

Adventures with the “Southern Rose” Part I

Ron Keisler

Over the last 20 years we had the privilege of sharing our Southern Rose band organ with many thousands of people all across the Southeastern United States. We’ve played the organ at hundreds of special events including festivals, fairs, grand openings, company picnics, charity events, private parties and parades. As a result, there is a lot of great memories and some interesting stories to share. We hope that these stories will entertain, while inspiring a new generation to carry on the tradition of sharing “The happiest music on earth” with members of the general public.

Chapter 1—The Adventure Begins

In the early years our lives were pretty normal. We both enjoyed music and we were in the high school band together, attended college together, and soon after graduation, we got married. The first five years of married life were happy and uneventful. Then, approaching our fifth wedding anniversary, we started down a path that would change our lives forever. Looking back, it was all because of an old broken carousel horse!

When my wife, Glynn, was a child she loved to ride the merry-go-round. One year at the South Carolina State Fair she noticed an old carousel horse that was lying on the ground. She quickly showed it to her father and persuaded him to ask the carousel operator if he would sell it. Surprisingly, the operator said that he would, for \$50.00. Unfortunately, Glynn’s father decided against the purchase so she left the Fair without her prized horse, but she never forgot about it.

In the early years our lives were pretty normal . . . The first five years of married life were happy and uneventful.

As our fifth wedding anniversary approached, we learned that the traditional gift for five years of marriage was wood. I decided that I would get Glynn some kind of woodcarving—maybe a cuckoo clock, or a wooden duck decoy, or a ship’s wheel or even something like one of

those giant carved wooden fork and spoon ornaments that she could hang on the kitchen wall. That would certainly be original!

I must confess that I’ve never been particularly gifted when it comes to selecting appropriate gifts for my wife. One year, I thought that I had purchased the perfect Christmas gift: a shiny brand new microwave oven. Boy, was I wrong about that! As she opened the box that fateful Christmas morning she expected to see an eclectic and beautiful statue of the Archangel Michael slaying a dragon that we had seen in an antique shop a few months earlier, but, the harsh reality was that I had selected the microwave instead, and she never let me forget about it! I had learned my lesson, so when she told me that she wanted to buy an antique wooden carousel horse as “our” fifth wedding anniversary gift and immediately agreed with her most excellent decision. I would not have survived to tell this story if I had instead selected that giant wooden fork and spoon wall ornament!



Figure 1. Glynn with the carousel horse that started it all.

At that time there were a number of dealers who were selling antique carousel horses. Many were very expensive and totally out of our price range but soon we found a nice little Dentzel topknot jumper that we could actually afford. We mailed the seller a certified check and two weeks later, we uncrated our first carousel horse. (Figure 1) Glynn was delighted with the purchase.

We quickly joined the American Carousel Society and the National Carousel Association to learn more about these painted ponies, as well as the talented carvers who created them. Next we attended a few carousel conventions and met other people with similar interests in the

history and artistry of antique wooden carousels. At that time, Glynn was employed as a graphic artist, so she was soon recruited to be the publisher of the newsletter of the American Carousel Society. We continued to meet people and make new friends within the carousel world, and most importantly, rediscovered band organs while riding on all those merry-go-rounds at carousel conventions.

I say rediscovering band organs because both of us had grown up listening to the wonderful music of the 96-keyless Myrtle Beach Ruth Concert Organ. As children and teenagers, Glynn and I had vacationed at Myrtle Beach, and although not knowing each other at the time, both of us were fascinated with the beautiful music and the ornate façade of that wonderful old Ruth organ. It was the Myrtle Beach Ruth that provided the memories, and it was our first carousel horse that led us back to the world of carousels and band organs.

While enjoying our new hobby, it never occurred to us that there were individuals who actually owned band organs. We considered band organs to be very nice instruments that played happy music for carousels, but had never met anyone that actually owned a band organ.

That all changed when Glynn's cousin in Virginia sent us a newspaper article about a couple who had restored an old carousel horse. Glynn quickly made contact and after exchanging several letters it wasn't long before she had scheduled a visit to Virginia to meet these folks, Joyce and Paul Harris. When arriving at their home we expected to see some carousel horses but knew that they also owned a band organ, which seemed interesting, and maybe just a little bit odd. Joyce and Paul greeted us at the front door and that was the beginning of a wonderful, life long friendship! They showed us their restored carousel horses, as well as many other delightful musical items, and then on the way to the band organ. Although not knowing at the time, our lives were about to change forever!

Joyce and Paul owned a wonderful Wurlitzer 103 Band Organ, which they had recently acquired. The organ was in immaculate original condition and it played beautifully. They had named their organ Little Otto and it played the happiest music that we had ever heard. We were amazed to see and hear such a wonderful instrument and we were hooked. We had to have one of these fantastic music machines of our own and so the search was on.

Because of our love of the Myrtle Beach Ruth organ we decided that if possible, to purchase a Ruth of our own. Over a period of two years several organs were considered, but a Ruth was never found that was affordable.

While we both enjoyed our new hobby, it never occurred to us that there were individuals who actually owned band organs.

We continued the search and eventually saw a small ad in The Antique Trader Weekly for a 52-keyless Ruth band organ that was located in Chicago. Jim Carroll, a dealer in mechanical music, had the organ for sale but it was still too expensive for us to consider. Even so, we were fascinated with the possibility, and continued to negotiate throughout the winter. We also requested a tape recording of the organ, but the seller explained that the organ was badly out of tune, and that he would need to get it tuned before making a tape. Although never receiving that tape,

it's probably a good thing, because after hearing it our interest would have been lost immediately. But, negotiations continued, based on a couple of Polaroid pictures that he sent us, and a price was agreed upon that was accept-

able. We told him that we would travel to Chicago, and if the organ was what we expected, we would purchase it.

So, in June of 1984, two one-way plane tickets were purchased to Chicago. Confident that our organ had been found, we would simply rent a truck to bring it back to South Carolina.

Arriving at the location where the organ was stored, along with several large orchestrions, it was spotted across the crowded room. It looked just like the photos that we'd seen but what would it sound like? A book was placed in the keyframe, the organ turned on, and immediately we had our answer. It sounded terrible! We could not even recognize the tune that it was playing, but at least it was playing. That confirmed that all the parts were there, and in spite of the cacophony of sound that it produced, we could tell that it had great potential. Our search was over.

We only listened to it for about 45 seconds. That was really all we could stand, but it was just enough to convince us of the great potential that the instrument had. After a quick inspection, the deal was done and we owned a band organ. **Figure 2**

With the renting of a U-Haul truck it was decided to buy the extra trip insurance, just in case something bad happened on the trip home. That turned out to be a very wise decision, because something bad did happen, and it happened very quickly. Within three minutes of leaving the U-Haul facility, I had destroyed the transmission in that truck.

When I rented the truck, I knew that it had a manual transmission. That was not a concern because of previously owning and driving vehicles with manual transmissions. Unfortunately, I had never driven a manual transmission with the stick in the floor. It was a short distance



Figure 2. An interior view of the organ.

back to the interstate and there was no problem with the first mile of the journey, but now it was time to get onto the interstate. This was during the worst part of the afternoon rush hour. Chicago traffic was extremely heavy, but was moving very fast.

The entrance ramp to the interstate was very short. I knew that I'd have to accelerate very quickly to merge into the traffic from a dead stop on such a short entry ramp. I saw an opening, and made my move, hit the gas, but then, to my shock and dismay, the gears couldn't be shifted to pick up enough speed to merge safely.

In desperation, I looked down at the knob on the stick shift to confirm that I was moving through the gears correctly. There was a diagram on the top of the stick, and was surprised to see that apparently I was trying to shift incorrectly, therefore immediately changed my plan, and tried to shift based on the diagram on the knob. That decision was followed by the horrible screeching and screaming of a transmission that was suffering great pain and anguish. Fortunately, the traffic behind me had slowed to a crawl and I had not caused a serious accident. The truck limped onto the shoulder, but that transmission was dead. I had killed it and there was no doubt about it. My only salvation was realizing that the knob on the stick shift was actually upside down, so when having tried to shift based on the diagram, I was really doing everything backwards. That transmission never had a chance. It was a good thing that I had purchased that optional truck insurance.

We made a quick call to the U-Haul dealer and they brought us another truck. This time, I confirmed that the knob on the stick shift was positioned correctly before starting to move.

We then returned to pick up the organ, quickly loaded the organ into the truck and headed south. Because of the near disaster with the first U-Haul truck, we wanted to get out of Chicago as quickly as possible.

Soon we were out of the heavy traffic of the city, driving south through rural Indiana. It was a very stormy night and many severe thunderstorms were encountered. The rain was blinding and traffic was moving a maximum of five miles per hour, when moving at all. Finally, we decided to pull off onto the shoulder, as many other motorists had already done. The night was pitch black, but illuminated by fierce and frequent lightning strikes. The rain was coming down so hard that nothing could be seen outside of the truck. Then the wind started to howl, and the truck began shaking so violently that we were afraid that we would be blown off the highway. This continued for several minutes. We briefly considered the possibility of leaving the truck to seek other shelter, but wisely decided to stay where we were. We couldn't see what was going on around us that night, but always believed that there must have been a tornado that passed nearby. Then, very quickly, the storm was over and we were on our way again.

Confident that all of our problems were left behind, we drove on toward Lexington, Kentucky. After finally stopping for the night, we were both exhausted, but at least we had our band organ!

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sion in that truck.

The next morning, things were looking much better. The weather had cleared overnight and it looked like a nice sunny day. For a while, it was a good day, but then we wrecked the truck! Pulling into a gas station, I cut the corner a little too sharp and our truck clipped the fender on another car. It actually did more damage to the truck than the other car, but it was just another frustration in what seemed like the longest trip of our lives. Once again, I was sure glad that we had purchased that optional truck insurance.

So, just to summarize, since leaving Chicago, in less than 24 hours we had:

- 1) Destroyed the transmission in the first rental truck,
- 2) Narrowly avoided a severe traffic accident in Chicago,
- 3) Survived near disaster in a fierce thunderstorm in Indiana,
- 4) Wrecked the second rental truck in Kentucky.

A few years earlier, when we first decided to purchase a band organ, we knew that it would be an adventure, but we never imagined anything like this.

But, in spite of all that had happened, life was good, because we finally had our band organ. The adventure was well underway.

Chapter 2—The Show Must Go On

From the moment it was decided to purchase a band organ, our objective was to put the organ on a trailer and share the instrument and her happy music with the general public. This would be a “working organ” and that we had a huge amount of work to do before the organ would be ready for her debut performance.

The return trip from Chicago back to South Carolina had been difficult. Our adventure was certainly off to a rough and rocky start, but there was confidence that the situation would soon improve.

Leaving Lexington Kentucky, the final leg of the journey home was uneventful. The drive from Kentucky to South Carolina was pleasant, and the enthusiasm was building with each mile that passed.

Finally arriving back in South Carolina, we unloaded the organ and immediately began showing it to close friends and family members.

Unfortunately, no one seemed to share our enthusiasm. When they looked at the organ, they saw nothing more than a broken down old box of junk in a general state of disrepair. They could not understand who would want to spend our time and effort to repair such a thing.

When the organ played all they heard was noise and couldn’t imagine the musical potential that was locked inside the instrument. After demonstrating the organ, we were typically met with awkward stares, uncomfortable silence and comments like “Boy, that thing sure is loud!” Glynn’s father summed it up pretty well. He looked the organ over, hesitated, then turned to us and asked: “So you really paid money for this thing?”

We were surprised and disappointed that no one shared our enthusiasm, but at least they were sympathetic. That was certainly not the response that we had hoped

for but we were undaunted, because the instrument had great potential.

Our biggest challenge was to turn that potential into reality. First the organ needed a total rebuild. Although not able to afford to hire a professional restorer to do the work—being a young married couple, just starting out. There was certainly no money available to pay for a professional restoration and it was clear that the work would be done by ourselves. This was not a concern. We had restored player pianos and reed organs in the past, and were confident that we had the basic skills that were needed, but we had never tackled a project as big as a band organ.

Fortunately, having attended several MBSI organ rallies we had met Ken Smith and Mike Kitner. Ken and Mike quickly became our mentors, and they were always willing to answer any questions. It was a “trial by fire” as the restoration process began, but were very fortunate to learn from the very best! We will always be grateful to Ken and Mike for their friendship, advice and assistance and could never have done it without them.

A few years earlier, when we first decided to purchase a band organ, we knew that it would be an adventure, but we never imagined anything like this

The organ and the façade both needed total restoration, so the organ was tackled first. After all, we wouldn’t need a nice façade if we couldn’t get the organ to play properly.

The restoration of the organ began in 1984. After removing all of the pipes, windchests and bellows, the case was empty, which remained that way for the next year. First we tackled the windchest, recovering the pallets and then replacing all leather gaskets (**Figure 3**). Next was the work on the valve chest, recovering all of the pneumatics. After that work was done on the pouchboard as well as re-leathering all the pouches. The pipework was in surprisingly good condition, although a number of pipes were coming apart at the seams. We carefully cleaned and inspected each pipe, then re-glued as necessary. Finally, the most difficult task of all was tackled. The bellows pumps and reservoirs were a real challenge, due primarily to their large size, but these were rebuilt without incident (**Figure 4**).

It was fortunate that the organ was in original, unrestored condition when purchased. While previous owners had patched it through the years, no one had ever attempted a total restoration. That was good news for us, because of not having to undo previous mistakes and damage. We could simply examine the parts and original materials, and then replace what was removed with comparable new leather and materials.



Figure 3. Glynn working on the pallets.

Throughout the restoration process, we were very careful to use the same types of materials that were originally used to construct the organ. A lot of hide glue and burnt shellac were used, and Glynn actually became quite fond of the smell of hide glue, gently simmering on the kitchen stove.



Figure 4. The organ bellows after restoration.

Did you notice that I said that the hot glue was simmering on the kitchen stove? Actually, there was a lot of organ restoration work that happened in our kitchen that winter. It was too cold to work outside, so most of the chests, pouchboards and pipes were brought into the kitchen, which quickly became our winter organ workshop (Figure 5).

Now you may ask, what kind of a woman would allow her kitchen to be transformed into a temporary



Figure 5. A view of the kitchen organ workshop.

organ repair shop? Well, you must understand that Glynn was just as enthusiastic about this project as I was. Her enthusiasm was electric (Figure 6) and she was anxious to get the organ playing again, so she never hesitated to move some of the restoration work into the kitchen. Needless to say, there were no hosted dinner parties while the organ was in the kitchen, and the Health Department would have shut the kitchen down, but it worked out just fine. With careful planning, the mashed potatoes and gravy were separated from the hot hide glue.

Regarding women and band organs, we've observed that while many ladies enjoy listening to the instruments, most have little or no interest in restoring or building an organ. There are exceptions, and Glynn is high on that list. You must understand that she was the driving force behind the restoration of our organ. I took it apart, stripped off the old leather, cleaned the wood and prepared the parts for rebuild. Glynn then took over with the fine detail work of recovering pallets, rebuilding pneumatics and releathering gaskets. This teamwork approach worked very well for us, so as a compliment I gave her a new title within our fledgling organ enterprise: "Glynn Keisler—Vice President of Fine Motor Skills." She promptly responded that I would forever be known as the "Vice President of Gross Motor Skills." What could I say? The name fit, so I had no choice but to accept it.

Once all of the pipes, chests and bellows had been restored, they were all assembled back inside the organ

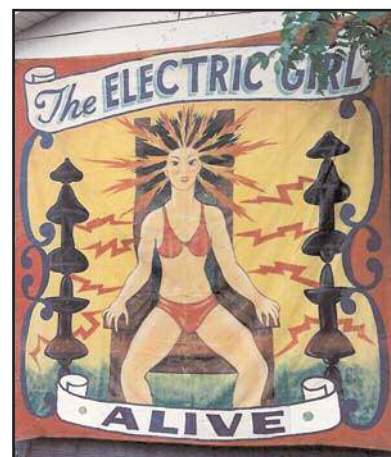


Figure 6. Electric enthusiasm!



Figure 7. The author reassembling the organ chest

case (**Figures 7 & 8**). This happened very quickly, and then we did a little tuning and prepared to test the organ for the first time.

On New Years Eve, 1986, we decided to ring in the New Year by playing the very first song on our newly restored band organ. Being very excited our expecta-

tions were high as the final preparations were made. The moment of truth had arrived.

It was a very cold night, and the temperature out in the garage was only 18 degrees. The organ was turned on and a book was placed in the keyframe, expecting to hear the beautiful sounds of our newly restored organ.

As soon as the organ began to play, we were devastated. It sounded terrible! While the sound had improved slightly, it was still very bad. The valves seemed sluggish, there was not enough wind to fill the reservoir and the tuning was especially bad that night.

Just five minutes earlier, we were excited and anxious to hear the “fruits of our labors.” Now, the fruits of our labors could best be described as “rotten peaches.” After a full year of restoration, with careful attention to every

detail, we still had an organ that played very poorly. What went wrong?

The organ was turned off—we were so discouraged that the instrument was not touched again for over four months.

Then spring arrived, bringing new hope and warmer weather, it was decided to try again. The entire organ was checked from top to bottom, tightening up all screws and gaskets. We double checked the valves and performed additional regulation. The pipes were tuned very carefully.

As soon as the organ began to play, we were devastated. It sounded terrible!

For the second time the organ was turned on, a book placed in the keyframe, and beautiful music poured forth from the instrument. It sounded 100% better than the New Year’s Eve fiasco just four months earlier.

Looking back, we realized that our problems on New Year’s Eve were primarily related to the very cold temperature and low humidity that night. Those conditions, combined with our failure to properly regulate and tune the instrument, accounted for her poor performance. Once these problems were all corrected, she played beautifully.

After the organ was playing properly, it was time to tackle the restoration of the façade. The façade required extensive work. Fortunately, we had experience in this area, from previously restoring other organ façades, carousel horses and specialty antiques. While working on the façade, we were fortunate to have the expertise and assistance of my brother, Gary Keisler, who is an excellent and accomplished woodworker.

Glynn then took care of the remaining artistic tasks. She recarved missing parts, and then tackled all of the painting, marbleizing and gilding. Remember, Glynn had the title of “Vice President of Fine Motor Skills” and her artistic talents were very obvious as the façade progressed (**Figure 9**).

When the façade was finally complete, it looked exactly as planned and we were both delighted with the results. At last, the organ finally had a beautiful façade that was appropriate (**Centerfold**).

So, there was a restored band organ with a beautiful façade and it was time to get out and book the organ for some public performances.

But first, the organ needed a name. One of our favorite tunes from the Myrtle Beach Ruth was the

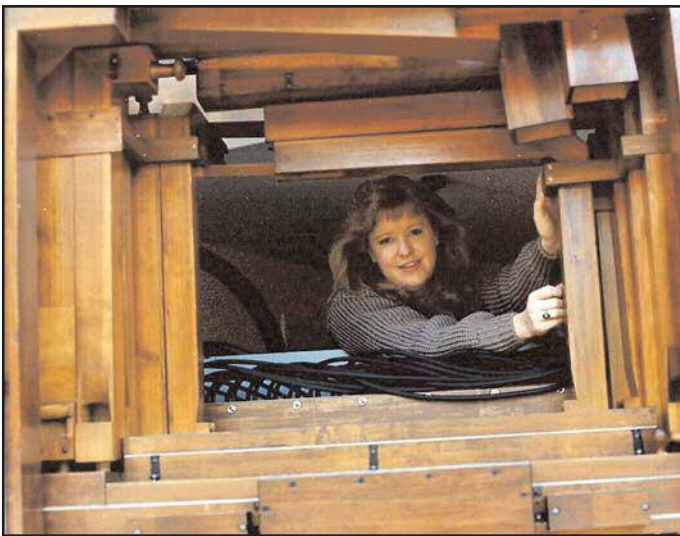


Figure 8. Glynn installing the pipes.

Strauss Waltz, “Roses from the South.” Since our organ was located in the Southern United States, and contained carvings of flowers on the façade, it was quickly named *The Southern Rose*.

Glynn went to work promoting the organ and was quickly able to book an eleven day run at the South Carolina State Fair, which was a huge deal, because it provided us with enough money to pay for an organ trailer, which had just been ordered.

In addition, we were very excited to book our very first performance as entertainment for members of the South Carolina State General Assembly. Our very first event would be a Legislative Luncheon on the State House grounds for South Carolina’s distinguished (so we thought) State Senators and Representatives. Could there possibly be a better setting for the debut performance of *The Southern Rose*? We were thrilled to have such an opportunity, but things certainly didn’t turn out as planned. There were definitely more surprises in store but the adventure would continue.



Figure 9. Carefully gilding the façade.

Chapter 3—The Show Hits the Road

Continuing to prepare for the debut performance of *The Southern Rose*, the surprises that lay ahead could not be imagined. Most important of all, we were about to learn a secret that would be our inspiration to continue playing the organ for the general public for many years to come and were about to discover our true mission.

While completing the restoration of the organ, we began to think about designs for a new organ trailer. After attending a number of MBSI organ rallies, we knew how most band organ trailers were constructed. Typically, they had a large split door on the display side, which lifted up like an awning to display the front of the organ. While this was perfect for stationary performances, something different was needed for other venues.

We were convinced that our organ would be much more popular if it could be utilized as a parade unit. Every festival in the state of South Carolina seemed to have such an event, and if we could offer the organ as a parade entry, that would make it much more desirable.

As a result, we designed a trailer with two large double doors on both the display and rear sides, which opened toward the front and back of the trailer. This design allowed us to use the trailer as a parade unit, and also worked perfectly for stationary performances (**Figure 11**).

The next consideration was the size of the trailer. Since our organ façade was 10 feet long and eight feet high, we selected a 16 foot trailer, and would have ample storage room in the front and the back of the trailer. However, the height of the trailer was a concern. Our organ façade was eight feet tall and we wanted the entire façade to be displayed, and needed a minimum of eight feet of interior height. The only possible way to reduce the interior height would be to display the organ without the top section of the façade, but that was unacceptable. In addition, we wanted to eliminate visible wheel wells in the floor of the trailer, so the floor was raised above the wheels, which added another six inches to the total height of the trailer. While that doesn't sound like much, now there was a trailer with a total exterior height of 10 feet 4 inches, which was much taller than the band organ trailers that we had seen. Discussing these requirements with the trailer manufacturer, Wells Cargo, they assured us that our design was reasonable, and that the completed trailer would have towing stability in spite of the size. So, the final size of the trailer would be 10 feet 4 inches high, seven feet wide and 16 feet long, with an extended tongue length of four feet, bringing the total length of the trailer to 20 feet. While it sounded big on paper, the trailer looked enormous when we finally saw the finished product.

As we continued to prepare for the debut performance of *The Southern Rose*, we could not imagine the surprises that lay ahead.

We drove down to the Wells Cargo factory in Waycross, Georgia to pick up the new trailer, and immediately spotted our trailer, towering above all the others on the lot. It looked gigantic. It was much taller than the other trailers, and the reality of our custom design was immediately evident. This was one big box. There was concern, but the salesman reassured us that our design



Figure 11. The rear view of the organ trailer.

was solid and that the trailer would be stable on the road. So, with those assurances, the trailer was hooked up and then headed back to South Carolina.

At this point I must tell you that I had never towed a trailer of any type, not even a boat trailer, so this was all a totally new experience for me. We pulled out onto the highway and the empty trailer towed beautifully at slow speeds, but when our vehicle got up to about 50 miles per hour, the trailer started to fishtail. It was not severe, but it was frightening. I quickly learned that the steering on our tow vehicle was very tight, and that the slightest movement of the steering wheel would cause the empty trailer to swing in the opposite direction. This was not easy to accept because we were over 400 miles from home! It was decided that there was no way that we could tow this behemoth on the interstate, primarily due to my inexperience and a general state of extreme panic. So, we mapped out a new route that avoided all interstates and allowed me to drive as slow as I needed to. Needless to say, it was a very long trip home.

The good news is that we arrived safely, and I was a much more experienced and confident driver when we finally arrived.

We were anxious to get the organ into the trailer, so I constructed a ramp from four by four inch posts and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch plywood. The ramp was very solid and very heavy, and we anticipated no problems in pushing the organ up the ramp, since the feet of the organ were attached to wooden skid boards with wheels. What was needed was enough manpower to get the organ to the top of that ramp and into the trailer. It sounded simple enough, but as we were learning, nothing is ever as simple as it seems.

The organ was pushed about two thirds of the way up the ramp without problems, and then another near disaster. The weight of the organ pushed one of the wheels through a weak spot in the edge of the plywood ramp, and the organ almost fell off the side of the ramp. Fortunately,

the organ was stabilized before that happened, and once the wheel was out of the hole, we managed to wrestle the organ to the top of the ramp successfully.

This “near miss” just reminded us of the other problems and tribulations that we had endured since purchasing the organ. These problems were all described previously, but just to recount, they included:

- 1) Destroying the transmission in a rental truck,
- 2) Narrowly avoiding a severe traffic accident in Chicago,
- 3) Surviving a fierce thunderstorm or tornado in Indiana,
- 4) Wrecking a second rental truck in Kentucky,
- 5) Suffering through serious emotional depression when the organ still played poorly after restoration,
- 6) Now, nearly losing the organ when it almost fell off the loading ramp.

When originally deciding to purchase a band organ, we knew that there were some adventures, but this was way more “excitement” than ever anticipated. Fortunately, the best part of the adventure was about to begin.

Once the organ and façade were securely mounted in the trailer, we were ready for our debut performance, and what a memorable performance it would be

I’m still not sure how she did it, but Glynn managed to book our very first performance on the grounds of the South Carolina State House at a “Legislative Luncheon” for our distinguished SC State Legislators. It was a beautiful setting for The Southern Rose and her coming out party and the organ would be entertaining some of the most powerful and influential individuals in the state of South Carolina. It seemed like the perfect engagement, but once again, surprises were headed our way.

On May 2, 1990, the trailer was loaded and headed for the SC State Capitol in Columbia. Our newly restored organ sounded great. The newly decorated façade looked beautiful. The organ was securely installed in a new display trailer. Finally, our work was complete and ready to entertain.

It was a beautiful, sunny Spring day arriving at the State House. We maneuvered our trailer into position. Large tents were on each side of us, and there was a wonderful spread of food and drink, just waiting to be consumed by our “distinguished” Legislators.

With much excitement, the doors were opened on the organ trailer. Once again, our band organ, now known as The Southern Rose, would entertain her listeners. It had been well over 50 years since she had last played her music for the public on an operating carousel. The motor was turned on, a book was placed in the keyframe and the organ immediately sprang to life, playing a delightful

assortment of waltzes, marches and show tunes. For the next three hours the organ played “The happiest music on earth” and set the stage for a festive event (Figure 12).

Soon the grounds were filled with prosperous (and sometimes pompous) State Senators and

Representatives. While a few expressed limited interest in the organ, most were clearly there only for the free meal. Imagine that!

Even so, we did our best to interact with our audience, but they obviously had more important things on their minds that day. Perhaps they were more interested in their re-election bids, or campaign contributions, or receiving bribes and vote buying (stay with me on this—I will explain the bribes and vote buying at the end of this article).

While definitely having fun, we had expected a much more enthusiastic response to the organ and her beautiful music. Glynn and I were both very excited about the organ and expected some of the Legislators to share just a little of our enthusiasm, but it just wasn’t happening.

What we did not understand was that the powerful Senators and Representatives that surrounded us that day were not really our most important audience.

Indeed, there was another much smaller audience, a block away, of which we were totally unaware.

As the event ended, we were approached by a woman with tears in her eyes. She quickly explained that she worked in a nearby office building, and that she had heard the organ playing in the distance. She continued to explain that she had a son, Frankie, born with Down’s Syndrome, who absolutely loved carousel music. She told us that when she first heard the music, she immediately called her son at home, to tell him about the organ. She told us how she had held the telephone outside of her office win-



Figure 12. The debut performance at the SC State Capital.

dow, hoping that he could hear the music as it played. She explained that he did hear it and that he was extremely excited. Because of his very enthusiastic response, she walked over to ask if we might have a recording of the organ that she could share with him. Unfortunately, we did not, but we promised to make one, and to mail it to him as soon as possible.

Glynn and I were both very moved by this experience and we learned a very valuable lesson that day. When the day began, we expected that the powerful State Legislators would be our most important audience. Instead, it turned out that an unknown mother and her disabled son, an audience of two, were really the most important audience of the day. They were the most important because the music touched their hearts and brought them joy.

Through the years, we’ve continued to play The Southern Rose for many thousands of people at hundreds of special events across the Southeast. At every engagement, we always meet at least one or two very special people who make it all worthwhile. These are the people who are filled with joy and excitement when they see the organ operating, and possibly discover band organ music for the very first time. These are the people who have deeply personal memories that resurface when they hear the music of The Southern Rose. These are the people who have tears in their eyes as they listen to the happy music of the band organ.

So, on our debut performance, May 2, 1990, we discovered our true mission and our most important audience.

Thankfully, we have been privileged to share The Southern Rose with this very special audience for over 20 years.

What we did not understand was that the powerful Senators and Representatives that surrounded us that day were not really our most important audience.

PostScript—The Sting

While thinking that the State Legislators that we entertained that day were distinguished and powerful, we were surprised when a Federal Grand Jury indicted 28 Legislators and Lobbyists in an FBI sting operation in August of 1990. “Operation Lost Trust” alleged that Legislators were selling their votes to support a pari-mutuel betting bill for proposed dog and horse racing in South Carolina. Ironically, it was later revealed that the Government’s star witness was himself a criminal and

drug addict. This individual later admitted that he had lied to the Grand Jury about the Legislators that he had implicated. Finally, a U.S District Court Judge dismissed all outstanding charges that were a part of the botched sting operation.

There were really some scoundrels in the group! Can you imagine that? Crooked politicians—who would have thought such a thing was possible?

“Adventures” to be continued in issue No. 44.

Ron and Glynn are long time members of the COAA. They are the organizers of the annual organ rally at Lake Winnie, and always enjoy sharing their band organ at COAA rallies and other public events

COAA Rally #1 Planned for Lake Winnie

The first COAA Organ Rally of 2010 is scheduled for May 29 - 31, Memorial Day Weekend, at Lake Winnepesaukah, just south of Chattanooga, Tennessee. The Rally will be the perfect opportunity to celebrate the end of a very cold and snowy winter, so please plan to join us in the Sunny South for a weekend of fun. Organs will begin playing on Saturday morning and will continue throughout the weekend, including Monday, which is Memorial Day.

The Lake Winnie Rally has become a COAA tradition, and 2010 will mark the sixth consecutive Rally at this wonderful family owned amusement park.

If you’ve attended the Lake Winnie Rally in past years, you already know the fun that we have, and we hope to see you all again this year. If you’ve never attended a Rally at Lake Winnie, then we invite you to join us and enjoy the South’s favorite family amusement park and some great Southern Hospitality.

Chattanooga is an interesting place to visit, with lots of things to see and do, so you might want to plan to stay an extra day or two to take in some of the other sights and attractions.

For additional information about the rally, please contact Ron or Glynn Keisler at 803-356-4545.

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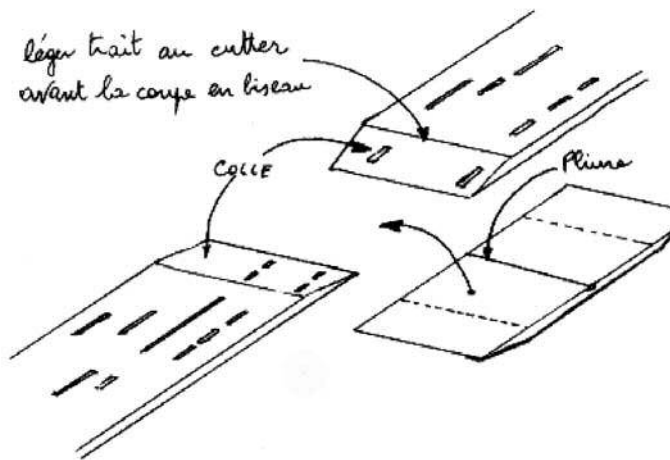


Figure 8. Using a slanted cutting edge to repair a single-thickness book. The glue is applied to the slanted edge.

Of course, from time to time, a damaged book can be beyond repair. In that case, the last resort will be the help of a gifted musician and arranger.

In the examples above, we haven’t treated cardboard consisting of one single layer, because it is much more difficult to restore: the only solution then is to cut a slanted edge, and this can only be achieved by a skilled hand (Figure 8)!

I won’t lie to you: all these methods require a lot of patience, time and skill. For a professional, all this work probably isn’t profitable, but for an amateur it surely is worthwhile, because one creates a book that is as good as new and will provide a lot of listening pleasure.

This article was first published in the 1st trimester 2006 edition of *Musiques Mécaniques Vivantes*, the journal of the Association Des Amis Instruments Et De La Musique Mécanique. The editor wishes to thank the French mechanical music association as well as the author, René Cauche, for permission to republish. Also, a hearty “thanks” goes to Björn Isebaert for translating this article for use in the *Carousel Organ*.

Adventures with the Southern Rose *Part 2*

Ron Keisler

In the previous episode, you heard about our debut performance with our Band Organ, *The Southern Rose*, on the beautiful grounds of the South Carolina State Capitol. The audience that day consisted of powerful State Legislators, who were expected to be our most important audience.

Instead, it was surprising to discover that the most important audience that day was actually a mother and her son with Down's syndrome, who just happened to love band organ music! *The Southern Rose* touched their hearts, and brought them joy.

So, on that day, May 2, 1990, our mission with *The Southern Rose* became perfectly clear.

Chapter 4: There's No Business Like Show Business!

Following our debut performance at the South Carolina State Capitol, many engagements were anticipated that would keep us busy on weekends throughout the year. These engagements included numerous community festivals, senior citizen picnics, museum celebrations and an eleven-day run at the South Carolina State Fair. It would certainly be a year to remember.

The stories that follow recount some of the most memorable experiences encountered in the years from 1990 to the present.

Festivals, Chitlins and Such

Community festivals are a big deal in our state. It seems that every town that is big enough to have at least one traffic light (or even a stop sign) has a festival that celebrates something important to the local economy. In many cases, that something is food. Just as examples, in South Carolina there are Peach Festivals, Watermelon Festivals, Peanut Festivals, Apple Festivals, Collard Festivals, Poultry Festivals, Barbecue Festivals and even a Chitlin Festival. For those of you who don't know, chitlins (chitterlings) are fried hog intestines. Fortunately, we've never had the opportunity to play at the Chitlin Festival.

Sometimes, festivals will celebrate things that should never be celebrated—a prime example is the SC Kudzu Festival. Kudzu is a large vine that grows aggressively in the South. It will literally cover old houses, abandoned structures and anything that stops moving for more than two minutes! In our opinion, Kudzu is not a plant to be celebrated, but for many years, there was a SC Kudzu Festival—we were never asked to perform.

Larger cities have festivals that are more generic and cosmopolitan in nature. Larger festivals don't typically celebrate a specific food or an animal group, but usually go by more generic names such as SpringFest, SummerFest, AutumnFest and OktoberFest.

Over the years, we have traveled to hundreds of festivals with our band organ. This includes communities all across South Carolina, to places that many people never knew existed. Living in central South Carolina, we can normally travel anywhere in the state, perform, and return on the same day. Even so, it can make for a very long day.

We've also traveled to events in Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia and Tennessee, but prefer not to travel more than 200 miles from home.

Rising at the crack of dawn in order to be on the road by 06:00 AM, the only other people encountered that early on a Saturday morning are usually the fishermen! We then drive for an hour or two, grab some breakfast, find our position in the parade lineup, do the parade, move into position for a stationary performance, play the organ for four to six hours, pack up, drive back, and arrive home exhausted, after a 12-hour day. But, what fun it is.

Rolling into a small town for the first time, there is always an element of anticipation. We know that there probably has never been a band organ in the town before, and we look forward to sharing the organ with a new community and a brand new audience.

Our very first festival was the Poultry Festival, in Leesville, SC. Leesville is a small rural town, but they have a big time festival with a great parade. Every year, over 100,000 people travel to Leesville to celebrate chickens and the economic impact of the poultry industry on that small community. There is always an abundance of Southern Fried Chicken at this event.

During our first visit to the Poultry Festival in May 1990, we met a number of people who simply loved the music of *The Southern Rose*. The organ played at the Poultry Festival for ten consecutive years, and each year we looked forward to seeing these same people, our friends for the day, who came back year after year to enjoy the music. While they listened, they would share personal stories and events from the previous year. In some ways, it was much like a family reunion (**Figure 1**).



Figure 1. A typical crowd behind the organ at the Poultry Festival.

It was at the Poultry Festival that we first experienced the emotional impact that band organ music can have on certain listeners. While playing, there was an elderly man standing behind the organ with tears in his eyes. As the music played, the tears continued to roll down his cheeks. When the song was over, we approached this gentleman, and he explained that the music brought back very fond memories of a very good buddy that he had lost in World War II.

When starting out on this “Band Organ Adventure,” we never imagined that the music would have such an emotional impact on people. However, through the years there have been many people to stand and listen, with tears rolling down their faces, because of the personal memories triggered by the music. Whenever this happens, it is always a very special day, because our music has brought back a cherished memory and touched the heart of a listener. It just doesn’t get any better than that!

The North Carolina Apple Festival is another of our favorite festivals. We played at the Apple Festival for three consecutive years, and the visitors to this festival were among the most enthusiastic that we’ve ever encountered. Located in Hendersonville, NC, the Apple Festival draws a crowd comprised largely of retirees from all parts of the United States who decided to move to the beautiful mountains of western North Carolina.

The Apple festival was always a three-day event, and each day, all day long, large enthusiastic crowds would gather behind the organ, watching the bellows pumping, the valves working, and the music traveling through the keyframe. It was always amazing to see the great response of that crowd to *The Southern Rose* and her music.

Our first year at the Apple Festival, we took some cassette recordings to sell. Having no idea of the number that would sell, we packed a dual cassette deck and some blank tapes, just in case more would be needed. It was shocking to sell all of the cassette tapes on the first day of the festival! People continued to ask for tapes and were disappointed when told that they were all sold out. As a last resort, I set up the cassette deck in the back of our truck and began duplicating tapes on site. There were people literally waiting in line to purchase recordings, and tapes were sold just as fast as I could duplicate them! What a tremendous response to *The Southern Rose*.



Figure 2. Clowns and band organs—a great combination!

There are many intangible benefits to being a festival entertainer and one is the opportunity to meet other like-minded entertainers. These are people much like us, who enjoy entertaining and interacting with the general public. Over the years, we’ve met lots of different entertainers: clowns, magicians, jugglers, unicyclists, puppeteers, musicians, kazoo band leaders and even a flea circus owner. It’s always been a priority to get the business cards of the other entertainers. After all, you never know when you might need to hire a good flea circus! (Figure 2)

Beware When The Ladies Go Organ Grinding

Regarding festivals, I must warn all men about the hazards of allowing the wife to go organ grinding without a husband close by her side.

Glynn booked a festival in the small historic town of Abbeville, South Carolina. Unfortunately, I had a conflict at work, and could not attend. Rather than cancel the gig, Glynn invited one of her girl friends, Mary Ann, to play the gig with her.

They decided to spend the night and made reservations at a historic bed and breakfast in the town. Then they packed up the organ trailer, including silver, flowers and linen tablecloths, and headed for Abbeville (Figure 3).

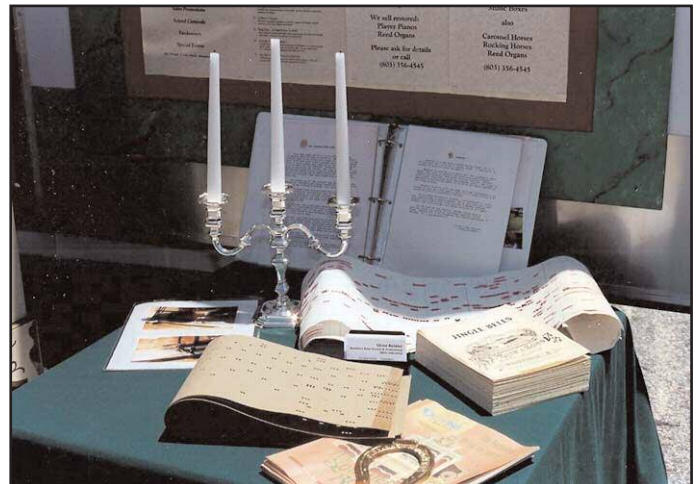


Figure 3. The feminine touch—a silver candelabra and cardboard book music

When the ladies arrived, they quickly made the acquaintance of the Police Chief and the Fire Chief. I’m not sure exactly how that happened, but Glynn says that both men were impressed with her driving skills as she backed and maneuvered the organ trailer into a tight spot. A likely story! But, I must admit that Glynn is a very good driver, and she can back and park that organ trailer on a dime, and that is a skill that does impress most men.

However, I’ve always suspected that there was more to the story, because the photos that they brought back showed both of them hanging out with the monkey organ outside of a local bar called The Rough House. She never told me what went on inside The Rough House and some stories are best left untold! (Figure 4)

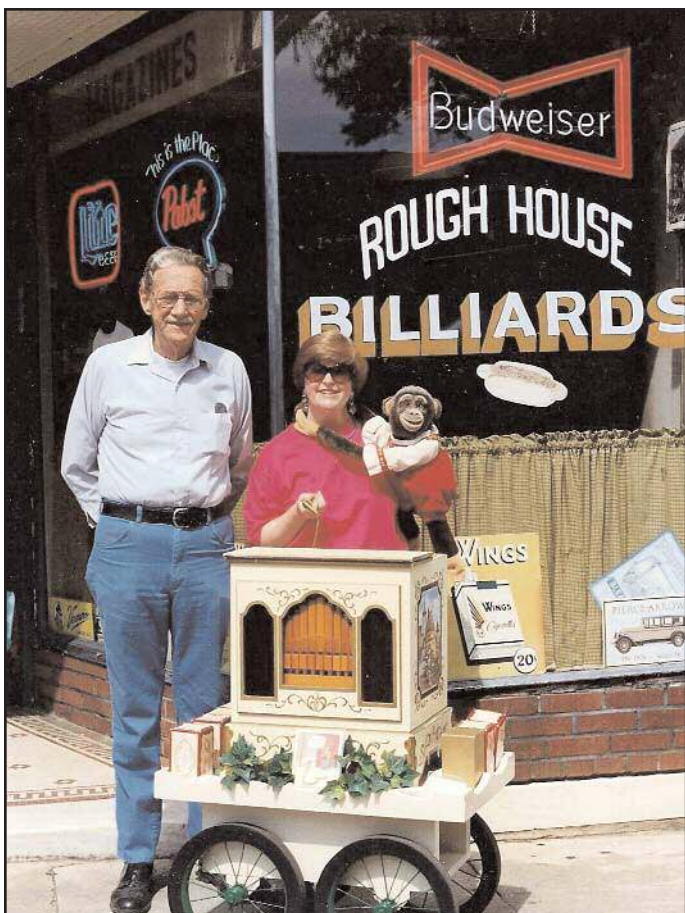


Figure 4. Glynn and a gentleman friend, outside The Rough House.

Senior Events

In addition to festivals, we have played numerous senior citizens events such as senior picnics and fishing rodeos. These events are always enjoyable, because older people are much more likely to have experienced a band organ at some point in their lives.

Also, many of the senior events are sponsored by organizations in the poorest areas of the state, where elderly residents are lucky to have the basic necessities of life. It is especially rewarding to entertain these individuals with the band organ and they always enjoy the music (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Band organ music makes you feel like dancing!

While performing at these events, the organ is typically hired simply to provide background music while attendees enjoy their picnic meal or as they try to catch a few fish in the fishing rodeo.

We have also performed many times at nursing homes and assisted living facilities. These facilities are special to us, as the residents are always very receptive, appreciative and enthusiastic about the organ music.

Children's Events

Children have a special fascination with music, and the melodies of a band organ are always well received by young people.

The first time that *The Southern Rose* played for children was during a visit to our daughter Allison's kindergarten class. The children loved the music, and so we continued by taking it to her Elementary School, as she grew older.

One of our most memorable encounters with children happened quite by accident. We were scheduled to perform at a senior citizen's picnic that was located in a very poor South Carolina county. As the organ began to play for the seniors, a lady walked over from a small elementary school across the street. She was a teacher and she asked if it would be possible for her to bring the children over to hear the organ. After getting approval from the organizers of the Picnic, she was told that it would be our pleasure to play the organ for the children.

Soon, there were several long lines of children exiting the school and heading for the organ. Several minutes later the organ trailer was completely surrounded by enthusiastic young children. As the music began to play, the children started to dance and clap, moving around with a wild intensity that we had never experienced. There were children everywhere, and it seemed that they were transformed into a musical frenzy by the organ music. Glynn and I were both inside the organ trailer, and as the children danced and sang, it seemed that we were in the middle of a huge beehive, and the children were the bees that buzzed excitedly, all around the organ.

After several songs, the children headed back to the school, full of energy and enthusiasm. The teacher who had organized their impromptu field trip thanked us and then explained the frenzied behavior of the children. She said the children lived in such poverty that they never had the opportunity to experience the things that most children do. Although the children lived only forty miles from the beach, she said that most had never even seen the ocean.

It was hard to imagine children living in such circumstances, but we were thankful that our band organ had been there to entertain them that day. Experiences like this were certainly what organ grinding was all about.

Corporate Events and Grand Openings

We have played *The Southern Rose* for many corporate events to include grand openings and special sales promotions.

As an example, for several years we performed regularly at store grand openings for the Lowe's Home Improvement chain (Figure 6).



Figure 6. At a Lowe's Grand Opening.

These types of events are different, in that people come to the stores to shop, not to be entertained. Even so, it was our job to make their shopping experience memorable and enjoyable.

Memorable it was, especially for Glynn and me! You haven't lived until you've had an opportunity to stroll around a Lowe's Home Improvement Superstore while playing a monkey organ. One of our favorite locations was always in the plumbing section, right next to the toilets. It was usually the perfect location—great acoustics—until that pesky Pink Panther (who was always promoting his pink fiberglass insulation) came over and tried to steal the (Figure 7).



Figure 7. The Pink Panther steals the show in the plumbing department!

One memory, not so fond, was at a Lowe's grand opening where we learned that the band organ would be located right next to the chain saw wood carvers! You must understand that there's nothing wrong with chain saw wood carvers, and we'll tell you that we have great admiration for any man who can convert a tree log into a life-size statue of Elvis Presley, the undisputed King of Rock and Roll, using nothing more than brute strength and a turbo charged chain saw!

However, this is certainly not a location where a band organ should be located. First of all, it is nearly impossible to hear a band organ above the roar of chain saw wood carvers

working feverishly on their artistic masterpieces. Secondly, the carving kicks up a cloud of wood chips and dust, which are not particularly healthy for a pneumatic instrument such as a band organ.

We endured that artistry for a couple of hours before finally reaching our limit. Very diplomatically, we explained to the store Manager that chain saws and band organs were not a good mix. He graciously allowed us to move the organ to the far end of the store. It was a good thing, because requiring us to stay in our original location could have resulted in another famous chain saw massacre, but it would not have been in Texas!

Parades: Big and Small

Through the years, parades have been very important to our marketing strategy. Almost all festivals sponsor a parade, and once selected by the parade committee, it is easy to be included as a part of the regular festival entertainment.

When designing our organ trailer, we planned it specifically for parades, with large double doors that open on each side of the trailer. This allows parade spectators on one side of the street to see the façade, while spectators on the opposite side of the street see the back of the organ in action.

Originally, the possibility was considered of building a second façade for the rear side, so that all parade viewers would have something nice to look at. It was quickly discovered that this would not be necessary, as the back of the organ, with the bellows pumping and the music moving through the keyframe generates much more interest than the façade on the front side (Figures 8 & 9).



Figure 8. In the parade lineup and ready to roll!

For many years we have participated in hundreds of parades, but one is particularly memorable. In 1990, the organ was booked for a Family Festival in Surfside Beach, SC. Surfside Beach is just south of Myrtle Beach, one of the primary tourist destinations in the Southeast. The festival organizer asked us to participate in a parade, and the invitation was quickly accepted. However, upon arriving, we learned that this parade would be very small.



Figure 9. The parade begins.

Small indeed! There was only one official unit planned for the parade—*The Southern Rose* band organ. When hearing the location of the parade, we really were concerned. They asked that the organ parade down U.S. Highway 17, the busiest highway in the area, which connects Myrtle Beach and all popular beaches to the south. Expressing concern, our host reassured us by explaining that two police cars would provide an escort—one in front and one behind.

Reluctantly we agreed, and a sign was attached to the rear of the organ trailer—"Follow Me to The Surfside Beach Family Fun Day Festival."

U.S. 17 is always an incredibly busy highway, with very heavy traffic that normally travels at 45 to 55 miles per hour. Even with the police escorts, this was a very uncomfortable prospect.

Nevertheless, the police cruisers positioned themselves at the front and back of the "parade" and we pulled out into the traffic of U.S.17, headed north toward Myrtle Beach. With sirens blasting and blue lights flashing, the police cruisers escorted us for about two miles up the busy highway.

In addition to being one of the smallest parades in history, this also had to be one of the fastest. Our police escorts were moving at 30 - 35 miles per hour as we traveled down the highway. If anyone saw us on the side of the road, they could not have heard the music because we were moving so fast.

Then, as quickly as it started, it was over. The entire parade lasted just two to three minutes, start to finish! Fortunately, the parade ended safely, and caused no major traffic accidents. It was definitely the smallest and fastest parade in our entertainment career, and one that will never be forgotten.

RoseBud: A New Addition

In 1992, Glynn saw a classified ad in the local newspaper—"For sale: German Crank Organ." Naturally this ad got our attention, so we called to get more information. The seller explained that the organ was a 20-note model that played paper rolls, so a trip was quickly scheduled to take a look.

The organ was located in Monck's Corner, a small town near Charleston, SC. Monck's Corner is an interesting place because there really is a Monastery, Mepkin Abbey, with Monks who spend their lives within the walls of that enclave.

The advertised crank organ was not located at the Monastery. But what a coincidence to find our "monkey organ" in a town called Monck's Corner, inhabited by Monks!

We followed the seller's directions to the location of the organ and soon found ourselves in a small neighborhood just outside the town. It was definitely not the type of neighborhood where you would expect to find a crank organ.

This was a concern, especially upon reaching our final destination. There was a small house in the middle of a large parcel of property, and it didn't look particularly inviting.

Even so, we got out of the car and began to walk toward the house, and immediately saw two vicious Rotweillers running straight toward us. The dogs were very large and very angry and they were not happy to see visitors! We ran back to our car and started to drive away when the owner appeared in the yard.

He assured us that the dogs would not harm us and then he pointed out a small single strand of wire that surrounded the area where the dogs patrolled. With apprehension, we began to walk toward the house again. The dogs continued to snarl and bark viciously, but they stopped abruptly as they approached the strand of wire, just as the owner had promised. There was great relief when we finally reached the safety of the house. Upon entering, the owner explained that the strand of wire that surrounded the dogs was an electric fence. He then laughed and told us that the electricity no longer worked, but the dogs didn't know that! He thought that was very funny, but for some reason, we failed to see the humor in that situation!

He then took us to the room where the organ was located. It was a 20-note Deleika organ with a single paper roll. We played the organ and it looked and sounded good.

The seller was from Germany, and he explained that he was in the Import / Export Business, primarily for used vehicles. He then asked if we would like to sell our vehicle, a Jeep Grand Wagoneer. He explained that such vehicles were very popular in South America, and that he would pay us top dollar. We politely declined his offer to buy our vehicle, but told him that he had a deal on the organ.

The organ was quickly loaded into the Jeep as the Rotweillers continued to snarl and threaten. We were relieved to finally get away in one piece. It was an unlikely (and possibly dangerous) place to buy a crank organ, but it was certainly an adventure.

After arriving home with the crank organ, Glynn decided to name it *Rosebud*. That seemed appropriate, especially since our band organ was *The Southern Rose*.

Rosebud quickly became a popular part of our total entertainment package, and the small organ provided new opportunities to interact, one on one, with our audience. The organ was well received, but now we needed a monkey!

A Million Dollar Monkey in a Five and Ten Cent Store

Glynn found our monkey in a thrift store. He looked very forlorn, lying there totally naked among all the old discarded toys, but he immediately caught Glynn's eye. She picked him up to discover a wonderfully realistic monkey puppet and she knew that this little guy was destined to be a star! As she paid for her newfound friend, she was surprised to learn that his

price was only \$2.50. Without a doubt, this purchase would turn out to be the best bargain of our lives.

Glynn quickly made him a costume and gave him a new name—Jocko. As she practiced working with Jocko, he came to life on her arm. Glynn is talented with all things artistic, and puppetry is no exception. Soon she was operating Jocko in such a smooth and realistic manner that many people (especially the children) were convinced that he was indeed a real monkey.

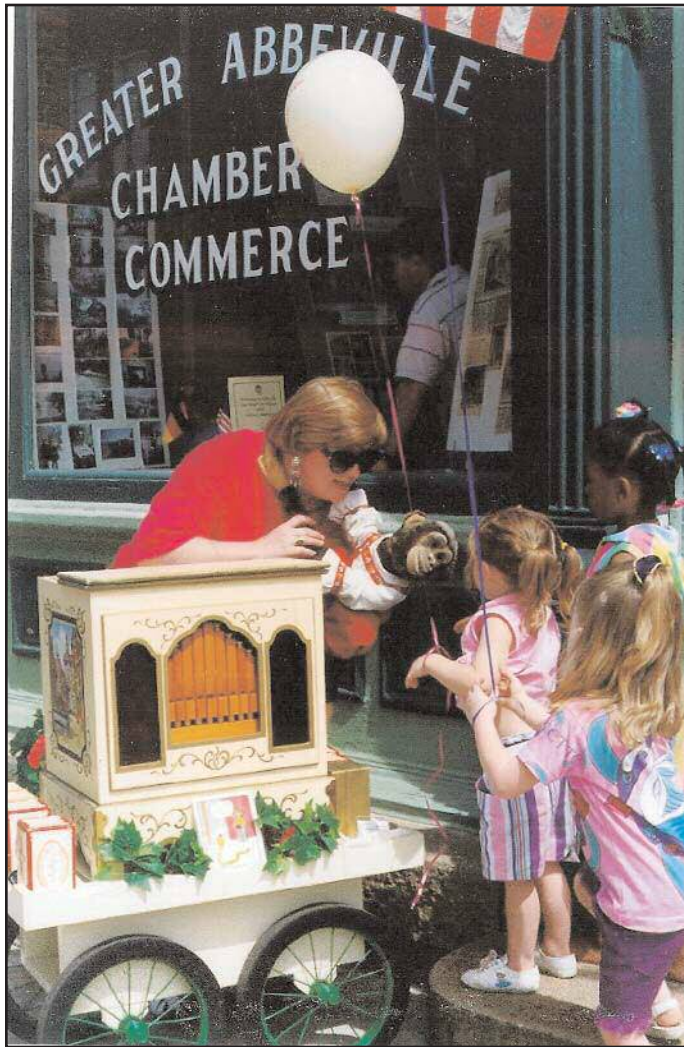


Figure 10. *RoseBud* and *Jocko* in action.

Jocko was an immediate success, and he quickly became an important part of our act. With Jocko on her arm, Glynn began to entertain children, up close and personal. The monkey always fascinates children, even when they sometimes realize that he is a puppet. Over the years, Jocko has been hugged and kissed by thousands of children. He has brought countless smiles to multitudes of spectators. Without a doubt, purchasing Jocko was the best \$2.50 that we ever spent. We literally found a million dollar monkey in a five and ten cent store (**Figure 10**).

State Fairs and Fried Mushrooms

Our longest engagement was an eleven-day run at the South Carolina State Fair. The year was 1990, and we were excited about the adventure that lay ahead. From a financial perspective, this would be our most lucrative event ever. Our performance fee for eleven days of music was more than enough to pay for our new organ trailer.

Even so, our excitement was tempered with apprehension. Eleven days is a long time to play a band organ. But imagine if you will, playing an eleven-day engagement with only ninety total minutes of book music! That was our situation, as there was a very limited amount of music at that time. Repetition was the only solution, and with much concentration, a repertoire was selected so that songs were not repeated in a given hour. By the time that the fair locked the gates on the eleventh night, we had played every one of those books at least fifty times! Even so, we never grew tired of the songs, because the audience changed constantly. No one knew that the same songs were playing over and over and over again.

While the fair was good from a financial perspective, it was even better from an emotional perspective. There were many personal encounters with listeners, and their response to the organ was fantastic.

One of the most memorable experiences occurred late one afternoon, while playing for a very special audience. Standing in the organ trailer, looking down the midway, I saw the group slowly approaching. There were 12 to 15 people in wheelchairs, all being pushed along by their caregivers. Eventually they all arrived at our location, and the caregivers positioned each one carefully in front of the organ. Most appeared to be relatively young, probably 20 to 50 years old, and all were severely disabled. Their physical limitations were profound and some seemed unaware of their surroundings. As I watched, it made me sad to see people in such difficult situations. For a moment, I felt that band organs and carousel music were trivial and unimportant, especially in light of the challenges that these people faced. I could not imagine that the music of the organ would mean anything to the group that was now assembled in front of the organ. Then, to my amazement, those folks gave me a surprise that will never be forgotten. Putting a book into the keyframe and turning on the organ, I saw a distinct change in some of the listeners. Before the music started they laid motionless, but as soon as the music started to play, they began moving their heads and arms in rhythm to the music. I realized that they were enjoying the music in spite of their severe disabilities. It was amazing to watch them enjoying the organ, each in his or her special way, and it was an honor and a privilege to play for them that day.

Another highlight of the State Fair performance was meeting Frankie, our very first fan. Previously you learned about our debut performance at the South Carolina State House where the organ played for the State Legislators. You also heard about the mother who approached us after the performance and told of her son, Frankie, who had Down's syndrome, and who loved band organ music. You may remember that this mother called her son on the phone that day, and she held the telephone outside her office window, so that he could hear the organ music playing in

the distance. Well, we saw this same mother again, five month's later at the State Fair, and this time Frankie was with her. While taking a break with the music, Frankie and his mother approached the organ. After a quick introduction, we put a book in the keyframe and turned on the organ. The music began to play and immediately, a look of intense joy spread over Frankie's face. He was grinning from ear to ear, and he gave us an immediate "thumbs up" then began to pound his fist into the air, in rhythm to the music. Frankie was thrilled to hear the organ that day, and it was nice to finally meet him.

There were many thousands of listeners during our eleven-day run at the Fair, and it was a great experience, but there were a few drawbacks.

As an example, just imagine the intense smell of all the food being cooked in countless concession trailers on the midway of a Fair. At first it was delightful. The smell of fried dough, fried sausages, fried oreos, fried ice cream, fried turkey legs, French fries and corn dogs filled the air. But then, after a couple of days, we started noticing other smells, not so pleasing. The concession trailer closest to our organ trailer was selling fried mushrooms. While mushrooms have never been one of our favorite foods, fried mushrooms are low on our list when it comes to fair food. Unfortunately, after noticing the smell of those fried mushrooms, it was difficult to smell anything else. So, for the next nine days, our noses were constantly assaulted by the smell of those mushrooms! This was not our most pleasant memory of the fair.



Figure 11. At the South Carolina State Fair.

Even so, eleven days at the fair passed quickly, and when the final night arrived, it was sad to think that it was about to end. Looking back, it was an experience that we'll always remember, and it was an adventure that would never have happened without a band organ (**Figure 11**).

Questions: How Much Is This Thing Worth?

When you play a band organ for the general public, you'll get questions—lots of questions! Furthermore, you'll hear the same questions, over and over from different people. This is not a bad thing, because it shows that people are interested.

The most common questions are:

- 1) How does it work?
- 2) How old is it?
- 3) Where did you get it?
- 4) What got you interested?
- 5) What's it worth?

The first question is always our favorite. Whenever a listener asks "How does it work?"

This is an opportunity to educate and to share the excitement of mechanical music. As mentioned previously, our organ trailer has large doors that open on the rear side, so that listeners can see the complete mechanism of the organ in action. In addition, the cloth panels on the rear of the organ case have been replaced with Plexiglas, so that people can see the valves, pouches and bellows in motion. This allows us to explain how it works by showing the actual parts in action. People really enjoy seeing the music moving through the keyframe, the crank wheel turning and the valves working. While people enjoy looking at the pretty façade, the best action is always behind the trailer! We strongly recommend that anyone considering the design of a new organ trailer should plan to have doors that open on the rear side. Otherwise, you'll be hiding the most fascinating part of the instrument.

Our least favorite question is "What's it worth?" When first beginning to play the organ for the public, we weren't sure how to answer. After all, it's a personal question and it's impossible to know why people are asking. Perhaps they are just curious. Maybe they would like to buy an organ of their own. Or, perhaps they are asking so that they can come back later to steal the instrument! Not a likely possibility, but caution is appropriate. Early on, we came up with a standard answer that addresses the question but doesn't say too much. When someone asks, we respond, "its worth about as much as a new car—something between a Yugo and a Ferrari." That usually takes care of that question.

The Business of Organ Grinding The Emotional Rewards are the Greatest!

After deciding that our band organ would be a working instrument, to be played for the general public, we simply wanted to share the organ and her music. It was primarily a labor of love and the primary objective was to introduce others to the wonders of mechanical music.

On a more practical note, it was realized that there would be expenses, and that expenses could be covered by charging performance fees.

While the business aspect of entertaining with a Band Organ is a subject that merits discussion, that's not really the focus of this article.

We will just say that over the last 20 years, there have been opportunities to play hundreds of events all across the Southeast. In some years, there were 30 or more engagements in a single year.

We are paid for most performances; however, free entertainment is offered to some nursing homes and select charities.

However, traveling with a large trailer involves significant expense. There's the cost of gasoline, as well as routine maintenance of the tow vehicle. These expenses can be substantial, especially when you consider the wear and tear inflicted upon the tow vehicle. We can attribute at least one blown engine and one failed transmission to towing the organ trailer.

All things considered, our organ business has been profitable over the last 20 years, but when you consider all the expenses and the time required to travel and perform, we would never recommend doing this just for the money.

Instead, you do it for the love of the music. You do it to entertain and educate. You do it to make people smile, and sometimes, to revive a memory that brings a tear to the eye of the listener.

In the end, the emotional rewards are always greater than the financial rewards (**Figure 12**).



Figure 12. Glynn entertains the crowd.

Looking Back—Looking Forward

Twenty years ago, we could never have imagined where our Band Organ Adventure would ultimately lead. Looking back, it has been a great journey, even though there were challenges along the way.

We are reminded of a trip in 1990 to Clover Fest, a small town festival in Clover, South Carolina. Travelling ninety miles to Clover, the truck ran out of gas just two miles from town. I had never run out of gas while traveling with the organ, and was upset for letting it happen. Glynn encouraged me to calm down, and then I grabbed an empty gas can from the organ trailer and started walking back to the last gas station that we had passed. While waiting, Glynn walked out into a field beside the road. The field was covered with beautiful clover, so she started looking around to see if she could find at least one four-leaf clover. By the time that I returned with the gas, she had found not one, but FIVE four-leaf clovers, which we interpreted as a very strong sign of future good luck! It turned out to be true. From that point on, there was plenty of good luck as we traveled with *The Southern Rose* for the next twenty years!

It is amazing how a single decision can change one's life. Because of the decision to buy a band organ, there have been travels to places that we never knew existed. There have been countless thousands of people whom we would never have met. It has been a great family experience to share with our daughter, Allison, who often traveled with us.

But most important of all, it has allowed us to share the happy music of *The Southern Rose* with countless individuals across the Southeast. It has allowed us to entertain people and share some happiness. It has allowed us to make people smile, and occasionally, to make them cry, but always tears of joy.

It has been an amazing adventure! We are thankful for the opportunity, and we are now looking forward to the next twenty years! Hopefully, we'll be back in 2030, with more stories to tell.

Ron and Glynn are long-time members of the COAA. They are the organizers of the annual organ rally at Lake Winnie, and always enjoy sharing their band organ at COAA rallies and other public events.

COAA Rally #6: "Country Carnival" Living History Farm, Urbandale, IA September 4-5, 2010

The Living History Farms (three times the size of Crossroads Village, MI), a reconstructed Iowa settlement, consists of the 1875 town of "Walnut Hill," the 1850 pioneer farm, the 1700 Iowa Indian settlement and the 1900 farm. The rally will be held on the weekend of the "Farmers Fall Carnival" and 500 to 1,000 visitors are expected. History is the theme and the inhabitants are excited over the mechanical music machines participating in this event.

Portable organs may roam the wooden sidewalks throughout the town of Walnut Hill. Costumes are encouraged but not required. Trailered organs will be located at the end of the main street in an area with many trees and shelter. Dinner will be at the shelter.

The location is a quarter of a mile from Interstates 35 & 80 (near Des Moines). A hotel rate of only \$59/night has been obtained. A restaurant is within walking distance of the hotel and farm entrance.

For more information (from three Iowa natives): Jim Lester, 515-233-2804; David Wilder, 515-232-7728; or Mike Schoeppner, 816-767-9766. And, more information will be in your mailbox this summer.



A grandmother of native Iowan, Mike Schoeppner, was born upstairs in the Greteman Store (now part of the town of "Walnut Hill").