

GRACE NOTES

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>The Mortier Story</i>	2
<i>In Brief</i>	2
<i>Newly offered for sale</i>	2
<i>Why is a scale important?</i>	3
<i>Serial numbers wanted</i>	3
<i>'Sweet Charity' restored</i>	4

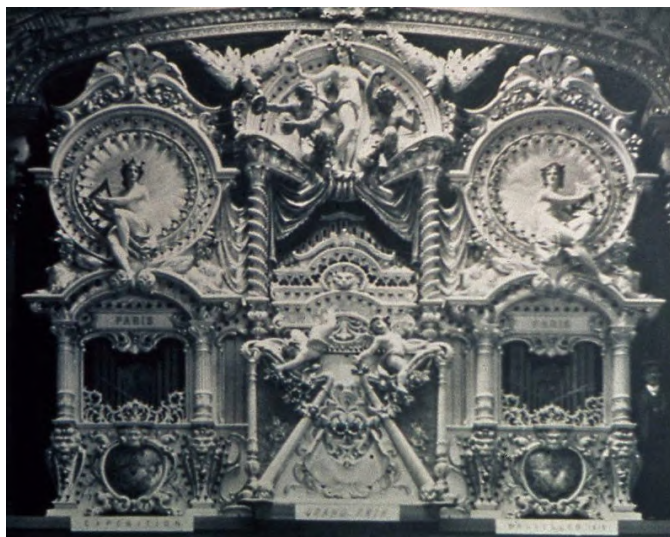
CHARLES MARENGHI 1858 — 1919

On October 25, 1919, the famous organ builder Charles Antoine Marengi died in Paris at the age of 61 years. In anticipation of this centenary, we take a brief look at the work of this influential man.

Born on September 10, 1858, he eventually became a valued and trusted employee of the Gavioli firm, ultimately holding the position of general foreman. It is said that he was treated like a family member in

builders became particularly fierce. Marengi & Cie. claimed to be the originators of combination organs and show fronts and went on to build them with up to 104-keys, none of which survive today. Concurrently, the dance hall business was booming on the continent, and Marengi produced many imposing instruments, particularly for the lucrative Belgian market, often introducing novel features. The zenith was probably reached at the 1910 Universal Exhibition in Brussels, where Marengi exhibited a huge and extremely ornate organ which

was awarded the grand prix. After the exhibition, this organ was installed in the Neptune Palace dance hall in Antwerp. This sustained period of unprecedented success was brought to an abrupt end, however, with the outbreak of World War One. It is not yet known how the war years passed for the firm, but it was less than a year after the Armistice had been signed that Marengi died on October 25, 1919. Few original Marengi organs survive, but in this anniversary year we are pleased to be associated with two significant instruments by this maker. The first is the only known 110-key Marengi organ, which is believed to have been silent since 1939. This restoration presents numerous challenges, but work has already begun and from time



The organ which Ch. Marengi & Cie. exhibited at the 1910 Brussels Universal Exhibition.

the Gavioli home, and in 1901 he was presented with a national medal of honour which rewarded employee fidelity. However, towards the end of 1902, Anselmo Gavioli became seriously ill and died on December 7th. At this time, the company was experiencing financial problems, leading to unrest amongst the workforce. Not long after Anselmo's death, Marengi left to establish his own business, which quickly became Gavioli's greatest competitor. The company's position was further weakened by the loss of many skilled craftsmen to Marengi. The new company was established, equipped and able to commence production in a remarkably short period of time: the first Marengi organ came to the UK towards the end of the 1903 season and was immediately sold to a leading showman. This instrument used Marengi's new violin-baritone system, which would eventually be expanded up to 98-keys. Hostile relations between the two firms quickly developed and as soon as April 1904, they were embroiled in legal action against each other. At about this time, the market for organs used in travelling cinema shows was expanding and competition between the

to time we hope to feature aspects of the work in future editions of *Grace Notes*. The second is the famous organ which once played in the centre of Hill's scenic railway and later travelled with Harniess Brothers.

After 1947 it was given a new lease of life, forming the front of Tom Norman's travelling variety show. It was purchased by Tom Alberts for preservation at Hull Fair in October 1957 and it was around this organ that early enthusiasts gathered at Bolton and later founded the Fair Organ Preservation Society. Mr Frank Lythgoe has now owned this organ longer than any previous owner. Further reports and pictures of progress will follow.



Detail of a restored windchest incorporating Marengi's lever action.

FEATURED ORGAN SCALE

WHY IS AN ORGAN SCALE SO IMPORTANT?

Continued from the last edition

We left the subject last time at the point when various makers* had begun to realise that non-chromatic scales (i.e. those missing some semitones), no matter how large, still imposed limitations on the music it was possible to play. Although scales such as the 87-key Gavioli are almost completely chromatic in some divisions (i.e. having all the notes of the musical scale), the restricted number of bass notes imposes a limitation on the musical keys in which music could be played. A great deal of music can still be successfully performed, but it is often necessary to resort to so-called 'false modulations' to keep as many elements as possible of the composer's intentions. This trick is sometimes used to avoid the modulation of a trio section in a march. In small organs, this was, of course, a matter of compromise between musical completeness and the size, weight and above all,

cost of an instrument. However, some firms resolved to address this problem. At a time of buoyancy in the market for new organs, firms became confident that buyers could be persuaded to pay a higher price for these improvements. The great success of travelling cinema shows prompted Marengi to introduce organs whose huge façades formed the entire frontage to the show, including pay boxes at each side. Rather than merely providing the accompaniment to a ride, the show front organs became an attraction in their own right and able to perform any music asked of them. Both Gavioli and Marengi brought out new scales and organ types in 1906 which met with immediate success. Gavioli initially enlarged the successful concept of its 89-key scales to 110-keys, making all the musical divisions, including the basses, fully chromatic. Marengi introduced a huge new 104-key type, also with chromatic bass, a fine example of which was supplied to showman Pat Collins. Meanwhile, in Germany, A. Ruth &

Sohn had been developing their own range of book-playing instruments of various sizes. The largest of these at this time was the model 38, which was virtually completely chromatic. Ruth produced some of the best arrangements of serious music for any mechanical organ using this scale. The visual and musical spectacle of these organs attracted the public to the fairs in droves and soon prompted Gavioli & Co. to produce an even larger type, using 112-keyless scales. These massive (and very expensive) Gavioli and Marengi show front organs provided rousing popular music for the paraders before the bioscope show commenced inside, but they were equally capable of performing overtures, operatic arias and concert pieces without compromise.

To be continued

* In Europe. Organ builders in the United States perpetuated the use of old-fashioned barrel organ scales, even when paper roll music was introduced.

IN BRIEF

Our **Paper Organ Kit** is now available for purchase over the counter to visitors at the Musical Museum, Kew Bridge, London. Don't miss visiting this museum next time you are in London.

Notification has recently reached us confirming that the **13th International Organ Festival** will be held in Waldkirch from June 19-21, 2020. Once again, the focus will be on historic instruments that have a link with Waldkirch and its organ-building tradition.

Waldkirch is a small town, so we recommend that intending visitors reserve their accommodation there as soon as possible to avoid disappointment. Due to the convenient railway connection, larger hotels in nearby Freiburg can also be used.

Next year will see the 50th anniversary of the publication by David & Charles of **Eric V. Cockayne's landmark work** *The Fairground Organ - Its music, mechanism and history*. We intend to mark this occasion with a serialised article to be

spread over next year's issues of *Grace Notes*.

Here is an opportunity for an enthusiast to obtain a **small chamber organ** for manual playing, especially suitable for early music. It has three ranks of pipes, one in continuous play and the others under stop control. It was completed in 1968 and now requires some work, such as fitting a new blower (included in the sale). If interested, drop us an e-mail with your contact details and we will forward them to the owner.

GAVIOLI SERIAL NUMBERS WANTED

Some time ago we wrote about the on-going project to document the Gavioli family and their companies so that as much information as possible can eventually be brought together in one place for future generations. One area of this research focuses on the compilation of a list of Gavioli & Cie. factory serial numbers. (Claude Gavioli ran his own separate company; identification of the serial numbers of this enterprise has not yet been attempted.) Instruments often reveal features which are related to patents, and as the publication

date of most of these patents is now known, it is often possible to estimate the year when instruments were made with more accuracy by cross-referencing the serial number. The list presently includes Gavioli numbers from the firm's earliest days through to the end of production, but there are still many gaps which it would be very useful to fill. Hence we appeal to anyone with access to a Gavioli instrument to let us know the serial number; this is usually stenciled in black on the woodwork inside, sometimes in several places, and can also often be found penciled on

panels, carvings etc. where they acted as identification in the works during the production of similar instruments. In the case of barrel organs, the tune list can also yield other clues, especially if the original factory pinning has survived. Sometimes additional stamps are present which advertise the firm's participation in exhibitions, and these should also be recorded. Any contributions will be gratefully received and acknowledged, and in so doing you will be contributing to a better understanding of this illustrious family's work, to which we owe so much.

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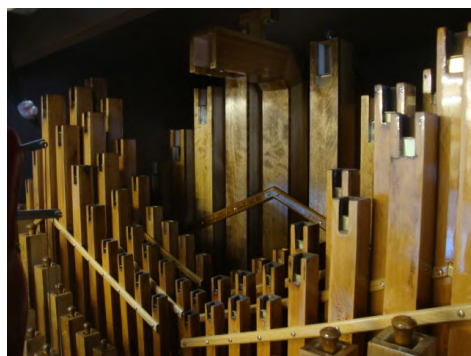
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LIMONAIRE 'SWEET CHARITY' RESTORED

When, in the summer of 1974, Yorkshire enthusiast Brian Blockley decided to acquire a Dutch street organ, he enlisted the help of Stanley Mortimer, owner of the *Golden Ruth* organ, to accompany him on a trip to the Netherlands in search of a suitable instrument.

A number of private individuals and dealers were visited on that trip, but nothing suitable was available. Eventually, Brian was able to conclude a deal with an enthusiast living near Nijmegen for a 62-key organ. This was duly delivered to England in November of that year. Still hand-turned, the organ first had to be motorised and mounted in a display vehicle in order to present it at events. Devoting all his spare time to the project, the organ was ready the following Spring for its first public engagement, having been nicknamed "Sweet Charity" after Brian's favourite musical. From this time onwards, the organ was to be a familiar sight at steam rallies and shows throughout England, travelling as far as Alnwick in the north, and the Dorset Steam Fair in the south. The organ came with a small repertoire of music consisting of Carl Frei arrangements and some popular songs of the day, arranged by Dick Gillet. Over the years, Brian ordered from Arthur Prinzen many new books of popular pieces, better known to the public in this country. Some of this music was featured on two long-playing stereo records, privately produced for Brian by the C. John Mears Organisation and recorded by Cliff Stafford. Another couple of tracks later found their way onto a CJMO sampler record *The Great Fair Organ Festival*. A new bandmaster figure was obtained as a result of a visit to Dutch carver Peter Smiesing; later two bell-ringer figures were also added. In the early 1980s the organ's reservoir was opened up and this brought to light a number of old ledgers, the content of which provided the material for an article *Gavioli—the inside story* which was published in the FOPS and KDV magazines. Later, a problem with the feeders during the busy summer period forced the emergency fitting of a blower which was installed between two weekend engagements. Tom Meijer later provided a number of arrangements which were cut by Andrew Pilmer, being



some of the first of this arranger's music to come to this country: some can be heard on a commercial cassette recording made in 1985. In the early 1990s, the organ was sold to an enthusiast on the Isle of Man, who presented it at many events there. On his death, it then passed to his daughter and later still, to her son, whereupon it was no longer used. Stored outdoors, water eventually found its way through the truck roof, passing through the keyframe and running down into the bellows. The present owner, who from time to time had seen the organ out playing in the past, heard of its plight and made it his mission to save it. Thus it was that some months after acquisition, the organ was delivered to us in Rufforth, where the extent of the damage was assessed whilst drying out continued. There was no alternative to a complete restoration, and a number of improvements were contemplated. Severe woodworm damage to the old organ case made it necessary to replace it, although the two side cases were retained. The bellows were repaired, re-leathered and brought back into use. This revealed another interesting glimpse of the organ's past, as a stamp was discovered from the little-known Grammont (Belgium) organ builder Adolphus Mahauden. The accompaniment division had previously consisted of a stopped pipe and a violin, and was repositioned and the violins replaced with an open pipe sounding the octave below. The 11 old violins were used together with matching new pipework to form a new violin céleste register. A new bourdon register was made by Russell Wattam to replace the rather mediocre miscellany of old pipes. Following extensive water damage, the keyframe needed much work to make it useable again. When the organ first came to England, the 12 note counter-melody division consisted only of rather bland-sounding stopped flutes. These were removed in the 1980s rebuild and replaced with two ranks of cellos. This time one of these ranks was removed and replaced with a rank of 12 new strings which together now form a very effective unda maris, adding a great deal of colour to the overall sound. Whilst all this work was going on, a completely new close-coupled display trailer was built to replace the old van body. Some editing of the existing music books to take advantage of the tonal improvements was done before the organ was mounted in its new trailer. Given that our present workshop is only a few hundred yards away from Brian Blockley's old premises in Ossett, it has been a slightly nostalgic project, looking back over the 44 years we have known the organ.

