A Wagon for "Finster"

Tim Wagner

Weighing in at only 12 pounds, the delightful 20-note bauchorgel (belly organ) manufactured by Der Orgelbau Im Wienerwald is the smallest, lightest commercially available 20-note pipe organ. The organ's light weight, leather neck strap and secondary, side-mount crank allow for great mobility with this busker organ. (**Figure 1**)

Figure 1. Lightweight bauchorgel in action.

Ever since purchasing *Finster Baby* (my bauchorgel) early in 2008, I had planned on creating a cart or wagon for it as a means of transporting the organ, rolls and accessories and to create a more noticeable street presence for the infant. After considering a variety of ideas and styles, I decided on an approach that would be consistent with my approach to organ grinding. Rather than reflect the European heritage of street organs in music and dress, I prefer vintage American clothing styles and contemporary American music. A hundred years ago in America, when organ grinders plied the streets of New York, Philadelphia or Boston, they played the popular music of the time. People like to listen to what they know. Today's audiences are no different. As an enthusiast who is proud to continue the tradition of organ grinding, I feel it's important to both entertain and educate the public: infotainment. Playing familiar music appeals to an audience. Once you have them engaged, it's a simple matter of communication to educate. Toward this end, I supplement COAA brochures and verbal conversation (which can be difficult to hear when cranking), with a laminated poster I've created. This poster not only relays information about the organ, its operation and the music, it also answers the universal question, "Where's the monkey?" (**Figure 2**) The poster also serves to engage the audience longer, allowing them to hear more music.

It is my pleasure to entertain you with

FINSTER BABY

the "Vienna Woods" belly organ.

"What is it?"

This organ was built for me by the organ building firm Der Orgelbau im Wienerwald (Organ building in the Viennese forest) in Pressbaum, Austria. The organ was completed in April 2008.

Weighing only 12 pounds, this is the smallest commercially built crank organ available. The organ plays perforated paper rolls employing a 20-note music scale. The 15 pipes along the front are joined by 5 pipes in the bottom.

"From Classical to Pop Rock"

Arranging music for a non-chromatic, limited scale of 20 notes presents a real challenge. Fortunately, several music arrangers around the world take up this challenge. My music collection represents talents from Austria, Canada, England, Germany, The Netherlands and the United States.

"Tradition"

This instrument operates in the 200-year-old tradition of mechanical organs. Turning the crank advances the music roll and pumps the bellows to create wind pressure used to read the music and play the pipes. Donations from listeners allow the organ grinder to purchase fuel for the "motor".

"So where's the monkey?"

Organ grinders once plied the streets of large cities, collecting coins to earn a living. Trained monkeys occasionally accompanied organ grinders to collect the coins. Now, before you ask, "Where's the monkey?" think about the world we live in. Insurance and legal issues prohibit the company of an unpredictable companion. Besides, I'm mischievous enough!

As a member of the Carousel Organ Association of America, I'm very proud to keep this tradition alive. We hope you enjoy listening to "The Happiest Music on Earth"!

- **Tim Wagner and Finster Baby** -

Figure 2. Laminated poster text.

For my first organ grinding season, prior to having my "wheels," the organ was supported on a tabletop stand of my own design, which placed *Finster Baby* at the ideal cranking height atop a folding wooden table. COAA member, President, and all around nice guy, Ted Guillaum, purchased the folding table for *Finster Baby*, and also informed me that the proper height for a crank organ places the crankshaft at the same height as your

Figure 3. *Finster Baby* debuts at Lake Winnie rally, 2008.

elbow. This reduces strain on your arm and back. Good to know! A large picnic basket was purchased to contain my music rolls, and an easel for displaying the poster. (**Figure 3)**

To begin planning my organ cart/wagon, I first compiled a list of requirements. It would need to accommodate the organ, picnic basket, poster, tip basket, COAA brochures, stuffed monkey, shade umbrella, and provide transport for a small cooler, camera, rain-proof cover, wheel chocks and a folding chair. Best to know one's needs at the outset! Measurements were made of all the large components to establish an estimated footprint. Throughout this process, I also looked through issues of the ***Carousel Organ*** to see what other organ grinders employ. Finally, an afternoon was spent out in the garage with my wooden coaster wagon (as we called them on Buffalo, NY's east side), to see if it could accommodate my needs. As luck would have it, it could. Great! Not only did it make my wagon more useful, but it also fits my American theme. What's more Norman Rockwell-y American than a kid pulling a coaster wagon? (No matter the age of the "kid.")

Figure 4. Test set-up of components on wagon.

After trying several placements of the components, an arrangement was created that allowed for transport of all my items and made a presentable appearance when set up. (**Figure 4**) The organ case, stood on end, could be used to support the organ, with a 2" x 4" lumber frame atop it to bring the organ up to proper height. The open picnic basket could live behind, and partially support, the poster. A fortunate coincidence during this testing stage showed me that the wooden frame could be extended to act as a support for the coaster handle, to keep it out of the way when not in use.

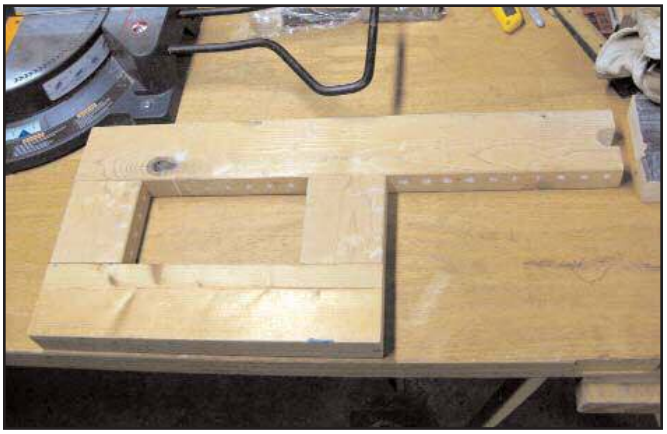
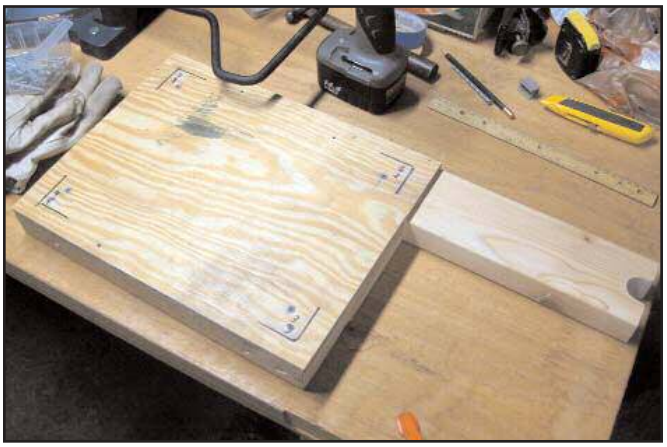


Figure 5 (above). Assembly of 2x4" lumber frame.

Figure 6 (below). Plywood cap atop the frame.



While the materials purchased for this project were minimal, it did necessitate the purchase of a compound miter saw, which was contemplated for some time anyway. My small garage soon became even smaller! After copious amounts of measurements, I began by building the frame to sit atop the organ case. To raise the organ to the proper height, this frame will be capped by a ¼" thick plywood cap and carpet cover. Scrap 2"x4" lumber was used for the frame, since most of it would not be visible. Screw fasteners were used, in case disassembly was needed. (**Figures 5 & 6**) The arm which extends from

Figure 7. Adding trim molding to the frame.

the frame has a semi-circular cut-out at the end, to accept the wagon's handle. To hold this frame assembly in place atop the organ case, I chose wooden trim molding which serves both as a finished appearance and, by extending below the 2"x4"s, locks the assembly into place atop the case (**Figure 7**).

Figure 8. Painted extension arm.

Before nailing the trim molding to the frame, the exposed extension arm was painted, as the molding will be receiving a wood stain & finish (**Figure 8**). After filling and sanding the nail holes and any corner gaps in the trim, two coats of a combination stain & polyurethane were applied to the trim (**Figure 9**). Based on my very limited wood finishing experience, I'll say that I would not use this type of combination product again due to the difficulty of control over shading/density as the product dried. Figure 9 also shows how the molding extends slightly above the plywood surface, to allow for the depth of the carpet, which was added next. I was fortunate to have some rubber-backed carpeting left over from the piece purchased to line the bed of the wagon. This was cut to fit atop the plywood, inside the border created by the molding (**Figure 10**).

Figure 9. Staining the trim.

Figure 10. Frame assembly with carpet.

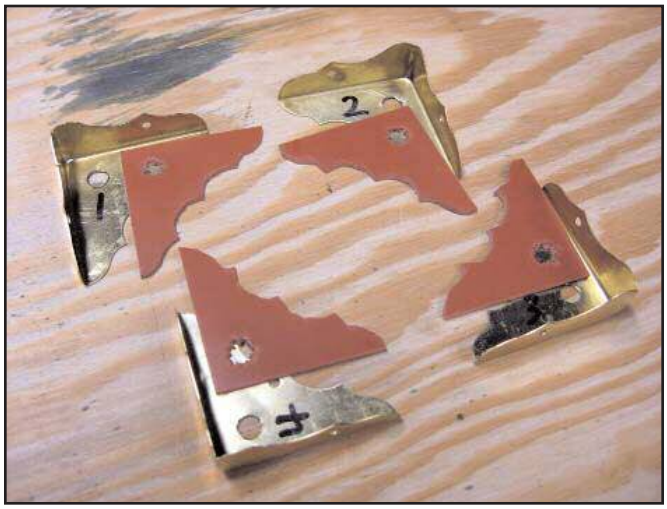


Figure 11. Gasket material cut to fit the brass corners.

The carpet was fastened to the plywood by screws adhering four brass corners to the plywood. These corners are used to hold the organ in place. (**Figure 11**) To prevent the screw heads from scratching the bottom of the organ, I cut some rubber gasket material to fit the bottom of the brass corners, and countersunk the heads of the screws into this material. (**Figures 12, 13 & 14**)

Figure 12. Brass corner secured through carpet to plywood.
Figure 13. All brass corners attached to frame assembly.
Figure 14. Brass corners hold organ in place.

The work was completed on this piece of the project by attaching a small brass latched hinge on the end of the extension arm, to secure the wagon handle in place when not in use. (**Figures 15 & 16**)

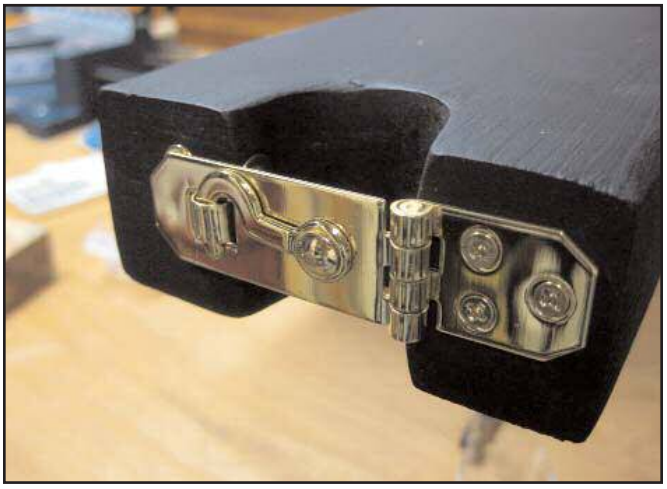


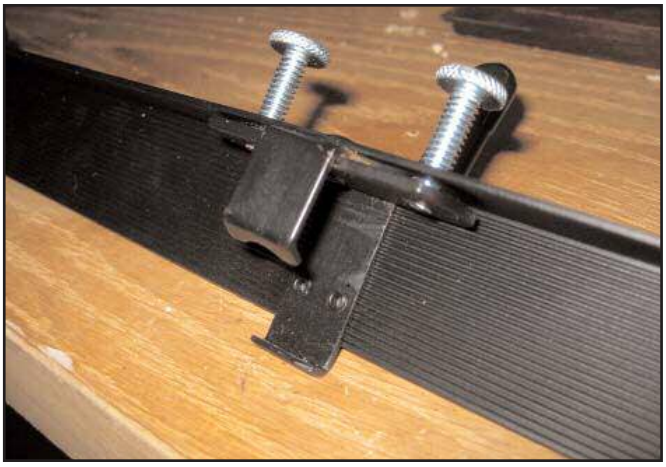
Figure 15 (above). Latched hinge attached to end of extension arm.

Figure 16 (below). Wagon handle held in place by latched hinge.

Creating a support for the laminated poster came next. Though I initially determined that the open lid of the picnic basket could support the poster, (**Figure 17**) I re-decided in favor of separate supports that would secure the poster more securely to the wagon and allow for the closing of the picnic basket lid without affecting the poster. Designing this rather simple apparatus proved the biggest challenge of the project. This began by employing the spring-clip top from the easel that was purchased for the poster. Made of aluminum, I used a hacksaw to trim its length to match the width of the

poster (**Figure 18**). The back of this top piece has hardware to attach it to the easel stand (**Figure 19**).

Figure 17 (top). Test set-up of basket supporting laminated poster.
Figure 18 (above). Aluminum spring clip sized to poster width.
Figure 19 (below). Back of spring clip.



I decided to fashion a piece of lumber that would attach to this hardware, and provide a means of support for the poster (**Figure 20**). The countersunk piece of metal in the center of the board is designed to prevent the pressure screws from the spring-clip from wearing into the wood. The ends of this board feature brackets, mounted on an angle, which accept cylindrical wooden supports (**Figure 21**).

Figure 20. Board for mounting spring clip.

Figure 21. Poster support assembly.

Figure 22. Support for basket lid.

The wooden supports are spaced to fit on either side of the picnic basket, which contains the organ rolls. To support the lid of the picnic basket, I drilled angled holes in the frame of the lid and the bottom, large enough in diameter to accommodate a wooden dowel, which was cut to length and inserted. A spare was also cut (**Figure 22**). The wooden dowel and poster supports were painted black, like the extension arm on the frame assembly, so they wouldn't call attention to themselves.

For a shade umbrella, I initially purchased a bright, lime green beach chair umbrella that features a clamp instead of a handle, for clamping to a beach chair. The

Figure 23. Copper pipe and mounts.

plan was to clamp this to the wagon handle, which is secured in an upright position. Unfortunately, the stem of the umbrella was too short and the plastic clamp not robust enough. Back to the drawing board! A trip to the local mall provided me with a much larger, black Golf umbrella, with a sturdy fiberglass stem. I figured that I could support this umbrella with a piece of ¾" copper plumbing pipe. A strategy was needed to carry this out, keeping in mind that this set-up needed to provide for assembly and disassembly every time I used the wagon for *Finster Baby*. To quote from Charles Chaplin, "The hardest part is thinking. Just thinking." **Figure 23** illustrates my solution. After careful measurements, I attached one copper pipe mount to the wood frame of the wagon (**Figure 24**) and one to the extension arm of the frame assembly. These support the copper pipe in a vertical position. I placed a piece of rubber gasket material below the bottom pipe mount so the copper pipe wouldn't scratch the extending bed of the wagon. I cut the copper pipe to a length I felt was long enough so that the umbrella wouldn't poke people in the eye or head, when assembled.

Figure 24. Lower pipe mount.

To mount the umbrella, the handle was cut off and the umbrella stem was slid into the top of the copper pipe (**Figure 25**). With the entire length of the umbrella stem inserted into the copper pipe, I didn't think it required any further securing. It's a good thing I set this up in my driveway on a day with a slight breeze for a test, because it only took a minute for me to find out that even a mild breeze could launch the umbrella from the pole! Back to that drawing board. A visit to the hardware store provided the solution; a hitch-pin. After drilling a hole horizontally through the copper pipe, and a matching hole through the fiberglass stem of the umbrella, I could now secure them together with the hitch pin. Another problem solved (**Figure 26**).

Figure 25 (above). Umbrella installed.

Figure 26 (below). Hitch pin secures umbrella stem to copper pipe.

While tackling the assembly of the organ wagon, I commissioned a friend to sew a black cover for the organ case. The result can be seen in Figures 23 & 25. To hang

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Figure 27. Tip basket hook.

my tip basket from the organ case, I created a hook from one of the copper pipe mounts I had purchased (**Figure 27**). When setting up the wagon, after placing the black cover over the organ case, the hook was laid over the edge before placing the frame assembly on top, to secure it.

The final detail to be addressed was the handle of the wagon. After purchasing the wagon for utility purposes several years ago, I had wrapped the metal handle with white rope, for comfort and protection. This color no longer worked with the organ wagon configuration. Visits to several stores failed to turn up black rope to replace it. I ended up purchasing camouflage nylon cord. To prevent the ends from fraying when cut, a propane candle lighter was used to melt the open ends after cutting. After wrapping the new cord around the handle and

Figure 28. Wrapping metal handle with cord.

Figure 29. Securing cord ends with wire and glue.

Figure 30 (above). Front of organ wagon.

Figure 31 (below). Back of organ wagon.

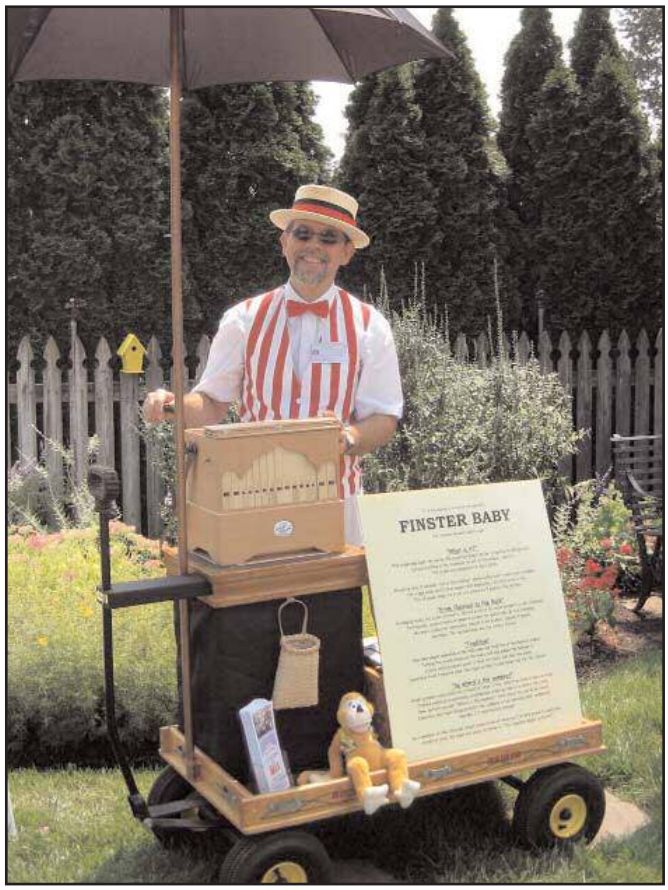

Figure32. Author and *Finster Baby* debuting the organ wagon, 2009.

tying the ends together, they were further secured with small gauge wire and Elmer's Glue, to prevent the cord from untying (**Figures 28 & 29**).

After several weeks' work, I was finally able to assemble all the elements for a first look at the complete organ wagon (**Figures 30 & 31**). By employing a limited color palette of black and earth tones (yellow, gold, brown and finished wood), I was able to create a more cohesive whole from a collection of disparate parts. The muted color palette of the wagon also serves to complement or enhance the organ grinder outfits that I'm assembling. The completion of the project allowed me to debut *Finster Baby's* organ wagon at the COAA rally in Waynesville, OH last summer (**Figure 32**). It was a great occasion to celebrate!

Though Tim is a rookie organ grinder, his passion for band organ music goes back 25 years. Tim and Ruth Wagner live near Rochester, NY. In addition to his profession in film preservation, Tim enjoys sharing his passions for photography, roller coasters, amusement parks, architecture, movie palaces and theater organs.

Why are Pat, Betty and Debbie smiling? Find out at the Knoebels rally this spring!

Knoebels Amusement Resort, Elysburg, PA

Date: June 12th & 13th, 2010

Hotel: The Quality Inn & Suites, Danville, PA.
Discount rate of $95.00 plus tax.
Rate good from June 10th thru June 13th.
Includes a complimentary hot breakfast.
Rooms held until May 10th.
Contact the hotel at (570) 275-5100 to Reserve. Mention COAA to receive the discount.

Campsites at Knoebels.: call (570) 672-9555.

Join me at America's finest traditional amusement park!

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