

# The *Music Box*

*An International Journal of Mechanical Music*

## **In this issue:**

- Essex Meeting report
- Cheap China
- The Roepke Musical Box
- 21st Century Mechanical Music



**The Journal of the Musical Box Society of Great Britain**

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Dreweatts<sup>1759</sup>



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# THE NICOLE FACTOR

in

## Mechanical Music.

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# From the Editors' Desk

Sadly, we have just learned of the death of a former editor of The Music Box, Bob Clarson-Leach. We have included a picture of Bob being introduced to H M the Queen, and the introduction included the information that he was the editor of the Music Box! During his time as editor of this journal, 'Society News' became a feature, with group photographs and snippets of information about members and their meetings. For the Music Box he wrote an excellent series of articles on the composers whose music features on many of the boxes to which we have the pleasure of listening. We shall hope to re-print some of these biographies in coming issues, so that we can all benefit from Bob's scholarship (or re-benefit in some cases!) An obituary will appear in the Autumn issue.



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Reading this issue, you, dear reader, are being asked to answer various questions. The President wants to know if you can suggest suitable places for Society meetings. Roger Booty asks that you consider his 'Cheap China' and help with dating the musical movements. In the Register News you are asked for help with the Guéssaz Fils et Cie and the L'Épée hymn boxes. Wonderful titles for hymns, but who knows anything more than the title? Do you own the missing Roepke? If so now is the time to own up. Our Vice-President, Coulson Conn would appreciate any information leading to the discovery of such an instrument. More technical research is requested in the Letter to the Editor.

Well, I have one last question for

you as this magazine goes to print. Do you still enjoy your collection? If the answer is an enthusiastic "yes" that is wonderful and it's the correct answer! If it was "no", then Laurence Fisher would be delighted to hear from you and has left his contact details on the auction sale report page (or you can put items into the Society auctions), but surely life hasn't come to that yet? Hey, the sun's shining and it's time to get out to play!

Time to get to the National Vintage Communications Fair, the AGM, one of the regional meetings or meet up with friends of similar interest.

Go on – you're spoiled for choice!

## Cover Picture

The World Record price  
Nicole Freres Grand Format  
overture musical box. See article  
on page 174.

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## *Dates for your Diary*

### **2008 Annual General Meeting & Society Auction**

Saturday 7th June 2008

Road Village Hall

Near Northampton

10.30 a.m. Start - followed by  
buffet lunch.

Society Auction 2 p.m.

**Why not come and join Us**

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### **Chanctonbury Ring Sunday 18th May 2008**

10.30 coffee for an 11am start

Lunch provided

**Saturday 19th July**

Open Day

**Sunday 21st September - 2008**

10.30 coffee for an 11am start

Please bring your own sandwiches

**Please phone Ted Brown -**

**01403 823533**

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### **Autumn Meeting 2008 plus Organ Grind**

Eastham Grange - Worcestershire

**Friday 12th - Sunday 14th**

**September**

Information Sheet and Booking

Form enclosed

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### **Essex Meeting Saturday 20th September 2008**

10am - 4pm

Bring your own lunch,

Tea & Coffee supplied

**Please phone Bruce Allen -**

**01702 232040**

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### **Overseas Trip 2008**

Speyer - Germany

**Tuesday 21 October - Tuesday 28th**

For more details please phone

Daphne Ladell 01737 843644

## President's Message No.8

It is that time of the year when we should be thinking of the AGM and our annual Society auction. This event is always interesting in that it is an opportunity for all of us to decide which way the Society is heading and for all to have their chance to express their views. The auction always provides a good selection of items of interest and of a type not always seen in a saleroom. It is also a time when we can renew friendships and generally have a good gossip. To those who are intending to come to this meeting, please see if it is possible to do a spot of car sharing. Good for both the pocket and the environment. For those desirous of having a little more time on the Saturday morning, do consider a stay at a nearby Travelodge. Book in good time and it is possible to get a room for as little as £9. [Really?- Ed]

Elsewhere in the journal, there should be information relating to the National Communications Fair to be held at Leamington Spa on the 11th of May. This year the Society collaborated with the organisers and our presence should be very noticeable. I personally believe that we should strive to make this an annual event using it as a tool to enrol new members and gain publicity for the Society. The event should be most interesting as the exhibition will have on view other items like gramophones and early wireless equipment.

By the time you read this the meeting in Brentford will have been and gone. I am sure it will have been one of those very exciting events with first class talks and exhibits. It is not every day that a new museum opens that is dedicated to mechanical music. I know

from the interest in this event and the number of early bookings, the event will have been popular.

The majority of our members do not come to our meetings. This is most unfortunate as I know they are missing a great deal. Of course the Society appreciates your support and dedication and without the silent majority, we would be in trouble but do consider attending an event every now and then. You will find them most enjoyable and interesting. Time and time again at the end of a meeting I have heard those attending for the first time say, "I really have enjoyed the meeting and I must come again."

I seem to have spent all my time talking about meetings, but it is important. What is difficult is finding new and interesting places to hold an event in a fresh place. We do need a musical content, but we can add other interests as well, so if you have any ideas on where to hold a meeting, please phone or write to Daphne Ladell our Meetings Secretary. She will be most appreciative.

Arthur Cunliffe.

### **The Music Box DVD** By Robert Ducat-Brown

At the AGM in June 2007 a matter arose from the floor, that our journal 'The Music Box' should be scanned and provided for members on CD or the Internet. Quite a long discussion followed and the committee were asked to look into the matter, reporting back at the next AGM.

After the meeting I was approached by two members, Roy Evett who

had first raised the matter and Ian Birchall, both of whom offered their help if such a project was to be undertaken.

The committee decided that we should look into the matter and a small working party consisting of Roy, Ian and myself was set up to look into the possibilities.

We visited possible suppliers in our various parts of the country and found one in Derbyshire who offered to undertake the work for a competitive cost. They also scanned some of our journals and provided a sample to show our committee how the final project would look and operate.

I reported back to the committee at the Coventry meeting when it was decided to put the project in hand. We discarded the idea of using the Internet for the time being, as this would involve a much more sophisticated web site than we have and would increase our costs substantially. As a CD would not cope with the amount of information in our journals we were advised to use DVD format.

When the project is completed the DVD will have an index covering all the journals up to and including volume 22, clicking on a title will take you to the first page of that article. It will be simple to navigate to any additional pages containing the article using page numbers, just as you would use an actual magazine. The DVD will also have a search engine and by typing in a key word, such as Polyphon a list of articles will be displayed for you to read.

All the scanning has been completed, but by far the greater part of the job, creating hyperlinks from the index to almost 3000 articles is still in hand. It is not possible to give a completion date yet, although we hope to have the project completed before the end of this year.

# Teme Valley Winders

22nd March 2008 at Derby – by John Farmer

The Teme Valley Winders went “On Location” this time, after Nicholas Simons’ kind invitation to meet at his home in Derby. There were some new faces this time, with Arthur Jones, Publicity Officer of the NWPPA, Mark Jefford, Membership Secretary of MOOS, and new MBSGB member Malcolm MacDonald in attendance, as well as several regulars (although the threat of blizzards had deterred one or two).

The meeting started, in Nicholas’ outside organ room, in the normal “Show and Tell” format with a nice little manivelle that John Moorhouse had picked up recently for £12.00. Although it had a non-original handle, and was missing some of its labelling, it played nicely and was judged a bargain. Kevin McElhone followed with a somewhat larger disc manivelle, probably by Adler/Fortuna, which played extremely well, had a nice inside lid picture, and brass feet and escutcheons. John Phillips had brought a book of cardboard music, purchased on Ebay as Racca music. However, it turned out to be wider than 48 note Racca and narrower than 73 note. Fortunately Nicholas knew what it was, and in fact the very instrument was to the left of the audience, being a Spaethe (or Späthe) Piano Melodico Concert 10, a large upright instrument using the same principles as the Racca instruments, but also having drum, triangle and bells. Späthe also made the less rare 30 note Piano Orchestrion, which Nicholas demonstrated later. This was news to most members, who thought these were all made by Racca. It seems that Racca probably licensed Späthe to utilise their mechanism, although there



*Nicholas Simons' American Regina Sublima piano. See also the colour centre fold for another image.*

are some significant mechanical differences between the two.

Bernard Weekes presented a large cylinder box with nickel plated parts, having 2 combs, probably sublime harmony, and probably being made by Ami-Rivenc around 1885. The case is very ornate with brass feet and corner plates inside, and having

the Dawkins Sphinx trade mark. It needs some work, but should be a nice box when finished. Nicholas followed with a recently restored snuff box playing 2 tunes being first class arrangements. Mark Jefford had brought along a “modern” organette – a Cotswold from around 1970/80 being the work of Peter Watts. This example had been owned

by Graham Whitehead, and Mark played several tunes, which are quite remarkable for only 14 notes. More impressive arrangements were heard from the Langdorff Sublime Harmony Piccolo concerto box brought by Colin Thompson. This was a very nice box indeed. Sue Titmus followed with a small but very tuneful wooden cigarette box that plays "Tavern in the Town" when the cigarette drawer is pulled out, and a very unusual tinsplate carousel, complete with tinsplate horses that whizz round as the music plays. This could well have been a hand-made one-off, but an interesting little novelty nevertheless.

Malcolm McDonald had acquired a large box needing restoration. As an experienced clock maker, he hoped to do much of the work himself, so was seeking advice. The box needed a couple of tooth tips, plus dampering and a general overhaul. The dampering is probably the most difficult thing to perfect, and thus might be best left to an expert. The 10 tune box should be a nice instrument when restored. Doug Pell showed a tiny "Mr Christmas" disc box novelty, and the simplest bird box ever – two pieces of wood which, when twisted, imitate a bird. He then showed an early Nicole cylinder box, around 20,000 series, with excellent arrangements, fitted into a more recent, but appropriate, box. John Harrold gave us a few tunes on his Weltmeister automatic accordion.

Having shown all the visiting instruments, the audience was treated to music from several of Nicholas's larger instruments including the Poppers Happy Jazz Band and his recently acquired Regina Sublima Piano from 1907. The latter is coin operated and represents the birth of the nickelodeon. It has a reiterating

piano action, a mandolin rail and a loud/soft action, but plays quietly, so probably wasn't that popular in noisy bars. This part of the afternoon finished with music from the Arthur Bursens Arburo dance organ (one of my favourites!). We were then treated to sandwiches, cakes and drinks before hearing more of Nicholas's instruments such as the Seeburg Style 'E' nickelodeon, the Hupfeld push-up piano-player which plays using 36 note cardboard discs, and several Organettes. Much of the card music used by Nicholas he produces himself, and there was some discussion on the materials used. A visit to the workshop and much discussion about the work in progress brought the meeting to a close.

For the next meeting, the Winders will return to Eastham Grange, Worcestershire, on Saturday 28th June 2008, starting at 1:30p.m. prompt. Those wishing to attend should contact John Phillips on **01584 781118** to confirm and get directions if required. Any instruments or items of interest are welcome.

## THE SOCIETY A.G.M.

Will be held at Roade Village Hall on Saturday 7th June 2008 at 10.30 a.m.

It will be followed by the Annual Auction, entries being accepted from 9.00 a.m. Please contact David Walch on 0117 968 4701 if you have any queries about suitable items to include in the auction.

Roade is situated about 2 miles south on the A508 from Junction 15 of the

## Essex Meeting - 29th March 2008 from Don Busby

This fine Spring day brought good attendance for Essex Group's fourth meeting at Rayleigh Church Parish Rooms. Twenty-one turned out 'locals', including two new members, were joined by welcome visitors from Chanctonbury Ring.

The meeting opened with a small display of marquetry works by Don Busby over a 50-year period. He retired his scalpel after finishing his last picture 10 years ago: this was a copy of Jan van Eyck's "Arnolfini and wife" which took well over 1000 hours to make, working periodically over 30 years. Don's small stock of veneers is now available to Group members for repairs to musical box pictures: let him know your needs.

Ted Brown displayed a small chamber organ dating from the 1750s that he bought at Sotheby's in 1982. The following year he repaired its bellows using split lambskin, which has lasted to the present day. Subsequently he has repaired or replaced external fascias and re-adjusted pins, knocking in or pulling out relative to a datum bar. Ted chose to do this instead of 'turning true' a rather bowed solid wooden cylinder that would have necessitated a total re-pin. He had the organ professionally tuned to a 1700s scale. Once, whilst playing the 8 airs to an audience of Country Dancers, he was told that they still dance to many of the tunes.

"Building John Smith's Street Organs" was the topic presented by Robert Ducat-Brown. His first build was a 20-note organ of simple design, with holes in its

paper roll allowing air from bellows straight into the pipes, with no need for valves. A more demanding and magnificent looking machine with 26 notes took him about a year to its recent completion. On this, Robert played a selection from his "French Collection", including "Mademoiselle de Paris". Detailed descriptions of air-valve manufacture, including parts made from corn-flake packets, and principles of operation followed together with methods for tuning and voicing pipes. Robert found that cedar for pipes and fruitwood for lips gave satisfactory results. How he made piccolo tubes and hammers and springs for his Glockenspiel finished his fine presentation.

Before we broke for lunch Paul Bellamy displayed a large gold-framed picture of a pastoral scene. The frame enclosed two musical movements behind the picture. Paul's inspection of tooth tips led him to believe that over the years one movement has been played more than the other. Both were once operated by a clock, which, on the hour, played one of the 5 tunes, pinned on each cylinder. Paul has recently re-furbished and re-dampened one of the movements: he intends to bring the second up to scratch and re-introduce clock control, together with a facility for continuous play which was never a feature.

After a break for lunch Paul continued by showing an automaton comprising an organ grinder, two maidens dancing and a spotted dog leaping to the music. Paul had repaired mechanisms inside the base using pulleys and rubber belting. Its 22-note movement gave a rendering of "Greensleeves".

As usual, Alan Clark did not disappoint with a large selection of musical smoking items. He played his cigarette dispensers of a wide variety of designs and ways of opening up to make their inner offerings available. Some were

plain wooden boxes, others had more ornate decorations: a 28-note 'Art Nouveau' pewter-like metal box, impressed with a 1920s young lady smoking, played "Itchy-Coo". The remainder of the programme was for anyone to show off their own items. Daphne Ladell started the ball rolling with her most favourite item, a 'Swiss Prime Commission' musical box of around 1875. Its oak box is ornately carved and gives a deep melodious sound. Daphne also showed a small 200 year-old American snuffbox in tortoise-shell that played "The Roundabout". She finished with a pretty snuffbox, circa 1820, in gold-wash over silver: her 'bargain purchase'.

David Worrall set before us two musical boxes, the first of which was from about 1830. It has external controls and when he bought it most pins were flattened, only about 1 in 200 were striking teeth. He has fully restored it, with its F. Nicole comb and Nicole Freres tune sheet offering 4 airs including an old variant of "Auld Lang Syne". David's second box, a recent purchase already fully restored, again from the 1830s, is of unknown make and played several nice airs.

Bridget Farley showed her "Brooke Bond Tea Clock" which she remembers from her childhood being associated with a tea vending shop at The Elephant and Castle. This was run by a Mrs. Utton (no 'H') and another lady: the former used to ask, "Would you like a horange?" An aspirated fruit! These tea clocks were given as a reward for tea-sales targets having been met. Bridget's clock has a Junghans movement, which plays music on the hour. Her second item was a modern Swiss box bought on a recent Society visit to Switzerland: it plays 3 arrangements by Tchaikovsky including "The Sugar Plum Fairy".

Roger Booty followed with a 120 year-old, 20-note Orchestrone organette. This is similar to John

Smith's designs, but has simple valve lifting and is economical with air. A 3-1/2" wide paper roll operated between 2 handles can play for up to 15 minutes. Roger spared us with a short roll version of "Hail Shining Morn", a nice deep-sounding hymn. We then had to close our eyes whilst Roger brought out his Peerless Pneumatic Organ. This was in fact his Orchestrone with a British modification to allow endless rolls to be played utilising the pneumatics of the original organette. A cast-iron 4oz. weight outside the box tensions the endless roll. Roger has a case of 117 rolls embracing hymns, dances, songs and nursery rhymes. We listened to 2 of the 117, "Humpty Dumpty" and a general march.

John Natrass's 28-note Tanzbar accordion; Spaethe 26-note, 4-tune Melodeon and a L'Epée musical box were demonstrated on his behalf by Ted Brown. Of 12 tunes on the last instrument, those assembled could name only 3 airs plus one of Tchaikovsky's which was identified as "Dance of the ?". We wish John a speedy recovery from his ankle problem.

Bruce Allen told us how at first he had passed by a Swiss chalet style musical box seen at a local auction, but after returning to play it he made a successful bid for it. It is probably a 1965 Cuendet made by this family firm, which established in 1810 as watchmakers. Bruce also showed us his 1900 ceramic cake dish and a recently purchased American Cabinetto with 19 rolls, mainly religious tunes plus a folk-tune and "Rule Britannia". Kevin McElhone finished by playing a small disc box on which the over-long turning handle needs to overlay the edge of the table for it to be played. Kevin's new book about disc boxes is now at proof-reading stage prior to publication. Appreciation was expressed by all for the hard work by Bruce Allen, which led to today's full and interesting programme. All



contributors are thanked for making this a successful day and we are grateful to those who travelled from afar to join us. Our thanks are also due to Margaret Allen for keeping us well supplied with refreshments in spite of suffering from a bad cold.

Please note that the date announced for our next meeting at Rayleigh has been changed to Saturday 1st November 2008 to avoid conflict with other Society events.



*Beer stein with Thorens movement.*



*Mug (above) with Cuendet movement.*

## Cheap China

by Roger Booty

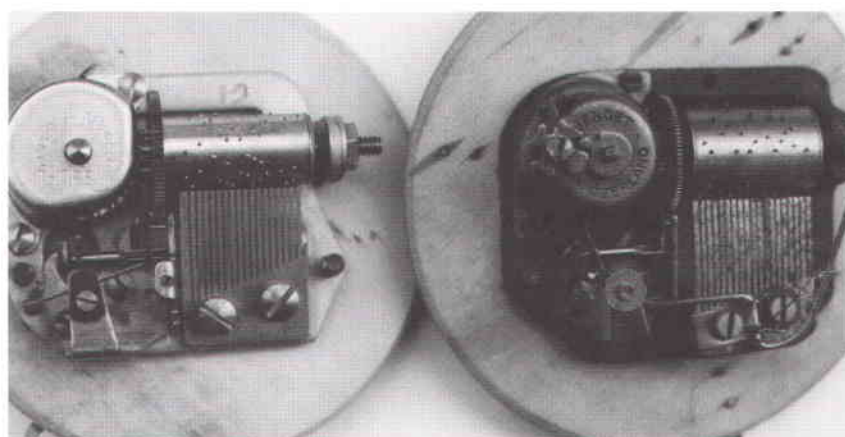
The current run of articles concerning the smaller musical movements has been of much interest to me. Unfortunately though, or perhaps fortunately, my collection of china containing musical movements is, shall we say, from the peanuts end of the market. The two pieces shown here came at the price of £3.00 for the two, but I must admit that both were offered as not working.

In the case of the stein this turned out to be an overwound spring, but the mug was a little worse, or at least that is how it sounded at the point of purchase. Winding the key produced a very quick rendition of the musical arrangement. Oh dear, don't do that again in case bits start flying off. Happily the trouble was not that dire, it was only the fan which had come adrift from its bearings, a problem quickly solved to allow "Tavern in the Town" to sing out nearly as new. This note brings me to the reason for this little story, can anyone out there knowledgeable in the world of music box dating, give me an idea of the date of manufacturer of these two items?

The stein has a Thorens 18 note all metal movement playing "Der alte Spinnrad", - "The Old Spinning Wheel". The lid is made from the grey pewter coloured metal which I consider to date it to pre 1960, from which time the lids had a cheaper look being made with a bright finish. The "Souvenir of Scotland" mug is obviously, to me of little musical movement knowledge, a much older item. Here we have a 19 tooth Guendet movement which not only has the on/off peg for use in a mug but also an on/off wire, seen pivoted and sprung across the bottom of the comb, of the type for use in a chalet or jewel box perhaps. The part that makes me think this movement is older though, is the Geneva stop mechanism fitted. Surely something so unrequired on a small piece like this must mean that date wise it goes back to, - when?

So the stein I date to the 1950s, the mug perhaps the 1920s. I am open to all comments from, 'spot on1, to 'silly old fool' !

*(Any comments can be passed on - Ed)*



*The two movements (Thorens on left)*

# Register News. No: 59

Box number 8,000 has recently been added to the Register so marking another milestone in Register work. It has taken 34 years to get to this stage, so I really must speed up a little as an average of 235.29411 boxes a year is really not good enough!

About one third of the boxes were made by Nicole which shows just how influential they were in those days. It also indicates that their products were held in high esteem. Firms like Paillard actually made many more boxes and the big players like Bremond and L'Epee also made substantial numbers, but for some reason their products do not appear to have the same survival rate. This I find very strange.

Considering the vast numbers of musical boxes made during the Victorian and early Edwardian period, the total survival rate is relatively poor. This may illustrate that the "throw away" society is not just a modern phonema but even in those far off days when new and exciting products came along, the humble musical box was quickly discarded and forgotten.

Looking at Ernst Holzweissig's tune sheet on page 103 of the Tune Sheet Book, we can see that up to now no identifiable maker has been associated with that tune sheet or agent. All this has changed as a Mermod box has turned up bearing that tune sheet. No doubt Holtzweissig either ordered the box to be sent without a tune sheet or he removed the official Mermod sheet to substitute his own. The tunes are written in German which would give an indication that the box was sold in Leipzig. Sometime since then, the box crossed the Atlantic and ended up in America. I suggest to those who have a copy of the Tune Sheet book that you turn to page 103 and make a note under illustration 178 that this sheet has been seen on a



*Comb of box with initials 'G R & Co' stamp.*

Mermod box, serial No: 72777.  
One popular type of cylinder box in the mid to late Victorian times was the hymn box. Once definitely unpopular with collectors they seem now to be recognised as having good musical qualities with tunes well arranged in four part harmony. A great number of these boxes played tunes by Moody and Sankey whilst others played the more traditional hymns. Occasionally along comes a hymn box that plays some lesser know hymns if not totally unknown hymns. One such box made by Gueissaz Fils et Cie playing no less than 12 hymns turned up with some strange titles. Among such favourites as Safe in the arms of Jesus and Hold the Fort, there came:

What means this eager? By Perkins

Oh be nothing, nothing only

More holiness give me

These last two came from the pen of someone called Bliss.

On a L'Epee box came two that puzzled me greatly,  
Haxton Chapel L.M.

Wanstead Hymn.

If you know anything further about any of these tunes, please drop a line to "Letters to the Editor" so that we can all learn.

Details about another box that were sent in for inclusion on the Register

proved to be most interesting in that some letters stamped on the comb have never been seen before. Someone in the Society may know more, but at the moment we have another puzzle to solve. The box is a fairly standard key wind example but clearly stamped on the comb are the letters G.R. & Co. within an oval. I have never come across these markings before and I hope someone will know who G.R. was. For the moment the box has been listed under the great unknowns. A close up picture of the comb is shown here.

Please keep on sending in details of your boxes as I am now starting to run out of material to enter up. I do have quite a number of the early auction room catalogues to go through, but boxes were not listed as accurately in those days as they are now. It is annoying to see fine examples in the catalogue and no one thought it important enough to mention a serial number! Another feature of these early publications is the quality and quantity of the musical boxes on offer. A great number were good and some exceptional. Where are they now? No doubt many were shipped abroad but some must have stayed over here. One hopes that one day they will turn up again.

Arthur Cunliffe.

# Bonhams- Fine Scientific & Mechanical Musical Instruments

19th March 2008 from LaurenceFisher

This London sale was the first of the four planned for Bonhams for 2008, and was attended by around twenty members of the MBSGB and a few from other related societies for the auction and view.

This was a small sale; however, with the lots having an average printed lot estimate of £28,000 and with the last such auction held on November 2007, this selection seemed to please members and other parties with rarities. This is what members can now expect to see from these fine sales in London.

Of the two EMG gramophones offered, just one (lot 11) sold for £2,200, whilst a rather impressive peach mirror-clad study suite with matching HMV radiogram managed to find a good home for just £400.

Moving towards more natural core mechanical music, the section entitled Fine Musical Vertu proved to take bids from the room, the book and at one point, six telephones relaying bids from four different continents. The very pretty gold and enamel musical snuffbox in the form of a box took £32,000 (lot 13) - the grande-barilet movement was signed Nicole & Meylan á Geneve, Lerit and the case was catalogued as being most probably by Piguet.

Next was a smaller than average gold and enamel snuffbox with interesting sur-plateau movement signed Golay & Fils which took £10,000 (lot 14), but for the ladies, a very bright and feminine rose-gold, enamel and diamond encrusted oval musical snuffbox with erotic automaton in the lid, made it to a museum for £30,000 (lot 15).

For the cylinder musical boxes, the selection was brief, but offered choice examples from the ever popular piano-forte to the scarce super-mandoline. The 4-air Grand-

*The unusual silvered brass tune sheet of Nicole Frères No. 32029. See also the front cover illustration.*



Format by Nicole Freres (No.32029 – Gamme No. 1396) managed to find itself the centre of attention as a new world record auction price (lot 22) of £27,000 (beating the level set by Christie's a good while back but with lower buyer's commission). The 19.5/8- inch Polyphon Autochange on disc bin made £10,000 (lot 20) and the small key-wind 'Super-Mandoline musical box with 88 teeth was knocked down at £850.

Six lots from the collection of John Powell was offered here, including lot 27 which was an early key-wind three-air musical box by H. LeCoultre. Although it was in a period case that was slightly altered, the dampers needing a workshop visit and the teeth tuning, it still proved a hit when frantic bidding saw it take £2,400 against the £500-800 estimate. The rest of John's selection for this sale was his massive interchangeable Paillard on stand with three cylinders (lot 26) which made £3,700, a Griesbaum No.2 (lot 43) for £1,150, a rather attractive French singing bird Callbox, with 1-2-3-4-5-6 paused sequence movement, soared to £3,200, but his coin-operated duet singing birds-in-cage struggled and was unsold (lot 49). This was sold after the sale.

The singing bird boxes in the sale were a top-to-bottom selection, with

two Brugier examples in gold and enamel offered. One full size and one three-quarter size (around 1/8th-inch smaller in every direction). Making £80,000 each, they are destined for a home abroad in Russia (lots 32 and 33). The two other fusee singing bird boxes (lots 34 and 35) were a Jacques Brugier and a Rochat, both in need of some movement attention, but the buyers were not put off by this task, making the auctioneer's gavel fall at £22,000 and £11,000 respectively. Before the next Fine London sale to be held on the 18th November, MBSGB and MBSI members can look forward to the two Knowle sales of mechanical music to be held on 13 May (to include the main collection from the Late John Powell) and the 30th September.

To discuss these two UK dedicated sites for mechanical music sales, please contact Laurence Fisher 08700 273 633 email:

laurence.fisher@bonhams.com  
and Mark Hannam 01564 776 151  
email: mark.Hannam@bonhams.com

Full results of all mechanical music sales held at Bonhams are published on the online catalogue via the department page at <http://www.bonhams.com>

All figures given here exclude buyer's premium.

11 May 2008

# National Vintage Communications Fair at The Warwickshire Exhibition Centre

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For any enquiries, please contact:

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Email: [info@nvcf.org.uk](mailto:info@nvcf.org.uk) a downloadable booking form is available from [www.nvcf.org.uk](http://www.nvcf.org.uk)

# A Roepke Musical Clock

by Cliff Burnett

(reproduced and re-edited from 'The Music Box' Vol 4 No 1 Easter 1969)

At the beginning of the year, we were called to see a large musical clock of unusual design. We looked at a dark brown, almost blackened case five feet six inches high and two feet square. To one side stood a two foot cube-shaped clock with dingy glass and brownish fourteen-inch square dial. Four three-quarter inch bolts protruded from the case for fixing the clock down. When we opened the door we saw a six feet long length of folding cardboard book music draped over the musical movement, suitably guided by covers which completely obscured the movement. An old gentleman presently showed us that he had taken off the back; we looked in and saw a large greasy spring and a governor, but little else. He proudly played the Roepke - it made a muffled, jumbled squeaking noise. I looked for the comb and found its lower edge protruding from under the nickel-plated shield over which the card ran. I saw that five of the eight comb screws were missing and the base end was raised on an old brass mirror plate one sixteenth of an inch thick. These faults pleased me, as there was an obvious prospect for substantially improving the musical properties. We glanced at the clock and were surprised to find the two-foot cube occupied by a clock measuring only four by four by three inches. Next



Fig 1. The musical clock

we looked in the drawer at the base of the clock. This contained three or four books of music, some fourteen inches wide, and some of the same sort but two inches wider from another larger movement. We immediately asked after another Roepke; we were told of something in the dim past, but what happened to it nobody knows. So we were content to acquire just the one intriguing and rare machine.

## Description and Operation.

The entire machine stands seven feet six inches high, it is twenty-five inches across and twenty-one inches from front to back. It has an ornate walnut case with legend and curly designs incised on the front and picked out in gold. The main body contains a musical movement playing a steel comb by means of folding card books that can be linked end to end to form an endless band fourteen inches wide and of any length. The slots in the card act on keys, which in turn pluck, a twelve-inch long comb with ninety teeth and a compass of five octaves. The scale is a little short of chromatic; many notes are sounded by two teeth.

The music is made up in programmes of several tunes each, and longer single pieces, and plays at a speed of three feet per minute. It is folded every three inches. An original printed 'tune sheet' was found slotted into the central window in the case front. This is reproduced here, suggesting that once a programme of music was made up, it was expected to stay in that order for some little time.

The music books we have comprise the following, which will play for a total of over half an hour:-



Fig 2. The music pressure plate

1129. Overture: Poet and Peasant, by Suppe (one book 8 yards long)

1001. March from 'Tannhauser' by Wagner.

1055. 'Soldiers Chorus' from opera 'Faust' by Gounod.

1006. Overture: 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' by Nicolai.

1120. Song: 'Queen of the Earth'

1125. Song: "Whisper and I shall hear (one book 14 yards long)

1008. Song: 'The Ship I Love' Felix McGlennon.

1025. Barn Dance: 'The Happy Darkies' by Godfrey.

1017. Opera 'The Bohemian Girl'; "I dreamt that I dwelt..." by Balfe.

1029. Song: 'La didliy-idily-umti-ay' by Rodger

1019. Song: 'And Her Golden Hair' Felix McGlennon. : v (one book 10 yards long)

The card is one sixteenth of an inch thick, and has quarter-inch square holes a quarter of an inch apart and running half an inch from each edge to receive the driving sprocket teeth. The musical perforations are five-sixteenths of an inch long by three thirty-seconds of an inch wide.

At the end of each piece of music is an extra perforation near the right hand edge to allow the spring-loaded stop-detent to arrest the motor.

The music book is changed by undoing a catch at the right of the pressure bar (which depresses the comb plucking keys) and swinging the pressure bar outwards. This is hinged at the left hand edge with a large taper pin. The book music has to be placed level over the sprocket teeth, and with the stop perforation over the stop detent tooth so that the motor does not start. Closing the catch releases the keys to press lightly against the back of the book music.

The pressure bar carries the maker's name plate, which has many English features, as can be seen from the illustration.

To wind the motor there is a nine inch diameter gilded plate on the right hand side with a gilded handle, fitting into an ornate circular escutcheon. The winding is smooth, the ratchet click being held away from the ratchet wheel whilst the handle is being turned.

The machine may be set to 'PLAY', or to 'PLAY EVERY 3 HOURS' or to 'STOP'. This

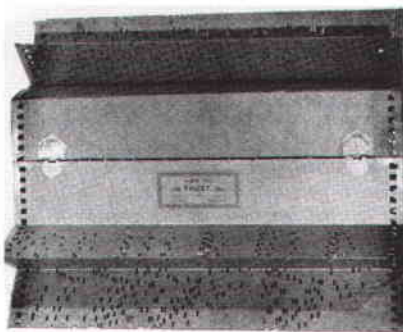


Fig 3. Roepke music book

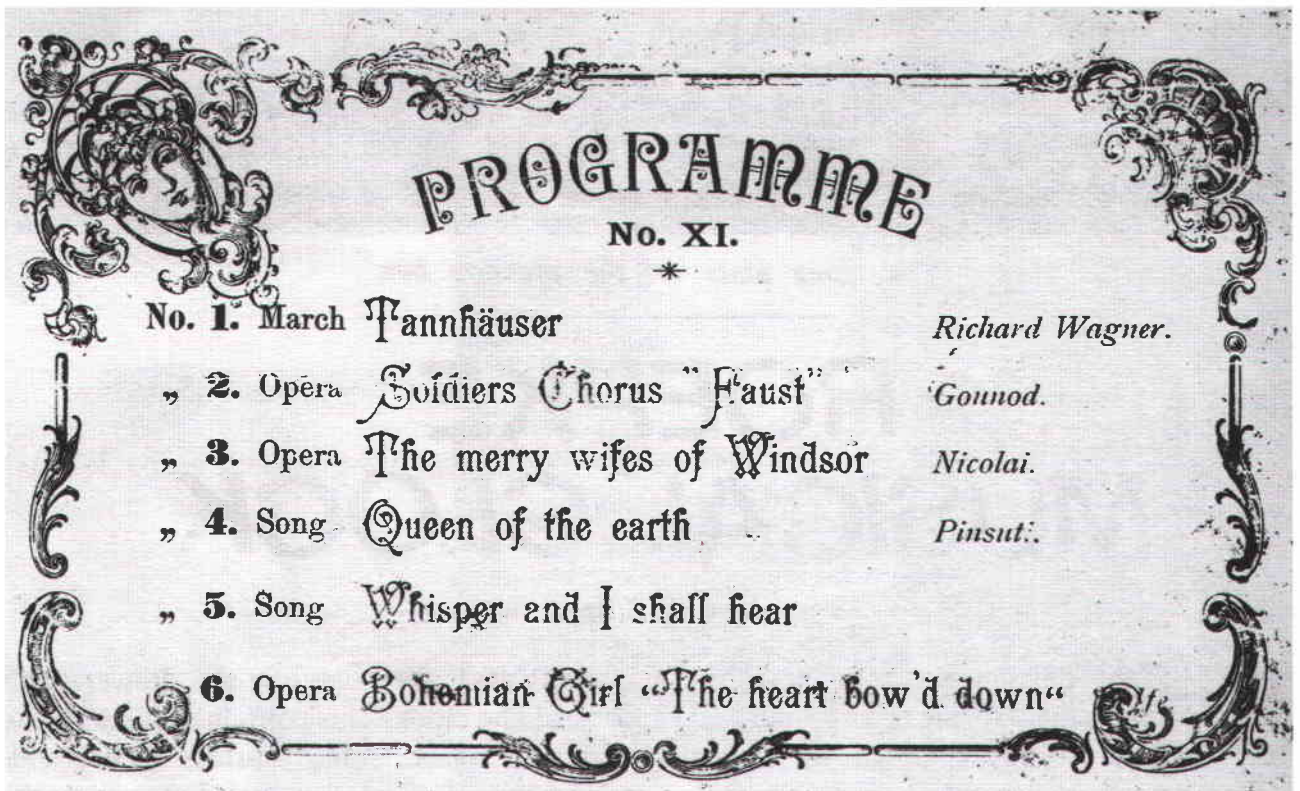
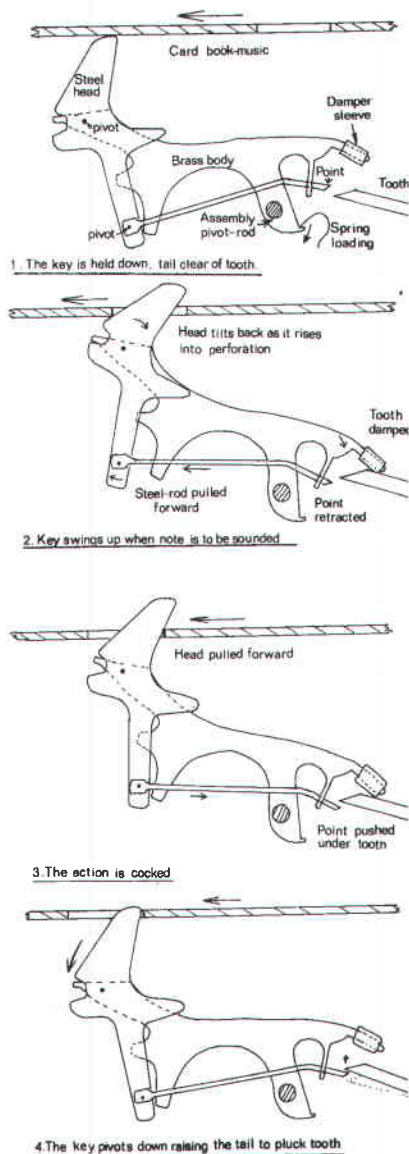


Fig 4. Programme card



*The key action*

*Fig 5. The comb plucking levers*

setting is by means of a pointer that may be rotated over a semi-circular gilded plate cast in bas-relief legend and patterns. This device, which I call the mode selector, is fitted to the side of the self-contained clock portion at the top of the main case.

Just inside the door on the left is an enamel plaque with the serial number 323. This number is also on the bedplate.

### The Musical Assembly.

When a slot in the music reaches a key it springs up through the slot. As they are shaped like dogs, I'll say that the ears

pass through the card. See the photograph and drawings. Simultaneously the tail falls and the point pushes past the chisel-ended tooth, the whole dog pivoting on a rod common to all the keys. The tail has a rubber sleeve that damps any vibration. The 'point' passes to just below the tooth (see diagram), then the trailing edge of the music slot pulls the dog's head forward from behind the 'ears', pivoting it at the jaws and pushing the front leg back, thus sliding the steel rod back till the point is positively just under the tooth tip. With the music slot still moving forward, the whole dog pivots on the rod, the tooth is undamped and the point pulls up the tooth at the same time, releasing it a fraction of a second later. Then the dog remains tilted forward under the card until required to strike that tooth again.

The twelve-inch comb is similar to a coarse, cylinder-box comb except that it has chisel ends to the teeth. It had to be honed just sufficiently to put back the correct sharp ends.

The key assembly was stripped down to clean all parts. After replacing this, I firmly mounted the comb in the best position with a full set of comb screws and no packing. I then had to adjust each 'dog' at the mouth so that all teeth were plucked with the same strength and timing.

The music is driven by two aluminium sprocket wheels of two-and-a-half-inches diameter and fourteen teeth, mounted at either end of the comb on a shaft which has a bevelled gear at one end, and a governor driving gear at the other. The bevelled gear meshes with another forty-five degree bevel to turn the motion through ninety degrees. From there, a three-inch shaft passes perpendicularly through

the bedplate to a small gear, which takes the drive from the spring barrel.

The governor is mounted behind the bedplate on the right and is of fairly conventional design. It has spring-loaded fan blades for compensation. There are two oil pipes that protrude over the edge of the bedplate and are accessible for oiling the endless when the machine is fully assembled.

Two brackets on the bedplate carry the hinged pressure bar when opened to release the pressure bar. The pressure bar has two long sprung rollers to hold down the book music. The same brackets also carry the cover, which allows smooth passage of the book music and has ninety slots for the keys. A spring loaded stop detent lever is fitted to stop the governor when it is actuated by the special stop hole in the music. There is a separate lever to lift the stop detent lever, carrying a little pan at the bottom of the guide tube.

### The Motor

The spring barrel is eight inches in diameter, and cast with a one-and-a-half-inch flange geared for driving the small gear on the musical chassis. Polyphonic stop-work is mounted on the spring retaining cross. The winding shaft has a tapered pinion that turns a six-inch diameter crown wheel mounted on the spring arbor. The ratchet is a silent type which does not suffer from wear as the ratchet pawl and wheel are held apart by the friction of a slipping spring arm when winding. The motor runs for fifteen minutes one winding.

The music overpowers most other musical boxes. It could serve as an extravagant alarm clock!

# The Roepke Musical Box

by John V. Knott, Coulson Conn, and Larry Karp

A few years ago, I (C.A.C.) was giving a presentation to a Spring Meeting of the MBSGB entitled "Bastard Disc Musical Boxes", by which I meant instruments that played a tuned comb, but used neither a cylinder or a metal disc to convey the music. These included the Ariophon, the Unikon, the Arno, the Capital Cuff, the Baskanion, and the Roepke boxes. It is also true that some early Polyphons used cardboard discs, but I excepted these. In an attempt to play upon patriotic feelings, I said that we would start with the only musical box to have been made in England—the Roepke. This statement was met with several denials from the audience, who claimed it was a German box, perhaps assembled in England.

My interest in the Roepke instrument was originally stirred by the work of John Knott, who, in 1969, discovered the instrument in the storage room in the Salford Museum, Manchester, England. [Fig 1] It was not a prized piece; in fact it was being used by the cleaning staff as a footstool. The museum's records showed that

the box was purchased in 1956 at the Auction Rooms of Capes Dunn Manchester for the sum of one pound ten shillings because it had Salford on the label of the instrument. On examining the box there was a label "The Lees, Warmsley, Bury" (Lancashire), which may have been the address of the original owner. On a metal plate, well above the music feed in and probably serving as a guide for book music, when this, rather than a small strip of music was used, is engraved "Roepke & Co. Ltd. patented Salford. England Orchestral No. 256". [Fig 2]

Inside is an ornately coloured instruction sheet in English, French, and German attached as a lid picture. [Fig 3] This also bears the title of "Roepke & Co. Salford England". There were no tune sheets, no winding handle, teeth missing from the main drive wheel, one leaf missing from the governor, and the governor jewel was missing. There were dampers missing, and a hammerhead from one of the three bell hammers was gone. In addition, the box was filthy. John cleaned the box and remedied

all the deficiencies except that of no music. The adjacent photo shows the comb, the pluckers, and the yoked drive gears on each side of the music. [Fig 4]

An effort to obtain such music was fruitless, and so it was apparent that new music would have to be arranged and made. John's son, Brian is a musician skilled in several instruments, and undertook this task. After identifying the 42 notes in the key of B flat, and determining the speed of the mechanism, Brian arranged two tunes: "Green sleeves" and "In a Country Garden", the second tune using the three bells of the box. The music then had to be actually made, and after several trials with paper and plastic products, the Knotts found hard fibreboard used in the electrical industry that filled the bill, and the two pieces were cut by hand. With the music now available, they then undertook to set up the comb and plucking levers, a difficult task as no doweling had been originally done. Finally, through a process of trial and error, they got the instrument to play music. It still leaves something to be desired, as considerable wear has taken place in the levers and teeth, the damper material was not correct, nor was any better found

The box's mechanism, seen in adjacent photos, has a double spring unit that gives a running time of approximately twenty minutes. The drive shaft has two aluminium sprockets that drive the perforated tune sheet forward over the levers that pluck the comb teeth. The base plate is made so as to allow a folded music book or continuous strip to be played. A hinged lever under the base plate is placed into position after the music strip is fitted, holding it in place. This mechanism differs



Fig 1. Roepke in storage.



from that described by Cliff Burnett in the Roepke clock, reported in *The Music Box*, Vol.4 No.1, Easter, 1969, p2-9.

To our knowledge, there is no other Roepke instrument in England, nor with the exception of the instrument shown in Q. David Bowers' "Encyclopaedia of Automatic Musical Instruments" p.248, is another table model by this maker in this 14.6 cm width, known to survive. In his write-up of the bell Roepke, Bowers mentions that the table models came in two sizes and the second size is known to have had a width of 10 cm. The Knott family undertook to compile information on Charles Albert Roepke, originally from Leipzig, Germany, and his company.

1888- He first appeared in the Manchester directories as a maker of musical boxes, watches, and clocks, living at 122 Corporation St. Manchester

1888- he set up business as C A Roepke Musical box maker at 13 Claremont Rd Moss Side Manchester

1894-5- moved to glasshouse St Regent Rd Salford

1895- manufactured the Orchestral music box

1896-7 became Roepke & Co. Ltd. Of 31 Lees St. Manchester

1898-9 moved to 33 Tib St Manchester

The firm then disappeared and cannot be found in either the 1887 or the 1900 directories. In Slater's Directory of Manchester and Salford in 1889, Roepke, Charles Albert Musical Box Manufacturer at Claremont Rd Moss Side Manchester is listed under musical box importers. On the other hand, he did obtain three patents, as follows:

No.6077/1890 Improvements to

music boxes- changing of tunes- travelling card music Agent -William Cadd, Manchester

No 41/1897 Improvement to winding devices for musical boxes etc.

Agent - F Bosshardt & Co Manchester

No 20713 Improvement to hinge fastening for tune sheets - belting etc.

Agent - F Bosshardt & Co Manchester

So we do know that Roepke was involved in musical box manufacture, but was it done substantially in England, or was he merely assembling parts made in Germany? One clue is provided by Arthur W J G Ord-hume, who wrote in Dec 11, 1975 to John Knott "While searching through records in the British Museum under the Music Trades Exhibition held at the Agricultural Hall in North London in July of 1897, I found the following reference, which I quote in entirety: 'The Roepke Company (Limited.) intended to show various automatic instruments; but at this time of our visit the goods were not on view as they had been "delayed at the port", as a notice informs us" '. This suggests that Roepke was importing parts and assembling them.

The Knott family undertook an extensive search for information about Carl Albert Roepke through the records of several Leipzig museums, various registry offices, and the death indices of the General Registry Office in London, all to no avail. Attempts to contact the one inhabitant of Leipzig with this last name were equally fruitless. So we are left with only the above information about the man and his company and its output.

There is one other source of information concerning this manufacturer: other instruments his

company produced. We will not repeat Cliff Burnett's fine article, but demonstrate a second upright instrument. Three of these upright boxes exist, and fortunately Larry Karp was able to obtain one of them some years ago and to have it restored. It varies from the other upright in that there is no clock present. This upright instrument stands 71 inches high from the floor to the top of the gallery, is 27 inches wide, and is 21 3/4 inches deep. [Figs 5 & 6] The original spring was broken and had to be replaced, so the running time is not original. The winding handle is unique, with a centre six lobed star above a disc [Fig 7]. The motor may be seen in the open cabinet and in the close ups. [Fig 8]. The instrument plays books of 90 notes, as does the clock Roepke. These books are of varying lengths, and contain three to six tunes per book. The music books are 14 inches wide; each fold is 2 7/8 inches wide, and the books contain 109 to 119 folds. [Fig 9]. They have a catch on the ends so that the book may be converted into one long continuous roll after being inserted into the instrument. The music is driven by yoked drive wheels on each side of the plucking mechanism, and plays the comb by means of pluckers. Above these is the pressure bar stating "Patentees Roepke & Co. Ltd Manufactured in Leipzig".

There is a slot in the books at the end of each individual tune, which allows a metal finger to come in through this slot, and stop the playing after each tune. The instrument was run by a coin op mechanism (not presently restored) so that one coin gave one tune, and multiple coins were needed to hear an entire book/roll.

The third upright Roepke box is in the National Museum, Van Speelklok Tot Pierement in Utrecht, The Netherlands. As Cliff Burnett mentioned finding some 16 inch wide books along with the 14 inch wide books that play on the Roepke



**Most of these pictures refer to the Roepke musical box article on Page 179**

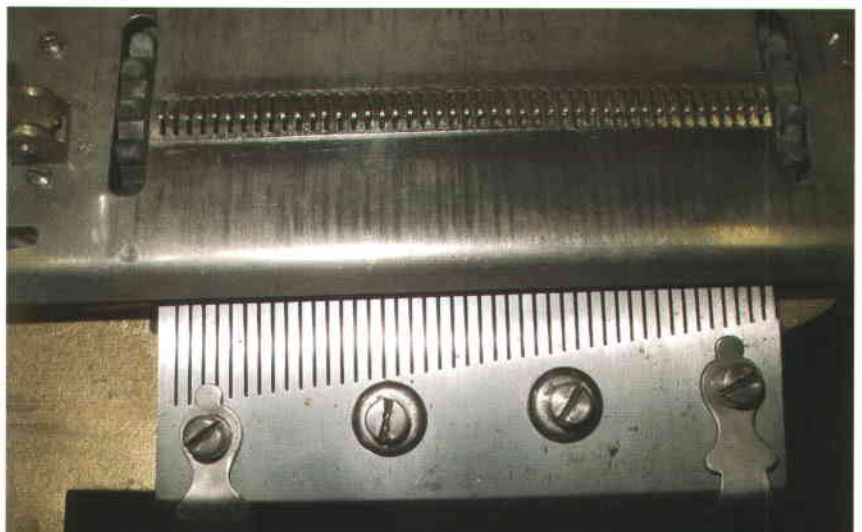
*Fig 2. 'Roepke & Co Ltd, Patentees, Salford, England'*



*Fig 5. Upright Roepke*



*Fig 3. Roepke instruction sheet.*



*Fig 4. Comb, pluckers and drive wheels.*



Fig 6. Upright machine open.

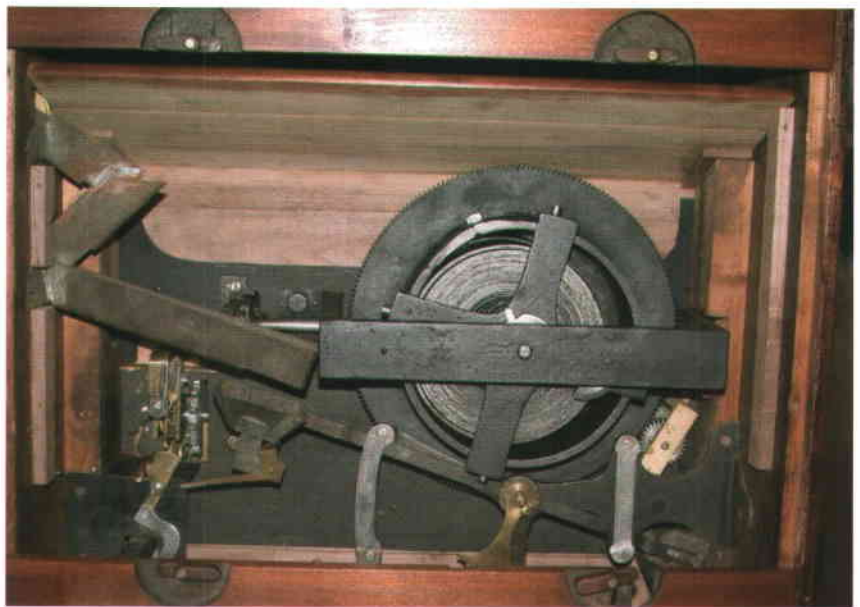


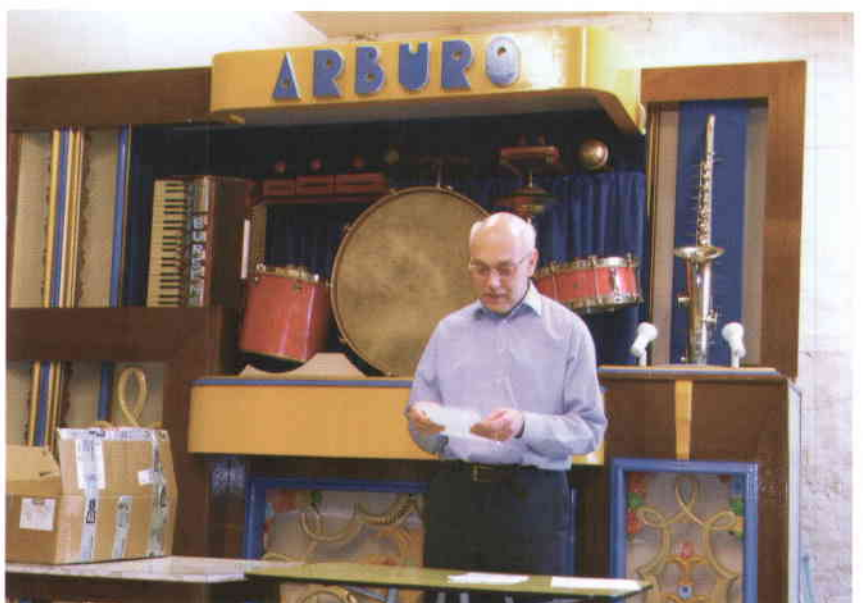
Fig 8. Motor, governor and coin release of machine in Fig. 6.



Fig 9. showing the folding cardboard music.



Fig 7 (left). Roepke winding handle showing fixing nut.



Nicholas Simons with Arburo dance organ see Teme Valley Winders report on page 169

clock he restored, one must wonder whether they play on the Utrecht instrument, or whether there is another upright Roepke (or more) out there, perhaps in England!

So there we have it! My distinguished audience was at least partly correct! This evidence suggests, through the pressure bar's use of English, and its Anglicised spelling of "Roepke" instead of using the German umlaut over the "o" and dropping the "e", that the parts,

made in Leipzig, Germany as stated on the pressure bar, were meant for the English market, and were almost surely assembled in Salford. It does not totally preclude there being some total manufacture in either site, but the small number of instruments remaining argues against there having been enough production to warrant the output of two factories. Such an arrangement is not unknown; its most prominent example was the construction of early Reginas using imported Polyphon parts. Let us enjoy one

brand of musical box at least assembled in Great Britain.

One final note: The table Roepke shown in Bowers "Encyclopaedia" was apparently in good shape and had music with it, which precludes it being the Salford instrument. If anyone knows of this instrument, I (C A C) would appreciate hearing any details.

*(The 'oe' in old German words and traditional names is a quite usual alternative to ö, even in Germany. Messages can be passed on – Ed)*

## 21st Century Mechanical Music

by John Farmer

Although most of us collect "Antique" mechanical music, there are quite a few modern mechanical music instruments available in the 21st Century. Some do take advantage of electronics and computer technology, but many don't. Hopefully the following will give you a taster for what is available now, and could well become collector's items in another 50 or 100 years time.

### Musical Boxes

The majority of cylinder boxes of distinction are made by Reuge, the subject of a comprehensive article a few issues back, whilst a range of smaller instruments in a variety of case styles is made by Sankyo. Selections of these are usually available from various sources including Keith Harding and The Music Box Shop (in Bristol).

**Disc boxes**, as far as I can find out, are only made by one company, namely Porter, in the USA ([www.portermusicbox.com](http://www.portermusicbox.com)). They make two single disc machines operating with 12 ¼" discs (2 x 54 teeth), or 15 ½" discs (2 x 76 teeth), and two twin disc machines using the same size discs. The instruments are built into high quality traditionally styled cases, and matching disc

cabinets/stands are available. Porter also produce discs and have a long list of available tunes.

### Novelties

Bearing in mind that Manivelles, Rollmonicas, Playasax, etc. were the novelties of their time, we shouldn't overlook today's novelties. The commonest are probably the little manivelle movements available for a few £££s which can be found with tunes old and new, and usually as bare mechanisms, but sometimes fitted into various ornaments (or under London buses !!). Perhaps a bit more interesting are the Sankyo 20 note (or more) movements which play from a paper roll. These are great fun, especially if you have basic musical skills, since the challenge of arranging a complex classical piece to play on 20 notes can be quite rewarding. Again, these movements can be found on their own, or fitted into a variety of cases – I have one disguised as a miniature fairground organ. Prices for this category range from a few pounds to several tens of pounds (usually depending on the case type).

Slightly more 21st century are some Japanese novelties mentioned in the latest Friends of the Musical

Museum magazine. They include an Edison style phonograph that records onto a plastic drinking cup – and it works, a simple Theremin, a miniature electronic piano which can record and play back your melodies, and an electronic hand-cranked organ in which the tunes are created by colouring in a grid on the card music, with a marker pen (instead of punching holes). I understand these may soon be on sale in the Musical Museum.

### Small Organs

This makes up the largest group of modern instruments, most of these being street organs. Probably the most famous of these is Raffin of Uberlingen, Germany ([www.raffin.de](http://www.raffin.de)), who currently make several 20 and 31 key organs. The smallest, the R20Z, is actually a reed organ (or organette), having just 20 reeds, whilst the largest is the R31/119 having 119 pipes. Music rolls are, of course, available from Raffin, but also from a number of other sources. Raffin have also recently started making a small 31 note flute clock available in several different cases. The tunes, although played on the pipes, are controlled electronically. As yet, I don't think Raffin have

produced a MIDI version of their other instruments.

According to the latest edition of *Vox Humana*, another German organ builder, Jaeger & Brommer, ([www.barrel-organ.eu](http://www.barrel-organ.eu)) have produced a new 20 note roll-playing organ which includes a "Tableau Vivante", an animated scene with two groups of dancers and an organ grinder. It is based on the original Gebruder Bruder designs. They are also producing a limited edition of 10 "Morgan Organs", commissioned to celebrate the centenary of the Morgan Sports Car Company. Each organ case will be to the customer's specification, but will feature the Morgan's distinctive radiator grille and carved figures in the likeness of founder Henry Frank Morgan and his son, Peter.

Alan Pell, the well known English organ builder produces a range of 25 and 31 note paper roll street organs, and a 45 note Trumpet organ, all in a variety of case styles, as well as the Harmonette 20 note busker organ which is hand-cranked but with MIDI controlled music. Alan also makes the Magic Accordion, a 48 note midi-controlled accordion mounted on a plinth with integral blower, as well as a whole range of pipe modules which enable the building of almost any size of organ. Alan is also an agent for Téanola instruments ([www.teanola.com](http://www.teanola.com)) from Nick Dean of Bristol. This range includes a card strip musical box (as described above), and a 14 key book-playing reed organ. Both are available ready built or in kit form. Dean Organs themselves ([www.deanorganbuilders.co.uk](http://www.deanorganbuilders.co.uk)) also have a range of 20, 31 and 36 note street organs available, hand-built to order.

This is just a selection of the better known street organs currently in production, there are many more, ([have a look at http://www.melright.com/boga/guide.htm](http://www.melright.com/boga/guide.htm)) and for those of a more practical bent, there are various designs and kits available, to

build your own. These include the John Smith organs (<http://freespace.virgin.net/chris.doe/jsmith/jsmith.htm>), Castlewood Organs ([www.castlewoodorgans.com](http://www.castlewoodorgans.com)), and Johan de Vries' design for a Small Barrel Organ (book available from KDV - <http://www.draaiorgel.org/english/index.htm>). To finish off the "Small Organ" section, there are, of course, the increasingly popular MIDI controlled Concertinas and Accordions from Thueringer Musikantenschmiede ([http://www.ziehorgel.de/produkte\\_en.php](http://www.ziehorgel.de/produkte_en.php)), owned by several Society members. These instruments are now equipped with radio links which enable several instruments to synchronise with each other, and with the new drum and cymbal set. They have also developed a self-playing Tuba, Sousaphone and Alphorn.

Prices for small organs vary from the high hundreds of pounds, to probably £15,000 and more, depending on the number of keys, pipes and case design.

### Large Organs

New Large Organs (those requiring permanent installation in a trailer, or static installation indoors) are normally built to order by specialists. Alan Pell's organ modules are available up to 65 key, enabling the building of substantial "Fairground" sized organs, whilst Dean Organs can design and build instruments up to 120 key. Johnny Verbeeck ([www.j-verbeeck.com](http://www.j-verbeeck.com)) can build you an organ up to 125 key, whilst the well known Decap family still exist as two companies, Gebroeders Decap Antwerpen ([www.decap-gebr-antwerp.com](http://www.decap-gebr-antwerp.com)), and Decap-Herenthals ([www.decap-herenthals.be](http://www.decap-herenthals.be)), both producing a range of book-playing and MIDI-controlled Dance and street organs.

David R Leach (e-mail [drl@pcuk.co.uk](mailto:drl@pcuk.co.uk)) in West Yorkshire produces large indoor organs, similar in style to the Imhoff & Mühle large barrel organs of the 19th Century,

but digitally controlled, as well as a MIDI compatible single manual hand-played organ.

### Something Completely Different

During my research for this article, I came across "Ragtime Automated Music" ([www.ragtimewest.com](http://www.ragtimewest.com)) where, if you have deep enough pockets, you can have almost any instrument played automatically. All of their instruments are MIDI-controlled, and include Steel Drums, various combinations of Guitar, Bass Guitar and Banjo, Glockenspiel, Xylophone, various percussion instruments, Calliopes (with or without Popcorn machine!), Band Organs, Accordions, Street and "Monkey" organs, and a giant Orchestration with what seems to be one of everything (cost around \$149,000). They also plan to automate Piccolo, Sousaphone, Tuba, Trumpet, Harp, Saxophone, Clarinet and Flute. They also supply a range of parts and instruments for you to build or modify your own machines, and will convert antique pianos and Nickelodeons to MIDI control.

I may have left out a few instruments and makers (let me know if I have missed anything significant), but I hope the foregoing gives you some idea of the wide range of new instruments available in the 21st Century. Although we tend to think of Mechanical Music Instruments as being artifacts from the past, I think it is clear from the above that is not the case. In fact it is quite possible that there is a wider range of instruments available today than at any time previously, bearing in mind that the originals tended to have quite specific periods of popularity as tastes changed.

You will have noticed frequent references in this article, and previously, to "MIDI" (Musical Instrument Digital Interface), which is, in effect, the modern equivalent of the paper roll, pinned cylinder, etc. Next time I will attempt to explain just what MIDI is, how it works, and its many advantages.

Patent Number 6077/1890 for the Roepke musical box. Other relevant patents are 41/1897 and 20,713/1897, both of which may be seen in Vol 4 No 1, Easter 1969 edition of the Music Box.

N° 6077



A.D. 1890

Date of Application, 22nd Apr., 1890—Accepted, 16th Aug., 1890

**COMPLETE SPECIFICATION.**

**Improvements in Musical Boxes.**

I, **CARL ALBERT ROEPKE** of Claremont Road Manchester Watchmaker, do hereby declare the nature of this invention and in what manner the same is to be performed, to be particularly described and ascertained in and by the following statement:—

The improvements relate to musical boxes, and have for object the changing of the tunes therein with facility, and the general cheapening of the cost of construction thereof.

To accomplish this and to effect my improvements, I provide what is known as the "comb," or row of vibrating tongues, of the ordinary description, or substitutes therefor, or additions thereto, mounted on a suitable frame, as is well understood. Instead, however, of operating this comb or the like, by means of a barrel formed with spikes or projections, I operate such comb by means of a travelling band or sheet of perforated cardboard, paper, or other substance, through special intervening apparatus, which intervening apparatus with the mode of action thereof constitutes the essential part of my invention.

This intervening apparatus consists of a number of dual or compound levers, one arrangement for each of the notes of the comb, and placed in line therewith, each being capable of receiving at the striking point a compound motion, by means of the direct pressure from the edges of the travelling perforated sheet. Each principal lever turns on a fulcrum, and is formed, by preference, with two legs. It is provided, at the end of the leg next the comb, with a small point or projection, which is capable of being caused to advance and recede to and from the vibrating note of the comb, on pressure from the edges of the perforated sheet being applied to the secondary or other leg attachment of the lever. The lever may be held in position by means of a spring or springs, or counterbalance weight or weights, or both; but, by preference, I employ a spring or springs for this purpose. At the end of the opposite leg of the main or principal lever is fulcrumed a second short lever, or equivalent therefor, which is shaped at one end so as to enter the perforations in the sheet as they present themselves thereto; and as the sheet is drawn over the same, by suitable mechanism, the perforations permit of the levers taking their normal or non-operating position. In the preferential form of lever, as the cardboard or other sheet travels forward, the edges of the perforations first press back the end of the short lever which is fulcrumed upon the principal one, and thus operates a draw rod attached to the other end; such draw rod passing through a small hole in a projection at the end of the principal lever, by which means the point of the draw rod is forced past the vibrator of the comb, when further pressure of the edge of the perforation operates the longer lever and thereby produces the necessary sound.

It is apparent that if the end of a simple lever is forced past a comb point, it will not be able to return to the first position; hence the function of the secondary lever, or equivalent action, is clearly seen, which is to enable the striking point to be drawn back, clear of the comb, so as to allow the lever to resume its original position as soon as a new perforation presents itself.

But that the invention may be better understood, I will, by the aid of the accompanying drawings, proceed more fully to describe means employed by me.

**DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS.**

Fig. 1 shows a plan with the perforated sheet in operation, and Fig. 2, a plan with the perforated sheet removed, and Fig. 3 a transverse section of apparatus, arranged in accordance with my invention; while the remaining Figs. show transverse sections of modified arrangements, which are obtainable by altering the position of the

[Price 8d.]

perforated sheet, and the shape of the levers producing the necessary compounded motion. The same letters indicate corresponding parts wherever they occur.

*a, a*, is the "comb," or row of vibrating tongues, or notes of a musical box; and *b, b*, the sheet of perforated paper; *c, c*, are the primary levers, and *d<sup>1</sup>, d<sup>2</sup>*, the secondary levers at the end thereof; and *e, e*, and *e<sup>1</sup>, e<sup>2</sup>*, are the springs, while *f, f*, is the draw rod, which may either be provided with a stop as at *f<sup>1</sup>*, or such stop may be upon the lever or levers as will be well understood; *g, g*, are dampers which may or may not be employed, *x, x*, is a bar, by preference hinged at one end, as shown, for holding the perforated sheet in position, and *h, h*, is the ordinary clock-work driving apparatus, which causes the perforated sheet to travel; but this may be accomplished by hand power, by means of a crank handle or otherwise, operating the wheels which draw forward the perforated sheet. In lieu of a comb, or in conjunction therewith, balls, drums, and other percussion sounders may be employed.

The mode of operation is as follows:—The sheet is drawn forward, by manual or automatic action, by means of the toothed wheels, *j, j*, on the revolving shaft *k, k*, taking into the holes or slots formed near the edges of the sheet, or at other convenient parts thereof, until the short lever ends at *c<sup>1</sup>*, enter perforations made for the production of sound. When the end of a lever enters into, and while it remains in such a perforation, the lever is kept in its normal or inoperative position, with the lever leg *c<sup>2</sup>*, resting underneath or on the striking side of the vibrator rod of the comb. As the sheet travels forward the edge of the perforation presses the short lever leg *d<sup>1</sup>*, and the opposing leg *d<sup>2</sup>*, pushes forward the draw rod *f, f*, when, on the short lever coming to its dead stop, the further pressure of the perforated sheet operates the main lever and the end of the draw rod is forced past the comb point, and so vibrates the same. During the time the sheet presents a blank space to the lever leg *c<sup>1</sup>*, it is retained in the last named position, as shewn by the dotted lines; but on another perforation presenting itself, the short lever is first released, and then the main lever resumes its original place, when the operation may be repeated.

The end of the draw rod, or equivalent, can pass the comb point on the lever returning to its original position, without difficulty, and without striking the same, on account of the compound motion given to such end of the draw rod or equivalent, by fulcruming one lever upon another, whereby the to and fro motion of the end or point is obtained. The arrows in each case illustrated, indicate the direction of motion of the travelling perforated sheet.

Variations in detail may be made, such as the shape and proportions of the levers, the direction of the two legs, and the consequent position and direction of travel of the perforated sheet, with other variations, without departing from the peculiar character of the invention. Examples of such variations are shewn in Figs. 4, 5, and 6.

In Fig. 4 the draw rod *f, f*, is caused to slide on a separate pin instead of through or on the opposing leg of the main lever.

In Fig. 5 the short lever *d<sup>1</sup>, d<sup>2</sup>*, is placed at the acting end of the main lever *c, c*, and the striking point is formed upon the end of the short lever, in lieu of the longer draw rod; while in Fig. 6 the draw rod *f, f*, is linked to the main lever *c, c*. In each and every case the arrangement of levers and springs gives the end of the rod or lever forming the striking point a compound motion, wherein it is first caused to approach the vibrating rod; secondly, to be forced past the same; thirdly, to be withdrawn therefrom; and lastly, to fall back to its original position; and all of which motions are obtained solely by the pressure and release derived from the edge of the perforation in the travelling sheet, acting upon the projecting end of the first lever.

I am aware that perforated sheets have been used, in conjunction with other intervening mechanisms, for the purpose of operating musical instruments, both of the vibratory kind and for wind instruments, but such intervening mechanisms are different from the compound or dual levers forming this my present invention, which latter utilizes the onward thrust of the edges of the perforations of the sheet for the dual purpose of putting the ends or points of the striking levers in gear, and

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*Roepke's Improvements in Musical Boxes.*

also of causing the tongues to be vibrated by the direct action of such ends or points, through the intervention of reciprocating mechanism of the peculiar character indicated. By which means I obtain a simple, direct, reliable, and cheap mechanism, having small and easy action, for the construction of musical boxes of the description already referred to.

Although I have described and shown in the drawings, a musical box, arranged according to my invention, employing endless bands of perforated card, it will be obvious that other forms of musical boxes may be constructed, wherein the improvements may be applied to the employment of perforated discs or the like.

Having now particularly described and ascertained the nature of my said invention, and in what manner the same is to be performed I declare that what I claim is:—

1. In musical boxes of the character indicated, the lever *c*, *c*, combined with the draw rod *f*, *f*, and secondary lever *d*, *d*, directly operated by the pressure of the edges of the perforations in a travelling sheet, giving a compound motion to the striking end or point and of the draw rod *f*, *f*, for the purpose and in manner substantially as herein shown and described, in reference to Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6.

2. In musical boxes of the character indicated the lever *c*, *c*, combined with the secondary lever *d*, *d*, having thereon a withdrawable striking end or point, directly operated by the pressure of the perforations in a travelling sheet, giving a compound motion to such end or point, for the purpose and in manner substantially as herein shown and described, in reference to Fig. 5.

Dated this 21st day of April 1880.

WILLIAM GADD, C.E.,  
64, Barton Arcade, Manchester, Agent for Applicant.

London: Printed for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, by Darling & Son, Ltd.—1880

[This Drawing is a reproduction of the Original on a reduced scale.]

FIG. 2.

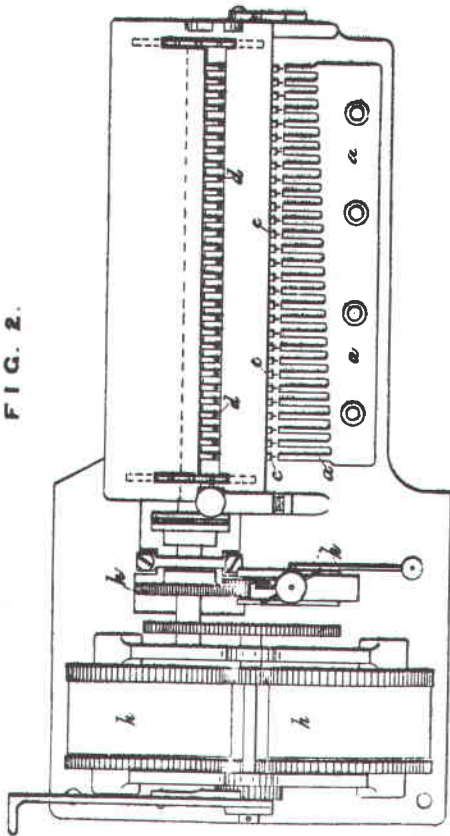


FIG. 3.

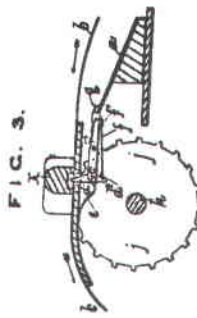


FIG. 5.

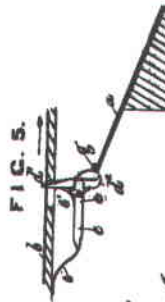


FIG. 6.

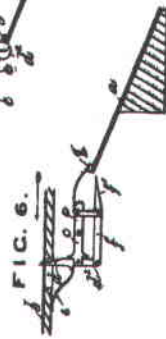


FIG. 4.

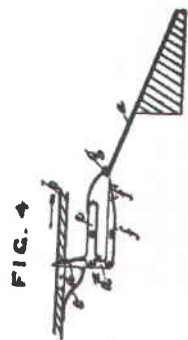
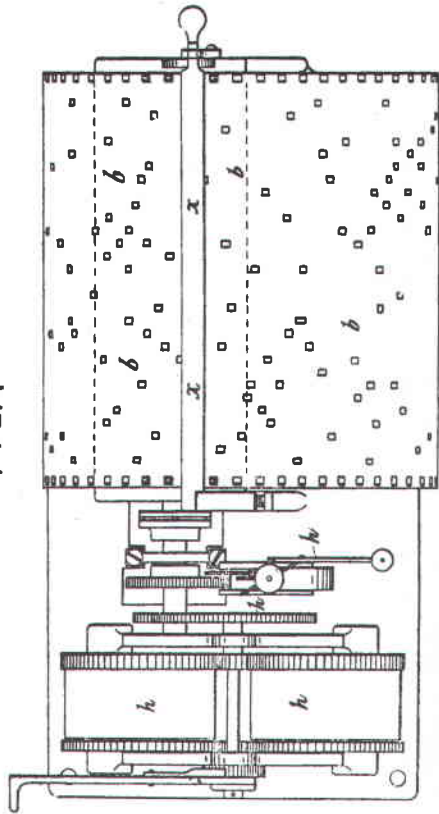


FIG. 1.





# Musical Box Oddments No.117

by Anthony Bulleid

Back in the 1970s, when interest in musical boxes was waking up from slumber and the MBSGB was only ten years old, the London auction houses started to hold separate musical box sales. Experts and non-experts started advising people what to buy, rightly emphasising that buying because you like it was better than buying with hopes of selling later at a profit.

At that period, I guess at least 90% of "the men in the street" thought a musical box was a small tinkling thing in jewellery boxes, ornamental mugs, etc. (and I think 25% still do). So I used to suggest they should be regarded in three main groups, so that when they came under discussion the arena was understood. The grouping would take into account how and where the box would be asked to perform.

I classed them as (1) Boudoir; (2) Standard; and (3) Large and Special.

Group (1) is for boxes mainly limited to small rooms, or to a close-by position on desk, table or floor. They will normally have cylinders less than 11 inches long and be standard, mandolin or forte piano and sublime harmonic types. Of course they include most of those marvellous early key-wind boxes, excluding those that some person has set up to play too loud. They are the sort of boxes which you bought largely for their tune list and which you like to have handy when you suddenly want to hear it for a few calm minutes.

Group (2) includes the large range of boxes with cylinders from about 11 to 14 inches, which are not dismayed by having

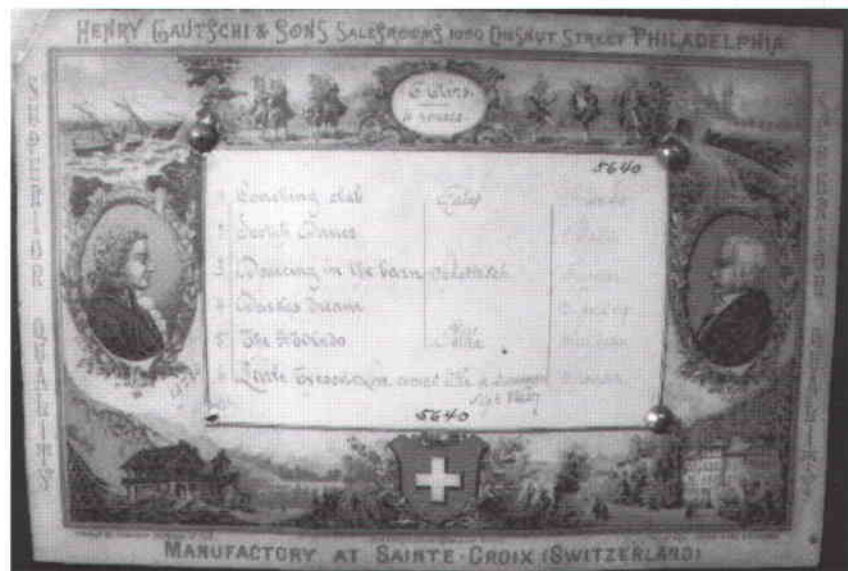


Fig 1. Gueissaz tune sheet with margins comprehensively overprinted by agent Gautschi.

to perform in any reasonable domestic space. They normally have a fine-looking veneered case that lives semi-permanently where it can be admired even when not playing. This group includes boxes of most types, even with drums and castanets.

Group (3) includes all large and special boxes, orchestral and multi-cylindrical boxes, many of which have a claim to fame and undoubted individuality.

The big advantage of such grouping is that it enables you to be more helpful to an enquirer by asking where the box is likely to be seen and heard. Imagine buying something and not knowing! But that thinking really should be done before thinking about buying.

## Tune Sheets beyond 400

It is tantalising when interesting tune sheets turn up, ideal for the series but of inadequate quality. Putting them in would debase the general quality and spoil the captions by having to include several illegible details. So I

hope we can tolerate examples here such as...

Gueissaz serial 14733 with their usual tune sheet, seen in Fig. 1. It is the same design as no. 150 in the series. But here it is quite exceptional, being decorated in all four margins by the well-known agent, Henry Gautschi of Philadelphia. He adds his address, credits Ste. Croix in the bottom margin, and adds in both side margins (reading vertically) SUPERIOR QUALITY.

Another rarity is in Fig. 2. The Metert and Langdorff partnership was in good trim in 1850 when it made and sold serial 5502. It is a fine hidden drum and bells box with three combs, - 96 music teeth, 10 for drum strikers, and 19 for the eleven bells - eight had two strikers. In these M & L boxes the bells were part of the music and always played; but the drum was optional and could be silenced by a fourth control lever behind the case end-flap. The pair decided to give it a classy engraved brass plaque for the tune list, as partially shown in Fig. 2. It closely imitates their

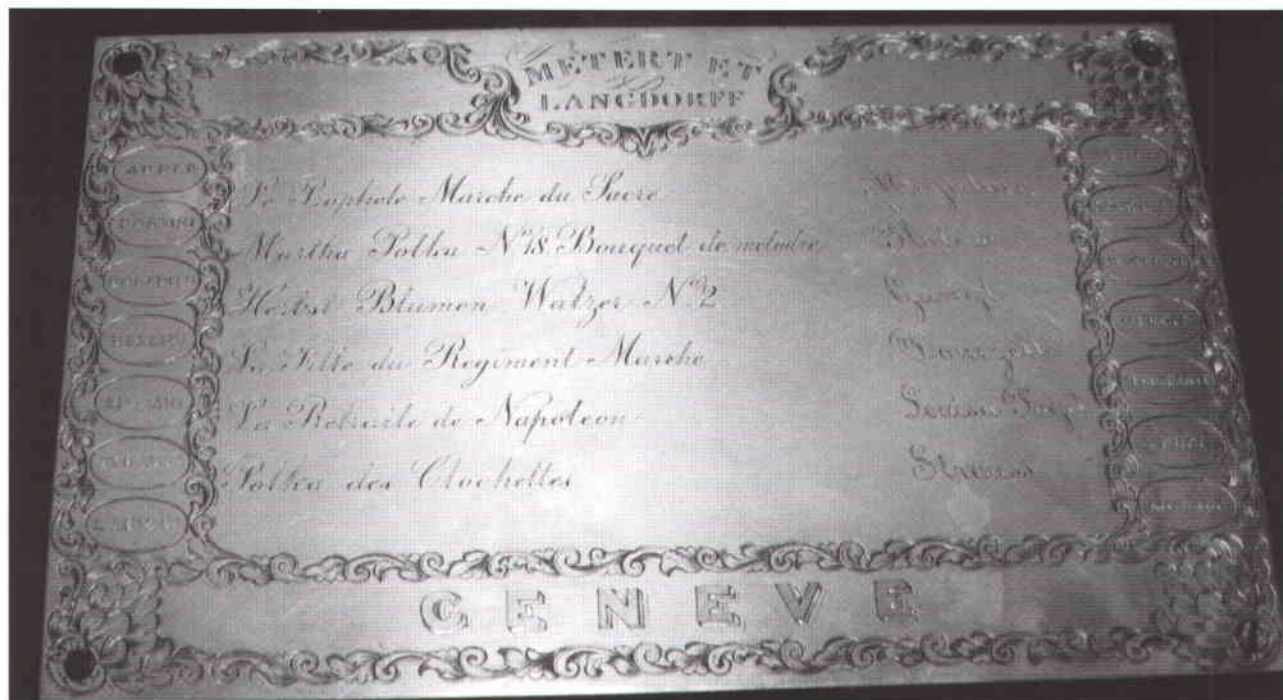


Fig. 2. Fine engraved plaque for Metert & Langdorff serial 5502. The latest tune is no. 1,1849. Serial number is omitted. Box made in 1850.

usual 7-composers-each-side layout as can be seen at no. 82. It adds their names at the top and Geneva prominently below, - all enhanced by elaborate scrollwork.

A rarer rarity is in Fig. 3. Not surprisingly, the French word *ordinaire* translates as ordinary, and though it is less derogatory in French than in English I cannot imagine any sales person - let alone B. A. Bremond - liking it on his goods. Also it credits composers and adds cylinder length, 5.5 pouces, neither of

which items were ever credited by Bremond, and it has serial number 4408 which is far too low for the 1866 tune 3. So possibly this is a pirated version of his tune sheet, which is the same design as no.172 in the series which incidentally suffers from the same too-low-serial-number syndrome.

#### The Karrers of Teufenthal.

There are two villages named Teufenthal in Switzerland. One is about 7 miles south-east of Aarau and had nothing to do with musical boxes as I wrongly

stated back in 1996. The other is about 18 miles south-east of Bern and 4 miles east of Thun. It is in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, and in the 1850s it started a useful involvement with musical boxes by Ludvig R. Karrer and his several sons. Adolph Karrer stayed a bit in the background, his works turning out many components and even some complete blanks. His A.K casting mark is seen on comb bases. Rudolph and two other brothers started the Karrer & Cie works in 1854 but they handed over to brother Samuel in 1857. He traded sometimes as Karrer & Cie and sometimes as S. Karrer - the latter, for example, when he won Exhibition medals for his musical boxes at Vienna in 1873, Philadelphia in 1876, and Paris in 1878. The two sides of these three medals decorate his tune sheets in numerous arrangements and are liable to trip up anyone who writes captions for them. That is because they certainly ordered new tune sheets, in more than one size each time, as soon as the award was confirmed. Some must have been left over from every batch - and used in due course. See Fig. 4.

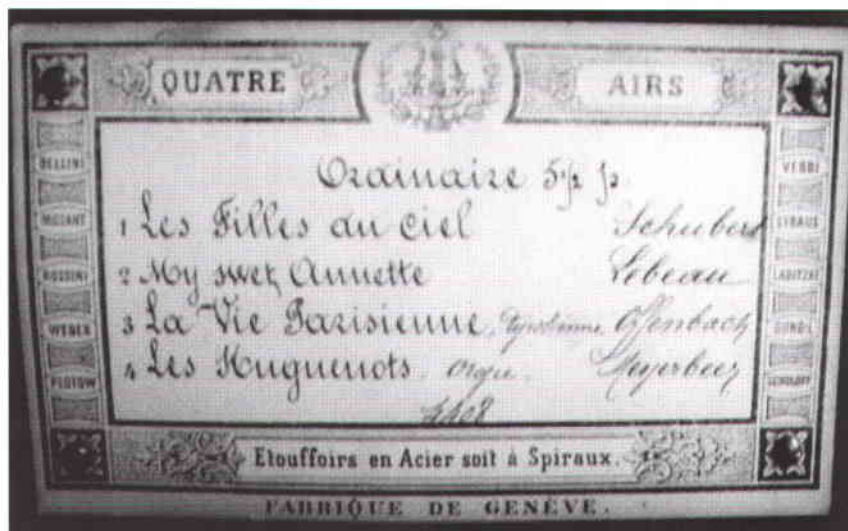


Fig. 3. Bremond style tune sheet with astonishingly modest tune list heading.



Fig. 4. Karrer's 1873 and 1876 medals on serial 4469's large tune sheet, 9x6" (23 x 15cms) which suits the large finely veneered case with plinth and feet for its 15" cylinder and eight hidden bells. The Vienna medal portrays the Austrian King, Franz Joseph I.

Throughout this period Samuel worked with his brother Rudolph who married Elise Hoffmann in 1868. In 1880 the company name was changed to E. Karrer-Hoffman in the usual Swiss routine. Samuel and the Karrer Cie both won separate awards for boxes at the 1883 Zurich Exhibition.

The two Karrers, Samuel and Rudolph, had the foresight to be the first to patent the idea of having the spring drive coaxial with the cylinder arbor. That was in August 1880 and the winding lever was geared so one pull would wind the spring one turn. Then they added another patent for a rather clumsy vertical spindle crank drive, in May 1881.

In visualizing a dating chart, the company Karrer & Cie. was launched in December 1854 and I think it is a reasonable guess that the first musical box with serial number (say) 1 or 0001 emerged at the earliest in 1856 with production reckoned to start in 1860. The maker is simply Karrer until year 1880 when it changed to E. Karrer-

Hoffmann. The serial numbers continued, undisturbed. The Karrers must have caused some delight in Zurich, not to mention Austria and Germany, when they presented all those Strauss melodies with their original titles. They certainly also made

small boxes with tabatiere type movements, presumably within their same serial numbers. The only one I have ever seen is on page 151 of volume 6 of this journal (Autumn 1973.)

Karrer boxes are comparatively

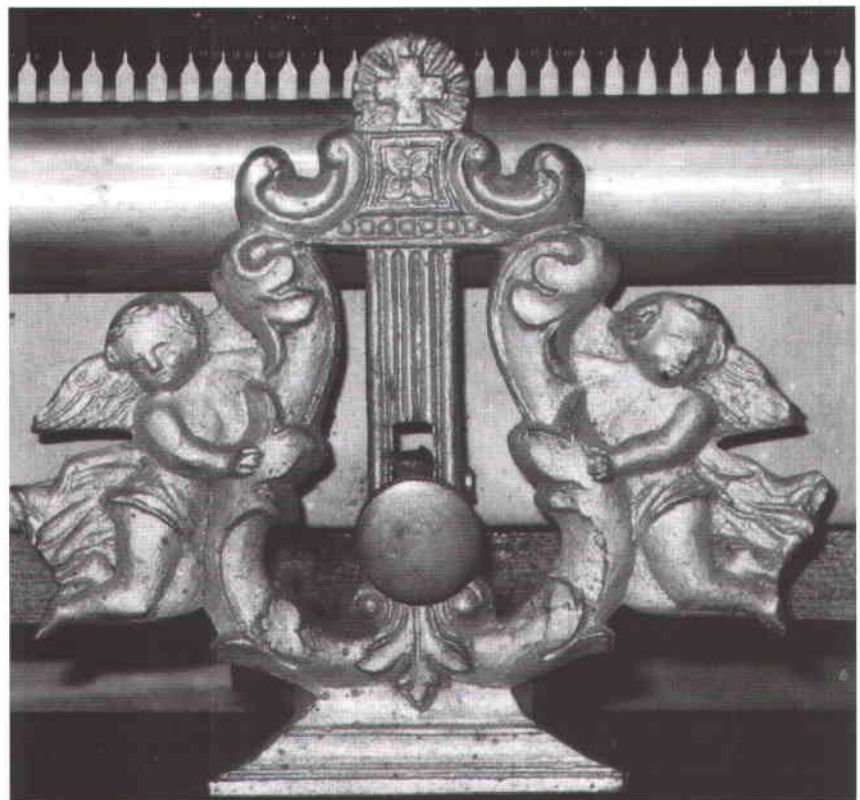
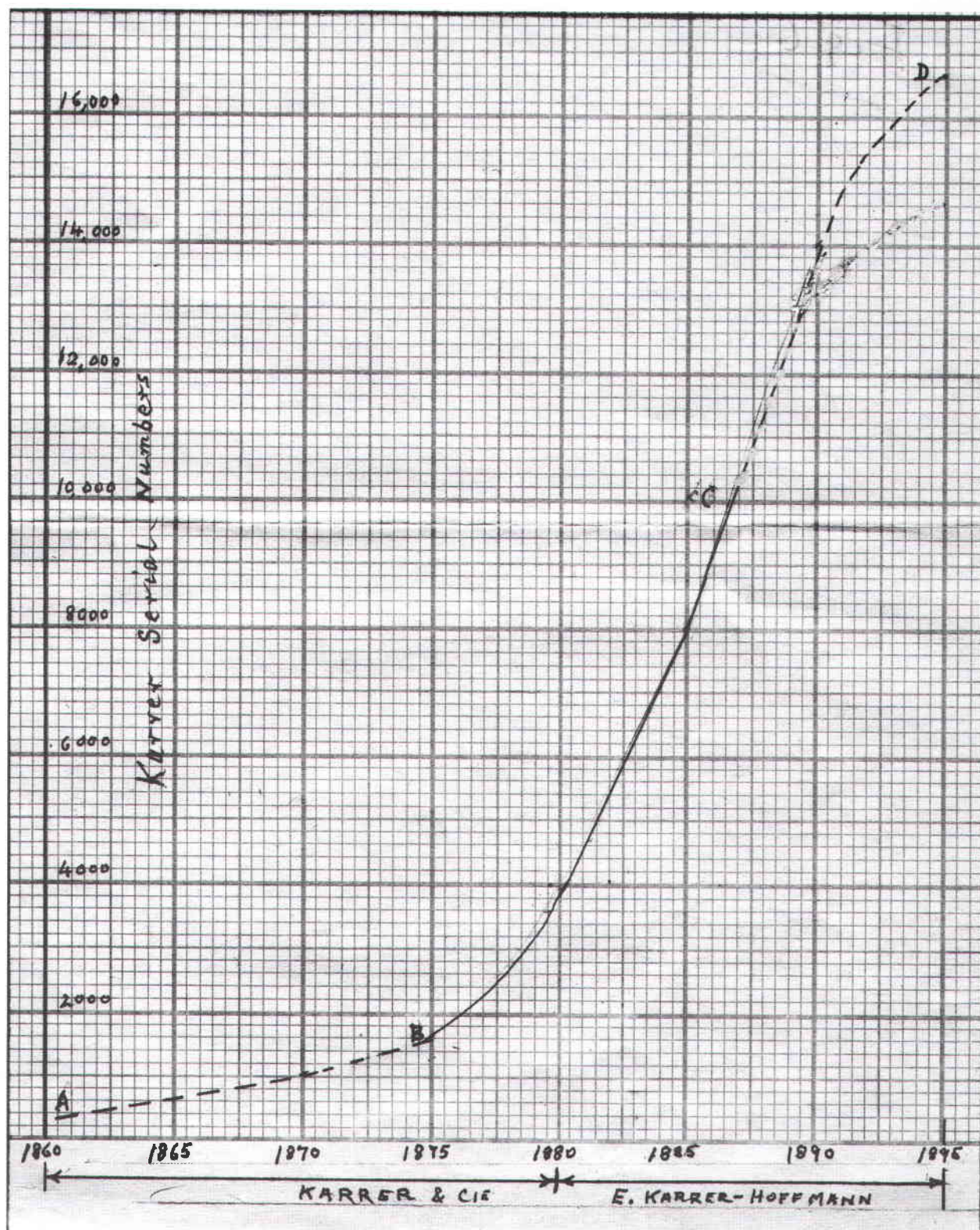


Fig. 5. Karrer's Zither holder, 3.5 x 3" (89 x 76mm), with on/off button, on serial 4469, about 1881.



scarce in the UK and even now I only have tune sheet data for eleven, and they include four of the eight traced by David Snelling in his 1999 articles, Vol. 19 nos. 1 and 2. There are only 14 on the Register.

Having an adjacent foundry may have tempted the Karrers to do a bit of fancy design work. Notable

or distinctive zither tissue holders are a rare field that they entered with the result shown in Fig. 5.

**Karrer Dating Chart.**

My first (and last) attempt at a dating chart for Karrer musical boxes is in Fig. 6. It is useful for dating only between 1875 and 1887, serial numbers from about 2000 to 10,000. There are only

two Karrer boxes on record with serial numbers below 2,000 and only one above 10,000. So I will end on a more cheerful note, quoting from E.Karrer-Hoffmann's last advert on record which was in the German clock-makers journal, in October 1895. It gave brief notes on output and repairs and ended:- "Novelty: Revolver-Musicalbox with 3 Cylinders."

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# News from Other Societies

by John Farmer

**Mechanical Music, Vol 54, No.1, January/February 2008**  
Hendrik Strengers continues his research into the Mechanical Music companies of Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, with three more, namely C. Gautschi & Co., purveyors of "Music Boxes", C.J. Heppe & Son, an agent for Aeolian, and the Columbia Phonograph Co. If you have a singing bird cage, or similar construction, Philip Brady explains his method of repairing missing mouldings using a silicone moulding material to create a resin copy of the original.

Hendrik Strengers (again!), in his article "A Thorens Christmas in the United States – 1941", gives a potted history of the Thorens family and their company, including their establishment in the USA. Included are many extracts from Thorens catalogues of the day, especially Christmas tree stands and associated novelties.

## **The Key Frame (Issue KF4/07)**

Remember Blue Peter badges? – it looks as if Mike Dean (Dean Organs) and Kevin Meayers (who some members will have met at Amersham Fair Organ Museum) might have received badges back in 1975. They were invited onto the Blue Peter programme after researchers "discovered" a very young Kevin arranging tunes for Mike. A photo shows them with Lesley Judd and Peter Noakes in front of a Dean organ.

Events covered in this issue include the 3rd. Organ Festival at the Glen Miller museum, Twinwoods, Bedfordshire; the Autumn Fairground weekend at Dingles in September 2007; the May Day Steam

event at Abbotsfield Park near Manchester; and the 2nd. Hooghuys Organ Festival at Geraardsbergen, Belgium. Peter Trueman also recounts his trip to the Kunkels Organ collection in Haarlem, Netherlands, and Duncan Mallows describes his "Magical Mystery Tour" covering Arnhem, Utrecht, Linz, Rudesheim, Seewen, Wilhelmsbau, Leuwarden and Haarlem, stopping at various events and museums.

Jan van Dinteren describes some of the restoration of an 89-key Gavioli, whilst Andy Hinds' "Musical Roots" gives a summary of the life of Swedish composer Hugo Alfvén (1872 – 1960), who wrote, amongst many other pieces, "Swedish Rhapsody", later recorded by Ted Heath (not the PM), Chet Atkins and Deep Purple, in various forms. The only future event mentioned is the Hollycombe Steam in the Country weekend, which will be 26th & 27th July, 2008.

## **The Key Frame (Issue KF1/08)**

The only event reported on is the St. Agnes Rally in August, the 52nd such rally. Fred Dahlinger's "Celebration of Gavioli 65-key Band Organs, Part 1", addresses the predecessors and development of the instruments followed by Manufacture and Design, scale features, automatic registers and divided chests and looks at European versus American applications. Fred then discusses examples in Europe, and a section about Louis Berni Gavioli & Co. of New York.

In "Scrapyard Challenge – Fair Organ Style", William Kromer takes a slightly different approach to organ building. He discovered a Wurlitzer 153

facade in "horrible shape" and decided to restore it. He is now building an organ from scratch, on which to mount the facade! Musical Roots, tells us that William Rimmer, composed the march "Punchinello", whilst "The Punch and Judy Show" was the work of Dudley-born Ben Black. The British March King was Frederick Ricketts (pseudonym Kennet J Alford) who wrote such well known pieces as The Thin Red Line, Colonel Bogey and Voice of the Guns (used in Lawrence of Arabia). Also included in this issue is the 2008 Organ Availability register.

## **Vox Humana – Summer/Winter 2007**

A large part of this issue is dedicated to the heyday of the Dutch organ (Draaiorgels) up to the 2nd world war. A well known figure during this period was "Tante Heintje", actually Mrs Hendrika van Rossum, who, together with her husband, Jan, spent many years playing organs for a living, on the streets of Amsterdam. Their organs were generally hired from Leon Warnies, and their famous "De Carillon" was due to return to Amsterdam in February to take part in the annual Tante Heintje Day at the Haarlem Organ museum.

Warnies was started in 1875 by Leon Senior, and taken over later by his sons Leon and Gabriel. Leon left the business in 1921, but in 1923 his brother, Gabriel, died and the whole stock of Warnies street organs was put up for auction. The article includes a picture of the auction room filled with organs. The final article covers the tragic events of 7th May, 1945, in Amsterdam, when celebrations of the capitulation of the Third Reich on 4th May,

were interrupted when a group of angry Nazis fired their machine guns into the crowd. Photographs of the event show people taking refuge behind the little 48-key street organ "het Snotneusje" ("Snotty Nose", or Street Urchin). The organ saved many lives, although 22 others were killed. The restored organ now resides in the Amsterdam History museum.

Also in this issue, Elma Walter shows how to "Build Your Own Hurdy-Gurdy", which is really a small hand turned musical movement built into a box with an animated monkey on top. An interesting novelty which would be an ideal musical gift to a child. Peter Craig chronicles the story of the first Mortier dance hall organ to be heard in Britain, and Bob Essex tells how he came to create his organ King Solomon.

#### **Reed Organ Society Quarterly, Vol XXVI, No.4, 2007**

Central to this issue is Frances Hartmann and Don Glasgow's account of the Society's 25th Anniversary Festival. This was hosted by the Hanover-Horton Area Historical Society, and included much organ playing and a Restoration Workshop. The account is illustrated with many excellent pictures of people and instruments. Lawton Posey tells the story of the railway "Chapel Cars" – mobile churches, with special attention and pictures of Chapel Car "Grace", with her Estey organ. This chapel car now resides near Green Lake Wisconsin.

#### **Organ Grinders News, No. 64, Spring 2008**

Major events for 2008 start with the Annual Gathering at the Black Country Living Museum, on 10th & 11th May, followed closely by a Return to Milestones during 12th – 18th May, which now includes a visit to Barry

Wilson's collection of barrel organs, Aeolians and radios, etc. August then brings 10 days at the Dingles Fairground Heritage Centre from 1st to 10th, and then on September 6th is the Banbury Street Organ Festival.

John Harrold gives an account of his restoration of an unusual French barrel organ, which was surmounted by a small stage with three monkeys, one being a magician, the other two musicians. They were articulated, and animated by a mechanism driven by the barrel. The whole instruments required extensive restoration by John. An article from the Times Education Supplement gives some background to Paul McCarthy, and his eponymous Organs, whilst an article by Avril Folly (to be read on 1st April only), explains the threat to Organ Grinding which could result from the current attempts by Government to deal with Global Warming.

#### **The Musical Museum and Friends, issue 41, Spring 2008**

In his opening words, Chairman Michael Ryder confirmed what we all now know, that the museum has re-opened in its new building. It re-opened to the public at 11:00a.m. on 27th November, 2007. Many of the volunteers were there to celebrate with a glass of champagne, but no great razamatazz. A few members of the public turned up, which gave the tour guides the chance to become familiar with everything, and not have to cope with huge numbers of people. Also present was Frank Mayers, the Council Officer who had helped to "make it happen". The Friends themselves paid a visit on 8th December to see the new arrangements, and to enjoy "musical bingo".

Other outings recently arranged by the Friends were to the Lawn

Tennis Museum at Wimbledon and Marble Hill House in Twickenham. Mike Messenger writes about the 1913 song "Charmaine!", by Erno Rapee and Mark Tomes recalls attending the 2007 Theremin Symposium at the Purcell School of Music. It is hoped that the Museum can host a future Symposium.

Other Non-English journals

#### **Musiques Mecaniques Vivantes – n Quarter, Year**

Highlights:-

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The Rise and Fall of Gavioli

Keyframes for Limonaire and Gasparini Fairground Organs

### **New Members**

We welcome the following new members who have joined us since the last journal was printed.

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If you have any friends or visitors who show interest in your collection and who might like to join please contact Kevin for a free sample back-issue of the magazine or a supply of joining forms.

To get the most out of your membership - join a local group.

## Letters to the Editors

Dear Ed.

It was an extraordinary co-incidence to find two articles dealing with the same subject, the vibration of musical box comb teeth, (Vol. 23/5) The first (Don Busby, Paul Bellamy) dealt with the mathematics of tooth vibration, albeit in a simplified form for teeth of uniform cross section but alluded to the more complex sound quality that the comb tuners and makers derived in practice. The other article by Anthony Bulleid illustrates visually the actual performance and analysis of individual vibrating teeth.

The spectral analyses in the Bulleid article were particularly revealing. For example Fig 10 shows the harmonic peaks to be of sufficient intensity to be heard against the background of the fundamental. Of course, as the editor pointed out, some of the responses shown in Bulleid's charts will be due to spurious and unintended harmonic vibrations.

Some are induced by wear, particularly of tooth tips. This is a major cause of poor sound quality. It can be rectified, in most cases, by careful honing. This should be done with expertise to ensure tips are 'dressed' at the correct angle, that they all remain in one line, the wear completely removed, all teeth and their pins are centrally aligned, the dampers in good condition and the pitch remains unaffected (hence the importance of recording the pitch by using an electronic tuner before starting work). Cylinders with straight pins may be re-ground if badly worn but, again, get expert advice first. Re-grinding raked tips may not be an option (because the pins are ground before being

raked and hence present an edge to the tooth; whereas an un-raked pin tip presents a flat surface. Theoretically, this does not give such a clean tooth-to-tip disengagement as the raked version but subsequent and inevitable wear reduces the clean drop-off of the raked tip as well.)

Other factors influence harmonics such as tooth symmetry. For example, a tooth may be tapered not only along its length but, particularly in the treble, on both sides. If the latter is asymmetrical (i.e. not quite the same shape on either side) it will vibrate in planes other than the vertical. Not just sideways, either, but in all sorts of ways such that, if one could look directly at the tip, it would oscillate and wander to 'all points of the compass'. One version of this type of oscillation applies particularly to teeth with lead weights. Because of its mass and hence centre of gravity well below the centre-line of the tooth, a tip may describe a small circle in space that moves quite slowly compared with the rate of vertical vibration. This phenomenon, called precession, may cyclically modify the vertical vibration and introduce a slower frequency harmonic, giving a slight 'wow-wow' vibrato.

Bulleid's Figs. 11 & 12 (comparing a 440Hz forte tooth with its piano 440Hz counterpart) shows how the cluster of harmonics between each can vary. The forte has at least two more harmonic peaks at higher frequency than its forte counterpart, no doubt due to greater dimensional variance between the two teeth. One only has to consider the humble tuning fork to appreciate how a vibrating tooth (in fact a pair of teeth of exactly the same proportions vibrating in unison) can produce a very pure sound,

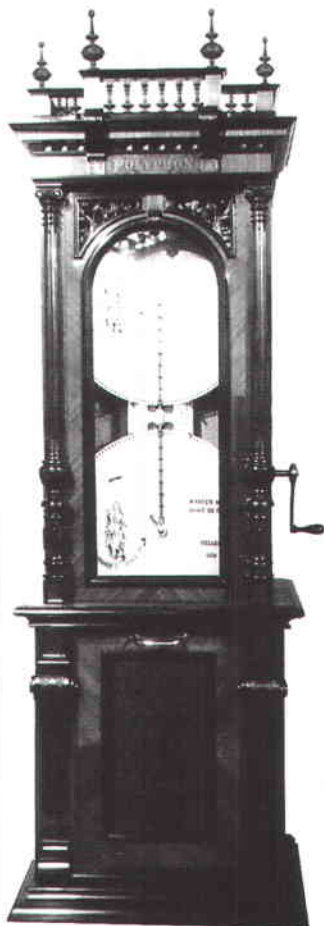
almost bereft of discernable harmonics, quite unlike the result obtained from our cantilevered, multi-dimensional, comb tooth.

This poses a question. To what extent did the tuner understand instinctively the tonal quality he required from the tooth? My thoughts are that they often filed teeth in order to enhance certain harmonics during the tuning process. This is little different in principle to the piano tuner tuning the strings of a piano. He/she will use the tuning fork to get the 'key' note to the right pitch but will then adjust every other note to its comparable mean-tone pitch. Towards the treble, and often towards the bass, (too long to explain here but the subject of many past articles), he/she will then 'stretch' the interval between each note. This allows the ear to distinguish the fundamental (but lower intensity) pitch of the higher note compared with its higher intensity lower octave when played in unison. Without the stretch the higher octave's fundamental can be swamped by the lower one.

A piano has harmonics induced by design as well as tuning. This is because the hammer strikes its strings 1/8th down its length. If struck at the centre there are, theoretically, no harmonics above the fundamental mode of vibration. By design, there are three other higher harmonics. Prove it by drawing a line, divide it into eight parts. Then draw a (sine) wave through all points, then through every other point and then one through the central point. The fundamental mode is just the centre point being 'twanged' and thus oscillating from side-to-side.

Let's hear more about technical analysis by those equipped to do it justice, particularly the Sublime Harmonie effect.





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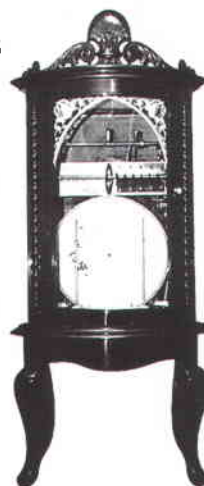
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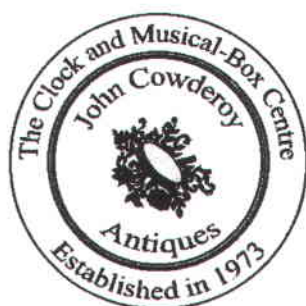
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