The World's Smallest Mechanical Organ

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An item, or thread, appeared on *Mechanical Music Digest* (MMD) over three years ago. This thread continued for several days with many MMD members contributing to the information base. The topic at the time was the "World's Smallest Organ" and it continues to surface within me, probably because I have the two close examples of mechanical music in my collection. They are the Tuneyville Choo Choo and the Tuneyville Player Piano.

They are not marketed as organs at all but rather a toy train and a toy piano. When dissecting each, however, we will find components that are similar if not identical to the mechanical organs in our hobby. While both were constructed and marketed by the Tomy Corporation of Carson, California, they are as different as they are similar. Both have been the topics of discussion in past issues of the MBSI "Technical Bulletin" by the late Mike Kitner. The advent of internet access to the U.S. Patent office has allowed examination of the patents for both instruments. Not marketed as an "instrument," they are, in fact, exactly that and they will be referred to as instruments in this article.

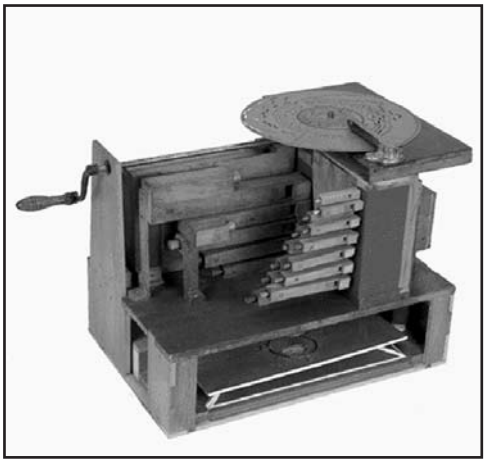

Figure 1. the Astroflute, a small mechanical organ which has a paper disk playing pipes.

First, I need to discuss other instruments in the race for the "World's Smallest Organ." Correspondence with Björn Isebaert (Belgium) regarding this subject revealed the existence of a disk-playing, hand-cranked pipe organ instrument (the Astroflute) which appears indeed to be quite small (**Figure 1**). Likewise, early serinettes, such as the one pictured (**Figure 2**) would qualify. While both have media to control the music (cardboard disk in the Astroflute and a pinned barrel in the Serinette) they require, in fact, hand cranking.

The Tuneyville Choo Choo (CC) and the Tuneyville Player Piano (PP) are totally automatic, depending on an 3-volt electrical motor to provide both the automatic progression of the music media (in this case, plastic disks with mechanical information programmed on them) as well as the wind pressure for the include flute mechanism.

Now having set the stage for this article, let us investigate both of these very small, if not the smallest, mechanical musical organs.

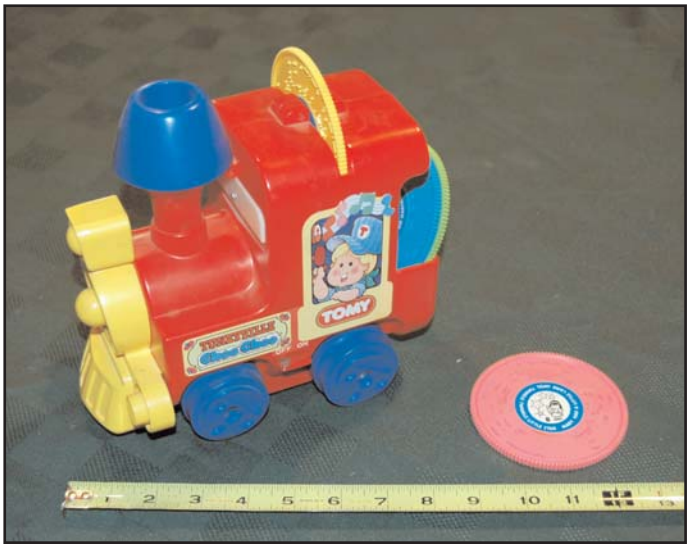

Figure 3. The Tuneyville Choo Choo with it's set of four disks.

Tuneyville Choo Choo

An overall assessment of the CC reveals a colorful plastic train, 8" in length, 5" wide and 8" tall (**Figure 3**). The train's housing is constructed of red, yellow and blue plastic (although there are variations). The train has a battery compartment underneath for 2 "D" batteries. On the left side is a metal slide switch that activates the train at which time it moves in a forward direction and. If a 3 ¾" disk is inserted in the slot at the

Figure 2. A top view (left) and bottom view (right) of a small Serinette. Photo: Christian Greinacher.

top of the cabin, a tune is played. On gross inspection one can see a line-up of pipe openings, not un-similar to pan pipes as there appears to be just one block of pipes (**Figure 4**). The pipe openings are just behind the smoke stack.

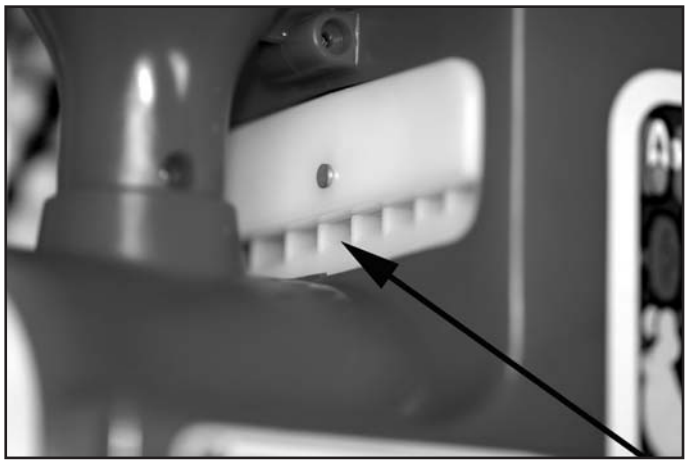

Figure 4. A view of the pan pipe openings (as noted by the arrow) behind the smokestack.

In evaluating the CC and its musical/sound producing mechanism a dissection of the playing components becomes necessary. Kenzo Akiyana, Long Beach, California, invented and designed the "Toy Musical Vehicle" for the Tomy Kogyo Co., Inc. of Tokyo (**Figure 5**). His patent (#3,982,459) for this toy was filed February 13, 1975 and granted September 28, 1976.

In his patent #3,982,459 Mr. Akiyana noted in other musical toys there was a lack of ease of use, multi-tuned medium (disks), lack of constant operation and sturdiness to withstand young and rough operation. He summarized his invention in regards to this by stating:

> *These objectives relative to a musical instrument are achieved by providing in the combination of a compressed gas source, a wind chest connected to such a source, a plurality of sound producing means for use in producing sound in response to a stream of compressed gas located adjacent to the wind chest, valve means for controlling the flow of such gas from the wind chest to such sound producing means and a rotary disk for controlling the operation of such valve means the improvement which comprises: this disk being located in a slot extending less than 180 degrees around the periphery of the disk and fitting with respect to the disk in such a manner that the disk is held so that as it is rotated it cannot move in an axial direction and so that as it is rotated it will selectively actuate various of these valve means, and drive means located so as to extend into the slot for engaging the periphery of the disk in order to rotate the disk during the operation of the instrument, this disk being held within the slot by gravity so that there is engagement between the periphery of the actuator and the drive means.*

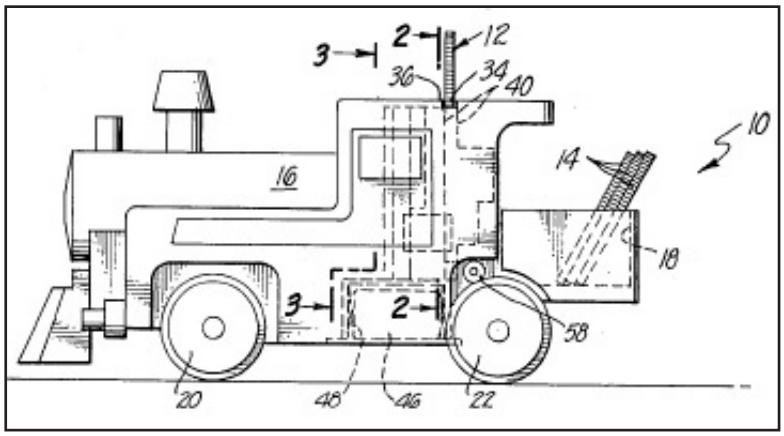

Figure 5. Patent #3,982,459 showing Akiyana's invention, the "Toy Musical Vehicle."

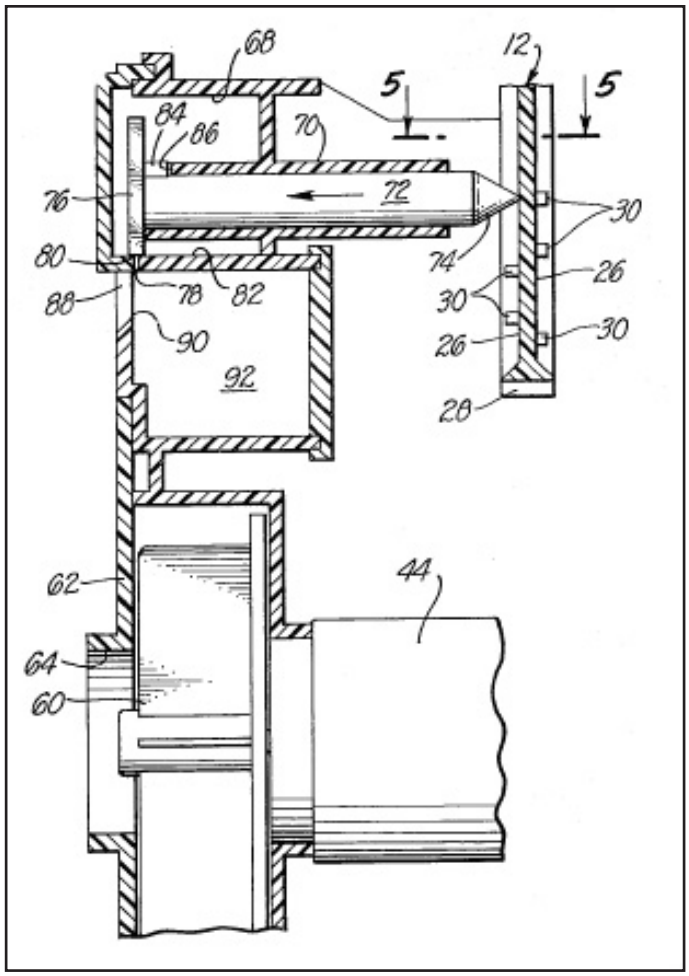

Figure 6. A side drawing of the Choo Choo mechanism detailing the actuator rod #72 activated by the disk projections #30.

Understanding his purpose for the patent is best explained using a series of photographs of the CC interior as well as some of the patent drawings. **Figure 6** is the patent drawing showing the side of the playing mechanism. #12 is the disk as seen from the side with #30 being the projections on the disk (**Figure 10** later will reveal an actual photo of the front of the disk). The projections in turn will push an "actuator rod" (or valve stem) #72 which moves a valve (#76). This will then uncover an opening (#78) and allow air to cross the pipe's opening (#80). The lip of the pipe is #90. Each of the eight flute pipes has such a mechanism.

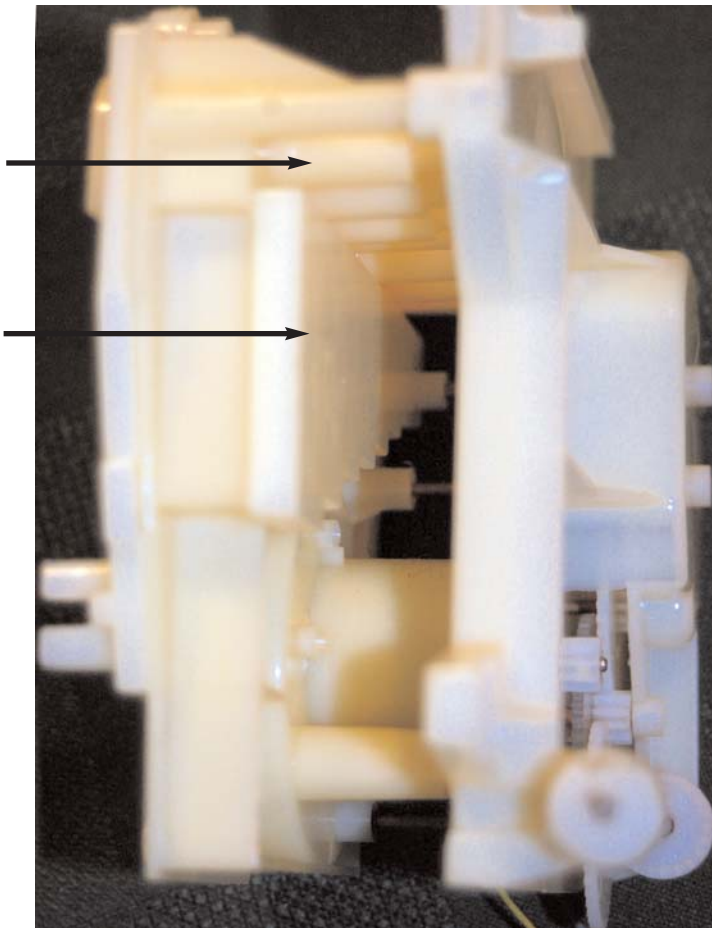

Figure 7. A side view of the Choo Choo mechanism shows the actuator rods (top arrow) and the pipes (lower arrow.

Figure 7 is a side shot of my CC showing the mechanism described above. The series of actuator rods may be seen at the top and the graduated pan flute pipes can be seen at the center of the photo. At the bottom on the right the series of gears can be appreciated- these turn the disk at a preset rate of motion in order to play the tune.

The patent photo in **Figure 8** is more complex at first glance, but with some help it becomes easier to understand. The view of the organ mechanism is from the front, with the eight pan flutes facing you (#90). #92 represents the actual length of the pipes, the lowest note being on the left. The actuator rods, noted previously (#72), are seen as round circles within the diameter of the 3 ¾" disk. #60, 62 and 64 comprise the wind turbine or fan motor mechanism. After the wind is developed it moves through a channel #66 to the wind chest #68 where it waits for one or more of the actuator rods and valves (#76) to be pushed by a projection on the disk, at which time the associated pipe would sound. The round bodies #46 are the batteries at the bottom of the mechanism.

A similar view of my CC is seen in **Figure 9**. You can view the actuator rods resting on the disks surface. Below the rod mechanism about half-way down the photo you should be able to make out the eight pipe openings. Further down the wind turbine mechanism can be seen.

Further notes in Mr. Akiyama's patent, in reference to the 3 ¾" plastic disks, state that:

> *As the motor is operated this vehicle will be propelled in a forward direction. Concurrently air will be blown into the wind chest so as to bias the followers where they can be engaged by cams. Such engagement will periodically occur as a consequence of the motor rotating a disk used within the vehicle. At any time such a disk may be replaced by lifting it out of the slot in its place. Similarly a disk may be pulled out of the slot and may be reinserted in a reverse position. Such changes of either the orientation of a particular disk or of individual disks enables different melodies or musical compositions to be played with a minimum of difficulty.*

Figure 10 details a close-up of just a portion of one of CC's operating disk. Clearly seen is the toothed, or gear-like, edge of the disk, which is used to engage with a small gear noted previously in Figure 7. Also seen in this photo are the projections on

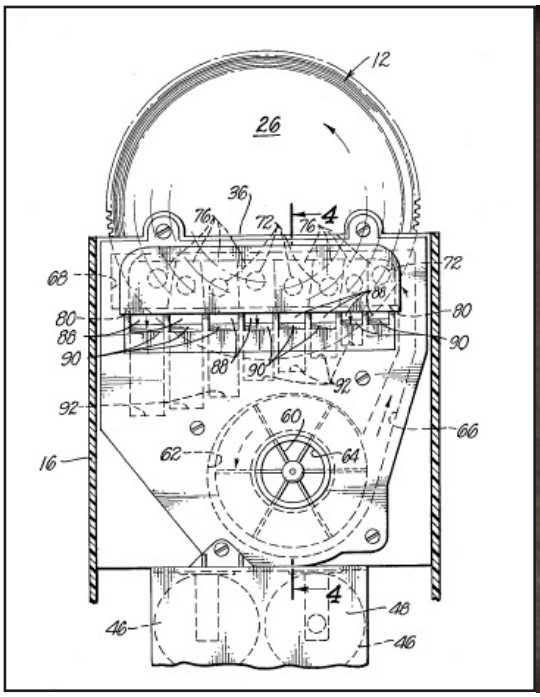

Figure 8 (right). A front view of the Choo Choo patent drawing.

Figure 9 (far right). A photo of the mechanism from the same view as Figure 8. The actuator rods can be clearly seen in their positions awaiting activation by the projections of the plastic disk.

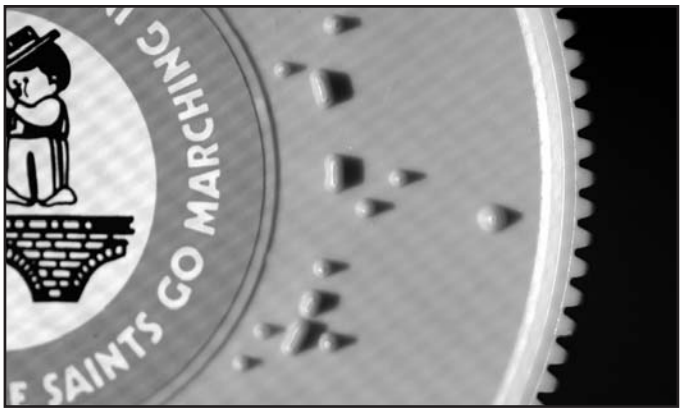

Figure 10. The Choo Choo disk with its projections and outside gear for propulsion

the disk—some short while others are long. Each concentric circle of projections plays just one pipe. In this photograph, five different pipes will sound. In **Figure 11**, there are four different disks, each with at least one tune on each side. There are actually 11 different tunes available. *Jingle Bells*, *Brahm's Lullaby*, *Down by the Station*, *Frere Jackques* and *Alouette* are on five of eight available sides while three disk sides have two tunes: *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* occurs with *Mary Had a Little Lamb*; *This Old Man* with *Baa, Baa, Black Sheep*; and *London Bridge* with *When the Saint Go Marching In*.

Figure 11. The back of the Choo Choo carries the extra disks.

The story would be complete for the Tuneyville Choo Choo if it was not for a patent, and a product marketed 15 years later, again by the Tomy Company. This is the Tuneyville Pipewagon (PW). **Figures 12 & 13** Casual observation of this toy reveals no similarity to the CC but upon closer inspection one can see a familiar disk behind the tall plastic pipes on top of the car.

Figure 12. The Tuneyville Pipewagon. Behind the pipes is the familiar disk. Photo: Bill Wineburgh.

The purpose of this patent, and subsequent Pipewagon toy, was that previous toys "attracted children's attention widely because it was novel and fantastic. But over a long lapse of time, it can become less novel or fantastic and children might lose interest in the toy." The inventor, Michiya Ohashi, then summarized the invention by saying:

> *The present invention solves this problem by providing a wind instrument toy including blower means; a plurality of melody pipes different in the music scale, the melody pipes being played by air fed from the blower means; opening/closing means for opening and closing vent portions of the melody pipes; operating means for causing the opening/closing means to perform the opening and closing operations; a plurality of vent pipes for allowing air discharged from the melody pipes to flow upward; and vertically movable floats contained in the vent pipes, the floats capable of floating by the pressure of air passing through the vent pipes.*

When the wind instrument toy of the present invention is played, the air discharged from each melody pipe flows into the corresponding vent pipe, and the float contained therein floats by the pressure of the air. Therefore, the floats provide an impression as if they were floating in accordance with the melody from the melody pipes.

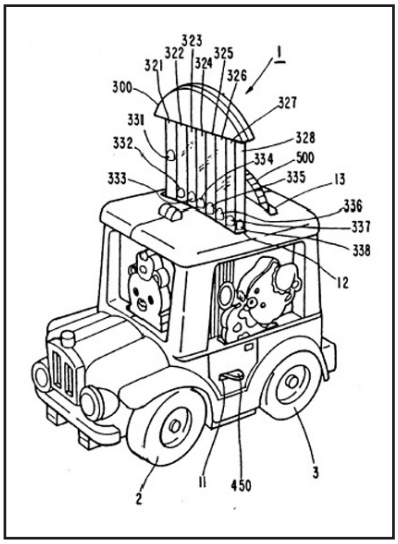

Figure 13. Patent #5,041,045 details the Tuneyville Pipewagon.

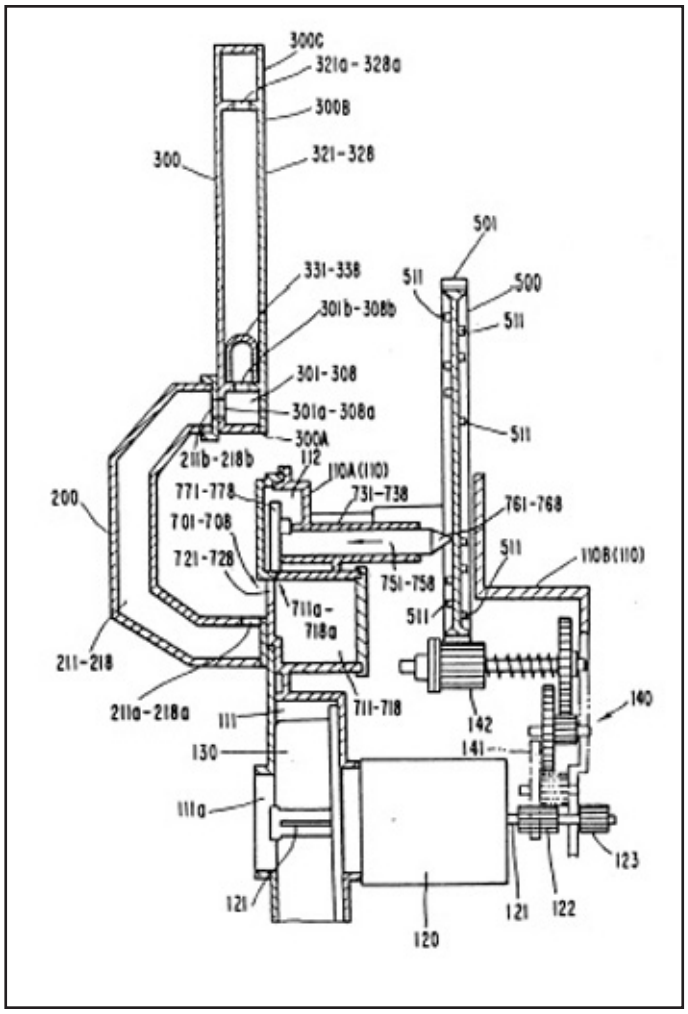

Figure 14. A side view of the Pipewagon in the patent drawing.

Figure 14 is a patent photo of the PW playing mechanism from the side elevation. We can see that to a point, this appears identical to the mechanism of the CC as seen in Figure 6. Comparison of the patent drawing in Figure 8 with a similar drawing in patent #5,041,045 reveals the mechanical music portion to be identical—Mr. Ohashi and Mr. Akiyama must have worked together for the Tomy Company. The difference is the addition of #211a - 218a "conduits" which vent air from the pipe chambers #711a - 718a up into the "vent pipe unit" (#300). It is this pipe unit that the "floats" (#331-338) move up and down, according to the pipe that is sounding. One would wonder if too much air would be lost to make a pipe sound sour but the top of the vent pipe units are open only to the tops of the remaining pipes, making this a combination of an open/closed system. Communication with Bill Wineburgh, owner of a PW, reveals the sound to be as loud as with the Choo Choo. Bill noted that the sound escapes from the side of the exposed pipes.

The entire vent pipe unit (#300) can be removed at the juncture of the vent holes (#301a-308a). **Figure 15** is a photo of the pipe unit removed from the PW seen in Figure 12. Although this photo is in black and white the different colored floats or balls can be appreciated.

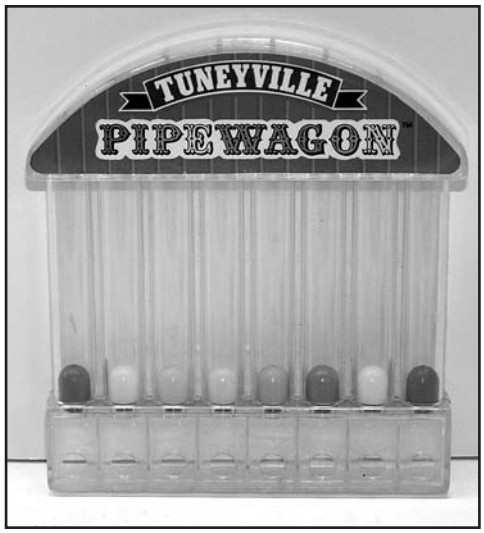

Figure 15. The pipe section removed from the rest of the toy. Photo Bill Wineburgh.

Figure 16. The Tuneyville Player Piano, complete with box and four musical disks.

Tuneyville Player Piano

As mentioned at the beginning of this article this toy piano (**Figure 16**) is unlikely as a candidate as the world's smallest organ but in fact, it is a miniature organ, in flute form. Both the CC and the PP are manufactured by the Tomy Company and both were the result of inventions by Mr. Kenzo Akiyama. They are, however, are as different as night and day, although the end result (i.e. organ music) is much the same. **Figure 17** details one of the two main differences. The size of the disk deters interchangeability. While the CC's plastic disk is 3 ¾" in diameter, the PP disk is just 3".

Figure 17. The Tuneyville Player Piano disks (left) compared to the Tuneyville Choo Choo disks (right).

Figure 18. Details of the PP disk reveals complicated multiplexing of notes.

Both have music patterns, or arrangements, imprinted on either side but a closer look (**Figure 18**) of a PP disk reveals a much more complex pattern of playing notes. It will become apparent with the next few patent drawings and photographs that the mechanism of playing notes is not just a projection for each note (like the CC mechanism) but rather a multiplex system of playing one or more notes.

Mr. Akiyama provided with this invention a method to play by both keyboard as well as mechanically and noted:

> *If a toy instrument is to maintain the attention of a comparatively young child the instrument should preferably have different, separate modes of operation so as to be capable of being used by a child in different ways.*
>
> *This recognition is believed to have led the development of a few limited types of instruments capable of being utilized both manually and automatically. Thus, for example, it has been recognized that various types of hurdy-gurdies or barrel organs could be constructed so as to be operated by the rotation of a cam drum record member and so as to be capable of being manually actuated. Such instrument structures are considered comparatively undesirable for toy purposes because the cam drums employed in them are essential unchangeable structures in the sense that they cannot be lifted out or replaced with any particular facility or ease.*

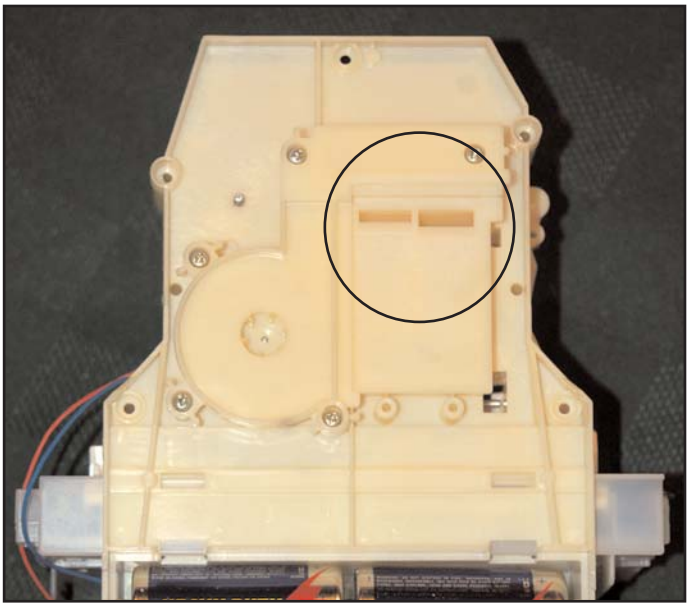

Figure 19. Two pipe openings are on the reverse side of the PP mechanism (circled).

One of the first surprises upon opening up the PP case is the inspection of the back of the mechanism (**Figure 19**). Instead of eight pipe openings for the notes there are just two. In Mr. Akiyama's summary of his patent he addresses this noting:

> *Further objects of the present invention are to provide musical instruments of the type specified which are especially desirable because of the use of a minimum number of valves controlling the operation of two resonating chambers to provide a series or set of eight consecutive notes on the musical scale.*

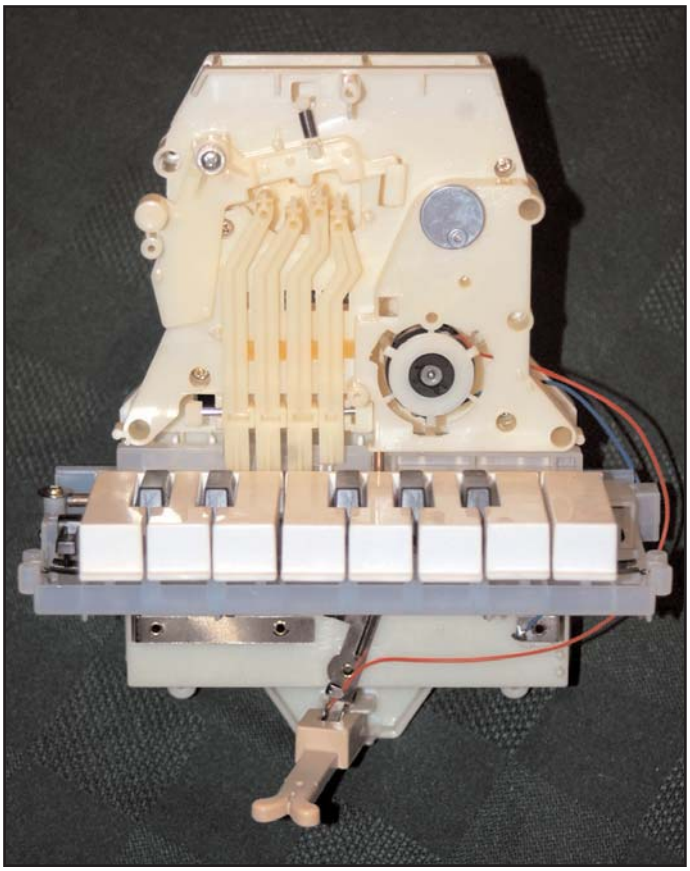

Figure 20. A front view of the PP mechanism detailing the keyboard with pedals below (the on/off switch) and other operating mechanisms above.

Figures 20 & 21 reveal the inside, front of the mechanism. This is much more complicated than the CC mechanism and will be explained using these figures as well as other patent photos to follow. Please note that the patents in Figures 21 and 24 are viewed from the front while **Figure 22** drawings (right and left) represents views from the back of the piano and the center drawing is from the left side.

When a music-encoded disk is inserted into the top of the piano it will begin the playing process when one of the "cam lugs" (#84 in **Figure 24**) comes in contact with an "actuating end" (#54) in Figure 22, center. Mr. Akiyama has also referred #54 as "cam followers." These are the same as the actuator rods in the CC discussed earlier. If you pay attention to Figure 20 you see four long pieces or levers (also #152 in Figure 21) coming up from the middle of the keyboard. Labeled "control levers" they are used when the piano keys are depressed to man-

ually play the piano. They are mentioned now to just highlight the valve mechanism or cam followers (#54 and #70 in Figures 21 and 22) that are depressed by them, (or by the cam lugs on the disk). The cam followers (under the first and third lever in Figure 21) operate, via actuator rods or valve stems (#52 in Figure 22, left and right), valves causing one of two pipe chambers (#62 and/or #64, Figure 22, right) to speak. Working in conjunction with these one or two actions are the cam followers (#70) seen in Figure 21 which are under the 2nd and 4th lever from the left. These operate a lever (#66) which have a pad or "valve plate" on the bottom of them (#74, Figure 22, center). The plates cover holes #78 (square) and #76 (round) in the two pipe chambers (#62 and #64, Figure 22, right).

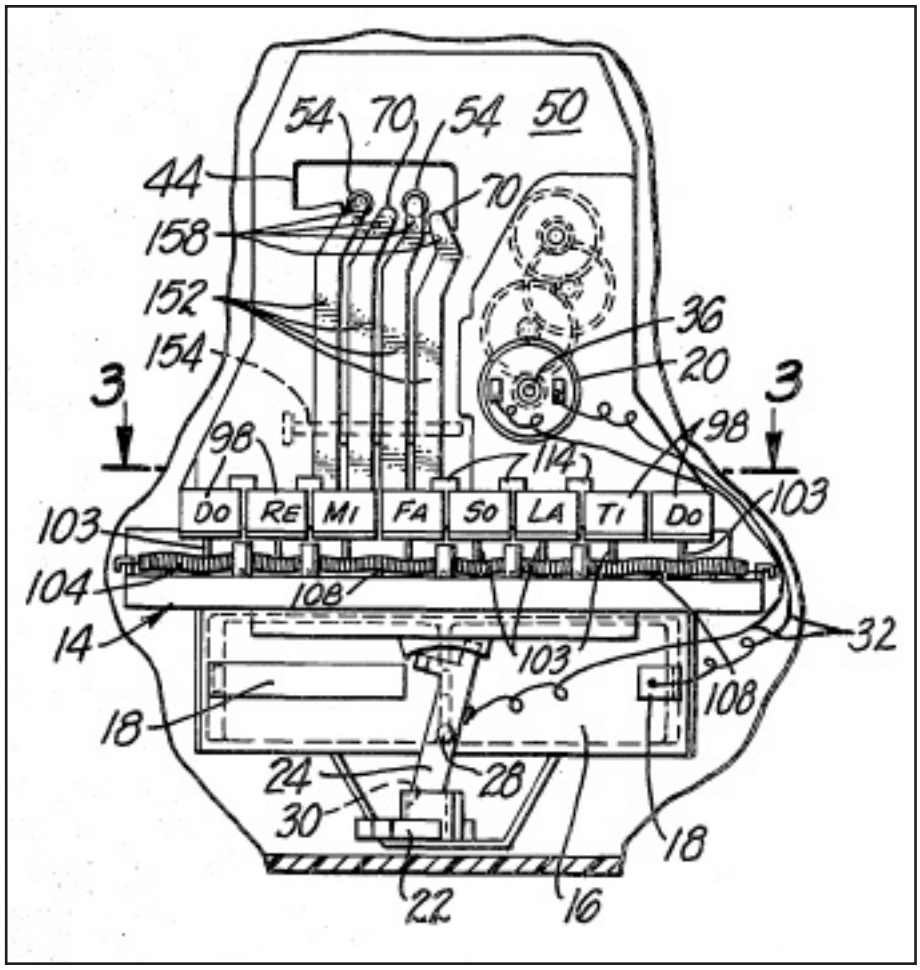

Figure 21. The patent drawing of the front mechanism of the PP. Control levers #152 operate the organ from the keyboard.

Inspection of **Figure 24** reveals the before-mentioned cam lugs (#84) and their relative positions to the positions of the actuator rods (circles highlighted). The driving force is the interlocking of the edge of the disk (#82) with the stationary gear (#90) of the piano mechanism. In effect, you have four cam lugs on the disc (or four levers from the piano action) operating a total of just two pipes to produce a total of eight notes, and as we will discover, four two-note chords.

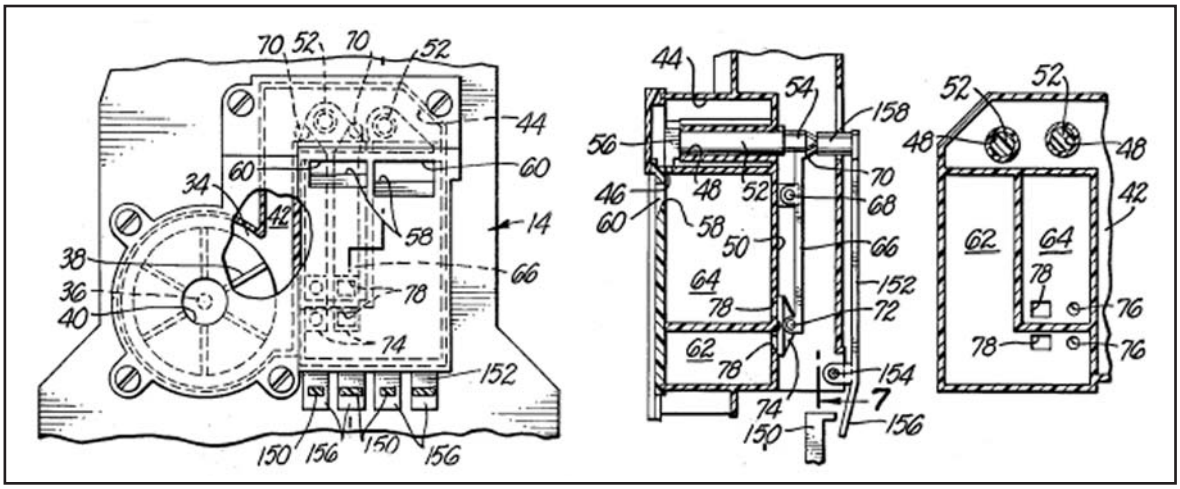

Figure 22. A reverse view (left), side view (center) and front view (right) of the pipe chambers, valves and note holes.

Each Tuneyville Player Piano comes with four disks programmed with the following children's tunes: *Playfellows, The Mulberry Bush*, *Little Bo Peep*, *Old MacDonald*, *Good Morning*, *Happy Birthday*, *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* and *Hush Little Baby*. Interestingly, none of these tunes were included with the Tuneyville Choo Choo (perhaps a marketing strategy for further musical toy sales?).

How does this system work? For ease in explanation let's label the cam lugs from left to right (outside, 2nd in, 3rd in and inner) and label the control levers #1 to #4, left to right from the front of the piano). **Figure 23** (chart). To produce the low C (*do*) the outside cam lug (or control lever #1) will depress #54 cam follower. This will open up chamber #62 (both holes, #76 and 78 are closed) and allow the larger of the two pipes to speak. Then to produce D (*re*) the same lever will open up chamber #62 and the inner cam lug (and control lever #4) will open up the round hole #76. Because chamber #64 has no air flowing from it, the round hole opened up on it

Cam Lug (and Control Lever) Note Control

Cam Lug Position (Control Lever)	Outside #1	next #2	next #3	inner #4
C (do)	X			
D (re)	X			X
E (me)	X	X		
F (fa)	X	X		X
G (so)			X	
A (la)			X	X
B (ti)		X	X	
C (do)		X	X	X
1st Chord (C & G)	X		X	
2nd Chord (D & A)	X		X	X
3rd Chord (E & B)	X	X	X	
4th Chord (F & C)	X	X	X	X

Figure 23. Cam lug note control as present on the PP disk. The corresponding control levers are also listed.

does not cause this pipe to sound. There is no need to go through the rest of the notes as the chart in Figure 23 will explain the process which is basically the same, except for the unique combination for each of the eight notes of the piano scale.

Very clever indeed! One can appreciate the complicated nature of the music arranging on the disk especially when viewing the close-up photo in Figure 18. If we use the information from the preceding paragraph and the chart in Figure 23 we can visualize at one vertical point on this disk that both F and high C are being played at the same time.

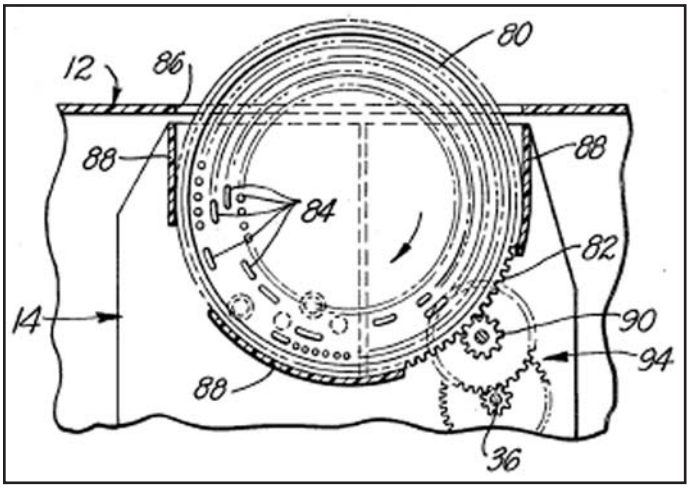

Figure 24. Cam lugs #84 positioned over the actuator rods.

Detailing the playing of the piano by keyboard is complicated as well and beyond the scope of this article. Interested readers can pull up the patent on the web and read that portion. In summary, however, when the disk is in place (as seen in **Figure 25, top**), there is a bar with a spring attached which is held down by the position of the disk and in turn, prevents the playing of the piano by the keys. Once the disk is removed (**Figure 25, bottom**) the bar is raised, thus allowing the control levers to activate the actuator rods by "pushers" #158 attached to ends of the control levers as seen in Figure 22, center. Again, the same mechanism is accomplished as when using the cam lugs on the disk, but in the actual playing of the piano, the control levers, #152, will do the work. No sharps or flats (black keys) are used but these keys will depress to imitate normal piano action.

One other action of the PP not discussed is the back and forth motion of the picture just above the keyboard. This can be seen in Figure 16 while the activating force is a round metal disk with a peg protruding from it—this can be viewed in both photos in Figure 25, on the right as a bright round object.

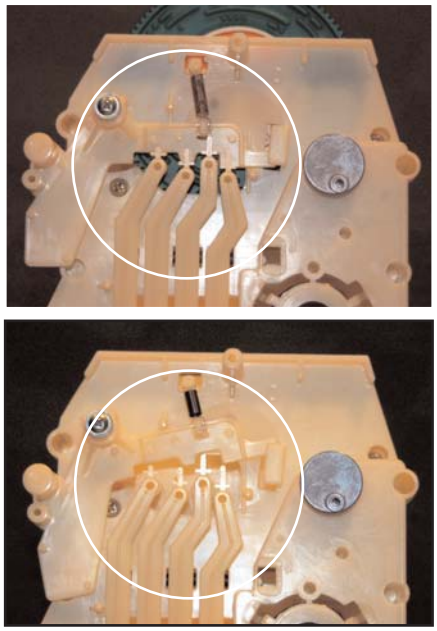

Figure 25. The top view shows the disk in place and a bar lowered so that the control levers cannot activate the pipe. Below, the bar is lifted to allow key playing of notes.

Other Small Organs

When working with patents, often one invention will lead to another. Once such invention and patent is #5,418,319 which was also offered by Mr. Akiyama. Approved in 1995 this patent, although entitled "Music Box," is again a small, mechanically operated pipe organ (**Figure 26a to c**). No practical use of this patent has been discovered by this author to date—such information would be appreciated. The invention seems to have several improvements over his previous attempts:

* Nine playing notes (instead of eight)
* The ability to play from either disk or continuous film (roll-operated)
* A tremolo effect.

Discussion of this patent/invention will be superficial because of no known actual working specimen. Inspection of Figure 26a to c reveals the typical disk #21 with "projections" (referred to in earlier patients as "cam lugs") #22. In Figure 22b the key members #66e protrude outward and are activated by the projections on the disk. In this view #23a, 23b, 23c, 23d and 23e are five of the nine pipes of this musical unit. Inspection of

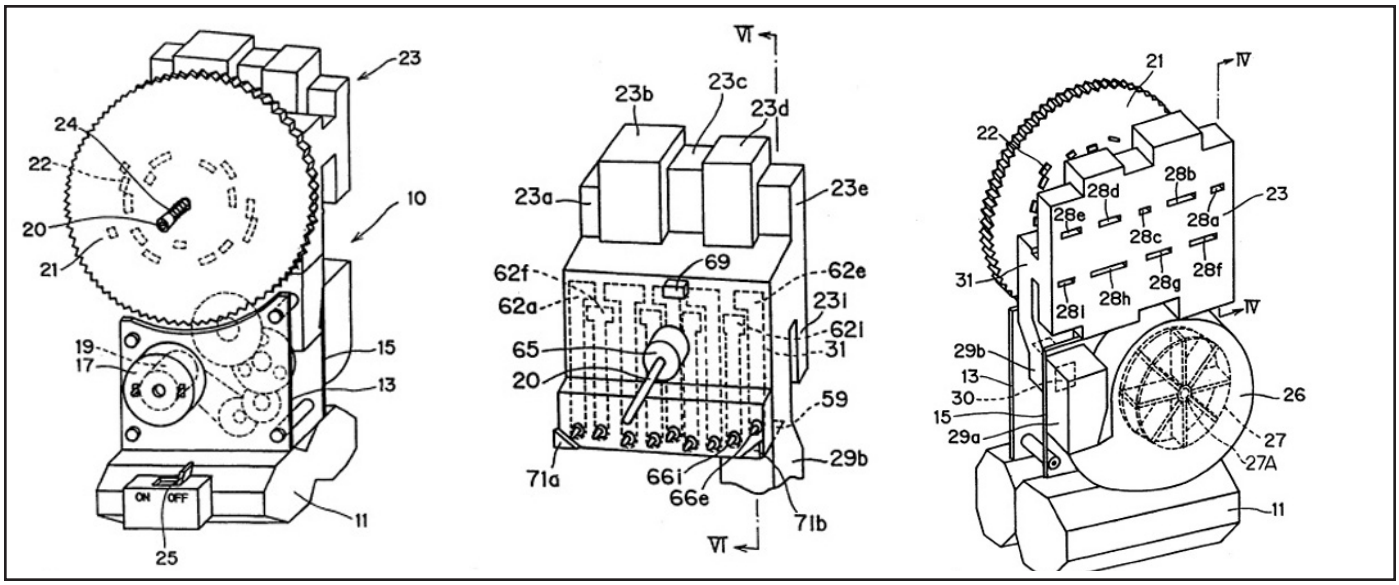

Figure 26 a-c. Left is the Music Box from the front showing the disk as it sits in front of five of nine pipes. Center is the same mechanism with the disk removed. The key members #66 are below the spindle for the disc. Right is the rear of the mechanism showing now the entire nine pipes plus the blower unit.

Figure 23c reveals the pipe openings #28a to 28i. #26 is the blower unit and #11 is the battery compartment.

Mr. Akiyama noted in the "Summary of the Invention:"

> *Accordingly, an object of the present invention is to provide a music box which during automatic playing of a melody, generates vibrating sounds like tremolo having the same soft tone as a sound made when a person plays a pipe, the music box being suitable for being mounted on toys or fancy goods.*

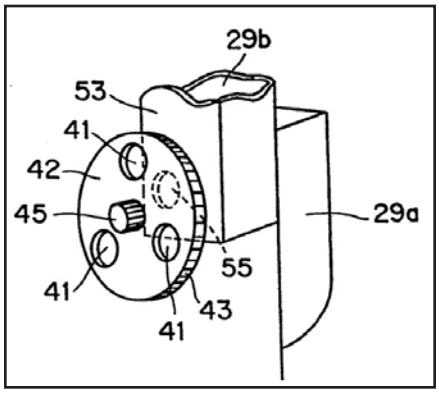

Figure 27. The tremolo mechanism. The round disk #42 rotates to allow pressurized air to escape from holes #41.

In **Figure 27** is a detailed sketch of the tremolo mechanism. A small disk (#42) is rotated by a gear #45 to allow holes #41 to intermittently allow some of the air pressure in the wind channel #29b to escape through a corresponding hole #55. There is a set frequency of air escape as noted in the patent:

> *The frequency, of the air outflow hole #55 in the front wall of the wind trunk #29b being opened by the three holes #41 in the disk, is 1/21 to 1/15 seconds, and preferably, 1/19 to 1/17 seconds. Wind (air) passing through the wind trunk escapes outside at the above frequencies in order to vibrate wind pressure. Then, the vibrated wind is supplied to the wind chest.*

In summarizing the use of a "film member" he notes:

> *Another preferred example of the wind feeding control means [as opposed to a conventional disk with "cam lugs" operating valve stems] is a long film member which is wide enough to intercept the wind trunks and movable along the length, the long film member including a plurality of holes for opening the wind trunk of each flute.*

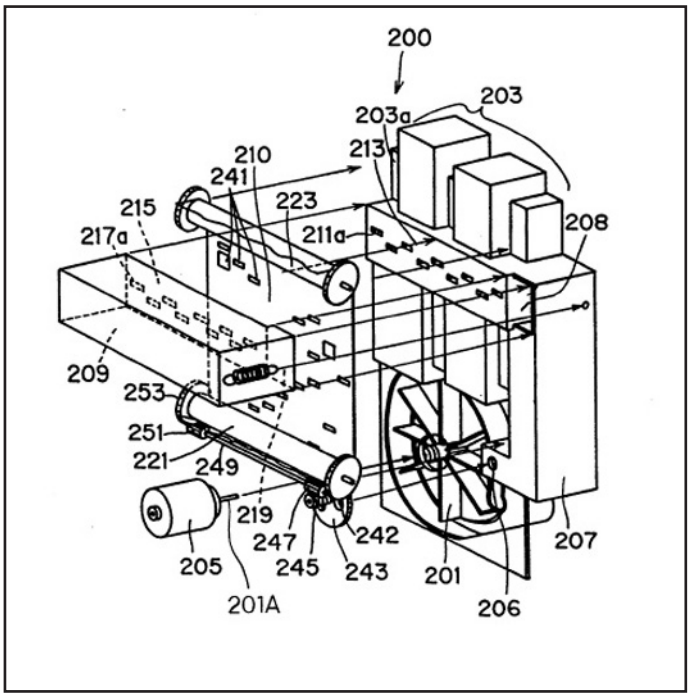

Figure 28. The Music Box as adapted to play a "film member" #210 or player roll as most contemporary collectors See discussion in text regarding proposed use.

With this arrangement the key members (and valves) have been replaced with a moving film member (roll). Inspection of **Figure 28** shows most of what is needed to understand the proposal. The vibrato mechanism remains but has been renumbered #243. The vibrated wind comes up the wind trunk #207 and travels to wind trunk #209 via an opening #208. There are openings in this wind trunk #217a ("wind outlet holes") which will communicate with openings in the various pipes #211a ("wind inlet holes"). Without a roll or film member the wind trunk's face #215 will be flush with the pipe chest's face #213. When the roll is inserted, it has perforations ("a plurality of holes") #241 which, when moved at a specified speed, will allow the pipes to speak. The proposed roll or film member is endless—the rest of the roll is not shown in this drawing.

The roll is put into motion by cams and gears #245, 247, 249, 251 and 253. He summarizes this last part of his invention by saying;

> *When the hole in the film coincides with the wind outlet holes and the wind inlet holes, wind is fed to a corresponding flute to generate a musical sound. The portion of the hole in the film changes successively when the film member is moved. Consequently, the flutes for generating a musical sound are exchanged successively; the music box plays a melody. . . . These sounds have a softly vibrating tone like a tremolo generated when a person plays a flute.*
>
> *The music box of the present invention is preferable for mounting on toys or fancy goods because it is capable of generating beautiful sounds comfortable to a listener.*

No note identification is given for the nine playing notes (*do, re, me,* etc.) which leads the author to confirm his suspicion that, at the time of patenting this invention, no actual use was in place.

Summary

This discussion has been interesting because it involves small items that many collectors have on their shelves that actually qualify for a mechanical, self-playing organ. The inventors have used techniques, tried and true, by the mechanical organ builders of the past. The differences are on a smaller scale with materials not found on larger instruments. The ingenuity with the multiplexing of the organ found in the Tuneyville Player Piano is fantastic and at some point, seems overkill for a child's toy. It was, and is, reliable as there are many of these still available on the internet market.

A "plus" for these inventions, and subsequent productions by the Tomy Corporation: any of the three of these toys gives everyone a chance to own a mechanical organ as well as one of the World's Smallest Mechanical organs.

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Ron Bopp is interested in all types of outdoor mechanical musical instruments. This article is a continuam of his fascination for mechanical organs. He lives with his wife, Mary Jo, now in Bradenton, Florida

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