

Late 1800s European Organ Now Traveling the States and Canada

The Diamond Jubilee 89-Key Gavioli Organ, A Newcomer to America



The Diamond Jubilee today. Painting will be completed this winter and a new proscenium added in the coming year.

By Roger C. Wiegand

Special to *The Carousel News & Trader*

The Diamond Jubilee Organ is a newcomer to American shores. It is an 89-key Gavioli organ playing the violin-baritone (or VB) scale. It is thought to be only the second organ playing this scale, which is quite common in England, in the Americas. The Jubilee was purchased by the author in 2007, restored in England, and is now beginning to play at fairs, festivals, and other events in the United States and Canada.

The Jubilee was built as an 87-key organ by Gavioli in Paris, probably between 1895 and 1899 – we've arbitrarily declared its birth year to be 1897, the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Like most of Gavioli's production of those years, it was probably built for the British export market. According to British fairground historian Philip Upchurch, it is speculated that the organ was first owned by Mr. Fred Gray of Hampstead, London, and was paired with a spinning top gondola switchback ride. The organ and ride changed hands several times, and the organ was moved to different rides over the years, ending up in a permanent installation in a gallopers (carousel) at Wonderland, in the seaside town of Cleethorpes in Yorkshire, probably in the 1930s.

In 1952 the organ was converted to the 89-key VB scale by Victor Chiappa, adding the violin and baritone pipes that give the scale its name, as well as adding a register box



The Gavioli prior to conversion to 89 keys in the 3-abreast gallopers at Wonderland Amusement Park, Cleethorpes. Photo courtesy of Philip Upchurch.

to turn those pipes on and off from the cardboard books. The saxophone register control wasn't implemented during the conversion; the pipes played continuously. It was also redecorated, with musical notes painted on the front. The organ played in the center of a steam-driven gallopers at Wonderland until 1975 when it was sold to the Screetons.

The Screeton family, showmen of Barton-upon-Humber, purchased the organ and an unused ride engine from the park and initiated restoration work. Some organ work was

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The gallopers at Wonderland, Cleethorpes, with the Gavioli mounted in the center. Photo is probably from the 1960s.

done, the carvings were repainted by the well-known fair-ground artist, James Tiller, but the project stalled. The carvings and organ parts were stored safely, but the case, with the main bellows, was allowed to sit out in the weather and were gradually destroyed.

The organ came onto the market in early 2007 and was purchased with the intent of returning the organ to "like new"



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condition and traveling it to fairs, festivals, and rallies across the country. With the help of Brian Wells (restoration joiner and owner of the "American" Gavioli) the organ was transported to Brian's shop and restoration work was begun by Andrew Whitehead.

Andrew took parts of the organ to his shop near Stratford for re-leathering and fine adjustment. Brian, with partner Dave Heritage, set about building new casework to house the organ in their shop in Banbury. The main case had been completely lost, replaced with a crude plywood box, while the drum cases were severely damaged by the weather and finished off by the crowning indignity of getting sawn in half. Fortunately, Brian's instrument is a close match to this one and it was possible to essentially build an exact replica of Brian's case to fit the new instrument. In addition to the main case and drum cases, the drums had been lost over time and the box pipes in the baritone were missing and had to be made new. The new brass drums are exact replications of the old drums, made by hand in the exact way that they would have been originally.

With restoration complete, the Jubilee was crated and shipped to the United States where it was mounted into a display trailer custom-built by M Manufacturing of Austintown, OH. The trailer is all aluminum, in the European-style with a hydraulically operated roof. It mounts an RV-style quiet diesel generator to provide power to the organ blower and lighting.

The Jubilee currently plays only traditional cardboard



The Gavioli mounted in a smaller galloper post-conversion to the 89 VB scale, probably in the 1960s. The violin pipes are removed from the organ in this photo. Photo courtesy of Rosie Screeton Armitage.

book music. The library originally associated with the organ was destroyed in a salt water flood so it has been necessary

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CN&T/Fraley Archive Photo

Early photo of an unidentified Illions Carousel and band organ. If you can ID this carousel, we'd love to hear from you.

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The Diamond Jubilee organ open and ready for business in the new display trailer. Signage on the trailer is in the works.

to acquire all new music from Andrew and Joan Whitehead. The library is currently comprised of marches, waltzes, and classical overtures typical of a British fairground organ. A non-invasive MIDI system is currently being installed that will permit a greatly expanded repertoire.

The Diamond Jubilee organ is now available for fairs, festivals, events and celebrations of any kind anywhere in the U.S. or Canada. Visit www.carouselorgan.com for details or contact the author at (508) 358-2563 or email info@carouselorgan.com.


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