

## Play It Again, Gaviman! . . . a recording review of outdoor mechanical music

### De Grote Gavioli Vol. 1

Little did the Gavioli shop in Waldkirch, Germany realize about 1905-1906 that they would assemble an 89 No. 4 keyless scale instrument that would in time become one of the most famous band organs in the world. But we can't credit the factory alone, for Carl Frei, Sr. played nearly an equal role in bringing about the existence of what is now known as *De Grote Gavioli*. Though there was a local following in Holland for the organ, it wasn't until about 1959 and Capitol Records release of their mis-titled LP (T10231), *The Great Gavioli, Hollands Most Famous Barrel Organ*, that the rest of the world adopted it as something of a standard against which other organs would be compared. The recording followed a significant restoration of the organ by Gijs Perlee of Amsterdam.

The subsequent release of a second LP by CJMO (PLP 1085) in 1978 reinforced the mystique that was further cemented when enthusiasts journeyed to England and saw and heard the instrument first hand in the 1980s, when it was cared for by the friendly Arthur Mason. It thoroughly charmed everyone that heard it. A brief period in less caring hands brought about the real need for a thorough rebuild. Thankfully, the Gavioli again has champions in current owners Nigel and Beverly Myers, who arranged for a complete restoration by Andrew Pilmer Automatic Music Leasing, Ltd., with Gavioli expert Russell Wattam and other craftsmen tending to the task of bringing back a legend. The work has resulted in a rebirth of this unique organ and the production of a quality compact disk that is the subject of this review.



*De Grote Gavioli* as seen at the 7th International Orgelfest in Waldkirch in June, 2002.

The history of the organ is known to some degree. It was assembled and probably mostly made in Gavioli's Waldkirch, Germany shop about 1905-1906 for Dresden, German kinematograph owner Carl Patty. It went to Dutch showman Reinhard Dirks in the 1920s and then in the 1950s to two different sets of Dutch preservationists before being sold abroad in 1963, much to the consternation of Dutch enthusiasts. For those interested in further details of the organ's history and details, comprehensive papers by Russell Wattam should be consulted (*Key Frame*, 2000, 3; and *Het Pierement*, 2000, 2).

The sound of this instrument is unlike other 89 No. 4 scale Black Forest Gaviolis. While some 89-key organs have 300 to 400 pipes, *De Grote Gavioli* has 550, the additions coming on during Frei's extensive rebuild of the organ about 1930. There's also the usual seventeen note glockenspiel (the 18th is a dummy for visual balance), cymbal, bass and snare drums. An extensive alteration, including the installation of nearly 200 additional pipes, changed the character of the instrument.

When asked about the seemingly transparent and delightful tone that wafts to the listener, Wattam observed that the trombones were not at pitches as low as in other similar instruments. A melody forte mixture and strengthening of the saxophone register also add to the special



tonal character of the organ. Even close up the Gavioli is extremely pleasant to hear, as evidenced by the 2002 appearance in Waldkirch. The sounds that this reviewer heard there are faithfully captured on this production.

The CD is accompanied by a well scripted eight-page illustrated booklet that has sections on Gavioli history and the organ's own tale, restoration and repertoire. The repertoire notes are especially interesting because they offer context to the selections and in several cases even some history on their origin.

The recording technique was well executed, with a good balance between the different types of pipework and the percussion. The recent restoration yielded an instrument playing in top form, not only in tune but with pipework speaking at the appropriate time within the arrangements. You'll hear no lagging trombones, slow registration or delayed bass drums here, no screaming mixtures, just rapid and crisp action, with pipework promptly speaking, well regulated and in good tune.

It is probably fitting that the selections on this first volume re-create the birth of the organ as a concert instrument in the late 1950s, duplicating some of the same titles as on the Capitol LP. Because of the emotional attachment of some to the organ, the disk's producers may have intentionally selected some of the same tunes so that they could serve as a benchmark of comparison, as opposed to the fleeting accuracy of mental memories. In this reviewer's opinion, the new disk readily equals the performance documented on the enhanced 1950s Capitol issue. The eighteen tracks provide an hour of enjoyable music.

Carl Frei, Sr. and Marcel van Boxtel arrangements return the listener to the time when the organ earned its well deserved reputation. Frei was a master at arranging for the 89 No. 4 Gavioli scale, or nearly any scale for that matter, and van Boxtel, a close friend, continued arranging in a similar style in later years. One hears the Frei compositions like *Hommerson March* and *Waffenehre*, and the sprightly *Rekordflug* (Record Breaking Flight) galop that was re-titled *Gavioli Galop* on both LPs. Just imagine when arrangers were so moved by a current event that they composed a fine piece of music for a mechanical organ! The chosen tunes clearly reveal the character of the instrument as envisioned by Frei and embodied in his rebuild. For devotees of German organs and Frei arrangements, "It doesn't get any better than this."

The compact disk is available from both Nancy Frati and Phil Jamison.

Fred Dahlinger, Jr.