The Stinson Band Organ Company, Incorporated Bellefontaine, Ohio

Ron Bopp

Overview

Donald N. Stinson (**Figure 1**) is an aficionado and owner of the only factory operation left in the United States dedicated solely to the repair, restoration and building of new band organs. I first became aware of the new organs made by Don Stinson in the late 1970s when Bill Eicher (Dayton, Ohio) brought what looked like a new Wurlitzer Caliola to a Mid-Am MBSI band organ rally in Coshocton, Ohio. Concurrently, my good friend of Joplin, Missouri, Gerold Koehler, also had invested in one of these neat machines (**Figure 2**). These two Stinson "Caliolas" or later, the Stinson Model 52, were the first of such production-line machines manufactured (of 23 total).

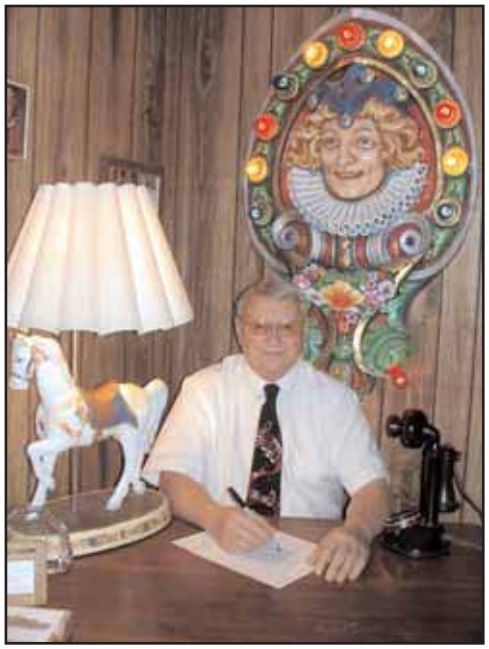


Figure 1. Don Stinson is the founder and owner of the Stinson Band Organ Company of Bellefontaine, Ohio

Figure 2. A Stinson "Caliola", or later the Model 52, in the collection of Gerold and Linda Koehler, Joplin, Missouri.

Soon, other Stinson organs appeared at rallies, including a different-looking organ brought by George Kallis at the Zoar, Ohio rally in 1979. This was what was later referred to, as the Style 57. Early Stinson Organs were designated by "Style"—later organs by "Model." The origins of the Stinson Organ Company, however, began years earlier in 1965. In Don Stinson's own words:

> I had just finished doing some house wiring for my father-in-law and he had an old pump organ on his back porch which was in very bad condition. He gave me the organ and that is where I started my life in music. I rebuilt the organ and installed it in our home where others admired it and asked me to rebuild one for them. It was not long before I was doing pump organs in almost all of my spare time. Then came the player piano phase and I will explain how it let me by accident to the band organ business.
>
> I started getting requests to repair player piano actions, which at that time was a new challenge. After rebuilding several player pianos, I found that no matter how well they were rebuilt, they needed tuning to complete the job and make my work complete. This is when I decided to learn to tune the piano and put out a complete job on the player pianos. This led to a very extensive sideline business and I ended up with my own customers from three music stores as well. I was self taught and made many mistakes in the early days, which I always corrected at my own expense and eventually became a very competent piano technician and tuner.
>
> It was while I was tuning a piano at the old Russel's Point Amusement Park, [Russell's Point, Ohio] that I came in close contact with my first band organ. Mr. [George] Quatman, who owned the park, asked me if I could repair his band organ [located on the merry-go-round] and I agreed to look at it. I had never seen inside a band organ and I didn't even know how to put the music roll on it, but I had just opened the door, which has now led to the Stinson [Band] Organ Company.

Leading up to these times, Don had graduated from high school in Lewistown, Ohio, and found employment locally with the New York Central Railroad, Bellefontaine, Ohio Branch. Facing the military draft, Don decided to voluntarily enlist in the United States Air Force. Halfway through his Air Force service Don returned home (on military leave) to marry his high school sweetheart, Phyllis. When honorably discharged in 1955 Don and Phyllis returned home to Bellefontaine, Ohio. Don

was able to get his old job back at the New York Central Railroad and also became the proud father of a daughter, Brenda (who would later work for the Stinson Band Organ Company, **Figure 3**).

Figure 3. Brenda Stinson applying paint to an organ figurine. Photo: Glen Cumberledge *The Columbus Dispatch*, 11/30/1980

When he was employed with the New York Central Railroad, before going into the Air Force, he enjoyed the glorious days of steam. When he returned four years later those days had dwindled and a new age of diesel was on the horizon, requiring Don to learn new skills. He then served a four year apprenticeship as a diesel locomotive electrician. Crisis than struck as the announcement was made, that the New York Central Railroad Branch in Bellefontaine would close forever. This forced Don to seek other work. He found full-time work in factory maintenance, learning wiring, plumbing, welding and repair of broken machinery. Don believes that this may have been a "blessing in disguise" because the knowledge gained during this particular time in his life became quite useful in the building of organs.

At first, organs were bought by hobbyists and collectors seeking new mechanical music machines for band organ rallies or home use. Only later would organs be built for commercial and special applications, carnivals and amusement parks. The early organs were not given a model number as Don didn't feel, at the time, this would even develop into a full fledge company. He has noted, in reference to early organ building:

> My first organ was not good as I had no knowledge of the instrument and did many things in the player piano fashion only to find they do not work on band organs. But it was a very good place to start. I was able to make this old 153 Wurlitzer (San Juan Amusement Park, Russels Point, Ohio) play very well. Other clients started coming here for band organ repair, and after a few years I had an established band organ business.

Over the next ten years Don felt that the high maintenance cost and repair of the complicated original band organs were factors causing the gradual disappearance of these great musical machines from the carousel/fairground scene. Skip Doyle, a former Stinson employee, wrote the following excerpt on the Stinson Band Organ Company on the company's web site at; http://www.stinsonbandorgans.com/press/index.htm, (story dated 02/21/2001, "Stinson Band Organ Company Brings Rebirth To Mechanical Band Organs"):

> High maintenance and repair costs had started to become responsible for many magnificent mechanical band organs to slip into the background. Don became more determined than ever to design and produce magnificent new mechanical band organs that would overcome fallacies of the past. New designs facilitated replacement of components without major disassembly. This reduced maintenance costs and more repairs were facilitated with ease in the field. Brushless air and vacuum motors were introduced to overcome maintenance of bellows and crankshafts. Demand started to return.
>
> Also a new paper roll frame was designed and perfected for all organ scales and later this roll frame became one of the signature highlights of owning a Stinson band organ. (**Figure 4**) The entire roll frame was manufactured in the Stinson Factory to include the intricate drilling and vacuum piping of the brass tracker bar. Efficient adjustable speed drive motors and faster-than-normal rewind motors negated the need for dual roll frames, previously in high demand on organs to ensure continuous play, especially on merry-go-rounds.

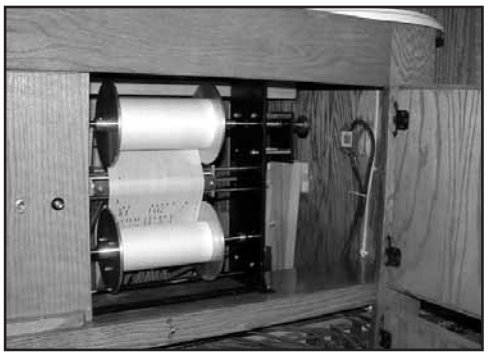
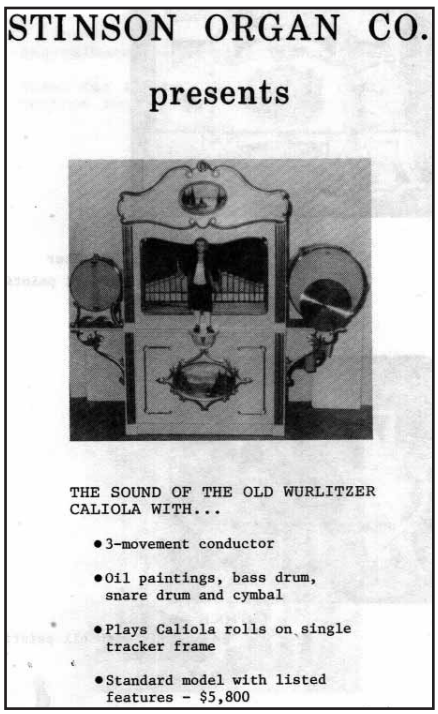


Figure 4. The Stinson newly-designed roll frame used for all Stinson and 165 rolls.

Many other stories, pictures and information can be gleamed by visiting the Stinson Web Site at: http://www.stinsonbandorgans.com

The Organs

At first, the Stinson organs resembled popular Wurlitzer organs. Early on, Don had a desire to build a calliope and went to the Columbus Zoo Amusement Park, which was owned and operated by the Gooding Amusement Company, to seek information on parts he would need to start. Eventually the first such production organ was the Stinson C-52, very similar in appearance to the Wurlitzer Caliola (see **Figure 2**).


STINSON ORGAN CO.

presents

THE SOUND OF THE OLD WURLITZER CALIOLA WITH...

- 3-movement conductor
- Oil paintings, bass drum, snare drum and cymbal
- Plays Caliola rolls on single tracker frame
- Standard model with listed features - $5,800

Figure 5. A very early Stinson Organ Co. advertising brochure promoted the C-52.

The Model C-52 was available in a cream or red-painted case. This unit was available with either loudly or softly-voiced flute pipes, a set of bells, drums, and a conductor figure. Playing the Wurlitzer Caliola roll as well as Wurlitzer's APP (Automatic Player Piano) roll, the C-52 found instant success and 23 were produced. A vintage Stinson Organ Company promotional advertising piece, circa 1978 (**Figure 5**) promoted the C-52 as "The Sound of the old Wurlitzer Caliola with a three-movement conductor . . . all for $5,800."

Another early Stinson organ was the "furniture front" organ (**Figure 6**), a large organ that utilized the Wurlitzer Style 165 roll and the usual percussion instruments. At least 12 were made and appear often at organ rallies. In the 1980s it was not unusual to see two or three of these large, attractive organs at band organ rallies.

Figure 6. One of Don Stinson's early organs was the "furniture front" organ which played Wurlitzer 165 music.

Figure 7. A Stinson Style 57 which appeared at a band organ rally in Columbus, Ohio in the late 1980s.

As time progressed the Stinson band organs appeared to become more standardized. From 1985 to 1997 the Style 57 organ was produced (**Figure 7**). According to factory records 15 of these attractive organs were produced. A few of these organs (and even some other Stinson Models) for a time, were produced with only the Stinson special scale paper roll frame, capable of playing only the Stinson European style music. Others were manufactured to play both the Stinson scale and the traditional Wurlitzer 165 scale.

The Style 57 was a decorative organ with exposed pipes and drums highlighted on semi-open shelves. A familiar organ at COAA rallies is Len Railsback's Stinson Style 57-2, a modified (extended bass and bourdon pipes) Stinson Style 57, which often will be heard playing Dutch music, as well as the recognizable Wurlitzer music (**Figure 8**). This organ marveled many with the ability to play the familiar 165 Wurlitzer musical arrangements of the past and with mere switching control, suddenly reveal that the same organ could activate idle standby voices that would play the organ similar to a Dutch street organ.

Figure 8. A Stinson Style 57-2 in the collection of Len Railsback. This organ has played at many COAA rallies.

Figure 9. A colorful Stinson Model JB66 in the collection of the late Art Eltzroth. This organ used the Wurlitzer Style 150 roll.

A new band organ was introduced September 7 and 8, 1990 and premiered for the first time at an American Band Organ Association (ABOA) Organ Rally in Chillicothe, Ohio in Yoctangee Park, hosted by Neil Smith of Chillicothe. Many remember Don arriving at the rally pulling a rustic old horse trailer. Soon it seemed that everyone there eventually gave a helping hand to unload the contents, which was not a horse, but a brand new beautiful band organ called a Stinson Model JB 66 Merry-Go-Round Band Organ. It was similar in size to a Wurlitzer 153, had a lighted replica Wurlitzer 153 Special facade and played the Wurlitzer Style 150 paper roll. The Style JB66 (**Figure 9**) was an organ modeled after the Wurlitzer 153 Special (also more detailed information can be seen about this organ in my book, *The America Carousel Organ—An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, Chapter 3).

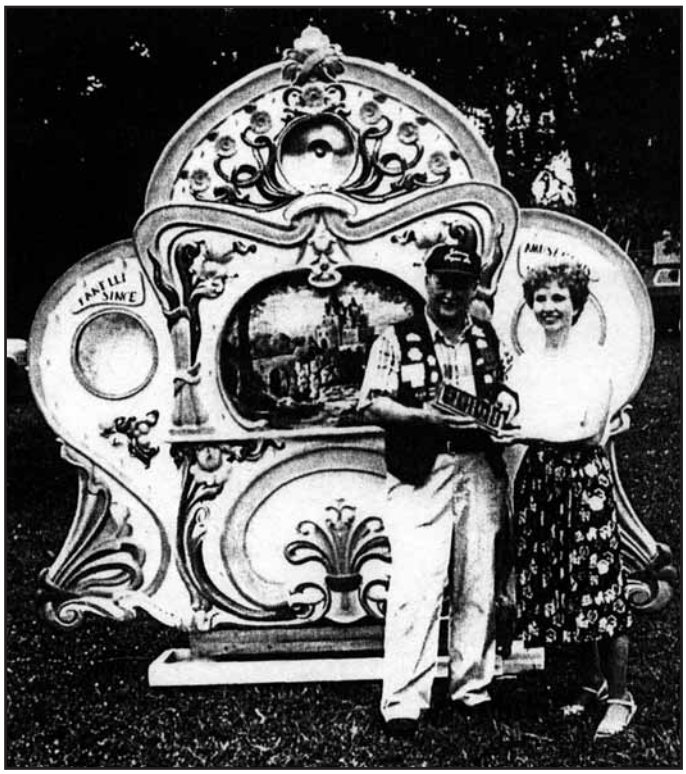


Figure 10. Don Stinson presenting a plaque to Freda Betts in honor of her late husband, Jerry Betts. Behind is the new JB-66 organ.
Photo: *Carousel News & Trader,* October, 1990.

The Style JB66 was manufactured and named after Don's close friend, the late Jerry Betts, who often accompanied Don in early days on organ repair trips. The Model Number JB stood for Jerry Betts and the 66 was the year that Don had met Jerry. Six JB66 Band Organs were made from 1990 to 1994 and the model is still being offered today. During the closing events of the rally Don tearfully presented a plaque to Mrs. Jerry Betts dedicating this new band organ in Jerry's remembrance (**Figure 10**).

Figure 11. Jerry Betts inspecting a new Wurlitzer band organ roll.

Don's thoughts and comments regarding band organs were quite folksy, as noted in his past, monthly musings in the *Carousel News & Trader* publication. One such comment, regarding his good friend, Jerry Betts, went as follows (**Figure 11**):

> I remember the time Jerry Betts, a dear friend, carousel and band organ aficionado (now deceased), called and said he would be at my place early the next morning. He instructed me not to fix breakfast as he was bringing the coffee and rolls. When he arrived with his thermos bottle and a stack of green 125 [Wurlitzer Style 125] rolls he wanted me to play on the Carpenter Bros. Organ……. I knew I'd been had!

The Stinson Organ Company also made larger organs, one of the most popular being the Style 87 which was modeled after the popular Wurlitzer Style 157 band organ (**Figure 12**). The Model 87 measures over 13 feet long, 4 feet deep and 8 feet high. Don had a great desire to expand what he had accomplished on smaller organs on to the larger Stinson Band Organs, wondering what he could really do. His diligence for this desire would again take the company in a still yet another brand new

Figure 12. A Style 87 band organ from the collection of the late Art Eltzroth. Art's subtle sense of humor can be depicted by the presence of sunglasses on the organ figurines.

direction. A Model 87 Stinson Band Organ was designed with an 87-note Stinson roll frame. The new model would have two roll frames. One roll frame was designed to play the Wurlitzer 165 roll (75-note) and through the use of ingenious coupler system (normally six to eight feet long, coupling all notes of the scale) a second Stinson roll frame (87-note) was designed and installed. Stinson then added the required European pipe voices to the organ. The second roll frame became commonly known as the Stinson 87-note scale. This roll was special made and was approximately four inches wider than a 165 Wurlitzer roll. It would allow Stinson band organs to play European-like tunes.

Now, a Stinson organ had been built that was actually two organs in one organ case. Play the roll frame on the right side and you could enjoy 165 Wurlitzer (the American sound) and then play the roll frame on the left and enjoy the Stinson scale with European voices (the European sound). Stinson also had several special tunes arranged in his new scale. These tunes became signature tunes if you owned a Stinson band organ. They are *Mary Poppins*, *Sound of Music*, *Notre Dame Fight Song* and the *Wizard of Oz*. For a Model 87 Stinson band organ manufactured for an amusement park in Japan, Don had their park theme song arranged, so they could play it on the organ in Stinson 87-note scale. Several organs were manufactured in this fashion to include the Ambassador Band Organ, (an organ owned by COAA Member Larry Kern.)

Figure 13. The "Ambassador," a Style 187 owned by Larry Kern, was the first of this series, beginning in 1991.

In the late 1990s the Stinson Factory redesigned this system which resulted in still yet a better way to continue building organs with both the American and European playing voices. The new system consisted of electronic switching. The acquisition for special musical arrangements and European style music was accomplished and the music was taken back to the 75-note scale. The new rolls were custom punched for the Stinson Band Organ Company by Mike Grant in Columbia City, Indiana. Originally the rolls were not registered during the punching process. Don registered each roll personally for each Stinson organ manufactured. This method personalized fully the roll to the exact organ that it would play on. Later on all previous organs, to include the Ambassador Band Organ, were returned to the factory to receive, at no cost, a new modified tracker bar that was 75 notes.

An example of the large scale Stinson Rolls is historically carried on the Ambassador Band Organ for viewing. Also the late Frank Rider music collection has a complete set of the original large 87-note Stinson scale paper rolls and roll boxes, (now maintained by Hope Rider in Wabash, Indiana) for historical preservation.

The new tracker bar was retubed and the 87-note tracker bar was removed. With the new musical arrangements provided and the new special arrangements made exclusively for the Stinson Systems, the company returning to the 75-note scale was a major accomplishment. Fifty Stinson European style paper music rolls were created for the new system. The design allowed the new system to work on a single tracker bar in all new Stinson band organs, and the electronic switching operated the special registration and pipe voice changes to change the organ from the American sound to the European sound. All large organs could now be played with both the Style 165 Wurlitzer music roll and the special Stinson roll (the 75-note Stinson Roll has the same spacing as the Style 165 but includes eight bass, 22 melody, 20 counter melody and 10 accompaniment notes, for a more European sound). Five animated figures and oil paintings on the façade of the Style 87 make this organ a show piece.

In 1991 an expanded version of the Style 87, the Model 187 of which COAA member, Larry Kern, displays often at rallies and exhibitions, was custom ordered and manufactured (**Figure 13**). To date this would be the largest band organ that Don had ever built. The model is 16 feet long, 5 feet deep and 10 feet high. The large ornate façade and organ were ordered for commercial application and incorporated more moving figures than ever placed on a Stinson organ

before. Included was a three-action maestro in the center, two cherub harp angels, two cherub bell ringers and two full body bell ringer band organ figures. This organ also introduced the use of static horn blower band organ figures and action cherub drummer boy-like figures for the first time on Stinson band organs.

Known as "The Ambassador," this organ travels six to seven months every year throughout the entire United States to band organ rallies, festivals, fairs and trade shows. For example, one of Larry's most popular events is the Eastern States Exposition (home of the "Big E") in West Springfield, MA where it has entertained millions of fair visitors. Larry recalls that when he asked Don why he designated the number 187 to his new organ, Don said, "Well, the last model down in size is my Style 87 and now that this stands before me, I realize this is at least 100 times better than that model, so I am going to call it the Stinson Model 187." One more Model 187 band organ was manufactured and this organ went to Mexico City, Mexico. With this organ, the paper roll frames would be replaced with state of the art MIDI systems and paper roll frames would become an additional option only (but highly discouraged). The new organs of this design would be designated Stinson Model 2000M.

The very first Stinson Model 2000M all-MIDI band organ, with no paper roll configuration installed, would be built for the Astro Amusement Company, an elite traveling carnival based out of Chicago, Illinois. In the year 2000, the Stinson Model 187 (Ambassador Band Organ), was once again returned to the Stinson Factory and became the first large Stinson band organ to be modified to add a MIDI music system. This was merely an additional system being added to the organ and the ability to still play paper music rolls would still remain. Coincidentally the new Astro band organ was nearing its final assembly at the Stinson factory at the same time. Events played out as to where the Ambassador actually became modified before the full completion of the first 2000M and Don was able to hear the full results of his new MIDI system first on the Ambassador. The results were excellent, especially when playing some of the brand new midi musical arrangements. Don was so impressed with his accomplishment and the fact that paper rolls were getting harder to acquire, that Don made an on spot decision; he was no longer going to offer the paper roll frame as an option. The entire factory operation would move forward from that day manufacturing only MIDI Band Organs.

Figure 14. Don Stinson poses with an early Style 27 organ which made its debut at an ABOA rally in Cleveland, Ohio.

Figure 15. A Stinson Style 29 organ with exposed drums and cymbal. This type of organ could play either the Wurlitzer 125 or 150 roll.

Since the mid-1990s the Stinson Organ Company has accommodated collectors with a smaller band organ, capable of playing either the Wurlitzer Style 125 or Style 150 roll. Offered as a Style 27 (**Figure 14**) without drums or Style 29 (**Figures 15 & 16**) with drums and bells this organ is compact and is often transported via van or small truck. Similar to the Wurlitzer Style 50 ("Kiddie Organ") the compact organ is as functional as it is attractive. These models are now only available with the Stinson MIDI 75-note system.

Figure 16. A completed facade style Stinson 29 in the collection of Carl and Sharon Curtis. This organ is frequently seen at COAA rallies.

Figure 17. This style 35M was built for a shopping mall and is particularly enjoyed around Christmas with its holiday music from the 165 MIDI.

The Stinson Band Organ Company continues to make additions and improvements to their line of organs. The Style 35 M (**Figure 17**) is available as the 30M-1 (playing the traditional 46-notes of the Wurlitzer Style 150 roll) or the 30M-2 which incorporates additional instrumentation making it capable of playing 75-note Wurlitzer and Stinson 165 music via MIDI. In addition there is the Style 59M (an example is the organ owned by the late Frank Rider) **Figure 18**. Note that this façade is different—any type of custom façade can be built, according to the customer's wishes.

Figure 18. A Stinson Style 59M displaying a different facade. This organ is in the Hope Rider collection.

Figure 19. A Stinson 2000M housed and playing for the Eastern States Exposition in West Springfield, Massachusetts.

In late 2000 and early 2001 two more Model 2000M's were manufactured and a new Model 3000M was announced. The sale of a second Model 2000M went to the "Big E" (Eastern States Exposition) in West Springfield, Massachusetts. (**Figure 19**, Eastern States Band Organ named "The New England States Band Organ"). The 3rd Model 2000M was manufactured for COAA Member, Dr. Ted Waflart, for inclusion in the wonderful Dr. Ted's Musical Marvels Museum, located near Dale, Indiana. This would also be Dr. Ted's second Stinson instrument with the previous purchase of a Stinson Caliola. [See the Dr Ted's Museum Web Site at http://www.drteds.com] Following suit the Model 2000M Organ became a very popular model with four more being manufactured and is currently the leading model of Stinson band organs today. The organ is 16 feet long, 5 feet deep and towers 10 feet high. The organ plays both the American and European voices and uses the state-of-the-art MIDI operating system as well as the "System Diagnostic Monitoring Panel."

Figure 20. The Style 300M is the largest band organ made by the Stinson Co. Named "Broadway" it is displayed at the First World Hotel and Resorts complex in Payang, Malaysia.

Completed at the end of 2001, the "Mighty 3000M" is the largest band organ manufactured by the Stinson Band Organ Company. Named "Broadway" the organ fits in well in a Las Vegas style complex billed as "Times Square," all within the world's largest hotel, the First World Hotel and Resorts complex in Payang, Malaysia (**Figure 20**).

Custom organ building is the norm at the Stinson Band Organ Company. More proof of this comes with the unique Castle Organ, "Treveris" (**Figure 21**); custom built specifically for COAA Members Mike and Liz Barnhart, Dayton, Ohio. Combining the talents of Mike and the diversity of the Stinson Band Organ Factory, this is an organ that is a must to see [more information can be found in the caption for Figure 21].

The Wave of the Future: MIDI

Enter the 21st century, and the role of paper music rolls and cardboard books become obsolete. Where the barrel-operated system of the fair organ was, practically speaking, replaced by the cardboard book music at the turn of the 20th century; and later, roll-operated paper organs became much more practical than those operated by cardboard books; now another technique is on the horizon to replace all of these—the MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) system. The Stinson Band Organ Company's approach to the MIDI way of supplying music is summarized in the following comment:

> Utilization of Stinson's new MIDI Operating Systems has opened a whole new field of operation, especially for commercial applications. In addition to eliminating opportunities for roll frame mechanical failures to occur, plus negating opportunities for operators to mess with tempo and such, redundancy of tunes (6 to 12 tunes per paper roll), which is probably as annoying as loudness to carousel operators or those situated

Figure 21. Details of Treveris are as follows:

Wurlitzer/Stinson 165 Roll Scale
6 Note Bass, 10 Note Accompaniment,
22 Note Melody, 14 Note Counter Melody
204 Pipes, 22 Bells, 6 Traps, Tremolo, 6
Registers Modular Breakdown Case

Treveris is a band organ that was constructed in 2003. The case and facade was designed and built by Mike Barnhart. The facade was inspired by the surviving 1700 year old Roman artifact Porta Nigra gate to the city of Trier, Germany. Trier was chartered in 16 BC as a Roman City named Augusta Treverorum later shortened to Treveris. The case of the organ is designed for disassembly into component modules for loading and transport inside a standard size Ford E-150 Club Wagon passenger van. The organ was built by the Stinson Band Organ Company of Bellefontaine, Ohio. The organ is pneumatically operated from a 75 track paper roll and is modeled after the larger production Wurlitzer Model 165 band organs used in fairgrounds, roller rinks, and dance halls in the early 1900s. A large repertoire of over 400 arrangements of marches, popular dance, semi classical, classical, and novelty music is available for the organ. (The organ also incorporates a MIDI interface for computer emulation of the paper roll operation) The organ is comprised of five sections; a 6 note bass division, a 10 note accompaniment division, a 22 note melody division, a 14 note counter melody division, and 6 percussions. In front of the organ stands a basswood carving of "Treviris" the Goddess of Trier derived from a drawing on a Roman calendar for the year 354 AD. On Treviris' shield is a drawing representative of organs used in Roman times. The carving was accomplished by Rex Branson a renowned Arkansas wood carver. The carving and facade were painted by Leonard Williams of Waynesville, Ohio.

within close proximity of a band organ for many hours, can be eliminated. MIDI music media (diskettes) can be loaded with up to 70 tunes (depending upon the length of tunes to be played) and can be played in sequence, randomly, or selectively. Operators, riders, and guests alike can now enjoy a much wider selection of the "Happiest Music on Earth" without necessity and sometimes hassle to change paper rolls or books. Stinson's MIDI Library contains hundreds of enhanced tunes for 125, 150 and 165 formats.

All organs offered by the Stinson Band Organ Company are now offered only as MIDI as the standard operating feature. All models, from the Model C 52M (Caliola model), the Style JB66M (Wurlitzer 153 Special) to the Model 2000M & 3000M and all other Stinson models have the letter "M" afterward to designate that. Although no new Stinson band organs are now manufactured with paper roll systems, the company does still modify vintage band organs with state of the art MIDI systems with great care as not to compromise the historical book or paper roll systems contained in them. For example, in July 2006, the company restored and added a MIDI system to the famous Model 38 Ruth fair organ located at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina (**Figure 22**).

Figure 22. Don Stinson explaining the restoration process of the Model 38 Ruth at the Myrtle Beach carousel.

Larry Kern, who is the proud owner of "The Ambassador," a Model 187/M Stinson band organ, has commented:

> Think about it, if we could communicate with the old timers, who operated mechanical band organs from the past, using paper rolls day after day, would they choose a ten-tune paper roll that required careful handling, or a 20+ tune MIDI disc they could have stuck into their back pocket, and changed in seconds? On this note, it is my opinion that addition of a Stinson MIDI Music System to a mechanical band organ adds considerably to its ability to perform while leaving historical or traditional paper roll music systems in place. This is what the Stinson Band Organ Company appears to be talking about when they state that MIDI does not compromise the original paper roll music system that exists within new and vintage band organs.

In addition to swell shutters (standard with the Model JB66M) new Stinson organs (since 2001) incorporate a "System Diagnostic Monitoring Panel" that illustrates wind pressure, vacuum, line voltage, DC voltage for the MIDI device and an hour meter. Also on this control panel electronic switching allows for partial voices to be turned off, reducing, in a sense, the volume. The Stinson literature also notes that:

> Larger Stinson band organs allow for trumpets to be turned off with remaining voices carrying that section. Trombones, and forte pipes, can also be turned off with the same effect. As well, percussion can be diluted. This ability can, in some ways, take away from the music, but when dealing with indoor situations when carousel pavilions are not open to the outside there is now an alternative available to facilitate both employees and guests should it be desirable to reduce amplitude.

The Stinson Band Organ Company is now building instruments voiced at lower pressure, voicing pipes slightly softer,

changing voices every few bars of music, using smaller scale violin pipes, and incorporating many other designs . . . all for the purpose of enhancing the listening pleasure of the general public. Stinson continues to build loud band organs upon request since there are applications whereby operators require higher amplitudes to accomplish results these instruments were purchased to perform.

Figure 23 (above). The Wurlitzer 153 Special as it sat at the Columbus Park Zoo carousel in 1987.
Figure 24 (below). The "stepladder" sign on the side of the case.

The Stinson Experience

Selling and repairing band organs for over 40 years has brought about many interesting band organ stories, one of which will be related here. Many of these stories appeared in older issues of the *Carousel News and Trader* as well as on the Stinson Band Organ web page. One story that I can relate to personally is about the Wurlitzer 153 Special located at the Columbus Park Zoo—this is an organ that I used for inclusion in my book *The American Carousel Organ-An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (**Figures 23 & 24**). The story is as follows:

> Some time ago I installed the 153 organ at the Columbus Zoo. The carousel and organ have been at the old Zoo Park for as long as I can remember, until the Columbus zoo acquired it this year. I had the privilege of working with my friends at the Carousel Works in Mansfield, Ohio on this project. I brought the organ to our shop on the same day they dismantled the carousel. The facade went to their location, as they wanted it to match the same style painting as they were doing on the carousel.
>
> There is a lot of organ history behind this organ and I will take time to relate part of it. When Gooding Amusement was running the park this 153 was the top organ in their collection and was kept in very fine form by the late Erwin Heller who I have mentioned earlier. At some time in the past he had observed someone climbing on the organ and painted a sign on the side which read
>
> ***Don't use this organ as a stepladder!***
>
> When we refinished the case we sadly sanded the sign away and part of organ history is gone forever. The carousel and organ are now in the hands of the Columbus Zoo and after working with the maintenance staff there, I can assure you this piece of history will be very well taken care of from this time on. I also consider the carousel restoration as another fine carousel saved from extinction."

[Editor's Note: All of Don Stinson stories published in the *Carousel News and Trader* Publication can be seen on the Stinson Company Web Site].

The Future

The Stinson Band Organ Company, Inc. still manufactures new band organs and many different models are available in all kinds of affordable price ranges. The company also restores and modifies vintage band organs, with great care as to not compromise the organ in any way from the original operating system, with new state of the art MIDI systems. The factory is located in Bellefontaine Ohio. The company has manufactured over 200 new band organs that are located throughout the world, including the United States, Canada, Japan, Mexico, Taiwan and Malaysia. Don Stinson is a true American band organ builder and is making tomorrow's history, today!

The author wishes to thank Mike Barnhart, Len Railsback, and Don Stinson for their aid and input in developing this article. I especially wish to thank Larry Kern who added a lot of valuable information to make the history factual.

Ron Bopp is the editor/publisher of the ***Carousel Organ.*** He and Mary Jo have enjoyed organs (the music and the rally experience) since 1978. His first organ was a Wurlitzer Style 125 Military Band Organ.