

Play it again, Gaviman

The English Mechanical Organ

(Vol. 1) - CD

*Music Heard in London From the 17th
- 19th Centuries*

Music Arranged and Played
by
Ian Alderman

My first article reviewing a recording of small mechanical organ music stated one of my goals was to present recordings that are: “unique in some sense as to the instrument being played, special content, music arrangement or commemorating a special event.” This compact disk recording, *The English Mechanical Organ (Vol. 1)* by Ian Alderman allows me to meet this particular goal without any effort at all.

The music contained on the disk is arranged and played by Mr. Alderman utilizing his 26 note scale; a format not often heard in the United States. It reflects Mr. Alderman’s special, and diverse, musical tastes and is largely derived from what would have been the ordinary music of the day when errand boys in London really did whistle the latest Rossini airs. The individual pieces range from the well known *All through the Night* to some not heard for Centuries such as *The Welsh Airs* and *The Morn Returns* from an opera by Sir Henry Bishop titled: *The Maniac*.

Other pieces on the disk include: E. Couperin’s *Larlequine* (a harpsichord piece set for organ); Andre Gentry’s *Zemire et Azor*; *The Pastorale Variee* sometimes attributed to Mozart; as well as three arias from English opera and pieces by John Field, Jan Ladislav Dussek, Johan Christian Bach, Franz Schubert, Padre Davide Da Bergamo, William Byrd and Dr. John Bull. All in all a very impressive list. The arrangement and presentation of Nicolo Paganini’s well known tune *La Campanella* incorporates an adaptation of the violin fireworks and demonstrates the impressive capacity of the 26-note, non-chromatic scale.

The organ presented in the recording, although new, also takes its inspiration from the past. It produces the 18th Century sound that is at home in Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens as in a concert hall. The organ was designed and built by Ian

and his partner, Roy Davis, in 1995 with a great deal of input from a German colleague who enabled them to achieve the tonal quality they were seeking. It has three ranks of 26 pipes, nominally at 8 ft., 4 ft. and 2 ft. pitch. The six bass notes can have pipes sounding one octave lower (You can hear this in *The Rising of the Lark*). The organ was built, and music recorded, in their workshop in Old St. James, Chedington, Dorset, England.

Mr. Alderman’s relevant biographical details are replete with an extensive background of serious and extensive musical activities. From beginning his career working for William De Blaize at the Welmar Piano factory in London making harpsichords, operating his own workshop restoring 18th and 19th Century pianos and subsequently building barrel organs, always playing classical music on them. Because of the tedium associated with pinning barrels he eventually decided to build instruments, which could be operated by paper rolls. From time to time, in addition to his full time arranging activities, he still works with German instrument makers specializing in the construction of authentic harpsichords and small chamber organs.

Although not specifically a part of my review of this disk; Mr. Alderman’s arranging talent and ability demand a few words of credit, compliment and praise.



Ian Alderman at a recent outing.



He unarguably may be the most talented arranger for small organs alive today. As he has said to me, “You can get *Roll Out the Barrel* from anyone but my stuff is different. You can get *Roll Out the Barrel* from me, too, but in a superior version, of course.” Anyone that has played, or heard, his 31-note arrangement of Nicolo Paganini’s *Moto Perpetuo* (Alderman Roll No. 42 Titled: *The Virtuoso Street Organ*) can only stand in awe of, and wonder in, Ian’s ability. I have had professional concert musicians stand in disbelief that such a complex work could be so successfully adapted to, and presented on, a small mechanical organ.

Admittedly, this CD is not for everyone’s musical taste. If you like serious or classical music this disk is a must have. If you hate serious music, or just plain don’t like it, you will hate this disk. However, whether you like serious music, or not, it belongs in everyone’s collection as an example of the “serious side” of organ grinding as well as the outer limits of small organ capabilities. The disk is of very high quality and comes in the standard jewel case with extensive liner notes on each of the pieces and a short discussion of the organ’s design philosophy. It is available from Hal O’Rourke, an advertiser in the *Carousel Organ*, 311 Four Islands Trail, Lanexa, VA 23089. He may also be contacted by e-mail at hal@halor.com. Mr. O’Rourke has a complete list of Alderman rolls, in all small organ scale formats, at his site: www.hal@halor.com. You should visit the site for no other reason than to just see the wide range of Alderman offerings.

Tom Griffith