 1992: £91.50 per person.

For information regarding the Dinner on Saturday night, please contact Alan Wyatt. ■

### REPORT ON PAST MEETINGS

by Reg Mayes

**Spring Meeting, Cardiff,  
10th - 12th April, 1992**

Cardiff is the capital city of the principality of Wales, situated by the River Taff and centered on a very fine well preserved castle. The Municipality boasts some elegant buildings, an art gallery exhibiting works of the masters and sculptures by Rodin. We were ensconced in the four star Park Hotel (with its own car park) right in the shopping centre of the City. There are no parking meters in Cardiff, 'herring bone' parking is allowed in some streets, but yellow lines on many others. There is a cathedral about three miles to the west of Cardiff called Llandaff Cathedral, it was nearly destroyed in World War Two by a parachuted land mine.

Friday the 10th was spent socialising. On Saturday at 9.30am

David Snelling started his talk entitled 'Chicago Challenge - The Seeburg Eagle'. This model 'KT' was advertised as a 61 note Midget Orchestrion although its size is approximately 4ft 6in tall; 3ft wide and 2ft deep. The 'Eagle' comes from the pattern in the glass decoration near the top of the front panel. This model was produced from about 1915 to 1928.

Having got it home David told us of his trials and tribulations then joys and satisfaction in completing its restoration. From slides to paper handouts he described in detail the restoration of each section of the coin operated 58 note instrument (3 advertised notes are dummies) with its 48 pneumatics; 43 note Mandolin rail and 22 note Xylophone stack, including Castanet; Triangle and Tambourine, all driven from a 65 note roll over the Tracker bar. Each paper roll has 10 tunes on it. The note playing layout is shown in Fig. No. 1.

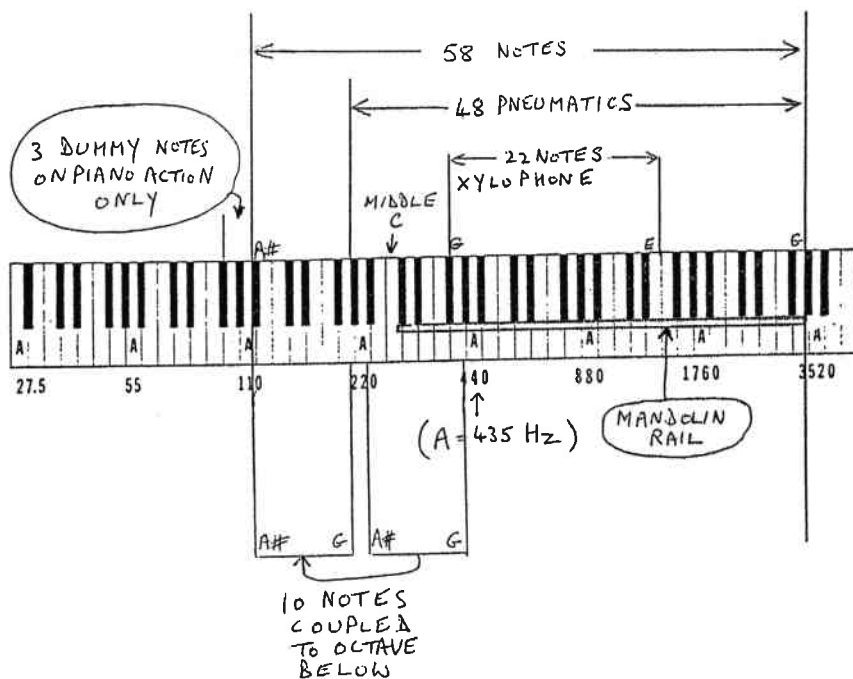
Figure 3 gives some appreciation of the immense amount of work involved, not to mention the casework that David had dedicated to the restoration - and spent more time describing to us so excellently. The talk was illustrated with slides and tape recordings. David's wife has now heard the tunes so many times that

he has had to hide the chain-saw for safety's sake.

Coffee was next. In the same room was displayed for sale a collection of craft work made by the ladies, led by Shelia Heely and Peggy Wright. As a mere man I couldn't start to describe the items but I sure had to buy some. Then under the window was a fine arrangement of Sugar Craft; a cake; animals and such, which were not for sale. These were made by Hilda Phillips. You never know, next year we may see a sugar musical box.

David Shankland, the local organiser for the meeting was the next speaker, who spoke on 'Musical Boxes?' In describing such items as an organ clock; Stella and Polyphons; a monkey that smoked and a cylinder box with 267 teeth, this was not so much a technical presentation but rather one of enjoyment, which is the major reason for collecting musical boxes. So David's talk was very well received.

This talk was followed by David Heeley demonstrating his fine wooden cigarette presentation box, where 35 cigarettes are lifted up altogether as the music plays. Then Lyn Wright demonstrated his approximately 12 inch high dome covered three singing birds, with an

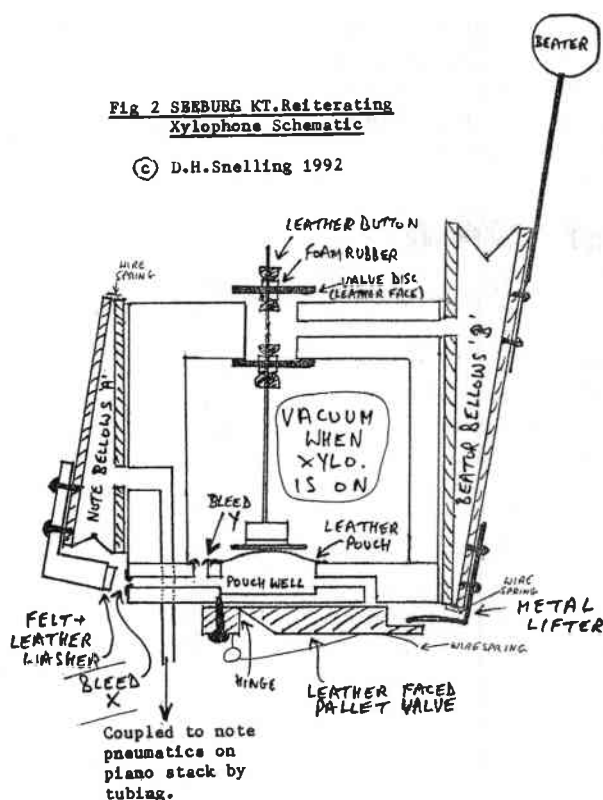


**Fig 1 SEEBURG KT. Note Playing Layout.**

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The electric motor providing the power to the vacuum pump is a 6 pole machine which on a 50 Hz (U.K.) supply rotates near to 1000 rpm, at 60 Hz (U.S.A.) supply it would rotate nearer to 1200 rpm; however David stated the motor operated well on 50 Hz. The label on the motor gave the name Emerson. David did have some hiccups with the reiterating Xylophone 'beaters', the Xylophone stack having proved most unforgiving.

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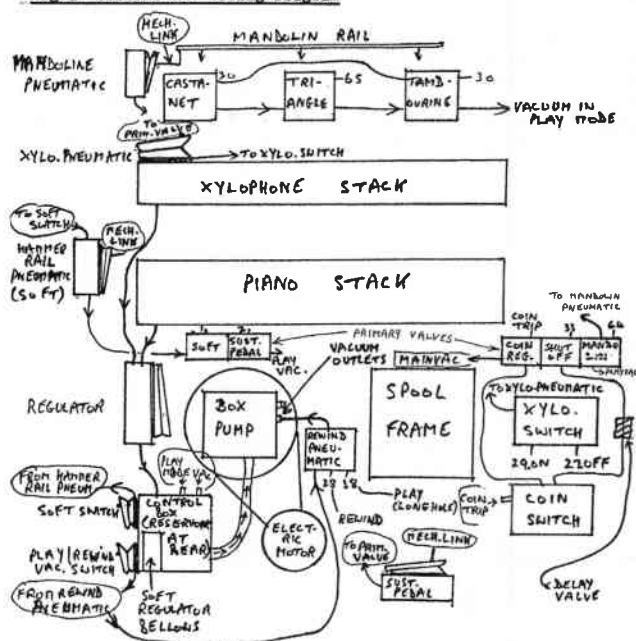


**The 'beaters' work in the following sequence:-**

- Action No. 1. Vacuum enters stack when Xylophone is switched on.**
- Action No. 2. Pouch goes up and vacuum is contained in stack.**
- Action No. 3. When a piano note is played, bellows 'A' collapses and closes bleed hole 'X' from outside air.**
- Action No. 4. Pouch now drops because of bleed hole 'Y'.**
- Action No. 5. Vacuum then closes valve at top of stack, which causes 'beater' bellows 'B' to collapse.**
- Action No. 6. Collapsing bellows 'B' lifts the pallet valve.**
- Action No. 7. The pouch then rises again and 'beater' bellows 'B' opens up again.**
- Action No. 8. If note bellows 'A' is still collapsed - go back to 4.**

The schematic diagram of the tubing of the whole machine including the coin operation is shown on Fig. 3.

Fig 3 SEEBURG KT. Tubing Diagram



Note 1 Numbers refer to tracker bar holes.

- " 2 Castanets + Tambourine + Triangle can also be ~~dis~~abled by an external switch, so can the xylophone stack.
- " 3 A third switch can activate the hammer rail (soft) pneumatic.

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unusually large amount of artificial foliage. As you can imagine they both sounded very well. So once again we were pleased that they shared their joys with us.

Later on Geoff Alford played a newly restored C. Chiappa Varetto 34key9 trumpet barrel street organ. When it was first seen by Geoff Alford and Bob Miney it was nothing but a box of parts and copies of the invoices of when it was sold as secondhand on the 4th March 1929 by the Varetto Brothers (Organ Builders) 17 Milton Street, Lower Broughton, Manchester for £12, this included the cost 'when the organ is completed with new tunes', there are 9 tunes on the barrel. It was sold to a Edwin Whieldon of 4 Heath Street, Tunstall, Staffordshire, England. What a fascinating story, I am sure that the old organ builders would have congratulated Geoff and Bob on their restoration work – the organ sounded delightful – a real credit to them both.

Saturday afternoon we visited Cardiff Castle which has more than 1900 years of recorded history, it still has Roman parts in its walls. For centuries it has been in the family of the Marquesses of Bute, in 1947 it was given to the City of Cardiff. As it has always been lived in so it is in fine decorative condition. Some of us went up the clock tower to see the four face mechanism and drive made by E. Dent in 1870 and obviously electrified sometime later. Each room of the Castle contained a wealth of artifacts. In the nursery there was a large musical box. Some of the living rooms are let out for weddings etc. We returned to the hotel to prepare for our Society Dinner. As well as being a very convivial affair it was graced by a bit of Welsh culture in the form of a Welsh Harp and Harpist Lowri Clements. Very nice it was too.

On Sunday morning we had a presentation by Adrian Little assisted by Alan Godier. The subject of their talk was Grand Format musical boxes. Adrian had brought along three examples in various conditions. First of all he spoke about the definition of Grant Format, he stated it doesn't necessarily mean a large musical box, usually if it is a Grand Format box it will be named on the tune sheet. Dimensional accuracy in this format is very important, if the pins are 1/2 thou; inch, out of concentricity, that would be unacceptable.

Commenting on Nicole Frere boxes generally, Adrian considered that four air boxes were always 'soft' in tone, whereas the two turns per tune four air variation box, serial numbers around 38000 were about the best made. This firm started making large boxes around the number 6000. Comment was made on the style of the inlay on Grand Format cases, where there is usually one large central panel and a smaller panel either side of it.

Alan then told us of some of the jobs he had to do on a Grand Format four overture movement that had been brought along. They included the cement coming away from the inside of the cylinder and corroded leads which needed to be cleaned in between with wet and dry abrasive paper.

The three Grand Format musical boxes brought along were classified as follows:-

No. 1. Piano Forte four overture. Gamme No. 931, Box No. 25224.

No. 2. Variation on four tunes. Gamme No. 1986, Box No. 38783.

No. 3. 4 Overture 229 teeth (10 teeth for one note). Gamme No. 1500, Box No. 32027.

A discussion on the subject of gamme numbers caused a great deal of interest. Alan spoke on this topic, he pointed out that it came from the French word for gamut i.e. scale, or range of notes, the whole series of musical notes used for an arrangement of certain tunes on a musical box. For Nicole Frere's alone there are well over 3000 gamme numbers.

Interchangeable musical boxes, with say six cylinders of six tunes each, would all have the same gamme number, as the chosen combination of notes and number of teeth tuned to each note are the same for each cylinder. So once again Adrian and Alan gave a very informative and helpful talk which we all enjoyed.

In the afternoon we made our various ways to the Welsh Folk Museum at St. Fagans, about 4 miles westward from the centre of Cardiff. The open air section of about 50 acres has some 30 original buildings from all over Wales moved there, to depict how the Welsh lived during the last 500 years. Of particular interest to us was the Music Room containing 40-50 instruments, from harps; orchestrions; player pianos; harmoniums; portable organs; organettes; phonographs; gramo-

phones; as well as humanly played instruments etc. It's a great place for the whole family, there is livestock all over the place, old fashioned shops, a castle surrounded by beautiful gardens and lakes - well worth a visit.

The local organiser David Shankland very kindly invited us to visit his home and enjoy his hospitality before making our way back to the hotel and/or home.

We would all agree that it was an excellent meeting and we are very grateful for all the hard work that David, Juliet and daughter Amelia had combined to ensure that we had such a very fine meeting - thank you all. ■

### Summer Meeting, Saturday 6th June, 1992, Regent's College, London



**John Powell**

With a 10.00am start John Powell gave a talk entitled 'Musical Miscellany'. His first item was a Zanza or Sansa which came from the Okavango Delta of what is now Botswana. It has eight steel tongues, reminiscent of a musical box comb. The 'melodious' intervals were demonstrated by holding the wooden baseboard and plucking the tongues with both thumbs. Its scale has six notes, two being duplicated. It included a 'zither' of six small brass rings, which rattled on a wire staple.

John went on to describe and play recordings of his recently restored barrel organ longcase clock. It was thought to have been built early/mid 1800's, it had the trademark of B. Mukle & Sohn - Baden. It had three barrels (6" Dia

x 22½" long) and 84 wooden pipes which had suffered extensive woodworm and fire damage which had taken a long time to restore. John said that "there were times when he wished that he had never seen the clock." Its scale is Diatonic, plus 'F' sharp, with a middle 'C' frequency of 215 Hertz; being about 3½ semitones lower than the present-day pitch. The range of pipes covers a little over 4½ octaves in 4 ranks, John showed us how he had copied and printed one of the trade labels which were on each barrel to replace those which, unfortunately, could not be saved.

The next item was a whistling bird mechanism said to imitate a nightingale, it is housed in a painted wooden box approximately 7" x 7" x 5" high. The mechanism was shown to consist of three wheels or cams operating the whistle plunger and three wheels or cams operating the air valve to the whistle. The 'song' cycle was in six parts, with a rest between each part.

John then showed and played a 17½" long mandolin movement, which had been acquired without a box. This was now suitably housed by John modifying an oversize box to match the movement, which showed only minor evidence of the joins.

This was followed by a non-musical item called a Dipleidoscope in its mahogany box of about 5" x 5" x 5". It is a portable 'transit' device for determining local solar time between 9.00am and 3.00pm by adjusting the instrument so as to align two images of the Sun and reading the time from a scale. The invention was registered in 1843 by James Bloxam, being immediately assigned to E. J. Dent (clockmakers) who developed this instrument and exhibited it at the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 in Hyde Park.

John ended his talk by showing us a video of the can-can sequence at the Warwick meeting with some of our members being instructed in the art by the girls. It caused as much amusement at this meeting as it did on the actual occasion.

Our next speaker was Ted Brown, a member who is a retired Police Officer. He gave a talk on Crime Prevention and Insurance.

Ted gave us the facts that in England there were ½ million burglaries last year (one every 66 seconds), 8 out of 10 are committed by amateurs and nearly a ⅓ of these are through unlocked doors. An average burglary only takes about 6



minutes so it is up to us to think of our security.

We were then shown a short video with a humorous vein pointing out security measures we could take, to make our houses more secure.



**Ted Brown**

Items of property can be 'property marked' with your post code, using an ultra violet marker. For musical boxes the registration number can also be put on it with the post code. Coding ensures that stolen items, found by police, are far more likely to be returned to the owners, and if the marks are clear lacquered they could remain readable for up to 50 years. The sound board makes an ideal marking surface and a few random extra marks will ensure that closer scrutiny is given by Police if the code is in a more obscure position. U.V. Marker Pens and Lamps can be obtained from good stationers and security firms.

On the question of insurance Ted pointed out that there is a vast difference in cost between "contents", (items that stay within your house and out buildings), and "All risks" (items that go out with you like cameras and street organs). Depending on the area in which you live, and the insurance company you employ, can mean costs between 31 pence to £1.80p for contents only and £1.00 to £5.15p for All Risks, for every £100 insured. If you intend to take an item out only a few times a year it may be worth asking for an individual quote. Being in a local Neighbourhood Watch Scheme often means a reduction in premiums, ask your insurance company. Do ensure that the savings outweigh any conditions that may be added to your insurance policy.

Every one present was able to have a booklet entitled 'Practical Ways to Crack Crime'. Extra copies are available free from Crime Prevention Officers at Police Stations.

We were reminded that it is up to us to keep our treasures safe.

The next item on the agenda was 'Open space' when anyone can address the meeting. The first person to take advantage of this was Anthony Bulleid, he played us a tape of a tune on 8 inch 4 air Nicole serial 26561 before and after re-pinning. Despite being made on a modest recorder it came over well thanks to John Powell's apparatus. Anthony said no cylinder pins had required any adjustment after the re-pin. He also reported fair progress on dating L'Epée and Ducommun-Girod boxes, both of whose serial numbers reverted to zero on dates which he had now estimated and would report in the next issue of MUSIC BOX. He specially asked for serial numbers and tune lists of any Conchon boxes.

Then Adrian Little took the stand and produced a Grand Format Nicole Frere box that was in such a state of dilapidation at the Cardiff meeting (10th-12th April, 1992) one wondered if it was worth restoring, yet here it was in all its glory. The tuning was done by Alan Godier.



**Walter Behrendt**

The next speaker was a visitor from Germany, Walter Behrendt who showed us a very interesting two overtone box by Rzebitschek of Prague where the group pinning for the trills started from left-right and sometimes right-left, this was on a 10 inch long cylinder and the comb had 200 teeth and the spring was key wound. ■

## **Belgium/Rhine Tour 25th - 30th May 1992**

Our coach started from Landbeach at 7.15am and met up with nine of us at Dover at 9.30am. The sea was calm as usual for us.

The first overnight stay was at Antwerp a city of about half a million people which a couple of years ago could boast about fifty cinemas. On the way we had an afternoon break in Bruges to listen to the town's carillon. The following day Arthur Prinsen, the great noteur and organ builder led our coach in his car to arrive at his lovely new home and workshop situated in pleasant woodland in the outskirts of the city.

Arthur showed us how he makes the 'books' for the organ. First there was the marking-out using a machine with drum of about two feet diameter with a divider scale on the left-hand rim. After the marking of the 'master' it was transferred to another machine where Arthur's wife Paula who by using her hands on a wheel to position the blank and master, used her right foot to make the chosen cutter come down to cut the blank, this she did with great dexterity. While we were there they finished a book and played it on one of the organs Arthur had made, which had 32 notes and 35 pipes, of which 5 were double bass; 7 accompaniment and the rest melody. Arthur then demonstrated a 89/98 note (on the Gavioli scale) organ that he was restoring, although the facia did not match the organ but oddly enough the facia bore the showman's name Winter of Cardiff, the venue for our last meeting. Whilst all this was going on we were served with refreshments until such time we had to leave to proceed to the Rhine, opposite Koblenz at a place called Ehrenbreitstein where we stayed at the Hotel Hogg for three nights.

The next morning we had the choice of taking our coach, or a five hour boat trip up the Rhine to Rudesheim, principally to see Siegfried Wendal's Mechanisches Musikkabinett which is housed in a fine old schloss. It attracted 95,000 visitors last year, opening seven days a week. There are nine tours a day between the hours of 10.00am - 10.00pm. The town also boasts a brandy distillery; museum of the wine industry; a chair-lift to the Bismark memorial where there is also an aviary for Eagles.

At 6.00pm Siegfried met us in the hostelry across the road from his museum, then having been

refreshed by the wine of the district, all at the hospitality of Siegfried, he took us into his museum, where he demonstrated 22 instruments. The first instrument was the Hupfeld Phonolist Violina, he is making a dozen replicas, about which more later. When we got to the piano room he told us that for the 1906 Welte Red he had 900 rolls but only 200 were usable, however he could punch rolls and books for all systems. A similar problem with rolls has been experienced at our Brentford Musical Museum, they resolved it by making a controlled-humidified room to store them in.

In the next room, which was originally the Chapel for the Knights, was a flute organ clock made by C. E. Kieemeyer of Berlin in about 1800, some of us were not certain if it played music of Haydn and/or Mozart. Next to it was an English table barrel organ, considered to be the oldest item in the museum. In the same room was a singing bird pistol which was finely decorated. Then as one moved out into the shop, there on the right was the reconstructed workshop, complete with a full sized model of the East German barrel noteur and portable organ builder G. Bacigalupi.

After we had made our purchases we walked down the hill through the town to our coach, which was led by Siegfried in his Land Rover to his workshops wherein is the huge project of building a dozen reproductions of the Hupfeld Violina based on that which is in the Musical Museum at Brentford. The first workshop was for the wooden parts, the next was for the metal components. We saw the annulus cage that carries the 'bow strings' and what a problem the making of the tracker bar proved to be because all the connecting pipes had to be soldered into the tracker bar at one go and if one joint was not airtight it was impossible to seal it because the re-applied heat would unseal adjacent joints.

The last workshop was that for assembly. Here was all the casework and the piano actions were stored. Siegfried told us that the first completed Violina did not at first play as well as it should, after much detective work it transpired that the fabric for the cheeks of the reservoir of main power unit were cut too large as compared with the original ones, thus significantly increasing the maximum volume of the reservoir which had the effect of

raising the operating pressure from 11 to 19cm on the water gauge. The temporary solution was to put a metal strap over the reservoir to restrain it to the size of the prototype, and all worked well. Who would have thought that a reservoir could be too big?

What a lot of pleasure Siegfried and his wife Grettle had given us not only by their hospitality but also the way they accommodated us in their Museum so that we had it to ourselves. We wish them every success in disposing of the remainder of their Violinas.

The next day we set off in the coach for Linz which was a town on-fete including an organ festival. As one passed through the gateway of the walled town one was assailed with the mingling sounds from several organs large and small, along the quarter mile length of the main street there must have been some forty organs, a great sight and sound.

The town also had a musical museum which we assembled for and entered with the general public. On the ground floor there were six large instruments and we didn't learn much about them. The biggest organ was a 1904 Model 5 Welte Philharmonic Organ, it had 21 registers and 1100 pipes. Our Richard Cole had brought along a roll for this organ from the Brentford Museum, (where he is the Curator) and it played Elgar's *Salut d'Amour*. The tracker bar has 150 ports and the whole instrument was restored in 1984-5.

The next morning we started our homeward journey, making an overnight stop in Brussels, where we had half a day to look around the city. Then in the evening our coach, again led by Arthur Prinsen, took us to the collection of J. Ghysels & A. Prinsen in the suburbs of Brussels. As we entered there was a magnificent buffet table laid out with the salmon as the centre piece, it looked a real picture, it was all prepared by Jenny Ghysels and Paula Prinsen. We all did the food justice, although even after additional helpings there was still a lot left over.

After the meal Arthur and Jef took us into the second hall where the main part of the collection was. Here we were told that we could have any instrument played that we liked, we heard twenty of them with Arthur's commentary, he played a Portable Street Organ with 32 notes in two registers that he had

made with Jef – they certainly could be proud of it. There was a Portable Street Organ example of the Bacigalupi family, of East Berlin, who are reputed to have made over 7000 organs. Then there were two musical boxes, one with bells and drums and the other a Bremond organ box with four interchangeable cylinders. Another unusual item was the Organina Thibouville with 36 reeds; as was the Beuvtrix Florestano Fairground organ built in 1913 with 72 keys in 8 registers and swell panels – Arthur's view was that it was not loud enough for its job. Perhaps the most astounding performance was from a 92 key Mortier Dance Organ, Arthur said that it has a very fast action including the swell panels, we heard it play Bach's Toccata and Fugue in 'D' minor, Elgar's Land of Hope and Glory (to which many of us sang) it was magnificent, it wouldn't have been disgraced by any cathedral organ. There were seven other organs we heard but due to limited space here they have not been commented on – but rest assured they all sounded very well indeed. On the wall of this hall was a photograph of Arthur Bursens who made over 1000 organs and had worked until he was 89 years old, we were also told that he was a brother-in-law to Mortier.

We returned to the first hall and whilst we partook of some liquid refreshment we were entertained by a Decap Jazz Dance Band organ but with the electronic parts disconnected, here again we choose our 'books' and some of us danced to the music.

Arthur said that it was really Jef's collection and he only comes over when there are problems with an organ. He didn't say that he makes up all the 'books' but I am sure that he does. It is a very fine collection and we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves visiting it. So our sincere thanks go out to Jenny; Paula; Arthur and Jef for a splendid evening.

We got back to our Hotel Charlimainge about midnight and set off around 10.00am the next morning; embarking at Calais onto the *Pride of Bruges* (7951 tons) in the mid afternoon and then Dover at about teatime.

The great success of this trip would not have happened without the time and organising skills of our President Alan Wyatt and his good lady Daphnie, so once again our sincere thanks to them. ■

# Picture Parade

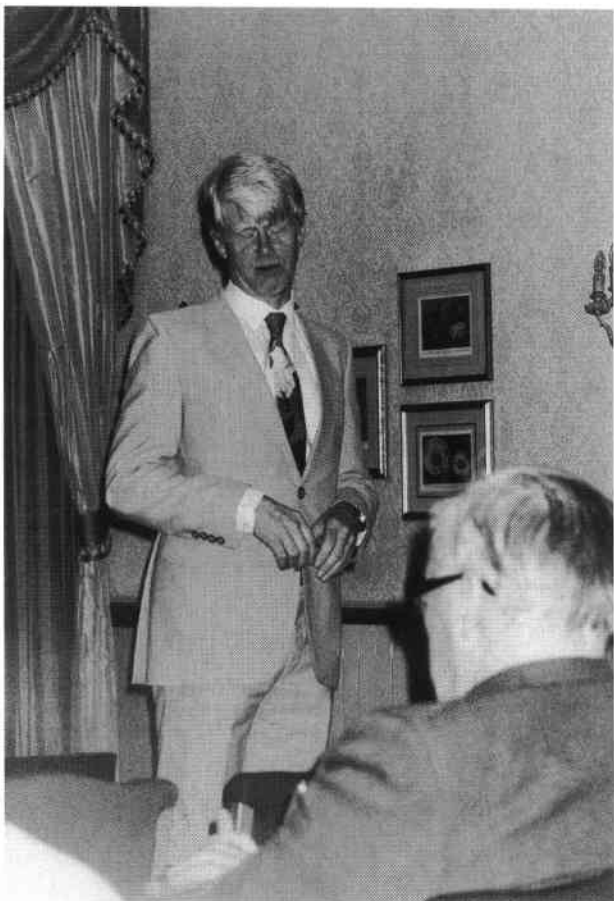
Spring Meeting at Cardiff, 10th - 12th April, 1992



Members gather before the Society Dinner which featured harpist Lowri Clements.



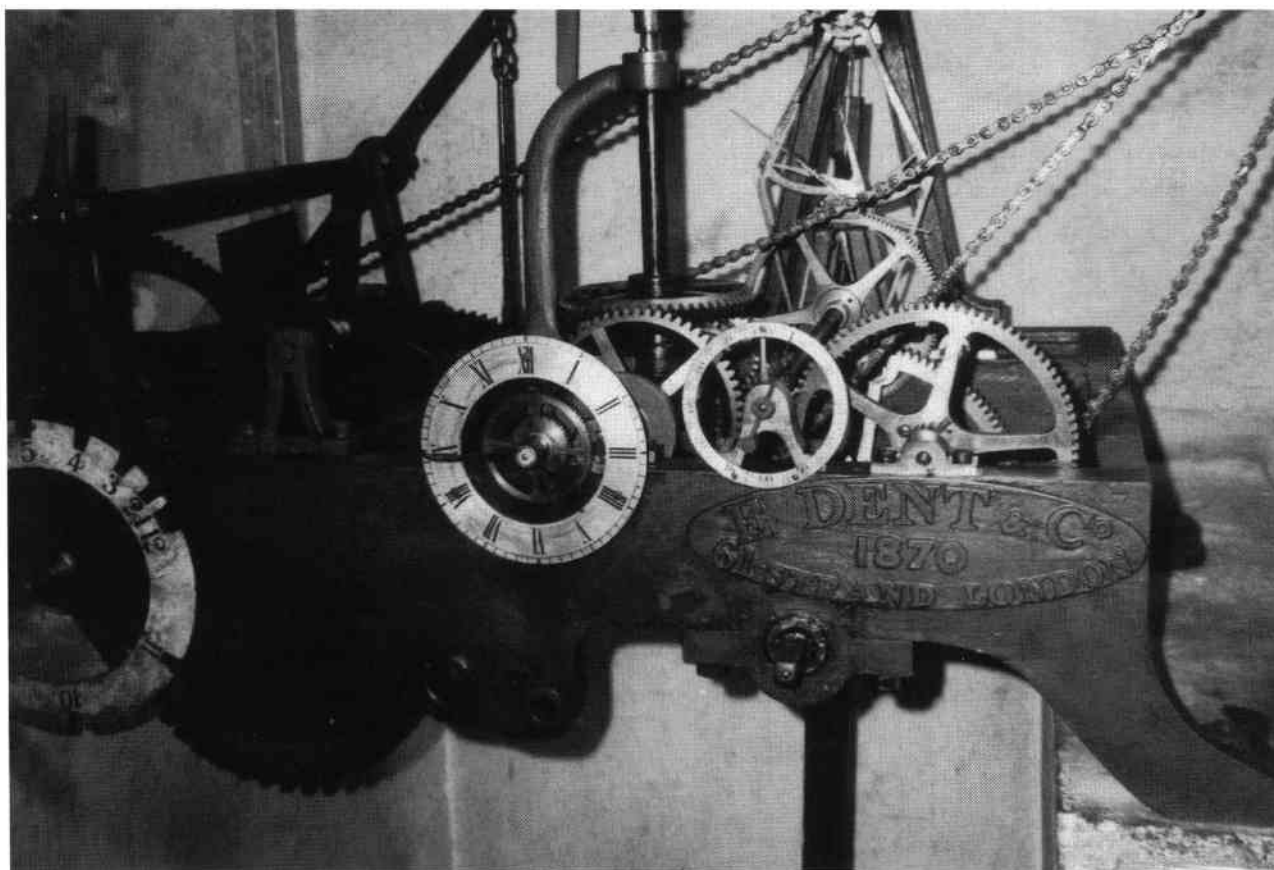
The newly restored C. Chiappa Varetto 34 key 9 trumpet barrel street organ.



Meeting organiser David Shankland.



Collection of craft work made by the ladies.

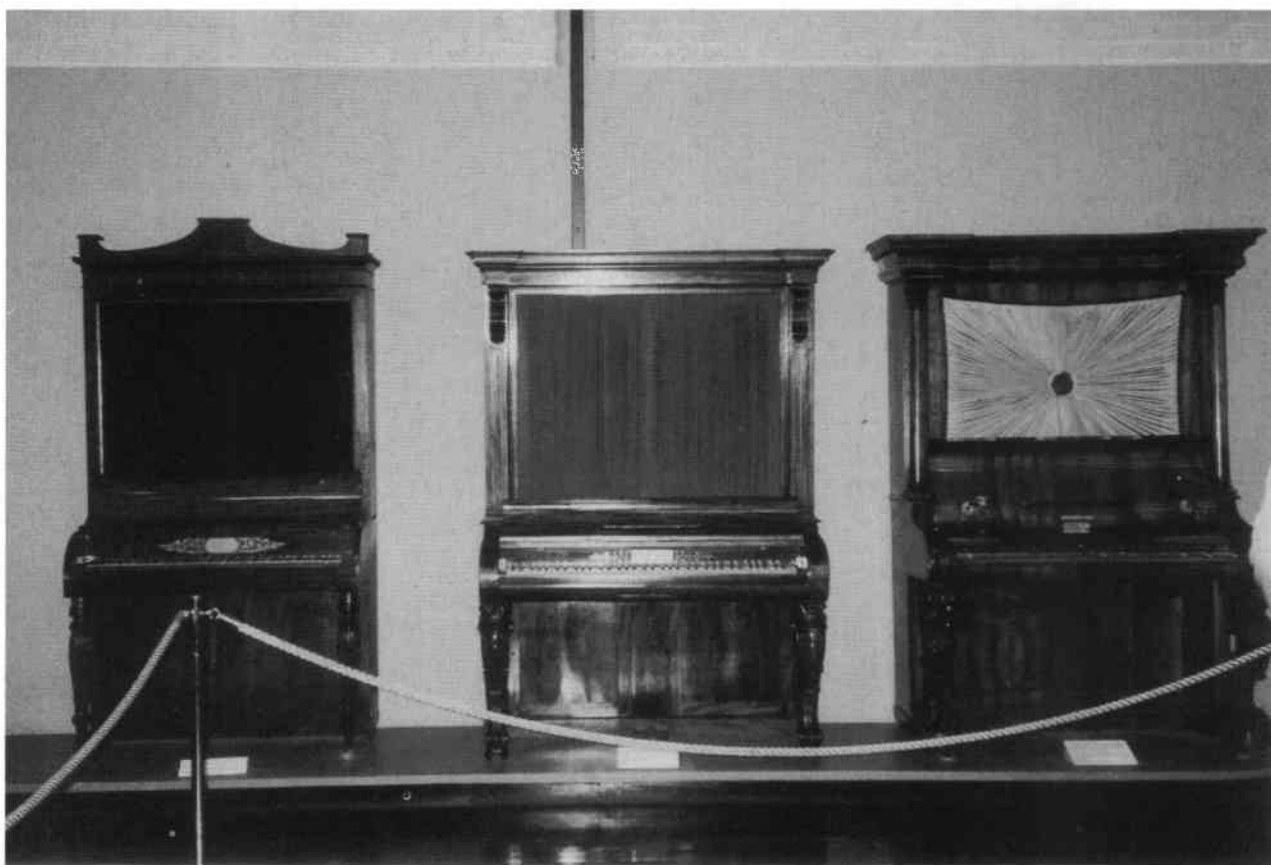


The four face mechanism and drive in the clock tower of Cardiff Castle.

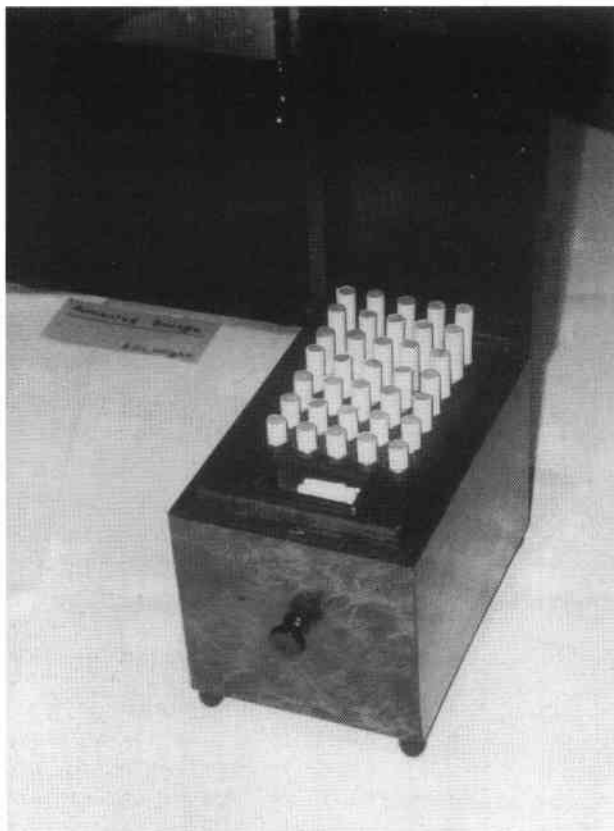




The Music Room in the Welsh Folk Museum at St. Fagans.



Other instruments in the Music Room in the Welsh Folk Museum.



David Heeley's fine wooden cigarette presentation box, when played 35 cigarettes are lifted up together.



Lyn Wright demonstrated these covered singing birds which have an unusual amount of foliage.



This fine arrangement of Sugar Craft was made by Hilda Phillips.

# NEWSDESK

## Musical Museum awarded grant

The museum is pleased to announce that it has been awarded a £5,000 grant (the maximum award) by The Carnegie U.K. Trust for its work in the conservation of paper piano rolls.

Not only does this grant provide the means to train volunteers by a professional conservator, but it is recognition of the nationally important work the museum does in the specialist area of automatic musical instruments.

The grant follows a substantial investment in creating an environmentally controlled paper music roll store during the winter of 1991/92. This store houses some 20,000 music rolls, the most extensive collection of its kind in any museum in Europe.

Punched paper music rolls are the life blood of the majority of instruments in the museum. They can be anything up to a hundred years old and a conservation report last year highlighted the need for controlled storage conditions. Part of the former St. Georges Church in Brentford, which houses the museum, has been sealed off from the main body of the building and steel industrial shelving in two tiers has been installed. Over ten thousand rolls and their boxes have already been cleaned and stored before a dehumidifier is switched on. Cleaning and storing the remaining rolls in the collection will continue throughout the summer.

Richard Cole, the Curator, is delighted that the rolls will now be properly stored but is having difficulty in finding what he wants. "I always knew exactly where to lay my hands on a specific roll" he said. "Now they are neatly stored in numerical order, I can't find anything!"

The Friends also had a preview of a Solo Orchestrelle, a type of player reed organ, which has been

restored; and an Orchestra Box, an advanced form of musical box, which was bequeathed to the museum last year. ■

## Naval Engineer hits the right note



The need to provide music for church services on board Royal Naval ships has inspired a Naval Engineer Officer, Sub Lieutenant Jeff Crofts (22), to invent a new version of the pianola.

The device controls a standard electronic keyboard to provide automatic, controllable musical accompaniment, in much the same way as a pianola does. The musical data for more than 50 tunes is stored on an inter-changeable memory cartridge, whilst the use of a microprocessor enables the operator to vary aspects of the tune, such as the pitch and tempo. Although the project was inspired by the problem of finding a skilled organist on board a Naval vessel, it soon became clear that many other organisations, such as schools and churches, face a similar problem.

Sub Lieutenant Crofts designed the instrument whilst studying at the Royal Naval Engineering College, Plymouth. The success of his design has earned him the top award in the senior category of the Young Electronic Designer Awards (YEDA); it is the second year running that an RNEC entry has won this top award. ■

## Salford Mechanical Music

During August and September visitors to Salford Museum & Art Gallery will have an opportunity to see and listen to the museum's collection of polyphons, organettes and cylinder boxes. Over the years the museum has built up a good collection of some 30 musical boxes, which range from a small snuff box, to table and upright Polyphons, a rare long-case Symphonium clock, and a street organ.

On selected days during the exhibition Mr John Knott, who is a member of the Musical Box Society of Great Britain and also one of the Friends of Salford Museum & Art Gallery, will be demonstrating the pieces on display. Mr Knott has worked on the collection for many years. He had long been interested in the repair of clocks, but musical boxes were a new field for him. He brought to the task all his considerable professional expertise as an engineer, draughtsman and electrician and also his knowledge of electronics and an inventive turn of mind. Gradually he worked his way through the museum collection putting it in working order and as he did so he became more and more addicted to the subject until it became his chief hobby. He is now a collector in his own right and the museum's 'tame expert' on the subject whenever they need advice.

One of his greatest achievements has been the restoration of a rare and interesting piece of mechanical music 'The Orchestral' which was patented and manufactured by Carl Roepke in Salford in 1894-5. No music survived with this piece, but Mr Knott and his son meticulously cut by hand two lengths of folding card music for the tunes 'Green-sleeves' and 'In an English Country Garden'.

Salford's musical boxes will be on display at the Museum & Art Gallery, Peel Park, Salford (Tel: 061 736 2649) until 27 September.

Demonstrations by Mr Knott will take place on Sunday 30 August and 27 September, starting at 3pm. Admission to the exhibition and demonstrations is free, and the Museum is open Monday to Friday 10am - 4.45pm and Sunday 2-5pm. ■

# Organ Grinders chat

by Geoff Alford



**The British Organ Grinder's Association** is now a fait accompli and, although I have indicated on more than one occasion my opposition to the formation of yet another mechanical music society, I am pleased that existing societies appear more or less happy to give their blessing to the new born infant. This should make future inter-cooperation easier. Already the founders are beginning to feel the pressures that an element of any membership feels compelled to inflict upon their unrewarded officers. I wonder whether it is a national characteristic that makes members seek to form power groupings to influence decisions. I have always taken care to avoid such cliques and I have certainly reached the age when I prefer to stand back and witness with sadness from a distance such destructive activities.

Choosing a name for a new organisation is often the most difficult task. I recall that the German G.S.M., which has changed its title several times, went through a traumatic period before giving in to its current name. BOGA are initials which can hardly be said to have a ring to them. I would have preferred the term street organ to organ grinder in the title, but there you are! Initial membership figures of 160 are bound to have encouraged the Committee. The difficult part now is to build on that membership and not let it fade through an inability to retain members as well as recruit.

I think that the Fair Organ Preservation Society is probably the oldest body for mechanical music in Europe so it is hardly surprising that I have been a member of it for more years than I care to remember. It was formed at a time when mechanical organs had become all but extinct in Britain. Its primary purpose was to purchase a fair organ and restore and maintain it and many enthusiasts rushed to join in support of this laudable objective. With the advantage of hindsight, the project never stood a chance as the demand for old fair organs ensured that their value escalated totally beyond the peanuts being raised.

Has the reader ever thought that the longer any organisation exists the more tenaciously it clings to what it regards as the traditions and values of the past and turns its face against the inevitable changes around it. You can apply this to any area you can think of – whether it be a Government which is in favour of modernisation of everything but itself, or a small society which its original purpose of preserving its own fair organ has no further relevance. As a former member of all three services, I was surprised at the relative democratic attitude of the R.A.F. after the Army, and was later horrified to find in the Navy a service acting as if Nelson had just died, (perhaps he had). F.O.P.S. has remained severely restricted by its original title. Efforts to change it have been fiercely resisted by the Old Guard. The original members were, of course, largely non-organ owners and, uniquely for such a society, this situation has remained unchanged in the succeeding years. Today, an estimated four out of every five members do not own any instrument. Given this balance of membership the aspirations of organ owning members cannot avoid being frustrated. The inevitable result is that from time to time there is a move to form a breakaway body. Usually the effectiveness of a new organisation is extremely limited because of its small size. It has to be seen whether the new society is able to break the mould and provide the service its members need. There are many pitfalls and its officers will have learn fast!

## To charge or not to charge

From time to time the subject of recompense for organ engagements is broached, not least by new organ owners. Obviously many of us hold widely varying views regarding whether to charge and how much, and all must be subjective. My opinion is that in most instances some payment should be requested, if only for the reason that it puts a value on the performer who will therefore not be taken for granted. Gone are the days when the average organ owner was likely to be a businessman for whom the cost of his hobby could be subsidised by the business. Even a street organ – well made but of modest proportions – is likely to cost £2,000 or more, and this figure excludes accessories, music, etc. Increasingly the small organ owner is likely to be retired or approaching retirement and this sector of the community is less likely

to be able to afford the costs of fulfilling frequent engagements without some recompense. How much to charge could depend on a number of factors – the period required, daylight or darkness, distance to travel, season of the year, whether out in the open or under cover and so on. In addition I apply a further calculation – whether it is to be done for a charity, commercial organisation or other body. If the cause is one which I favour any charge will be minimal, or even waived, on the basis that they will be offset by commercial rated fees.

Some organ owners express the view that as it is their hobby one should not look for profit. I would not really disagree with this attitude, although in my opinion one would need to work very hard and levy high charges to make any sort of profit. I am aware that a few do precisely that, but most of us undercharge. I do, however, disapprove of those who are prepared to go anywhere and everywhere for nothing as this makes life difficult for the rest. This leaves events like rallies, festivals and shows. Most steam rallies have got away with murder for years, paying ridiculous attendance fees and providing nothing in kind but a heavy lump of brass which is totally useless. Facilities provided are usually minimal and basic and entertainment for exhibitors non-existent. In the days when rallies were organised for and by the exhibitors and were non profit making that was entirely acceptable. Nowadays most of the public paying the high admission charges have not the slightest interest in organs, steam or preservation. They come for a day out and a look around the traders stands. Nevertheless, the organ owner will be expected to be playing his organ, and the busiest time is when, after an exhausting day in the sun, you are trying to pack up for the day, have dinner and enjoy a bit of TV on the portable. I now only support local rallies, purely because they are local and I am likely to meet local people. Also it probably supports a local charity.

Other events where organs predominate, such as festivals, are a different matter. Although there is usually a commercial aspect, unless the event takes place within a closed area so that admission fees can be charged, it is wholly dependent for its success on sponsorship and the goodwill of the participants. Unfortunately the former is in increasingly short supply and most firms are looking to find a substantial publicity benefit. Some companies do what they can, but all too many



prefer to put most of their budget into things like the Football League to enable supporters to continue to rampage through town centres. So the most likely source of funding is likely to be Councils, if the Government have given them enough leeway to help without being 'capped.' And I don't mean capped as in capped for England.

The great difference with purely organ events is that they provide excellent opportunities for people with similar interests to gather together and enjoy themselves. This form of 'payment in kind' may represent all you are likely to get for participating. Internationally, what can be provided at a festival varies tremendously. As a general rule the largest tend to provide the least, largely because the large numbers taking part inevitably means that the jam has to be spread more thinly. A well-organised Dutch Stichting can put on a most enjoyable event purely because of the amount of effort put in by members and their hard-working wives. Often they have halls which enables charges to be made so the event becomes profitable. In German-speaking countries, the prestige of the event may mean that it does not need to offer much because of the sheer numbers wanting to take part. Sometimes the local council or a business even may be prepared to get involved which can result in payments being made to entrants.

Here in Britain the number of organ events is growing but too many think in terms of steam rally organisation methods, which are hardly applicable. In the present financial climate, organ owners will have to accept in most cases that little reward will be available and they will have to decide whether the pleasure of taking part, plus perhaps a few fringe benefits is adequate reward. The Steam Rally system is to offer payment for attending and leave the participants to make their own arrangements. I think it more important that the money should be mainly spent on making arrangements for an enjoyable festival.

### New Organ Models

A major purpose of BOGA's first annual meeting, held in the beautiful setting of Ashorne Hall, appears to have been to display as many street organ models currently in production as possible, and a number of builders were there in person including Paul McCarthy, Ian Alderman, Peter Trueman and Rob Barker from Alan Pell Music. The

great weakness with the event was lack of time – a mere three hours for the whole event. This left insufficient time to look at organs and socialise as well. Also the intended display of individual organs was found to be not possible. This was a pity because it resulted in some indiscipline in grinding. It is bad enough when two organs play simultaneously, but when there are five . . . ! Why does there have to be the odd grinder who believes that everyone has come to hear his particular organ and the others are just there for ornament. The only new organ model on display was Paul McCarthy's Model 20/56. Basically this is the standard 20/22 keyless card book organ with four registers – stopped flute, bourdon celeste, violin and piccolo. The other two McCarthy models are the 20/45 with three manual registers, and the 20/34 with two registers.

Details were also disclosed of the latest product from the Raffin organ works. This is also based on the 20 scale, this time the keyless roll-playing scale. Described as the R20/67, it is of the same dimensions as the R31/84 and has no less than five manual registers – bourdon, concert flute, violin, piccolo and clarinet. The introduction of clarinet reed pipes into the modern street organ introduces a new sound which, I believe I am right in saying, hasn't been utilised before. The clarinet, together with the similar saxophone, have a distinctive strong sound which will attract customers looking for something different.

Only recently I wrote that I thought there was room for more three register 20 note organs. Now we have a new four register and a five register model to choose from. I have to say, however, that neither organ comes up to the compactness, and so portability, of my Bruns, which effectively is four registers as half operation of the piccolos slider produces a bourdon effect. The R20/67 must be one of the largest 20 scale street organs produced, though it is probably exceeded by the more basic Dean organ. Of course, five registers provides plenty of opportunity to provide sound variety, but if given the choice I would plump for a larger scale and fewer pipes. This is because I personally prefer greater scale variety on an organ of this size. Not all will agree, I am sure. Incidentally, on the Raffin R31/103 the new clarinets are now an alternative option to trumpets.

At Ashorne Hall I had my first opportunity of seeing, hearing and

playing Dorothy Robinson's 45 keyless Alan Pell trumpet organ. It confirmed my opinion, from listening to a tape of the organ, that it reproduces the genuine Berlin sound and the pipework balance I found most satisfactory. I was a little surprised that the organ didn't seem to have the power of other German organs of this type, but this may have been because the cabinet was completely closed. Turning the organ, never easy on an instrument of this size, was no more difficult than one would expect, especially bearing in mind that it is still fairly new. I was a little surprised by some jerkiness in the action, but this is something one would get used to in time. For me, these organs are in their element playing typical Berlin folk music and the sounds of Walter Kollo and Frans Lehar. I would have been happier turning the organ with one of the excellently arranged rolls of this music produced by Alan Pell, but instead it was a roll of British music. I just don't think that British arrangements sit well on these organs. For this, the 31 scale organ I find much more versatile.

**Organ Carts** are the most important item of equipment after the street organ itself and a good proportion of organ owners start off, as I did, by converting a pram or similar carriage. Alternatively they knock up something simple or get a friend to do it for them. Whilst these may be more than adequate for the job, sooner or later many of us think of getting something which looks more attractive or more appropriate. If you have one built to your own design it is better to keep it of simple framed construction. If it is too large and complicated it detracts from the organ which then looks as if it is an accessory to the cart rather than the other way round. There are a number of organ carts on the market now but you can usually expect to pay from £300 upwards. Traditional carts with iron bound wheels have been available for Raffin organs for a number of years, and even for the reed organ a folding stand can be obtained. Alan Pell supplies what is probably the most up market model – of traditional appearance but with a less rustic finish. The strip of rubber around the spoked wheels ensure that the whole town does not hear you coming. But of course you have to pay for this luxury. An up-market trolley is also on the market in Germany, all metal parts being non-rust and with a large lockable music drawer. The trolley can be built to suit most organ makes and mine has an insert for the platform

which enables it to be suitable for a 20 note organ as well as a 31. Height of the organ handle is most important and there is nothing worse than having to play an organ where the handle height is much too high or too low. One of the main problems with the traditional cart is that it is a bit of a fiddle assembling and dismantling the wheels – the last thing one wants when it has decided to pour with rain. Also iron-bound wheels are difficult to secure and can play havoc rolling around the rear of a vehicle. The former snag has been over come on a trolley available from Fred Walker of Boston which has the added advantage that it retails at under £300. The wheels are secured in place with a quick release clip and 'corners' are screwed to the platform to secure the organ according to its base dimensions. A wheelbarrow version is also available for those with small cars for whom size is a high priority. The obvious problem with wheelbarrow versions of course is that you don't want to wheel them very far. If you take your organ out to a wide variety of functions then this is something that you will certainly have to do from time to time.

**STREET ORGAN EVENTS** continue to increase in numbers in 1992 providing a more attractive alternative scene for owners of smaller organs than field events. Organising Hereford Organalia, one of the smaller one day gatherings was, for me, something in the nature of an experiment as well as a succumbing to pressure. It served to confirm my worst fears. Whereas in a small town like Llandrindod everything is free and easy and it is possible to do almost anything within reason, in a larger town there is all the bureaucracy to contend with. Pressure from the growing number of charities means that in many towns all Saturdays and often many Fridays too, have been 'sewn up' which places severe limitations on any other activities. An authorised charity will tend to object to any other collections being made of whatever nature, while Councils will be more likely to adopt a legal stance and view busking as a form of collection. Over recent years particularly there have been growing problems in town centres where no regulation exists, with some events clashing, and this has accelerated more recently prompted, no doubt, by the continuing recession. The major menace is the cassette player. Last Christmas, a number of chain shops blasted out pop music and

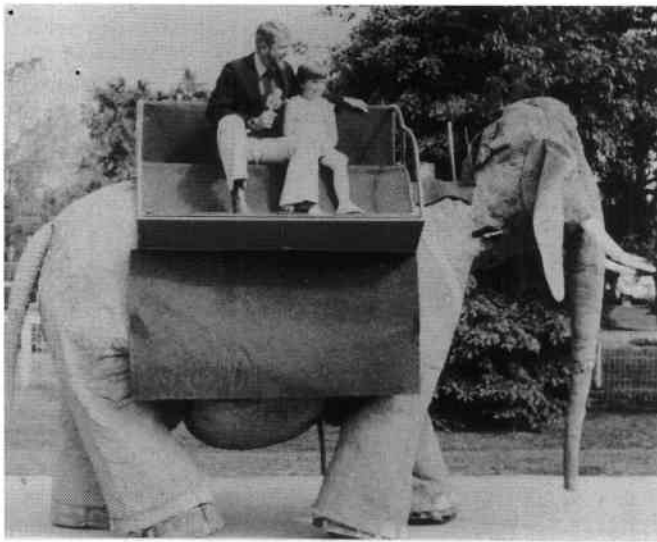
advertising slogans through their doorways in order to boost sales. This was bad enough but was fortunately confined to that seasonal period. More unpleasant now is the beggar (for he is certainly no busker) who plays professional tapes through a player with speakers and mimes in an attempt to fool the public – which he often does. The electronic amplification from these people reaches such high levels that it prevents other, more legitimate activity over a quite vast area. Lacking clear guidance, the police are often reluctant to take action against what they would regard as minor offenders anyway. The closing hours of Hereford Organalia were marred by such a person. It seems that some towns have taken action to have a measure of control in their centres, but from what one organ owner tells me these can on occasions be over onerous as he has been restricted to only two appearances in a year. If more people continue to abuse our present system, it is likely that more councils will be tempted to overreact to the menace. Having witnessed how damaging amplified sound can be in mainland Europe I have always banned electronic organs or any form of amplified sound at Llandrindod and I would strongly urge other organisers to adopt this principle.

A further modern complication for the budding organiser is the growing number of private developments which will not be covered by any local authority permission so separate permission must be obtained for each. As many provide undercover facilities they are worth cultivating, but each has its own rules which adds a further complication. Some will have their own charity collection arrangements, whilst others ban any form of collection whatever.

Ideally, of course, the local council should see to the town organisation of events – they have the contacts and the influence – and increasingly this is what is happening as they follow the need to keep town centres alive. Unfortunately, even if you are lucky enough in having a council prepared to identify event funding, they are usually reluctant to provide organisational back-up. Local organ contacts can do a lot towards seeing that funding is used towards putting on an interesting event as well as paying normal expenses.

**MUSIC COPYRIGHT** is a system which is designed to ensure that every composer and arranger

receives an appropriate reward for his labours. Laudable though this aim may be on the surface, over the years it has proved to be entirely impracticable and unenforceable, despite numerous efforts by the appropriate organisations to levy fees on Joe Public. Ever since the Mechanical Organ Owners' Society was formed, largely through the efforts of the late Brian Oram, it has taken an extraordinary interest in copyright matters. Some of their pronouncements have given rise to a deep sense of unease on the part of organ owners. As a result, over the years, I have received a number of calls from panicking owners asking for advice. My advice has always been the same – 'Don't worry, don't do anything and don't pay anything.' Now, following a recent circular to M.O.O.S. members, the phone calls have started again. Now, the talk is of a levy on all noteurs. But, once again, how on earth is such an imposition to be enforced. We are no longer an island, we are part of a huge international market, and if any society thinks that it can impose its will over a small section of this market, which will shortly have no real boundaries, they must be living in cloud cuckooland. It is totally impracticable and unenforceable. On the Continent it was realised long ago that copyright is a fragile being, which is why it has proved impossible to control pirating, other than by the voluntary discipline of organ owners. Does M.O.O. S. seriously believe that any British copyright society is capable in this day and age of enforcing a levy of arbitrary amount when there is none in the rest of the Common Market? I hope that our noteurs will hold firm and resist these overtures as such a levy can rarely be justified. Most of my music comes from the Continent at the moment and all that M.C.P.S. could do would be to kill the British industry and force noteurs to market their products outside Britain. I like the story my local publican once told me. Some years ago he received a visit from a representative of one of these copyright organisations. This person told him that the background music he was playing through his hi-fi equipment was copyright and constituted a public performance. Therefore he had to pay an appropriate fee to his organisation each year to cover this. My publican told him in quite strong language to leave his pub before he was given assistance and not to return again. He didn't, and nothing further was heard. ■



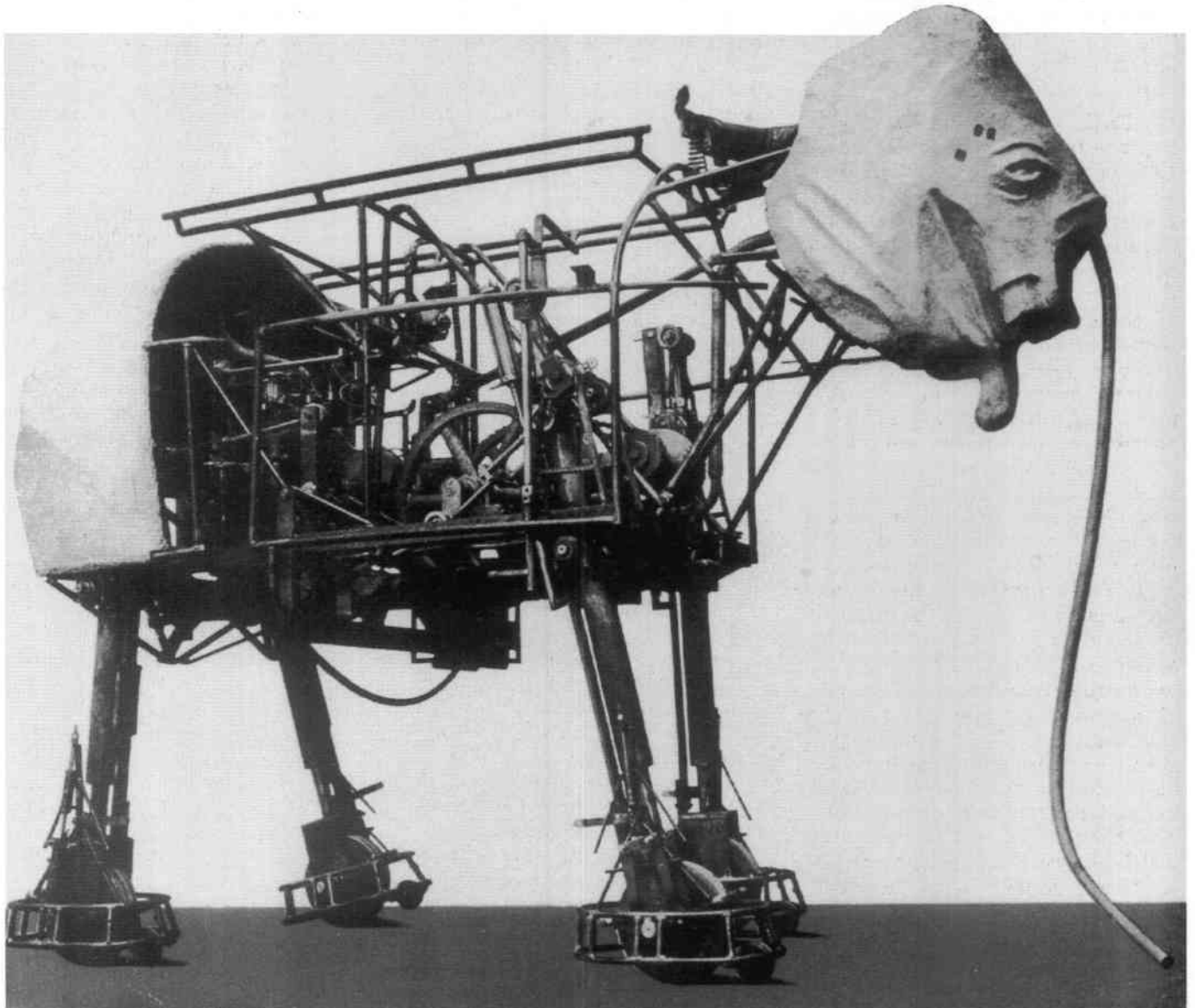
# *The Robot Walking Elephant*

*Is this the world's largest automata?*

Around 1949, Frank Stuart a mechanical engineer from Essex, built this amazing automata as a child's ride in pleasure parks and also for use along the quieter country lanes of England as shown in the accompanying photograph where the children are delighted by having a walking elephant on their own doorstep.

The elephant is full-sized, lifelike and carries 8

adults and 4 children or 12 children, with little effort. The elephant's appearance is quite realistic, the outer shell being mounted on a patented steel and canvas chassis which is covered with a thick material being the appearance of actual elephant hide. The trunk sways and the head nods while the elephant is walking. The attendant sits on the elephant's neck where he has control over the



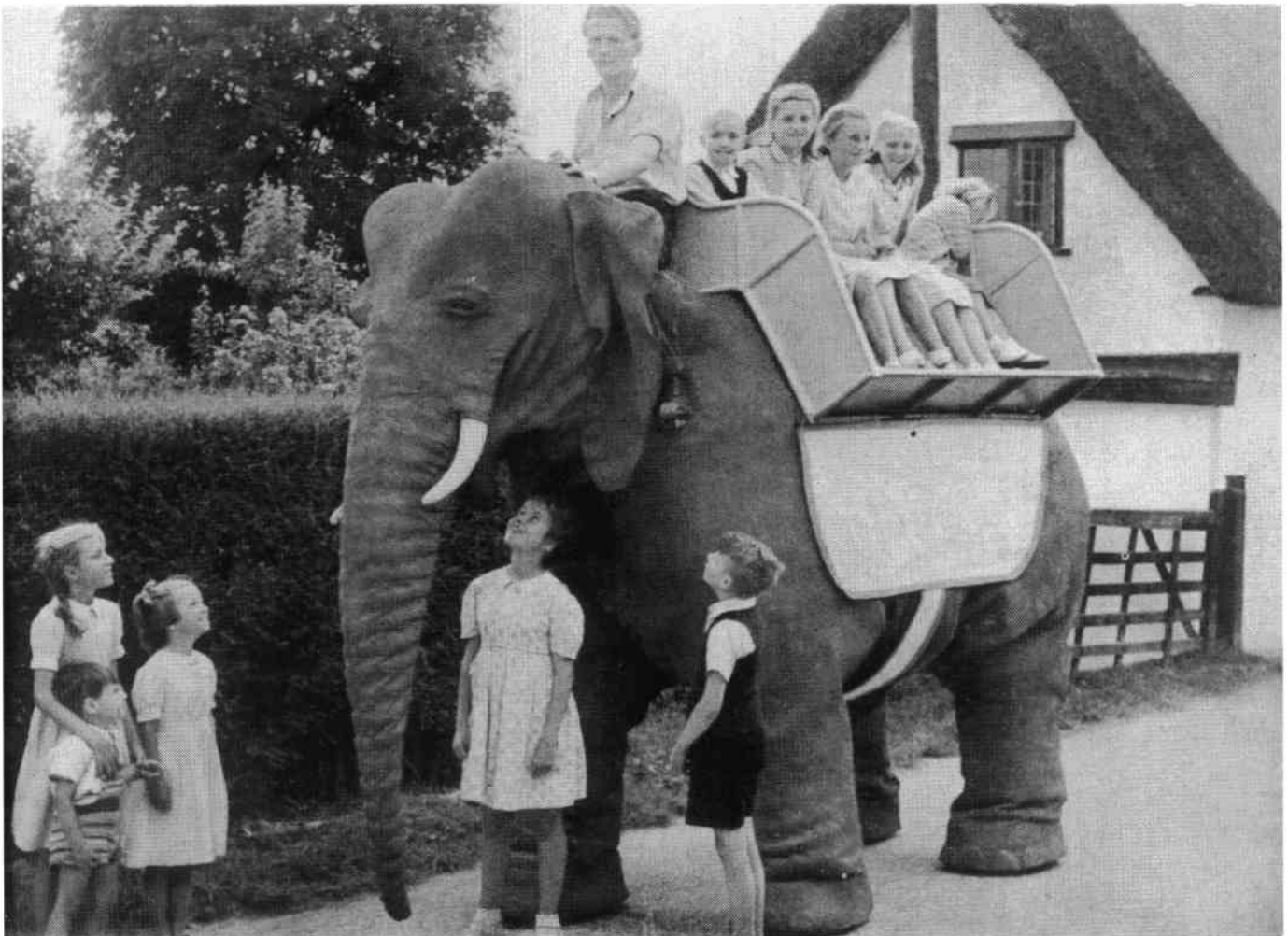
power unit and breaking systems with car type controls. An 8 horse power 4 cylinder Ford water cooled engine gives a walking speed from 2-12 miles per hour and the elephant can even walk backwards at similar speeds. The passengers sit in the houdah which is constructed in steel and has upholstered seats. The ride was operated by its owner until one day the elephant toppled over and unceremoniously discharged its passengers on to the road, fortunately without injury except to itself. After that incident public liability insurance became impossible and the elephant was retired off.

But the elephant was not to be abandoned in the scrap merchants yard, like all ageing performing animals a home was needed where the elephant could spend its remaining years in tranquil retirement and with love and affection.

That home was found when an American mechanical music enthusiast Tim Trager made a successful bid and transported the animal:- machine:- thing; thousands of miles back to his home in Chicago. On special occasions the robot elephant stomps its foot, swings his trunk, revs up and marches proudly just as it once did in a quiet Essex village.



**A day at the sea-side. Brighton holiday-makers are astounded by the arrival of a robot elephant and beats having a donkey ride on the sands anyway.**



**Loading is by way of a raised platform. The elephant's total unladen weight is 1,400lbs. The length is 12 feet overall and the height to the top of the head is 8 feet 6 inches.**



# MAN versus MACHINE in MUSIC

by Mark Hambourg (the famous pianist)

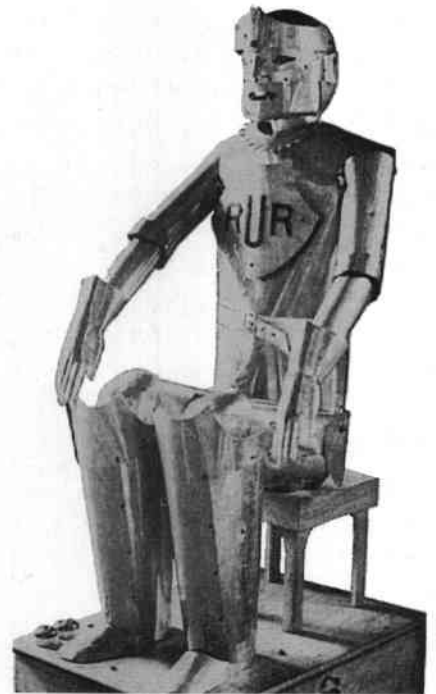
Have we had our day? questions the anxious pianist, who has spent a lifetime and all his brain and energy in perfecting himself in the difficult art of piano-playing. Are the mechanical reproducers to turn us out and make our art obsolete, as machines have done for the workers in so many other walks of life?

Until the present generation the machines had spared the musicians, and had directed their irresistible onslaught mainly to trade and to commercial endeavour; but now they are advancing against the musical profession with alarming swiftness and success. With inhuman accuracy they reproduce, as the result of a few moments' work, that which has taken a mere man years of patient study to bring to perfection. What is going to be the end of all these new departures in the making of music, now that people are able to enjoy so much of it without effort to themselves?

To-day it is possible for the enthusiast who has never studied music at all to blow into that homely instrument, the harmonica, and, by putting pieces of prepared paper across the various stop-holes, to produce appealing melodies. Accordions are being advertised as being able to play the "Liebestod" from Wagner's "Tristan und Isolde" by means of perforated rolls which are inserted into that interesting instrument. Shall we, then, call this new era in music "The Era of Perforated Rolls"? It would seem to be a suitable name. At any rate, it is cer-

tainly the age of reproduction, and of that new process invented in the United States and described by the word "canning."

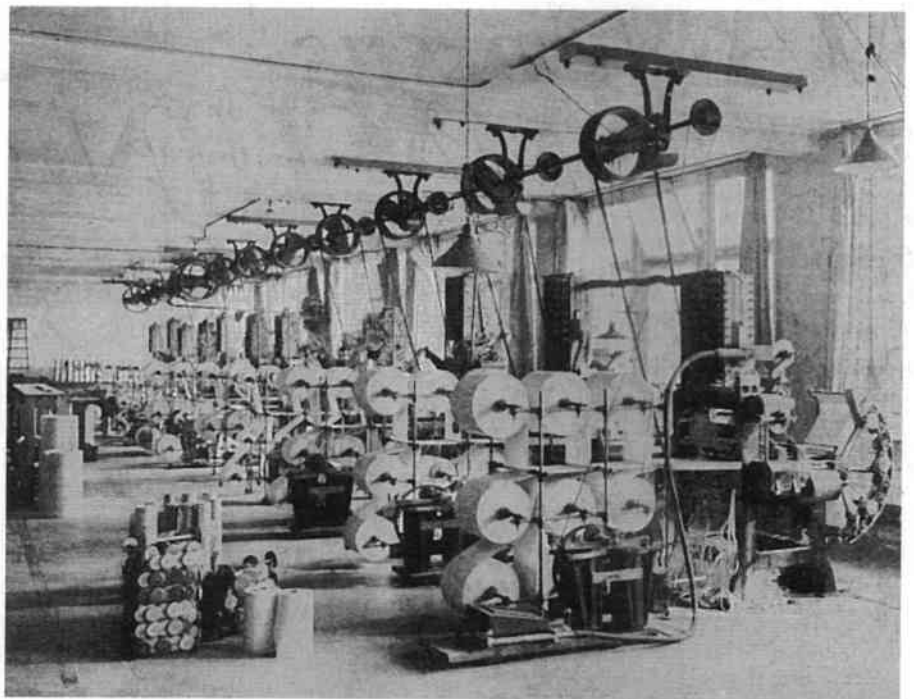
First "canned" food, later "canned" literature through the medium of films, and now "canned" music! It is a well known fact that a dress-buyer will pay an enormous price for a women's model in Paris, and in a month he will reproduce it in all the American women's shops, exactly copied, but costing only a fraction of the original price. Still, someone has to create the model, and there remains a ray of hope for the artist performer in this direction. The robot has not yet been invented who can create anything, but that is not to say that it will not be able to do so one day, for in this time of stupendous invention one is afraid to say that anything is impossible. In the



A "robot" public speaker, who recently opened an exhibition in London. Shall we next have "robot" *prime donne*?

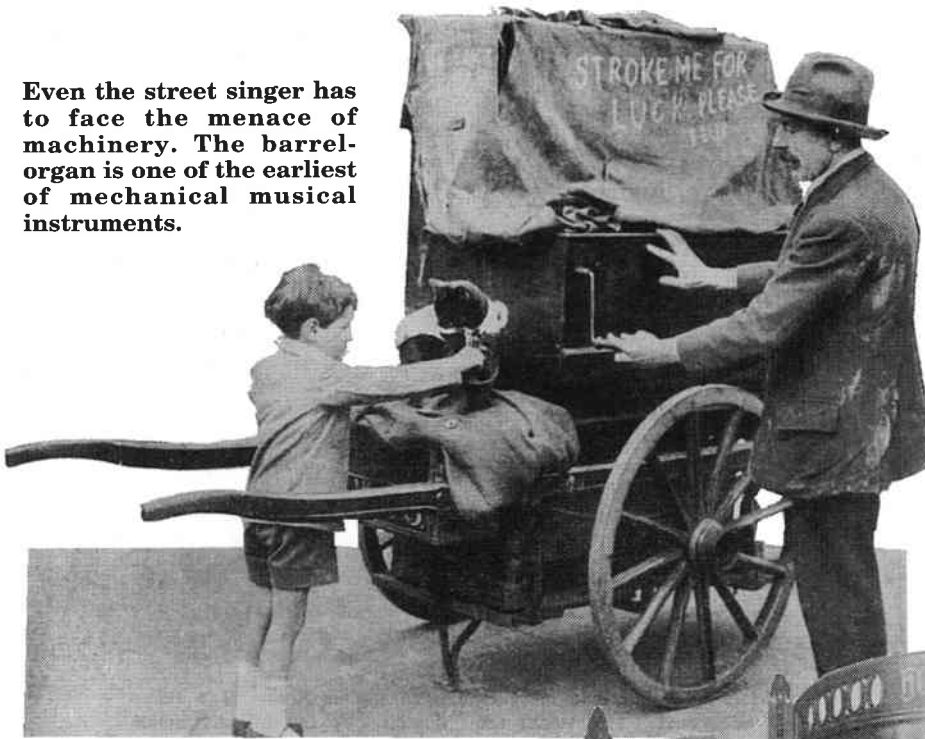
meantime how many customs have been changed through the coming of the machine into the entertainment world!

Not more than thirty years ago it was the habit when people gave parties for the host to ask any of the guests, who could sing or play at all tolerably, to do so for the general entertainment. Nowadays, if the company at a party cannot



Part of a factory devoted to the manufacture of rolls for automatic pianos.

Even the street singer has to face the menace of machinery. The barrel-organ is one of the earliest of mechanical musical instruments.

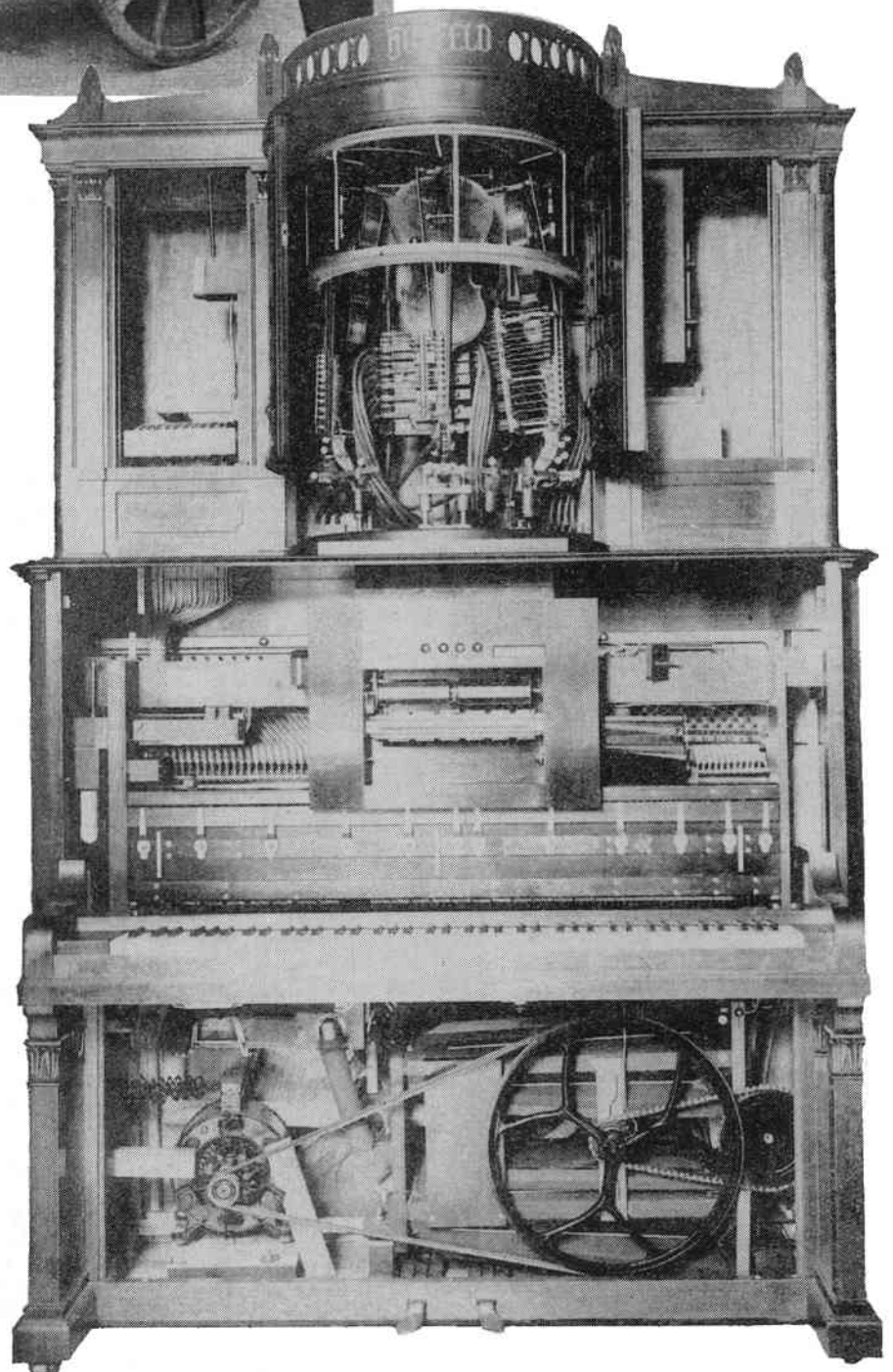


had discovered that a most admirable pottery had been in existence in a certain part of Mexico until quite lately, and was made by the natives there. But when the tin and aluminium pots came from the United States were introduced into the country, the native art of pottery died out. Being anxious to revive this lost art, my expert searched until he had discovered an old woman

This formidable machine plays four violins automatically, to a piano accompaniment! The violins are "bowed" by the rotating horse-hair which is seen encircling them.

find enough to talk about, or if they do not play Bridge, the radio, pianola, or gramophone is turned on to divert them. The resulting entertainment is no doubt better in quality than the old-fashioned kind, but will young people feel encouraged to learn to sing and to play when they can get a certain photographic perfection of performance in the art which they might be thinking of studying, and that without any effort whatsoever on their part beyond going to a shop and buying a record, or a roll, or a radio set? Possibly this particular effect of the machine on the public may have no important bearing upon the future of music in general, but it is a point which must give cause for reflection.

I think everyone will agree that, so far, machine-made art, like machine-made goods, lacks that indefinable quality which the direct action of a human worker alone can give to his material. Hand-sewn boots (to take a banal instance) are still better than machine-made boots, but machine-made boots have come to stay all the same. A well-known art expert told me lately how he

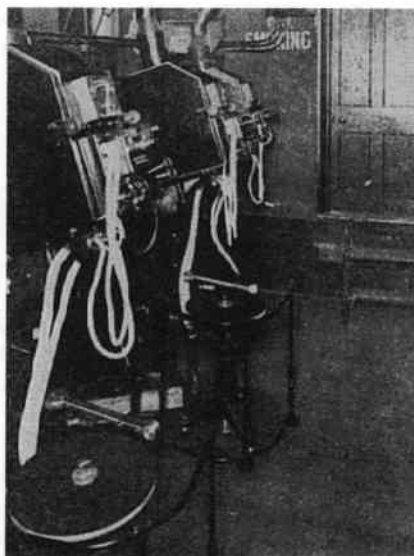




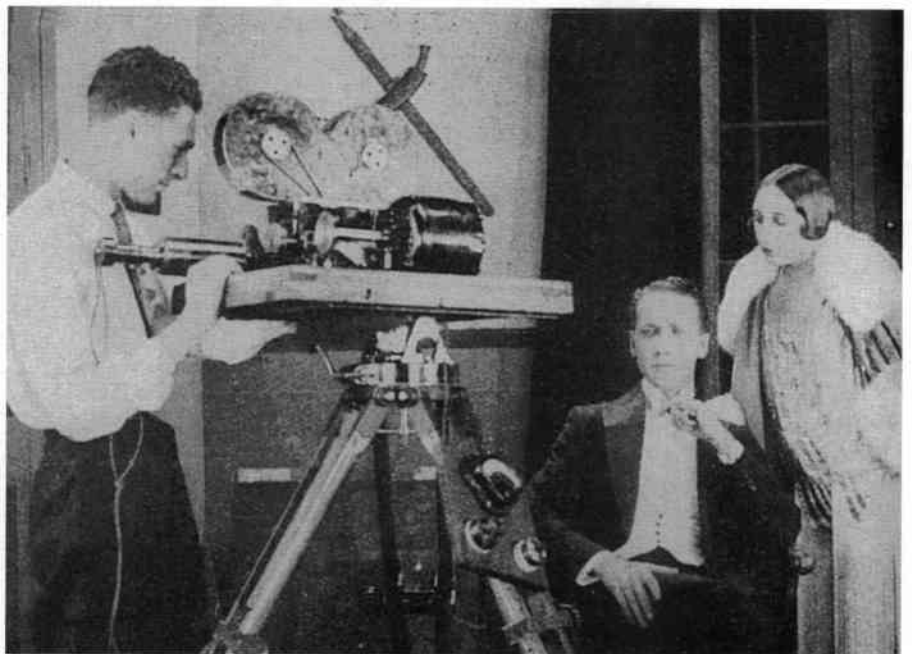
**Mr. Mark Hambourg about to record in a German studio.**

in a village where the pottery had flourished; she had actually been employed in making it in her youth. Overjoyed at having found such a link with the past, he provided the old lady with all that she asked for in the way of material and started her to work at the pottery again. What was his disappointment to find that, though she could make a kind of pottery somewhat akin to the old stuff, her work was absolutely inferior in colour, form, and design to the original? Though she had known how to make the genuine article in her youth, she had forgotten. The artistic *individuality* had flown after a lapse of not more than a few decades, on account of the easy-to-come-by, ready-made goods.

The earliest form of reproducing musical machine which I can remember playing for was that which I saw when I was touring in Australia as a boy. This was the phonograph, invented by the celebrated Edison, and with it one had to play on to a wax disc cylinder. I used to make use of it to send pieces played by myself as greetings to my parents instead of writing them letters, which I detested doing. I can also recollect Zimmerman's



**The apparatus which reproduces the sound part of a "talking-film."**



**Simultaneous filming and recording of a scene for the "talkies."**

mechanical piano in Moscow in the 'nineties, on which instrument half the notes would always stick; but still everyone regarded it with wonder and awe as a machine whose ingenuity could only have been inspired by the devil himself.

What would those wondering Moscovites have said could they have heard the modern mechanical organs, with all their elaborate sounds and devices? I was amused this year, when I went to record for a mechanical piano abroad, to find a musician sitting in a box near me while I played, his purpose being to take down on a slate any mistakes I might make. He was, in fact, a regular "Beckmesser," like the famous character in Wagner's "Mastersingers." Such faults as he noted would afterwards be rectified on a recording roll. He told me that his work was often very arduous when he had to correct elaborate technical pieces, and he also confided to me that his firm had once engaged a pianist, who had a great reputation as an interpreter, to play for them. He possessed small or, at least, uncertain technical equipment. They persuaded him,





An enlarged positive from a portion of a sound-film. The sounds are recorded on the shaded band on the left. A beam of light passing through this band on to a photo-electric cell operates the loud-speaker.

however, to record Chopin's study in Thirds by playing only the top notes of the thirds, whilst the lower ones were cut into the roll afterwards by the professors who stood by! He said that the piece came out admirably on the machine; everything sounded so smooth and easy in this most difficult of Chopin's technical studies!

With gramophone recording, however, such after-thoughts are not possible. For the gramophone is the faithful servant of the recorder, and produces infallibly by means of the microphone only that which the performer himself has actually played. The microphone is an instrument of so fine a perception that it is said to be able to reproduce the sound of grass growing, and that of buds bursting into flower. It certainly reproduces the intricacies of hard technical passages on the piano with almost too great an accuracy for the harassed player. For in pieces of music of great difficulty of execution, one or two faults in the playing may pass unnoticed even on a gramophone record, but when many occur the recording

instrument reproduces them with great fidelity, and then the record is of no use, and the work has to be done all over again. Absolute perfection of detail is a necessary characteristic of machine-made music, and as it is human to err occasionally, the deadly accuracy of the music of the reproducing machines is apt

after a time to give an atmosphere of inhumanity to the performance. I have known artists make mistakes purposely when playing for the pianola, asking the "Beckmessers" to leave the faults on the rolls, in order that their performances should appear more natural!

Another wonder is the mechanical violin, a very remarkable and little-known machine. I saw it in Leipzig and was struck by its ingenuity. It consists of four violins with a circular bow in a cabinet, whilst underneath them is the recording roll. The machine tunes itself, and is worked electrically, and plays the most difficult concerti with the utmost ease. Probably only its bulk and its expense prevent it from becoming popular. What an affair it will be when the same machine is brought on the market for the mechanical playing simultaneously of the 'cello, viola, and double bass! I have even seen a mechanical instrument for turning over the leaves of the music during the performance,



In the presence of Sir Henry J. Wood and Sir Oliver Lodge, Professor Leo Theremin demonstrates his apparatus for drawing "music from the ether." Notes are produced by moving the hand up and down over the wire loop seen protruding from the left-hand side of the machine.





Mr. Mark Hambourg

but this was not a success. The only time I saw it employed, the performer sneezed at the critical moment, and the mechanical turner fell down to the floor with a great clatter, and that was the end of it! The newest thing of all is the music produced from the air, brought about by only the manipulation of the hands. I have not myself seen this invention, but I imagine that, without the skill and knowledge of an artist to arrange the presentation of the sounds, no results of any aesthetic value will be obtained from it. It will remain a marvel of scientific wizardry.

With all this influx of mechanical performance into music, the artist must cling for comfort to the fact that, if he is cut off from serving his human public, at least he will remain necessary, if only to serve the machines. For the more the machine can produce of the individuality of the player, and the finer performance the player can offer on the machine, the better will be the record. No mechanical record, however, can communicate the personal magnetism of the performer, which seems somehow to elude the machine.

In living music, no two artists play any piece quite alike, and few true artists give exactly the same rendering of a work each time they play it. The main line of interpretation will remain more or less fixed, but details will vary according to the mood of the player at the moment. Apropos of this, I remember an amusing incident of my boyhood, when I had developed an unusual facility and speed in octave technique. A certain great pianist who was a friend of mine was especially generous in his appreciation of my ability in this direction. One day, when several pianists were together, he made a wager that I would play the Octave Study of Chopin in two minutes. I protested, but was urged by the others for the sake of the bet. I did my best, but when I had reached the end I was overwhelmed with reproaches by my friend. "Alas, alas!" he cried. "You made a slight *ritardando* in the first part, and I have lost my bet by two whole seconds!"

As regards technical achievements, the reproducing machines have brought about an unnatural situation in this respect, in that no feat of virtuosity on these instruments astonishes the listener, because he is aware that it is only a machine that is performing. Now some musicians like to dumbfound their public by devising monstrosities of great difficulty, such as playing two Etudes of Chopin together or performing a piece written for two hands with one hand alone! But such eccentricities would make no effect on a machine; they would appear to be perfectly simple of execution and would not be noticed at all in respect of their technical problems, but merely, in the case of the Chopin Etudes, for their peculiar grotesqueness of idea.

Whereas feats of agility produced by the human hands on an actual instrument never fail to excite wonder at the skill of the performer. This has not much to do with the actual question of artistic values, except in so far that technical dexterity is a necessary adjunct to the perfect presentation of all aesthetic ideas, but it possesses a significance for the artist player.

Well, if our lot in the future is to serve machines, let us at least give the machines credit for the service they render to mankind. This service is that they spread and popularize the taste and knowledge of good music. I find now that the populace at large talks to me enthusiastically about the classical masters, not to speak of Debussy, Ravel, and the moderns, whereas, in the old days, they really enjoyed (because they were all they ever heard) only such tunes as "A Bicycle Built for Two" and "Two Lovely Black Eyes," made familiar to them by another mechanical instrument, namely, the old barrel-organ of Victorian days.

But to return to my main theme of the case of the individual as compared with the machine; even jazz requires the wild energy of the Negro performers to give it its full significance, and when used for dancing, the jazz music of the machine, though highly effective, cannot quite give the vivid virility of the human band.

For myself, I do not really fear that artistic individuality will not hold its own even in a world of "robots." For the spirit of Art, like that of religion, seems to be unquenchable even in the most hard-baked times, and to spring eternal in some new shape or other in the mind of man. ■

# Musical Box Oddments

by H. A. V. Bulleid

Number 54

Famous American composers include Reginald De Koven (1859-1920). He spent ten years in Europe studying and singing in light opera with Suppé and others and returned to the USA in 1882 armed with a degree from Oxford University. After a spell as music critic and composer he found fame with a series of twenty-seven popular operettas and some 400 songs. In 1902 he founded and conducted the Philharmonic Orchestra of Washington, DC. Most of his work is rather late for cylinder boxes, but his great success, Robin Hood, often appears as do some of his other early works...

The Begum	1887
Don Quixote	1889
Robin Hood	1890
The Fencing Master	1892
The Algerian	1893
Rob Roy	1894
The Tzigane	1895
The Mandarin	1896
The Paris Doll	1897

## Comb washers

By 1870, the comb washers on almost all cartel musical boxes were of steel, domed and highly polished. The visible part of their convex surface reflects all the ambient light, adding a noticeable sparkle to the general appearance of the movement.

These washers retain their polish remarkably well. Rusting is generally easy to remove with 00 grade wire wool and if necessary repolishing with crocus or finest 600 grit emery paper. A curious feature is that they are extremely hard and decidedly brittle; occasionally they are found cracked or even broken.

I have it on good metallurgical authority that these excellent washers were made comparatively cheaply in large quantities as follows...

1. Punch, pierce and form convex face from wrought iron strip.
2. Carburize, 2 hours at 900°C.
3. Harden and water quench.
4. Polish in tumbler.

Carburizing involved heating the washers in contact with charcoal and organic scrap material such as leather, probably in batches of about 5000, weighing about 20lb. Polishing in a tumbling barrel is one of those processes enshrouded in mystique, and I doubt if we will ever find out either how it was done or how it was claimed to have been done.

## Geneva vs Ste. Croix

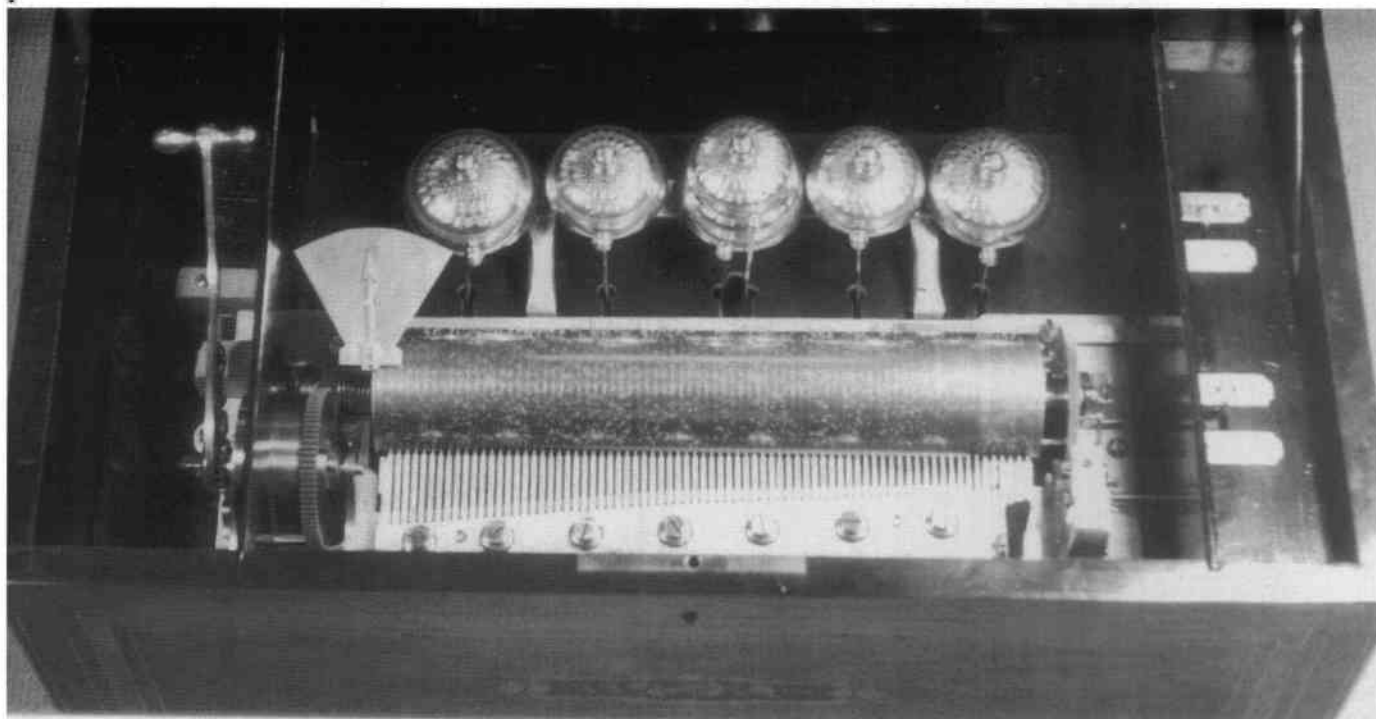
Proof that Geneva got rather bored with musical boxes after Ste. Croix took over as "the musical box centre of the world" in about 1890 came with Geneva's National Exhibition of 1896. An illustrated daily paper was issued for the duration; it totalled 600 pages – but only one page plus one picture featured musical boxes.

The one-page article is full of mistakes, now at last corrected by member E. Blyelle who runs the CABAM in Geneva. But on the credit side, as he points out, the article records many interesting exhibits, including a Duplex by Mermod in which the two cylinders can be played together or separately.

The Geneva makers exhibited large interchangeable boxes with cylinders up to 18 pouces (19", 49cm). Those by Allard & Jaquet included one with carillon; by Langdorff one Quintette; by Geo. Baker one with tuyaphone (tubular bells); and by Conchon a Polytype and one with long-playing device credited to Grosclaude (Helicoidal with device to withdraw cylinder from comb during its return to starting position).



Fig. 1. Ducommun Girod's standard tune sheet design, with mask over lyre, here 6½ by 3½ inches (17 x 9cms), with serial number written as usual in lower right corner and, unusually, signed and dated – London, Sept. 1877.



**Fig. 2. Ducommun Girod serial 7777 with tune indicator above the cylinder and with the bells tiered, highest treble above the second lowest in the middle.**

Only Mermod and E. Paillard of the Ste. Croix exhibitors included large boxes, Mermod's shown in the one and only picture; but of the five Geneva exhibitors four showed several large machines, many sublime harmonie plus innovations. This probably gives a more accurate account of the Geneva exhibition than can be found in the Chapuis book and shows, as Blyelle points out, that in 1896 the making of large musical boxes, often in ornate pieces of furniture, was based mainly in Geneva. This certainly supports one's general impression that these four makers turned out most of the very large cylinder musical boxes so far reported . . . but it leaves a mystery – why no exhibit from B.A. Bremond? and another mystery, why nothing from Ami Rivenc?

### Ducommun-Girod

Late Ducommun-Girod boxes, lever wound and with serial numbers to about 8000, were probably all made by Ducommun et Cie., initially at no. 7 Rue de Mont Blanc, Geneva, starting about 1862 – as explained in Vol. 7, page 60. They probably started a new line of serial numbers about that time, but retained their old style of tune sheets with side borders containing the names of composers and a lyre at top centre surmounted by a mask. Fig. 1 shows the tune sheet for serial 7777, with "6 timbres" rather casually added in the top border. Tune 3 is the latest, 1874, but run close by tune 1 whose premiere was on November 29th, 1873. The business closed in 1874 so this must have been among the last of the Ducommun-Girod boxes. The note dated 25.9.77 in the right border suggests it was first sold in London on that date – a delay in selling was to be expected at that time because stocks were high in London.

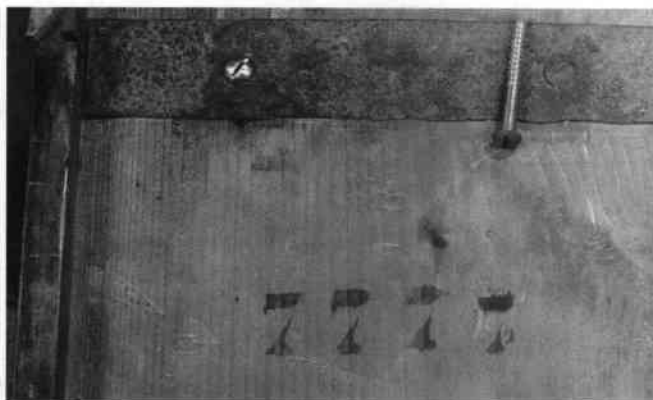
The mechanism of 7777 is shown in Fig. 2. Judging by my experience on the LMS Railway in 1936 (if you will pardon a small digression) when class 3 express loco no. 777 was always referred to as "three sevens," I wondered how this machine was called . . . "sept, sept,

sept, sept" sounds as idiotic in French as in English.

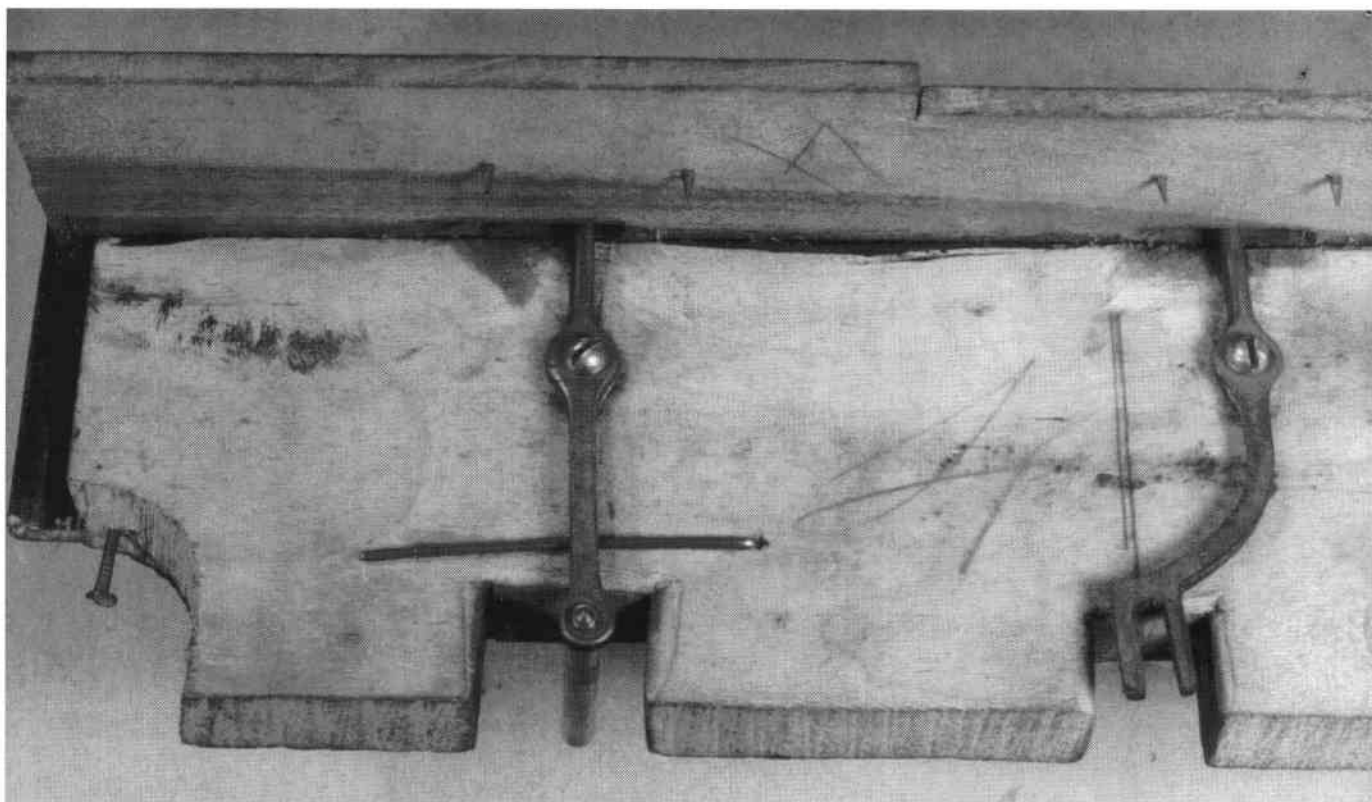
It has a  $10\frac{3}{4}$ " (27cm) cylinder playing eight airs on a 70-tooth comb, with separate 6-tooth comb for the bells. The *a* teeth (440Hz) are nos. 18 and 19, with relative stiffness 250. The teeth are numbered 1 to 7 in each octave on the brass comb base, the semitones having their numbers stamped sideways.

Blank code 0 is stamped on the bedplate edge and great wheel and scribed on end caps and governor. Figure 6 is scribed on winder, spring cover and governor jewel plate. Serial 7777 is stamped on cylinder details and governor and scribed on the tune indicator. Gear ratio, endless to cylinder, is 1664 to 1. It is a conventional 1875-period 6-bell movement except for the limited blank code numbers and the tune indicator which is oddly placed and disconcertingly close to the cylinder pins.

The case is longer, wider and deeper than strictly necessary but looks good with stringing plus banding on front, sides and domed lid and marquetry on lid and front.



**Fig. 3. Oversize screws and second-hand hoop iron used to secure the mounting blocks inside the case. The same stencil for 7777 was used to mark the bedplate under the comb.**



**Fig. 4. The cast brass control levers, the change lever offset and an iron wire slide under the thin play/stop lever to improve the feel. The curved cut-out to clear the wood spacer along the front of the case was made too deep, and crudely corrected with a nail, as shown.**

The bedplate is mounted on two blocks fixed in the case from below by 2" (5cm) round head wood screws which pass through iron straps under the case fully two inches wide as shown in Fig. 3. Heavy engineering!

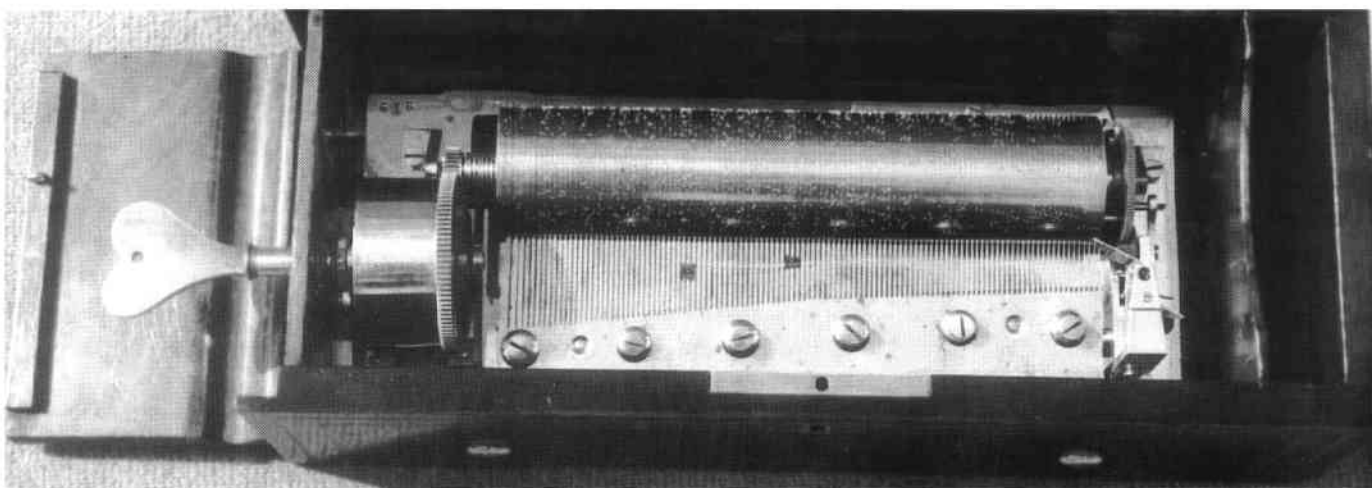
The control levers are rather spindly brass castings, shown in Fig. 4. Their tops are twisted through 90° for improved finger contact. The offset tune change lever, with central position marked by a double line, is a strange complication. It increases the spacing between the two levers, but to no advantage. As seen in Fig. 2, the engraved brass labels for the control levers are set at right angles to the usual positions. Sometimes Ducommun Girod, like some other makers, simply omitted them.

The performance is well up to normal 1875 standards except that the cylinder is pinned to play at .12 inches (3mm) per second so tunes last only 52

seconds. They are all well arranged, but there is no piccolo emphasis which at one time was a Ducommun Girod feature; but the bells are very nicely used and more than make up – particularly if you have recently heard a powerful piccolo performance.

A good early example of the Ducommun re-numbering is serial 616, shown in Fig. 5 with its tune sheet in Fig. 6. Its key-wound mechanism on polished brass bedplate, with 8" (20cm) cylinder and fine 4-air comb enhanced by the red case interior, could pass as an 1840 movement except for the inlaid lid and grained front with stringing and keyhole – and for tune 1 which is an excellent but less well known piece by Stephen Foster, about 1845, here credited to Christy who "managed" him after 1850.

Serial 616 recaptures the delightful attributes of the



**Fig. 5. Ducommun serial 616, probably made in 1863. Marks on comb indicate 440 and 880 Hz *a* teeth.**





Fig. 6. The 4-air version of the Ducommun Girod tune sheet, here 6 by 3¼ inches (15 by 8cms) and duly inscribed for serial 616.

very best "earlies." It has 115 comb teeth, very well exploited by the tune arrangers with satisfactory piccolo support. Even *Home sweet home* stands out as rather special. Tunes last about 55 seconds, cylinder surface speed .10 inches (2.5mm) per second. Endless ratio is 1375 to one. Blank numbers 12 and 18. Case measures 14¼" by 6" (36 by 15cm) with 616 twice written underneath, in huge characters.

## Dating

Many are the pitfalls awaiting attempts at musical box dating, among them boxes wrongly attributed; first digit of serial number omitted; tune sheet missing; all tunes many years earlier than box; obscure tunes; and bogus tune sheets.

Many tune sheets must have been replaced during repairs in the 1865 to 1895 period, when cylinder boxes were still cherished, which has added to incorrect attributions and perhaps explains some bizarre cases of a tune sheet being used by two entirely unconnected companies.

So it is despite manifest risks that I now offer my attempt at dating Ducommun-Girod boxes, based on over thirty reasonably safe fixes. The main uncertainty is the date or period at which their serial numbers reverted to zero, which I have assumed to be 1862 when the 40-year-old F.W. Ducommun-Girod company became L. Ducommun et Cie. as detailed in Vol. 7, page 60.

This and other uncertainties can only be cleared by more data, so please help if you can. In particular, data sent to the Register should include all tunes and relevant details.

If my dating chart, Fig. 7, survives scrutiny I will duly provide an improved version and give the key fixes. Resulting items of interest include two closely similar 8" cylinder 4-air boxes, serials 20207 and 616: the former in plain case dated 1840, the latter (shown in Fig. 5) with inlaid veneered lid dated

1863, both key wound. Like Langdorff and Nicole, the Ducommun's started offering lever-wind about 1858 but were still turning out some key-winds five years later.

Other makers who used more than one set of serial numbers include the apparently inseparable Paillards, and L'Epée – for whom I also offer a first attempt at dating in Fig. 8.

Two sets of serial numbers mean that large quantities of boxes have duplicate numbers – about 8,000 for Ducommun alone. So it is a measure of our meagre records that we have as yet not a solitary example of such duplicates in the Register. I hope the day is drawing near when at last its computer can cry "Snap."

In offering the shot at L'Epée dating, Fig. 8, I have assumed the second set of numbers started about 1880 – serial 1216 has an 1879 tune. The firm of L'Epée is still going very strong and when our member E. Blyelle was organizing their 150-year celebrations he tried but failed to find out this change-over date – the fact that it happened over a hundred years ago is certainly a reasonable excuse. Starting a new series at, say, 50,000 would save stamping and writing superfluous digits and thereby reduce errors; I think that was L'Epée's motive, but the Ducommun's more likely did it when the management changed in 1862. Nicole had a positive reason for apparently maintaining their series, to create the false impression that they were still makers.

Again, if Fig. 8 survives the scrutiny of members I will offer an improved version together with the more important fixes – of which I hope by then to have a better supply, particularly covering the tricky period from opening their new workshops in 1869 to 1880.

## Dating detail

Due to an initiative from the USA it became accepted practice, starting in 1891, to mark exported goods with their country of origin. It can therefore be taken as a reliable guide that a tune sheet stamped Made in

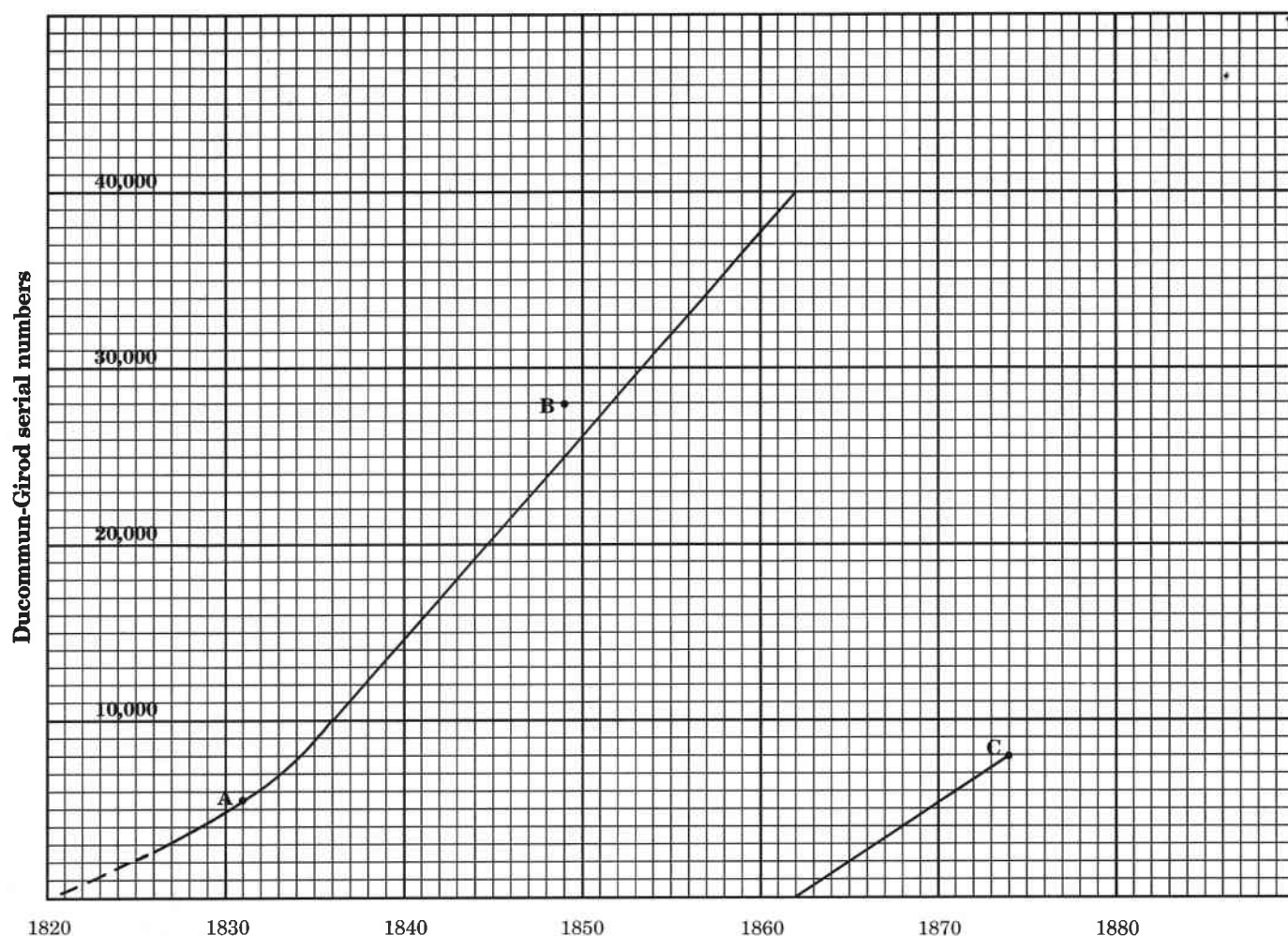


Fig. 7. Ducommun Girod dating chart. From the vertical scale, a serial number can be marked on the appropriate line and its date of manufacture read from the horizontal scale.

A marks serial 5518 whose spring is dated 1831.

B marks serial 28001 which has 1849 tunes.

C marks serial 7777 which has 1874 tunes.

Starting date of the second series is taken as 1862. Highest recorded serial number is 39580. Highest number recorded with external controls is 12061.

Switzerland (or, France) reached its destination in or after the year 1891. The converse does not apply—I have seen many tune sheets later than 1891 devoid of the stamp; perhaps the items were marked elsewhere.

## Musical background

Some very interesting autobiographies were written in the early 1900s by people who had been notable figures in the musical arena from 1860 to 1900. Here are two examples, both still available on request from the Public Libraries . . .

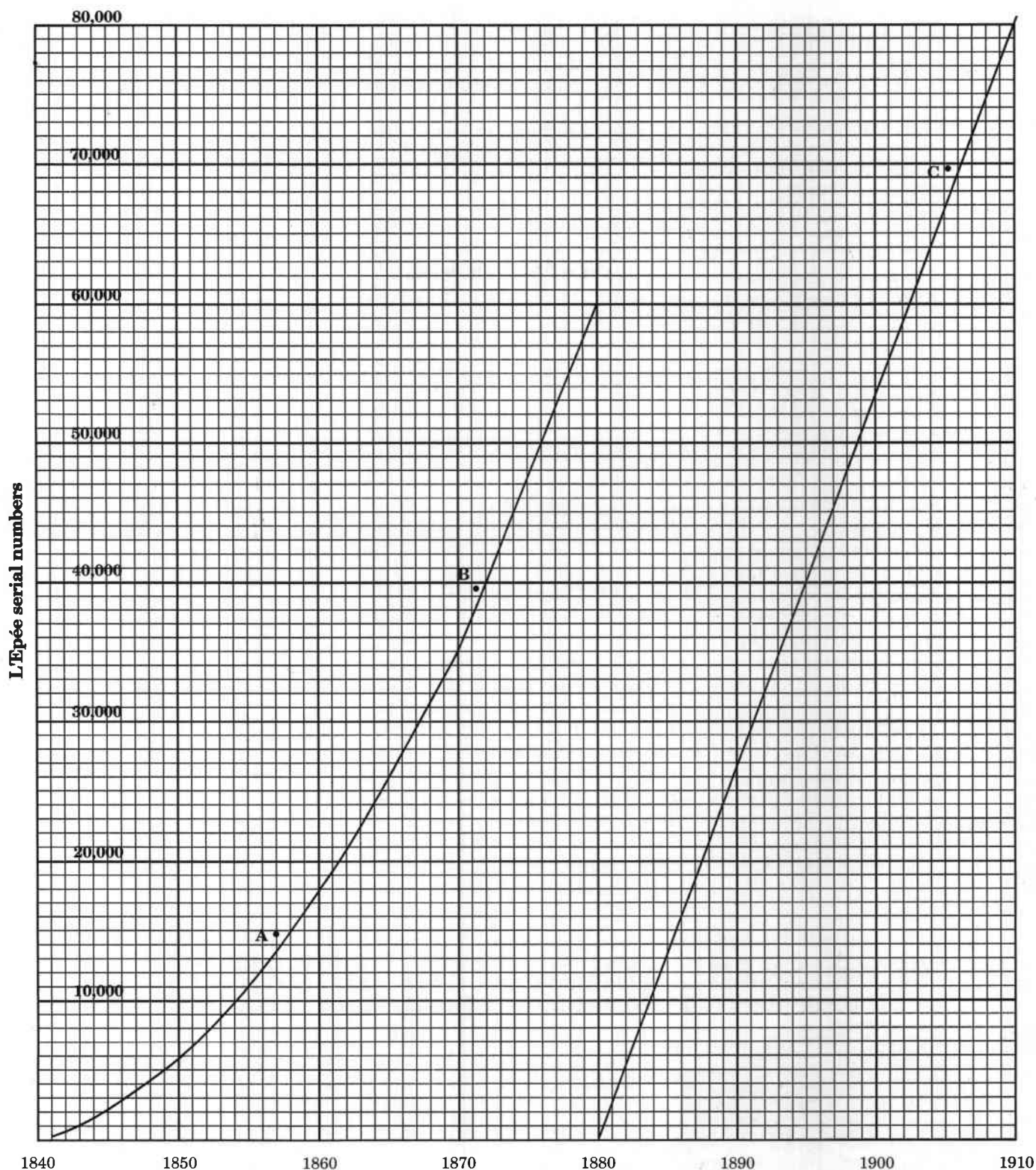
*Memories of a Musician* by W. Ganz (1833 - 1913) published by John Murray in 1913. Ganz came to London in 1848 when his father (conductor of the Opera at Mainz for 25 years) settled in England at the suggestion of Balfe. Though only fourteen he already had wide musical experience which led to his long career in London as teacher, conductor, composer and producer of concerts. He worked with many of the leading musicians and singers of what one might call "the cylinder musical box period," and he has much of interest to say about them. His own compositions were modest songs and dances and include two often seen on tune sheets – *Qui vive* galop and *Kutsche* (coach) polka, both about 1862 . . the latter, I must record, not mentioned in his own modest listing of his compositions.

*Jimmy Glover and his friends* by J. M. Glover, published by Chatto & Windus, 1913. This recounts incidents in and around London's music halls and theatres between 1870 and 1910, ranging from the comic to the sinister. One chapter is devoted to The Comic Song, giving many quotes and comments, and naturally lays emphasis on the big successes most of which duly figured on musical boxes. The quality of some quoted lyrics is startlingly bad, and makes you realize the importance of a memorable tune. For example, *In the Strand* (1861, by Frank Hall) has this first verse and chorus:—

For the last three weeks I've been a-dodging  
A girl I know who has a lodging  
In the Strand. In the Strand. In the Strand.  
In the Strand.

*Chorus* I wish I was with Nancy, Oh! Hi! Ho!  
In a second floor, for evermore,  
To live and die with Nancy.

This was given a powerful drum, bells and castanet performance on Bremond serial 14801; and the title at least is well remembered from tune sheets because the tune is extraordinarily similar to *Dixie* (1860 by D.D. Emmett) sometimes given as *I wish I was in Dixie's Land*. Some of these tunes crossed the Atlantic pretty briskly.



**Fig. 8. L'Epée dating chart.** The factory started in a small way in 1840. Tune limitations were enforced from 1861 until 1866. Production rate in 1870 was 2000 a year, with apparently minimal effect from the war interruption that year. A denotes the latest recorded key-wind, serial 14943 with 1853 tunes. B marks serial 39210, purchased in 1872. C marks serial 69710 in the second set of serial numbers; it has 1905 tunes.

### Orchestrion in the Black Mountains

Ganz devoted a chapter of his autobiography to the famous soprano Adelina Patti. Her charity jobs included annual concerts at Brecon, Neath and Swansea in the 1880s and 90s, all conducted by Ganz who with other musicians stayed for the duration at her home, Craig-y-nos Castle, which was very conveniently served by Penwyllt station on the Neath and Brecon Railway. Ganz also reports "In the billiard room there is a big orchestrion, which has a repertoire of all the

popular operas, a large number being those of Wagner. Madame Patti generally joins in these airs, singing them while they are being played. She told me that Wagner asked her repeatedly to sing the soprano parts in *Lohengrin* and *Tannhauser*, but she always declined, fearing the dramatic parts might hurt her voice. The orchestrion is generally wound up to play after dinner, to the delight of the Diva's guests."

How pleasant to hear these musical experts actually appreciating mechanical music. ■

# Audio Cassette REVIEW

by Ian Alderman

## Keith Harding's World of Mechanical Music

£6.99 available from Keith Harding's  
World of Mechanical Music, Northleach,  
Cheltenham, Glos. GL54 3EU.

It is more than 25 years since I first met Keith Harding, I was then living and working in a basement in Barnsbury while Keith was already established in his shop in Hornsey Road. The occasion of our meeting was that I had discovered some derelict paper roll, reed organ about which I knew absolutely nothing. But I knew a man who did. Keith and his partner came to my place to view the antique object and they bought it, giving me what I came to realise was a very fair price for something which I had considered worth very little. Time has moved on and both Keith and I have decided to leave London to get on without us and we have all moved into the country – me to an abandoned church in Dorset and Keith to an interesting old house and workshop/studios at Northleach in the heart of the Cotswolds. The move to the country gave us both an opportunity to move on to new areas – I have been able to manufacture

street organs while Keith has used the opportunity to expand his well-known restoration business and as a new dimension – his museum, which he has fittingly called his World of Mechanical Music. The recording under review is a celebration of that world – I will not call it a "museum" for that suggests something dusty and lifeless. That is not what this is.

Sometime ago I enthusiastically reviewed recordings from the Keith Harding Collection. What we have here is not the least like that and those who expect the same will be disappointed. Here is a personal tour of some of the exhibits. One is transported and guided by Keith's own special view of his instruments; it is as if guided by a kindly uncle, anxious that we do not miss the special significance of this or that development in automatic musical history. The early boxes come from 1810, (which is not very early), and we hear then many disc boxes. The choice of music is somewhat idiosyncratic, a polyphon is made to play what purports to be an Indonesian tune. I remember well renting a basement in Ladbroke Grove filled with old washing machines and two tons of pre-war bubble gum. Below this treasure I found an ancient polyphon and I whiled away many dismal hours by the light of a hurricane lamp listening

to it perform its one disc: Weber's Invitation to the Dance. The old lady from upstairs made tea and together we listened in the gloom to these sounds of another age, another time. This, I think, is what mechanical music does best.

But it cannot be denied that Keith's World of Mechanical Music stands for Keith's values and not mine. He guides us round the collection, speaking over our shoulders, and we listen in amazement to the percussion effects achieved by some of the instruments. The German cafe barrel piano I remember in particular has an awesome bass drum.

There are some tracks of old phonographs and gramophones. When we came to the EMG horn gramophone I felt an opportunity had been missed, for by then we had got to serious reproduction music and collectors were prepared to subscribe to special editions, and we should perhaps have been treated to Schnabel playing Beethoven, or at the very least, Amelita Galli-Gurci singing 'Lo here the gentle lark'.

Quibbles aside, anyone who knows and respects Keith Harding will know what to expect and this tape is a fitting souvenir of a visit to his Cotswold World of Mechanical Music. ■

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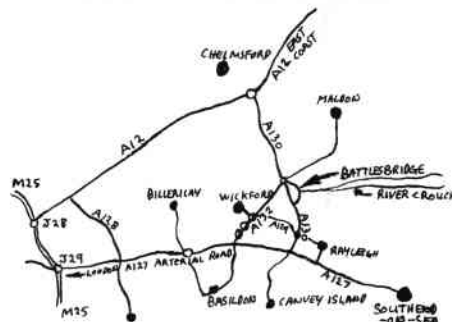
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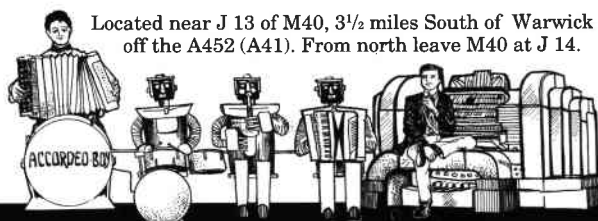
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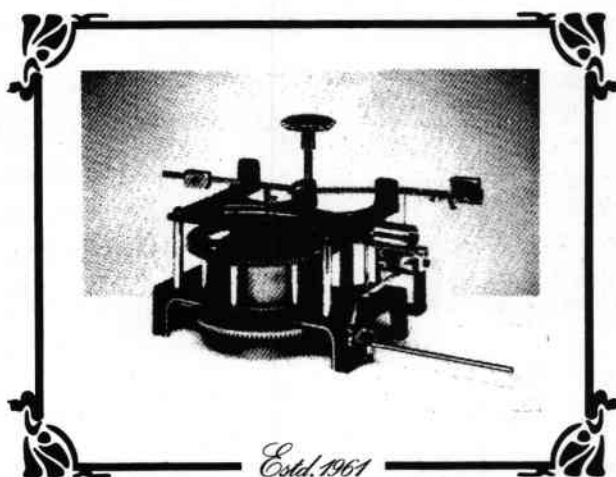
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*The Musical Box Centre*

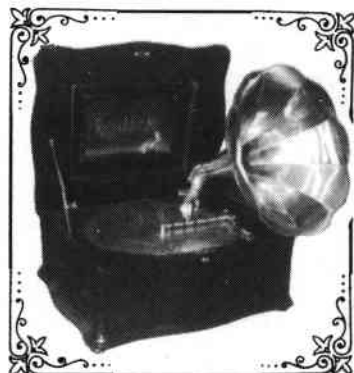
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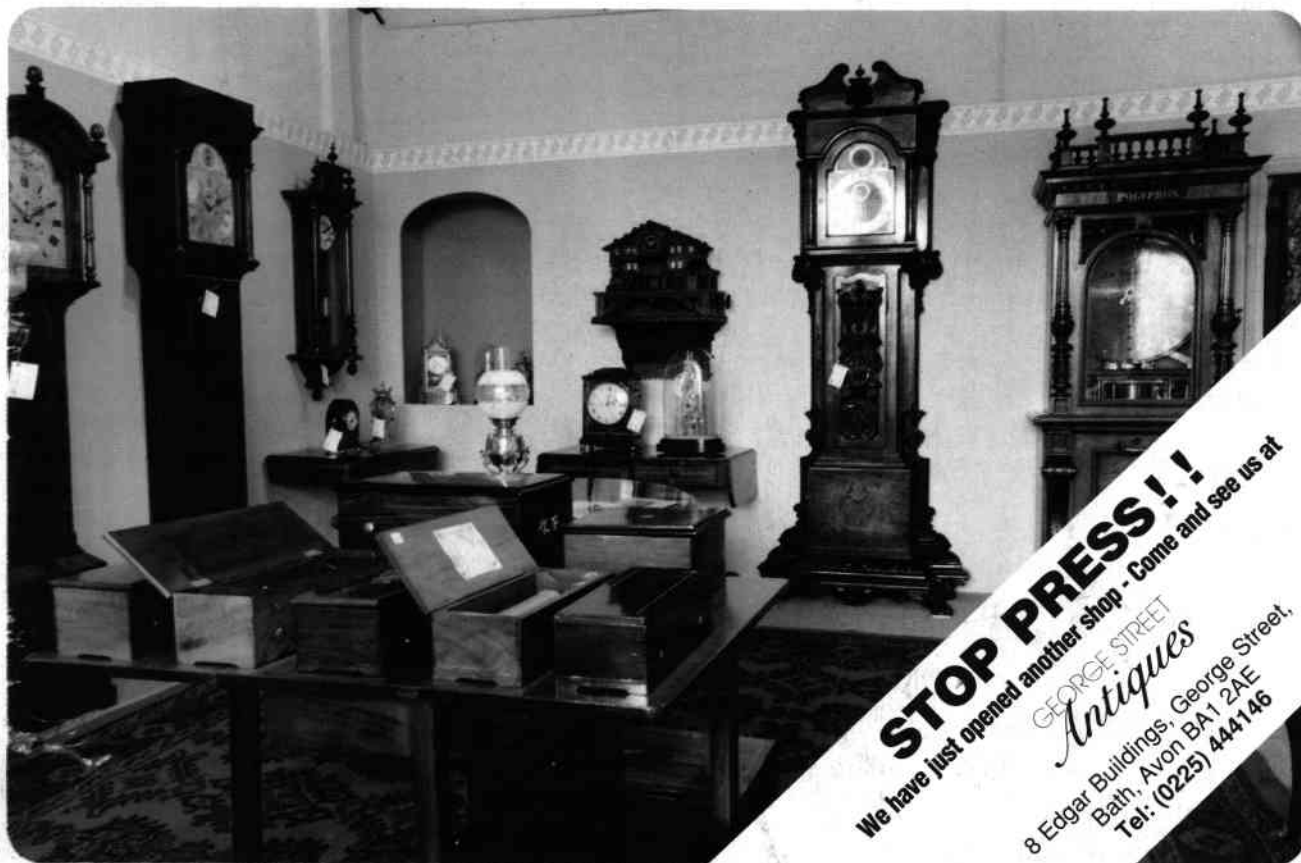
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