

# CONVENTION

## 2006 - CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Three hundred fortunate registrants attended the 2006 Convention in Chicago, and what a treat they were in for. This is always a favorite destination with AMICAnS, and this year Mel Septon and his capable committee made it a real jewel.

The Hotel was the Hyatt Regency, with a location close to restaurants, and perhaps even more important, the huge shopping mall just a couple of blocks away. Tuesday found a lot of attendees roaming the mall looking for bargains while the Board met at the Hotel.

The start of the Convention actually was Wednesday, July 26th with a welcoming breakfast followed by tours to the wonderful Krughoff collection or the Museum of Science and Industry.

The Krughoff collection always has something new every time you go, and this year was no exception. (Not that they need anything new to enchant the attendees) The Ruth 38 had just been finished being set up the night before. It is a magnificent organ, and everyone enjoyed it immensely. Another new item was the Robot Band, which kept us laughing and tapping our feet. Other items not to be forgotten are a Hupfeld Pan, a Welte Style 4, the Popper Felix, two Hupfeld Phonoliszt-Violinas, a Phillips Monster Pagannini, the wonderful 97-key Steenput concert fairground organ, and other European machines.

A few American machines in the collection are a Seeburg "H", a Cremona Orchestral "J", a Wurlitzer Harp, and a Mills Bow Front Violano. These are just a few of the many instruments.

A Bar-B-Q lunch rounded out the day.

The Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago is in the building that was the Palace of Fine Arts at the 1893 World's Fair. It is the largest science museum in a single building in the Western Hemisphere.

A captured WWII German submarine is among the exhibits, and is a fascinating tour through history. Other exhibits include a working coal-mine shaft elevator, a cantilevered Boeing 727, a 3,500 square foot model railroad, and on and on. It's a great place to spend an afternoon.

When everyone returned to the hotel, had dinner, and relaxed for a while, they were treated to a piano concert by Nathan Bello. Many remembered Nathan from the Portland Convention a few years ago. He is a very talented artist, and has grown in self-confidence and stage presence immensely over the years.

He started off his program with "Windy City Blues", which he wrote especially for the souvenir roll we were all to receive. He proceeded from there with another 27 numbers, all transcribed by him from great unknown jazz piano roll artists. It was quite a concert, and it was very pleasing to have this young man at the Convention for a repeat performance. I think many of us feel we have an emotional tie to Nathan, and were so happy to have him back.

The piano rolls were distributed after the concert ended, and Nathan was available to autograph them.

Thursday's tours were a repeat of the Krughoff tour and the "3 in 1" tour.

The "3 in 1" tour included the wonderful collection of Al and Susan Choffnes. I don't think you'll find a better representation of musical box variety anywhere, and Al always has a program set up. This time was no exception, and he showed us boxes from the very early to the later models, both cylinder and disc. As he took us from box to box, he took us back in time, giving us history and romance of the era. It was interesting and entertaining, and we found ourselves entranced with the music and Al's presentation.

Instruments dated from 1815 to 1930, and included miniatures, key wind, lever wind, interchangeable, Grand Format and orchestral cylinder music boxes. Many styles of disc boxes, including all sizes of Regina music boxes and many unusual case styles were featured.

There were also a Seeburg KT Special replica, a Mills Double Violano Virtuoso and a Steinway Duo-Art Louis XV reproducing piano.

Al and Susan have a lovely home, and their hospitality and warmth are exceptional.

Another part of this tour was the Schaff Piano Supply Co. tour. Schaff was founded in 1884 and has been a major supplier to the industry for over 120 years, it has the title of the oldest and largest piano supply company in the country.

This was the first time a collectors group was offered a tour of Schaff, and it was really a treat.

Part three of the tour was a trip through the Volo Auto Museum and Antique Malls. The showrooms have some 300 collectible cars, 25 TV and Movie cars, and a new Armed Forces Exhibit. Add to this the 3 large antique malls and you can spend hours wandering the grounds.

We came back to the Hotel, had dinner, relaxed and then proceeded to the Pumper Contest, which was, as always, a really entertaining show.

Every year seems to produce better and better contestants, with more and more talent. This year's winner, Chris Kehoe, a young man of 16, presented "Love Tales" and managed to barely nose out Roger Stumpfoll for first place.

The whole contest, though, was very close, and the judges really had their jobs cut out for them, with contestants like Julian Dyer, Tim Baxter, Rob Deland, Alex Thompson, Joe Hutter, Richard Ingram (with a version of "Tijuana Taxi" we won't soon forget – words written by a friend of Richards), Joyce Brite.

Of course, along with the above contestants was the master of wit and comedy – our own Larry Norman, assisted by Holly Walter doing "Cherokee". Larry, of course, had provided costumes for himself and Holly. He was the Indian Chief, and she was Annie Oakley. You had to see it!

When the contest was over, Shirley Nix presented Larry a plaque specially made to thank him for his years and years of comic relief. The plaque said "With sincere appreciation for all the sophisticated comedy, deluxe costumes and sets, previously undiscovered local talent, and high-class music you have brought

to the annual AMICA pumper contest year after year”, with figures of some of his more memorable performances.

After the contest, we were treated to an ice cream social, with ice cream bars, cookies and drinks. It was really an entertaining evening. In fact, the whole day was really a lot of fun.

Friday meant workshops. There was a great range of workshops: “Archival Preservation of Music Roll Content” by Terry Smythe, “Valve Construction and Special Tools” by Bennet Leedy, “Basic Finish Touch Up, Should You or Can You Do It?” by Mike Edwards, “Saving the Musical Heritage” by Jack Breen, “You Can Do It” by Yousuf Wilson, “Working and Playing With Music in Electronic Formats” by Spencer Chase, “The Fan System Duo-Art” by Geoffrey Kaiser, and “Getting to Know the Aeolian Pipe Organ” by Robert W. Taylor.

Of course, as always, there was a cross-stitch project, presented by Elsa Pekarek.

Something for everyone.

The Mart occurred in the afternoon, and was a large one, with lots of goodies.

Dinner was a New York Deli Buffet in the Tent, and it was a veritable gourmet delight. Entertainment was provided by Mike Barnhart and his Stinson 165 organ. Mike designed the façade himself, and it is a replica of a palace in Europe. Mike designed it so it breaks down into several pieces in order to fit in his van. He takes it to organ rallies and we were fortunate to have him bring it, both to the hospitality room and to the buffet dinner.

After the dinner we were presented with a program by Ron Bopp. That’s enough to let you know it will be a good, entertaining program. Ron’s program was “A Musical History of Patriotic Music”. (He had some competition from a singles dance band next door, but that’s another story.) It was a comprehensive program of heart-tugging melodies from the Revolutionary War up to the war on Terrorism.

The music was furnished by over twenty organs, each finely restored, and it couldn’t fail to touch the hearts of all with world conditions the way they are.

The table favors were distributed at the end of the program to avoid having them conflict with the banquet. These were bound to become favorites...a “Nipper” dog. They are beautifully done, and will grace the homes of all who received them.

Saturday started off with a breakfast buffet, the annual membership meeting and a slide presentation by Frank Nix showing highlights of next year’s tour of Germany and Holland. Looks like a lot of fun.

When we finished, we loaded the buses for a visit to the Sanfilippo home.

The usual comment upon entering the home is “Wow!!!” and that was heard many, many times. The residence is 44,000 square feet, and is packed with one of the largest and best-known collections of automatic musical instruments in the world, with over 100 in the main residence alone.

Anything you want to see and hear is probably here. Nearly every European and American manufacturer is represented, each instrument restored to its’ original glory. Some of these instruments were the real “basket cases” when found, but no expense was spared to bring them back.

To name just a few (I couldn’t begin to name them all... we haven’t the space in the whole magazine), the only known

Wurlitzer “EX” orchestrion, a wonderful Welte organ, Hupfeld Phonoliszt Violinas, Mortier organs of several types and sizes, and Hupfeld Helios.

Large European instruments along the walls frame the main music auditorium, and the balcony contains some rare fairground organs and the jewel of the auditorium – the largest theater organ in the world. We were treated to a wonderful concert on the organ during our visit, with a visiting organist.

The lower level of the house contains restored steam engines, an antique bar with antique gambling machines and many more automatic musical instruments. You have to keep reminding yourself that many of these machines are one of two or three in the whole world, and are probably in better condition than any other anywhere.

From the home we trekked down to the carousel building...another “Wow”. Here we saw the “Eden Palais”, a restored French salon carousel. This was found in Montana, and was restored over many years. It is simply magnificent...a treasure to look at, and delightful to ride. I doubt there is another anywhere in the world, and certainly nothing like the restoration job here.

Around the perimeter of the building are band organs, fairground organs and dance organs, each one more lovely than the next. Also in the building are a restored steam locomotive, parlor car and caboose. Yes, that’s a full size train, and it doesn’t crowd a thing! There is also an antique power generating plant and a collection of restored steam engines.

We were fed a wonderful catered lunch in the carousel building, accompanied by music from the finest of the fine organs.

We are very fortunate that the Sanfilippos are so hospitable and willing to have us to visit their wonderful grounds and collection. Their passion for the instruments is obvious, and they seem to love to share with others.

When we got back, with our minds still reeling from our visit, we had a couple of hours to recover, and then on to the banquet.

The banquet entertainment was furnished by the “West End Jazz Band”, and they are a great group. Their specialty is music of the 20’s and 30’s, which fits our interests perfectly.

They were a super band to dance to, and everyone had a great time.

Sunday there were four open houses, with each one having it’s particular charm.

Margaret Bisberg and Richard VanMetre had a couple of music boxes that were really great examples of the art, a Steinway XR Duo-Art, and various other things around the house. We had a very nice visit there.

Carol Veome had one of the nicest Steinway OR Duo-Art in a Spanish art case. This was a beautiful piano, with great sound. Just right for the room. She also had a Mills Violano Virtuoso, a Seeburg “G”, Music Boxes and a super collection of phonographs, with many rare examples.

Wayne and Connie Wolf had a Seeburg “G”, a Coinola C2, a Link A, music boxes and phonographs. Everywhere you looked there was another treasure lurking. Another really fun place to visit.

Dave Ramey, Jr., Susan, and Toni also had an open house. This was a particularly generous thing, since Dave Sr. had

died only the previous Friday. They turned the open house into a memorial for Dave, Sr., with pictures, mementos, and of course his instruments. It was a fitting tribute, and a touching one. I think everyone who attended felt the spirit of Dave there, looking on with his great smile.

We have so many people to thank for this wonderful convention, starting with Mel Septon and his committee, all those who generously opened their homes and collections to us, both on tours and open houses, those who provided entertainment, and all the unsung heroes who did the effort to make it all work....a great big "Thank You" from all of us.



*Jim & Sherrie Krughoff*



*Al Choffnes*



*Marian & Jasper Sanfilippo*



Submitted by: Bill Dean

# PLAYER PIANO

## COLLECTOR SHARES INSIGHT INTO 'AGE OF MECHANICAL MUSIC'

By Frank Whelan  
The Morning Call-Sunday,  
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It is the early 1960s. America is decorating with Danish modern furniture, listening to Elvis and Connie Frances, watching "Gidget Goes Hawaiian" at the movies and worrying about astronauts. But 6-year-old Richard Groman's heart is elsewhere.

"There was this couple names Haines in my neighborhood," he says. "They both taught at Moravian College. They had this player piano. It played 'The Man on The Flying Trapeze.' I was entranced. It was the grandest thing I had ever seen or heard."

The years passed, but Groman never forgot his first love. In 1969, when he was in junior high school, he heard that the Edgeboro School in Bethlehem, which he attended as a child, was getting rid of old furniture. Among the items for sale was a player piano.

"My father knew the man who was handling the sale," recalls Groman, whose family once owned the well-known Gromans Bakeries. "I was able to get the piano for \$10."

While his contemporaries were playing the Beatles "Abbey Road" album backwards trying to find out if Paul had died, Groman was offering neighborhood player piano



*Richard Groman will help Moravian College's push to become an all-Steinway campus by holding a fundraiser in his Bethlehem estate featuring his antique player piano.*