

The Elusive Roll

Matthew Caulfield

In 1933 Wurlitzer decided for economic reasons to reduce the number of tunes on its band organ rolls from ten tunes to six, while keeping the roll length approximately the same. A total of 53 six-tune style 165 band organ rolls issued from 1934 to 1967. Rolls 6672 to 6691 were issued by Wurlitzer between 1934 and 1946, for a total of 20 rolls; the remaining 33 rolls, rolls 6692 to 6724, were issued by Ralph Tussing, doing business as T.R.T. Manufacturing Company, from 1947 to 1967.

This chronology ignores the fact that copies of roll 6691, made in 1946, bear the typewritten label of the Allan Herschell Company. Herschell attempted for some months in 1946 to continue the Wurlitzer band organ roll business, but soon got out of it. Roll 6691 was probably mostly or entirely Wurlitzer's work; I believe copies exist with the Wurlitzer and/or the T.R.T. label. Don Rand reports that he has a copy of roll 6692 with the Herschell label, though the T.R.T. label is more commonly seen. The latest copyright dates for tunes on rolls 6691 and 6692 are the same: Feb. 11, 1946. So it appears that both these rolls were in process at Wurlitzer in early 1946, and got passed along as the roll business rapidly changed hands.

[This is a good opportunity to correct two common misunderstandings. The initials "T.R.T." are not purely Ralph Tussing's initials, as is often thought. They represent the last names of the three investors in his company: Ralph himself; his son-in-law, Lloyd Robbins, who was never active in the operation; and Ralph's son, Gordon Tussing. The other misunderstanding concerns the pronunciation of the family name, which is phonetically "Too-sing," not "Tuss-ing".]

All of these 53 six-tune rolls have been located in their original form in one or another collection and made available as recuts—except for roll 6720. That roll remained tantalizingly elusive until last year. I had long wanted to snare a copy and have it recut to close that one gap in the six-tune series. There are a number of lost 10-tune rolls in the 6600 series from the 1920s, but only this lone roll after 1933, making it a trophy to bag.

The Herschell Carousel Factory Museum has the masters for the six tunes on that roll, but the technical problems in converting those 3-to-one-scale masters to a usable roll made them a last resort. Rye Playland used to have a copy of roll 6720, but it had been cut up and altered so much that it wouldn't do, if it could be found. Ed Openshaw thought that Ross Davis had bought a copy of the roll when it was issued, and that it was still somewhere among the Davis rolls that he and Don Rand owned, but the roll was never located. I myself had the dim memory of hearing the roll at Seabreeze Park, but it was not in the park's

collection at the time of the fire, which destroyed the merry-go-round, band organ, and every roll.

Suddenly exactly one year ago, out of the blue, as they say, I got an email from Robert Moore who had noticed the "no known copies" notation for roll 6720 as listed in my online 165 roll catalog (<http://wurlitzer-rolls.com>). He told me that he had lived in upstate New York as a child, had worked at Roseland Park in Canandaigua, N.Y., as a youth, and had later bought himself a band organ that played 165 rolls. The organ came with only a couple of rolls, so Merrick Price, of the Seabreeze Park family, gave him one of the rolls from the park's large collection—a roll that Merrick didn't particularly like. That was roll 6720. Bob Moore no longer owned the organ or the roll, but he gave me the address of the man who did: Pete Zorlencan, an amusement operator on Long Island.

In the 1980s all the Seabreeze band organ rolls that were one-of-a-kind were sent to Play-Rite for recutting, so no rolls were irretrievably lost in the 1994 fire, although I assumed 6720 was, if the park in fact had owned a copy. But by this one act of generosity on Merrick Price's part, the roll survived. And Seabreeze today has the most complete set of Wurlitzer/T.R.T. style 165 rolls in existence, some rolls containing tunes missing on copies in other collections.

A letter to Mr. Zorlencan and his generosity in releasing his copy of roll 6720 put me in March of 2001 in possession of the roll. It was in good condition, on the brown "butcher paper" which Ralph Tussing punched most of his rolls on after using

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Military Band Organ

STYLE 165
ROLL NO. 6720

1. North To Alaska	(Mike Phillips)	Fox Trot
2. Itsy Bitsy Teenie Weenie	Yellow Polka-Dot Bikini (Vance & Pockriss)	Fox Trot
3. Poetry In Motion	(Kaufman & Anthony)	Fox Trot
4. Puppet On A String	(Martin & Coulter)	Fox Trot
5. Down The River Of Golden Dreams	(Klenner & Shilkret)	Waltz
6. You're Sixteen (You're Beautiful And You're Mine)	(Sherman & Sherman)	Fox Trot
7. The Sailor	(Loretta Pearl Jackson)	Fox Trot
8. Happy Go Lucky Me	(Al Byron)	Fox Trot
9. Cuckoo Waltz = Gökvalsen	(Johan Emanuel Jonasson)	Waltz
10. Mack The Knife	(Kurt Weil)	Fox Trot

(Tunes 2, 4, 9, and 10 arranged by David E. Stumpf to extend the original 1961 6-tune roll)

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For MATTHEW O. CAULFIELD -- (716) 338-1186

Figure 1. The roll label from the new Roll No. 6720.

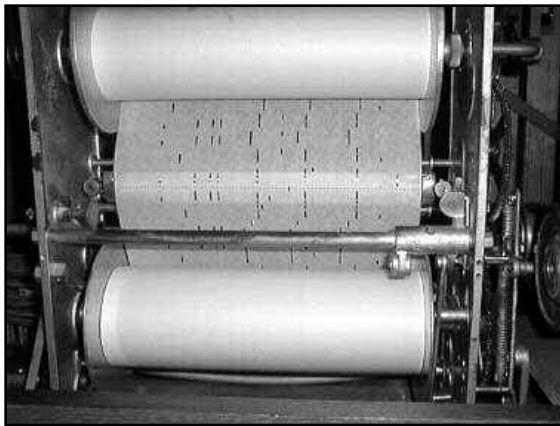


Figure 2. The Wurlitzer Style 165 roll frame.

up the good green roll paper that came from Wurlitzer when he bought out their band organ department. Until I got in touch with Bob Moore, I had always assumed that the term “butcher paper” was just a derogatory way of referring to T.R.T.’s heavier, abrasion-prone paper as compared Wurlitzer’s superb green paper. But Bob reported this piece of roll trivia: “Regarding the paper used in the production of rolls, we had a couple of rolls at Roseland that were punched on meat wrapping paper. They had an orange shade to them and a watermark that read ‘keeps meat fresh.’ In all the information I have read, I have never heard anyone mention this. I was told that after the war, there were shortages in just about everything, including paper.” So some, at least, of the paper that T.R.T used was butcher paper!

Now that I had the long-sought roll 6720 in hand, the question arose what to composite it with. Six-tune rolls are by their nature very repetitive. To keep costs down each tune was arranged on a master cardboard in the form of a single verse and a single chorus, then that master was repeatedly run to produce enough repeats of the verse and chorus to make a tune of the proper length. A Wurlitzer band organ roll plays for approximately 25 minutes. In the days of the ten-tune roll, that meant that each tune lasted about 2 1/2 minutes, a good length for most musical pieces. In the 6-tune roll era, each tune had to last about four minutes, which meant perhaps eight or more identical verse-chorus repeats, with the percussion and the pipe-voice registers turning on and off at the same places in each repeat -- resulting in a very monotonous set of tunes. Play-Rite’s solution to this problem—and an ingenious solution it is—was to cut down the length of each tune and to interweave the six tunes from one roll with the six tunes from another roll to make a 12-tune recut. The interweaving (tune 1 of the first roll, tune 1 of the second roll, tune 2 of the first roll, tune 2 of the second, etc.) was necessary to keep as close as possible to the proper tune tempo in the resulting recut.

Having composited two sets of rolls myself (rolls 6721-6722 and rolls 6723-6724), I can testify that the compositing process takes some care and cannot be done strictly by formula. You end up surrounded with mountains of paper and cut-off sections of tunes, which—if you don’t have them carefully marked—can lead to the mistake Play-Rite made in composi-

ing roll 6703-6717: tune 11, *Dunlap Commandery*, is repeated as tune 12, instead of the tune that should have been no. 12, *The Convoy*. Moreover, the best tempo often results from selecting the beginning of the tune taken from the first roll and following it with the end of the tune taken from the second roll. However, occasionally major tempo adjustment is needed and results in changing the strict 1,1,2,2,3,3,4,4,5,5,6,6 order of the interweaving process. Compositing takes some careful calculation and is a major jigsaw puzzle, but if you do it right you end up with one roll that is better than either of the two original rolls.

The process requires scissoring up the original, discarding parts, and taping the remainder to similar pieces from another roll. Since no owner of an original roll is going to allow it to be so butchered, the first step in compositing is to make a recut copy of the original roll as it stands. I did this with roll 6720, sending it heavily insured to Mike Grant for making at least four copies. Mike returned the original to Mr. Zorlenzan and one recut copy to me, this time not so heavily insured, since we were no longer dealing with a one-of-a-kind situation.

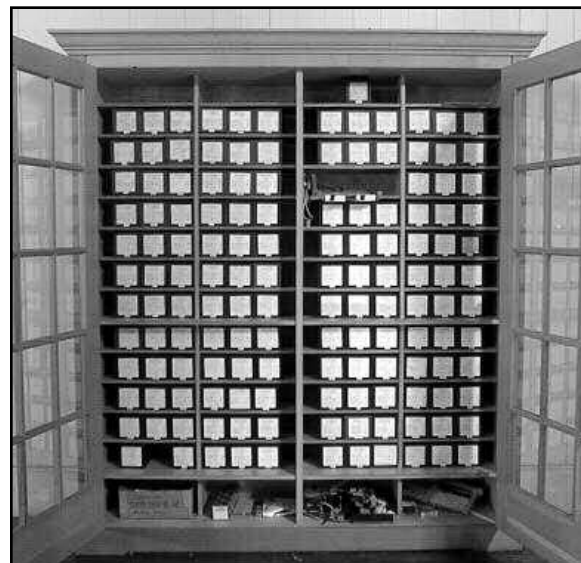


Figure 3. The Seabreeze roll cabinet. The empty space at bottom left is for the elusive roll, #6720.

There was not another un-recut six-tune roll to composite with roll 6720, so I decided to make it into a 10-tune roll by having four new tunes arranged to add to the six on the roll. I tried to choose four tunes similar in character to the six. The first step in the arranging process was to obtain sheet music for the four tunes I had in mind, and to send the sheet music to arranger David Stumpf so that he could start the scoring them to the 165 scale. While David was doing that I was recording the recut copy of 6720, timing each piece, and deciding with the use of the recording and a wristwatch, where to cut off each tune to approximate the proper 2 1/2 minute length.

It seems that by 1961—which was late in Ralph Tussing’s career—he was “selling music by the pound.” Whereas tune 1 of roll 6720 went on for a good 4+ minutes, with many, many verse-chorus repeats, tune 5 was much shorter and went through verse-chorus only three times. Apparently, as Ralph was running

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off copies of the roll for sale, he noticed that it was becoming nice and fat in its finished form, and so he cut down on tune length as he neared the end of the perforating process. Tune 1 demanded shortening, as did some of the others. But I didn't need to cut the length of tune 5 at all. In order to compensate for the significant cuts I made in tune 1 and tune 2, I decided to interpolate one of David's four new tunes between original tunes 1 and 2 and another of his four between original tunes 2 and 3. The remaining two new Stumpf tunes I assigned to the developing roll's end, as tunes 9 and 10.

To test out this plan I inserted 2 1/2 minute's worth of blank paper between the cut-down versions of tunes 1 and 2 and a similar section of blank paper between cut-down tunes 2 and 3, following tune 3 with tunes 4, 5, and 6, cut or not as necessary. Then I played and recorded the result. The tempos were good. So I mailed the roll to David Stumpf at his request so that he could calculate from examination of the roll the proper tempo of the four

tunes he had scored and was now ready to punch out in roll form. Right after Christmas David mailed me the finished 10-tune roll.

I spent the next month tweaking the result, notably adjusting the cadence of a couple of David's arrangements and putting more variety into the register and percussion patterns of the original six T.R.T. tunes. I also found it advisable to correct the generally faulty register-change patterns in the T.R.T. tunes. Too often the *declenche* (general cancel) perforation came on too early and not in combination with the new register settings, the result being that notes that should play were muted by the *declenche*. An experienced master-maker like Ralph Tussing should have seen this problem and avoided it. This suggests to me that the masters for this roll may have been made by Gordon Tussing, who has told me that he did work with his dad in the T.R.T. organ shop occasionally.

The final version of ten-tune roll 6720 went off for recutting on Jan. 26, 2002, insured for \$1,000.

Photo credits: Author

Matthew Caulfield, a well-known expert in the field of Wurlitzer Style 165 rollography, spends a lot of his spare time with the Seabreeze Carousel and its new organ, built from the ground up by Johnny Verbeeck.

... continued from page 19 *Small Organs — Big Rally*



Figure 5. The 20-note Gem Roller Organ was manufactured by the Autophone Co. in Ithaca, NY. The machine plays a small wooden roller with the music arranged spirally with rows of small pins that open the metal valve levers as the roller rotates. The music lasts 43 seconds as the roller turns three rotations to the right and then returns to home position. Tens of thousands of the Gem organettes were made in the 1800s and early 1900s. Sears Roebuck Co. listed the Gem for \$3.25 in their 1902 catalog.

phone (Figure 3) has to go to the fair. It is a rare sight to see a cardboard strip with holes in it playing music while squeezing your hand. Now I can pick instruments from my collection until the van is full. For example: an Ariston (Figure 4), a Gem Roller Organ (Figure 5), a Concert Roller Organ, a Musette Organette (Figure 6), a 14-note McTammany organette, and an Edison Gem Phonograph. When the van is full then I'm off to the fair!

I organized events and participants to bring their band organs, pushcart organs and organettes. Dwayne Steck, who owns and operates rides at the fair, worked with the fair management on plans for our participation at the event. When it was time to go to the fair I had to decide which instruments to take. I couldn't take them all. I had made a pushcart for my 39-note Manopan (Figure 1) and 32-note Grand Roller Organ (Figure 2). These I would take to the fair and as many other organs that would fit in the van. The 22-note Auto-

We set up the small organ display on tables outside the most popular exhibit building, the Automobile Building. All the spectators who went through the automobile building came by our display. The most fun was watching the young kids, their eyes big as saucers, and their endless questions. "How does it work?" "What makes it play?" "Can I turn the Crank?" "Where did you get it?" etc., on and on.

The band organs were placed throughout the midway of the fair and everyone could hear the music and see the instruments. Pushcart organs of various kinds roamed the fairgrounds to everyone's delight. The 1996 band organ rally was a great success and plans began immediately for a 1997 band organ rally. It is no surprise that the fair management is inviting us back on September 27 - 29th of 2002 for a bigger and better band organ rally and plans are being made to have a great show and a lot of fun.

Photo credits: Author.

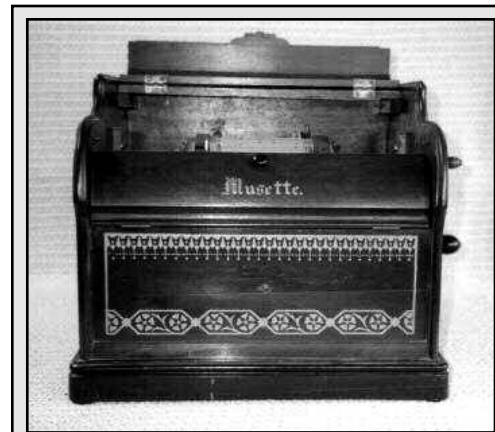


Figure 6. The 16-note Musette was made by the Aeolian Organ and Music Co. of New York in the mid-1880s. The machine has a 16-note tracker bar with 16 small pneumatics which open the pallet valves to the reed chamber. These early pneumatic organettes led to the development of the pneumatic system used in player pianos and other automatic musical machines.

Walter Moore is a long time member of the Sunbelt Chapter of the MBSI and is a well known restorer of organettes. Walter, his wife, Jessie and son Charlie make "new music for old players" under the name of *Honor Rolls*.