

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

The Edgerton 89-Key Gavioli Fairground Organ — CD

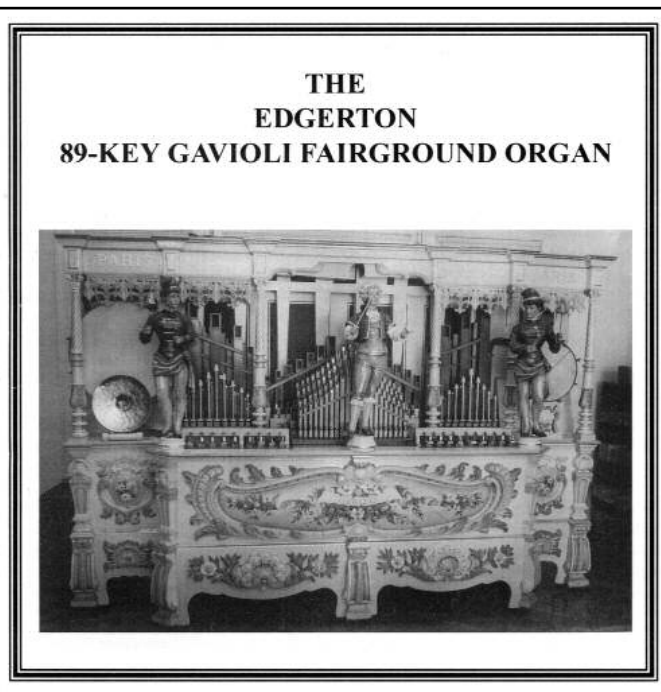
The restoration of a derelict organ that was substantially altered during its existence is a challenge fraught with many pitfalls. Such was the case with the organ that is heard on this recently issued compact disk. The condition of the organ was so poor that it caused me to state in a 1988 letter that I thought that it would never play again. In a way my words have proven true; the extent of the rebuild probably takes it beyond being a restoration. Regardless of philosophy, the work has yielded an instrument with a very good Gavioli sound that provides a very enjoyable listening experience.

Sometime around 1900, likely in the early twentieth century, the Paris factory of Gavioli et Cie. fabricated an 87-key organ, serial number 8465. It was destined to be utilized on a three-abreast British gallopers, or merry-go-round, as it would be termed in the U. S. Exactly what complement of pipes it received is unknown, because in 1926 Varetto Bros. of Manchester rebuilt and altered it. The extent of their modifications might have been initiated by a possible overturning of the instrument and subsequent damage to the pipework. To increase the loudness of the organ, it was altered to the popular Marengi 89-key violin-baritone scale. Brass resonator trumpets were installed to create the baritone register. It was an action taken dozens of times previously in the United Kingdom, where 87-Gavioli instruments were transformed into louder fairground boom boxes. What developed was a tonality that is almost exclusively associated with British fairground organs.

The history of the organ is largely unknown until the 1940s, when it was the property of the Butlin family of showmen, who traded under the Sussex Amusements name. Following decades of British fairground service, the organ and gallopers were exported to the U. S. in the 1950s. The current owner, Bill Edgerton, bought it at auction in 1979. In 1996 he commissioned A. C. Pilmer Automatic Music (Leasing) Ltd. to rebuild the organ. Given its wretched

condition, it presented a large number of opportunities to show enlightened treatment. Russell Wattam, Judith Howard and other craftspeople associated with the project proved worthy to the task. The organ seen and heard today is one that was converted to another 89-key scale, the well-known Gavioli 89 No.4. While the cumulative heritage of the organ was thereby compromised, the resultant sound is quite good, the voicing of the new pipework being in the Gavioli style.

The disk is accompanied by a twelve-page booklet divided into essentially four major parts. The introduction and history serve to tell a detailed story of the organ's existence. The tonal specification provides a clear understanding of the instrument's 352 pipes and percussion (17-note glockenspiel, snare and bass drums and cymbal). The most interesting section covers the music, which has something for both the novice and the accomplished organ devotee. The tune listing incorporates various bits of trivia and insight on the sixteen included tunes. The only shortcoming of the music listing is that some of the arrangers are not noted. Presumably they were unidentified books, a not uncommon circumstance in preservation. Andrew Pilmer is credited with four tunes, Carl Frei, Sr. and Louis Blache with two, and there are also two original Gavioli arrangements, leaving six unidentified. There are six waltz selections, four marches, a polka, an operetta selection, a fantasia, a Broadway melody and three others. A novelty track is included on the disk in the form of a narrated tour of the organ's constituent elements. For anyone desiring to learn how the tonality of the organ is devel-



oped it's an intriguing piece, never before on a recording. The technique has been demonstrated before, at St. Albans as early as 1986. There is a bit over 68 minutes of music on the disk.

The chosen pieces provide the organ with a good workout and yield a variety of conditions for listening pleasure. Stringy violins, bright piccolos repeating clearly, smooth clarinets, quick speaking saxophones and proud trombones all work in proper unison to develop the wide variety of sounds typically associated with Gavioli organs of the 89 key size. There is a good mix of solo passages, along with blending of different ranks and the usual "full organ" to please discriminating listeners.

The disk comes in the standard jewel case with a nice color image of the organ on the booklet cover. It is available domestically from Nancy Fratti, Phil Jamison and also from Bill Edgerton (Box 88, Darien, CT 06820) for \$15.00 plus \$2.00 postage.

Fred Dahlinger, Jr.