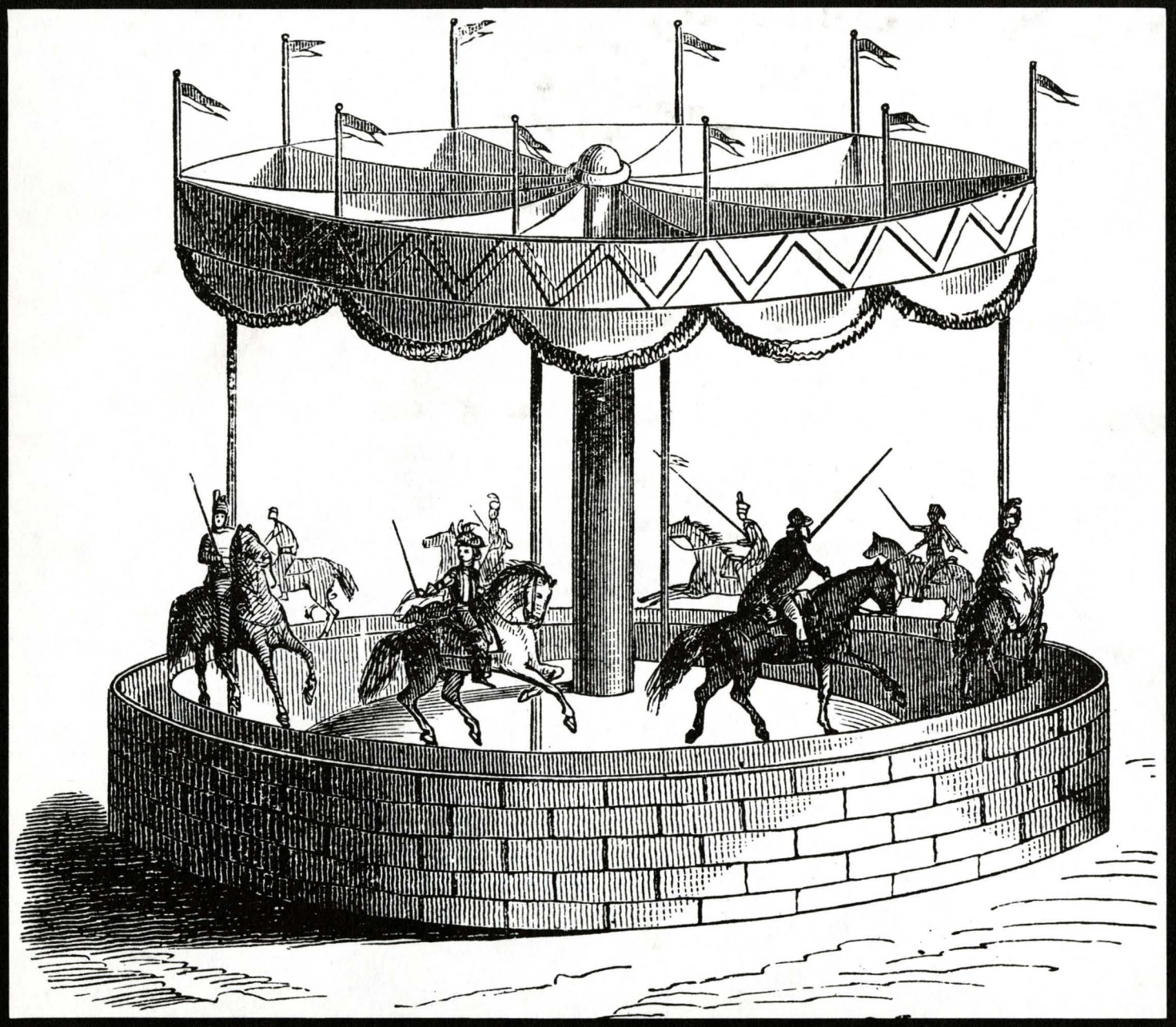
FOLKWAYS RECORDS FX 6126

SOUNDS OF CARNIVAL



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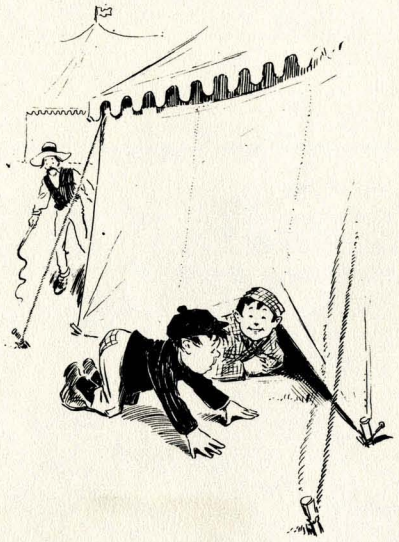
FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FX 6126

SOUNDS of CARNIVAL

THE MIDWAY

MERRY-GO-ROUND MUSIC



Notes by Charles Edward Smith

SOUNDS OF THE CARNIVAL

The Setting

"I don't hear no organ..."

The sounds and sights and smells of carnival hold magic and mystery for all ages, the small fry, teen-agers and sophisticates, even the slumberous and senile. Bright Neon illuminates alike the freckle-face grin and the sour smile. The conglomerate of carnival is a nostrum for Weltschmerz and a wonder for all.

William Lindsay Gresham, in "Monster Midway" (Rinehart), sets the scene: "from daybreak until afternoon the lot is a beehive of action, with tractors hauling in wagons until it looks like a 1,000 piece jigsaw puzzle designed for giants.

"Shrewd psychology is used in laying out the midway. On each side of the entrance are booths selling toys and novelties, while directly in front of the customers as he enters is the frozen-custard wagon. Children find it hard to pass any of these. Next, in the middle and at the sides of the midway, are the games: shooting galleries, cat racks, bowling alleys, hoop-toss concessions, the bingo layout and a series of wheels with prizes of watches, giant teddy bears, pressure cookers, packages of ham and bacon, and radios...."

The show is now set up and ready to roll. On a still date, as locally sponsored engagements are called, the time is early evening; at a Fair, about nine in the morning. At the lot described above (World of Mirth) Frank Bergen, a veteran of the sawdust circuit, his voice hoarse from years as a barker, cups his hand and shouts, "I don't hear no organ!"

That's the signal. The show is now officially opened. The key word, you'll have noticed, was organ. The merry-go-round is the most consistently popular attraction on this and any lot. It has been so for almost a century, both in its permeative, nostalgic musical style and in its principal artefacts, the plunging horses that go around in circles only to an unimaginative onlooker. One can hardly conceive of a modern carnival without merry-go-rounds and calliopes (or calliope attachments to existing organs, as is the practice today), competing with colorful but less musical noise-makers in the burgeoning waves of cacaphony that greet you at the approach to the midway, sucking you in even before you reach the first ticket box.

This long play set brings you the sounds and, we believe, something of the "feel" of a great carnival midway. It is that of the Royal American Shows, one of the three or four largest railroad carnivals in America, associated with many historic state fairs. Here are the actual sounds of a carnival in action as the recording machines take the listener down the midway. Here are the barkers (talkers), the Fun Houses, the House of strange things and people, the shrieking kids on the roll-o-plane, the unmistakable whirr-and-ratchet sound of the Ferris Wheel (all wheels beings named after the Pittsburgh inventor of the first really important one), and, intersticed between these segments, the ever-old, ever-young enchantment of the merry-go-round. Then we take you to the back lot, as it's called, to meet some of the people who set up, participate in, and sell the show, giving us, in their own voices, vignettes of carnival life.

The carnival is ancient, more hoary with history than its midway is spangled with lights and banners. To Americans, though, each will have a spot in his memory for a carnival that seems just around the corner. To the city dweller it might be a carnival to break the ribbon on a new bridge, a trip to the local "Coney", a day "out at the lake". To those brought up in the country it might mean a "locality" affair, perhaps to raise money for a new fire truck, but, above all, and particularly to those raised on farms, it means the county or state fair.

Who, in the country, hasn't prepared carrots and beets and onions -- color, quality and kind -- for the exhibit table or, coming into the kitchen, found the woman of the house speculatively holding a glass of jelly up to the light? Who, brought up to the rigors of farm life, hasn't felt vicariously the strain of the beast at an ox pull, held his breath while the judges paused before a bull calf he'd brushed and coddled only that morning, or jingled the precious change in his jeans as he headed for the midway?

The fair, more than any other setting, symbolizes the historic relationship of fair and carnival and the dual appeal of reality and make-believe. The word fair derives from fariae, meaning holidays (holy days) and the first displays of fruits and vegetables were probably religious offerings, the first "gifts" of animals, token sacrifices. Carnival (in Latin: the lightening, or taking away, of meat) specifically was and still is applied to the uproarious abandonment of the pre-Lenten celebration. Thus we have in one setting, that of the agricultural fair and the carnival, what Schweitzer has called "the reverence for life," and, along with it, the cup to be filled for all that is irksome in it, a capacity for laughter and enjoyment. The English, who call their carousels roundabouts, have even made a bit of everyday philosophy from aspects of carnival life: what you lose on the round-about you gain on the swings.

Of course, the rudimentary elements of carnival attractions, the swings and rides, may be found in any well-stocked children's playground, and this also has been true since ancient times. Moreover, if you were brought up on a farm, as was the writer, and your father liked contented kids as well as cows, you probably were introduced to home-made "rides" that resembled those of ancient Italy, Egypt and Arabia. You may (like the author) recall a home-made "barouche-style" "swing" in the attic or out-of-doors. The big attraction on the Smith lot was a hardwood pole, with hand-hold swings that flew outward when rotated (usually after chores or on a holiday). Long, strong wires attached to a circular rotator atop the pole; centrifugal force and the inexhaustible energy of youth did the rest. (In William F. Mangel's detailed and carefully documented book, "The Out-door Amusement Industry", an amusing illustration reveals that the Egyptians had anticipated my father's ingenuity as, no doubt, had many other peoples, in divers times and places)

Royal American

> "Step right up, ladies and gentlemen, so that I can tell you about the wonderful show we are about to present for your edification and amusement. On the inside you will see without a doubt one of the most thrilling shows you have ever had the privilege to behold."--Carl Sedlmayr, Sr., in remarks styled after the opening used by "talkers" (barkers).

Phinaus T. Barnum spent his boyhood in Connecticut where his father was variously farmer, livery stable owner and owner of a store. In the period of Barnum's youth, or not too long before, nutmegs grew on wood turning lathes in that part of the country, and the wit, tomfoolery and slyness of the cracker-barrel crowd sharpened the wisdom tooth of the young man who was to become America's foremost exponent of hokum. No doubt this grass-roots grasp of human nature prepared him for the role of cliche-inventor. He not only proved that "to invent a cliche" is not just an idle remark with such gems as "A fool is born every minute," he constantly expostulated one of the major truths of the midway, that not only can people be fooled, they can be made to like it and pay for it. "Many persons," said Barnum, "have such a horror of being taken in, or such an elevated opinion of their own acuteness, that they believe everything to be a sham, and this way are continually humbugging themselves." *

A little more than a century ago Barnum put an elephant in a huge field facing the New Haven railroad tracks (he had a farm outside Bridgeport), attended by a keeper in oriental costume. The keeper was given a railroad timetable and whenever a passenger train rounded the bend, the elephant plowed the land, the keeper leading him close to the tracks, so that the passengers on the New York, New Haven, Boston train could gape (as they did) at this agronomical innovation.

Soon we learn from M. R. Werner's "Barnum" (Harcourt, Brace) newspapers here and in Europe were giving headlines and feature stories to the yarn that P. T. Barnum, of the American Museum, "was the first man in the world to make use of the elephant as an agricultural animal." (Not even the "firster" claim was true; work elephants, however impractical they would be in the climate and terrain of New England, have been known in the Orient for centuries.) Hundreds of letters, nonetheless, came in from farmers and agricultural societies, asking for information. To discourage such enquirers from trying to buy elephants, Barnum ordered the printing of a "Strictly Confidential" form letter. In this letter, sent to each of his correspondents, he said that "to him the elephant was a profitable agricultural because he advertised the Museum, but that other farmers might find the animal a burden." Which was a size-able understatement.

Barnum's practical knowledge of farming was about nil; he frankly professed an aversion to manual labor. Nevertheless, at this period he was president of the Fairfield (Conn.) Agricultural Society and proved useful as manager of its fairs. Needless to say, he master-mined the "attractions", anticipating the present period when almost circus-size carnivals are associated with agricultural fairs.

Fairs, like market days, were a tradition brought over from England, and are a feature of life in just about every country of the world. Peter Kalm, an 18th century visitor to Philadelphia (1753-61) wrote: "The town has two great fairs every year and besides these there are every week two market days..." The Berkshire Cattle Show of western Massachusetts was established in 1810. State fairs got well under way during the first half of the 19th century, those of New York and New Jersey dating from 1841. Usually at such events and up to the time of people now living, entertainment centered about the horse race, whether trot or running races. Among the pre-midway attractions, an early favorite in audience participation more messy and twice as humiliating as the $64 or

$64,000 question, was the "game" of catching the greased pig. Often the event was timed and side bets laid.

The circus differs from the carnival both in obvious aspects and "back lot" particulars, though many showmen, from P. T. Barnum on, have worked both media. The following quotation, from "Monster Midway," should suffice to clarify this"

"A circus," writes Mr. Gresham, "is a single organization with a single payroll, barring a few small concessions, but most carnivals are made up of individual entrepensurs who pay the management so much per foot of frontage on the midway every week. They compete with each other for the patronage of the crowds, the shows with ballys out front (come-on performances) operating on a traditional agreement that one outside talker does not start his bally until the show next to him has 'turned' ('sold') as many of the 'tip' ('crowd') as possible."

There are more than 2500 annual fairs in the United States, and a fair without a carnival would be rare indeed. Royal American plays nineteen cities a year, including seven in Canada, and plays such major fairs as Kansas Free Fair, Minnesota, Oklahoma and Florida state fairs.

"I was sitting in the lobby of the old Coates house in Kansas City one winter many years back," said Carl Sedlmayr, Sr., "when I saw a poster on the wall advertising the American Royal livestock exposition. It seemed to me that it would be a good idea to call the shows that I eventually acquired, 'Royal American'. It seemed to me that would fit well when I played in this country and also because I had hopes of playing the major expositions of Canada."

Winter quarters for Royal America are the Florida State Fairgrounds where, idle or in action, it draws thousands of tourists and visiting showmen. The show maintains its own railway shop and trackage for its

> There is an absorbing chapter in Gresham's book about the gaffs and gimmicks, from the ligitimate to the illegal, that have decorated the midway at one time or another. Read it before you toss your next hoop. In fact, the entire book is absorbingly entertaining, even if you don't want to "eat" fire, set out to be a "shill", or "fix" a hooded cobra.

many railroad cars. (It employs more rolling stock than most circuses.) There are machine, electrical, carpentry and other shops, a wardrobe and an art department, and so forth. The show department's canvas crews and mechanics ready up equipment, the ride department goes over new and old devices (all of them calculated to thrill,) testing each one exhaustively for safety.

The Florida State Fair is a sort of clearing house for showmen from the Fair and Exhibition field. Showmen from all parts of the country, ride and show manufacturers, participate and exchange shop talk. Since many new rides find space on the midway at Florida State each year, Royal American is in an enviable position to introduce new ones to the Carnival world.

Olivia Claxton, ten, who was born on Royal American, says, "Oh, traveling's all right, I guess. It's wonderful for anybody else who'd like to travel." "Veteran carnies do, of course, or they wouldn't stick it out, season after season, despite long hours, a grueling, tough grind, a never-ceasing maelstrom of noise and activity, and the bane of all outdoor showmen, the weather. Says Gresham, "It takes a real carny to finish a season. The '40-mile wonders' drop out the first time they 'get their feet wet,' which may mean three days without sleep or a change into dry clothes...Rain and wind are natural enemies; while rain is simply waited out, a 'blowdown' (windstorm) can be serious."

In a season the show might travel 46,000 railroad miles, unloading and loading 28 times. It employs large crews merely to handle transportation and construction. Before the show moves in the location crew readies the lot itself. Each ride and attraction has to have its own space and this must be accurate. In view of this it is rather amazing that they do not use tape in "staking out" but rely on 36-inch steps acquired through long years of experience. "Sometimes we might be accused of taking a longer step going downhill," said one veteran, "or a shorter one going up an incline, but this is not apparent after almost sixty years of stepping off a location."

Even this workaday world (it hardly needs to be stressed to most adults) fascinates kids and they swarm around the lot, so eager to do odd jobs you'd think the free ticket was a secondary consideration. (It's that age-old appeal of theatre in any form, reminding one of Katherine Cornell's childhood wish: "If I could walk across the stage -- just once!") "Carnival bakers, operators, and performers," says Compton's Picture Encyclopedia, "seem reckless, romantic folk to staring youngsters. They speak a strange slang in which small outfits are 'gillies' or '40-milers'..." Reminded of this a crew member snorted, "If this is romance, it consists of not knowing what the next problem will be."

> "My father gets up and talks and cracks jokes before a crowd of people 'nd then when he's in the arena at the park, or at the Fair, or anywhere he beams and talks and he talks and talks and talks to the people, 'nd he just smiles at them. I couldn't do that to save my life." -- Olivia Claxton, age ten.

"This city which is called Royal American," said Carl Sedlmayr, Jr., "has a tremendous problem of maintenance, sanitation, food and so forth, just as a town that size would have. For example, we have Sanitation, Police and Volunteer Fire Departments and an electric light plant that could do the job for a good-sized place." (In addition to attracting people from nearby localities, a carnival on location makes substantial purchases -- literally tons of food and supplies.)

But the contrast to a community ceases when one leaves that behind-the-scenes reckoning. The midway is the "real" reality, even to carnies and most of all to many of them. Their ears, like those of the customers, vibrate pleasantly to the sweet bedlam of sound, nor can they get away from the shrill-screaming kids, the sight of spun sugar candy, the smell of sawdust and of hot dogs, the rasping shouts of the barkers.

"To handle the front of the show," Mr. Gresham observes, "making one opening after another, from morning to night, requires a type of inner relaxation that all real carnies have." Indeed, without something of the sort, all performers would find it hard to sustain themselves for a week, let alone a season. But many "name" performers have been through the midway mill. Among those who have been associated with Mr. Sedlmayr, Sr., have been Red Grange, Mildred Harris (the first Mrs. Charles Chaplin,) Sally Rand of the physique and esthetique, inimitable, irrepressible (even vocally) Gypsy Rose Lee.

The cheese-cake attractions have tamed down from the 1920's, though a stripper is still called that on the back lot. Burlesque strippers, oblivious to the baldheads in the days of the memorable wheels (circuits), made quite a "thing" of stripping. The slow or "sweet" strip suggested the walk of a high fashion model. The "hot" strip could be an extraordinary arrangement of bumps and grinds, somehow fused into an incandescent performance, or, (depending on the performer) merely a lewd, perhaps indecent, exhibition.

Once out of burlesque the undressing took on somewhat the aspect and decorum of a "refined" Salome Veil dance out of 3-a-day vaudeville. But some of the artistry, not to say pulchitrude, that attracted such artists as Reginald Marsh to the houses of the old Columbia Wheel, still remains. That is to say--something the doers-away of burlesque and possibly much of the audience hadn't noticed -- the strip artists had developed a style.

The girl attraction at Royal American for 1955 was a Jezebel show, i.e. named somewhat irrevantly, we may presume, for a biblical lady of that name. Here are a few pertinent remarks by Ona Day of that company: "I am six-one with heels. My waist is 26, my bust is 37, my hips 36 1/2. I weigh 138 pounds. I do a number with a long, flowing, transparent cape. During the course of my dance, naturally . . . I lose my cape. The demand for strip is great. It's a form of dancing. It's an art and it takes time to learn. You have to know music to strip. You can't just walk around the stage. I do not strip all the way," she concluded, "It's an honest living."

On Side 1, the midway sounds include such rides as the Roll-o-plane. Like many rides, this one must be described in terms of sensation, but most of us have ridden this or somewhat similar rides developed gradually from oscillating swings that moved you in several directions at once. A tingling sensation, particularly to couples. Watching the Motordrome, which we also hear on this side, you hold your breath (figuratively if not mentally) in anticipation of a possible spill. And, of course, dangerous stunts are still dangerous, though today's "silos" are made as safe for the riders as possible. New safety devices often save the rider from serious injury. This happened when Eleanor Price, a veteran rider, hit her fellow performer's machine, then hit it again. It was surprising that both of them weren't tossed for a loss by that time! At any rate, she got out of it. "Luck was with me," she said. "I hit what is called our cut-off button and after hitting, my motor just slid down the wall...and me--very gracefully I just come right on down, slid, down the wall and lit on my head. Me, I'm out. I laid off the next three days. I had lost a little equilibrium and -- which is a funny thing -- to gain my equilibrium back I went back up on the wall again."

The Merry-Go-Round and Other Mechanical Marvels

> "I see a strange species of reeds; surely they have rather sprung up from a brazen field: wild -- nor are they swayed by our winds; but a blast, rushing forth from a cavern of bull's hide, forces its way from beneath, under the root of the well-bored reeds. And a skillful man having nimble fingers stands feeling the yielding rods of pipes, and they, gently dancing, press out song." - attrib. to Julian the Apostate, A.D. 363 (Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians)

The instrument described above is a crude organ without a keyboard. Whether they meant brazen as foreign or brassy, one is not certain, more likely the former. This was one of many instruments related to the bag-pipe which seems to have come to Scotland from remote lands to the East. (In the history of musical instruments there is to be found an uneven development and often similar developments that were separate in space and often seperate and almost simultaneous. So that we do not care to present these facts as gospel, even though they have been, so far as we know, carefully documented. To put it another way, we are no sticklers for chronology and believe even less in the "bigger and better" school of progress. We have heard the flute of a Greek shepherd and we have decided that this flute, handmade as it was made thousands of years ago, affords an esthetic satisfaction that is immeasurable. Similarly, the complexity of organ stops should be of satisfaction chiefly to the manufacturer, the composer and the organist, i.e. to the craftsman involved; we do not hear the one reed or the numerous organ stops, we hear music.) But, getting back to our theme, the ancestor and, in one form or another, familiar relative of the carousel (merry-go-round),

the cylinder organ, dates far back. Some form of mechanization came to the organ family of instruments a very long time ago.

A fascinating account of "Mechanical Music of Olden Times," by Hugo Leichentritt, turned up in an old issue of Musical Quarterly (January, 1934) and though it doesn't concern itself with carousels, it will nonetheless be of considerable interest to any who wishes to explore the scope of mechanical music Mr. Leichentritt describes such music, in its special sense, "as music produced without the direct assistance of the player, or music transmitted over allong range." In brief, quite a range of instruments and devices from the Aeolian harp, which sang when the wind sang, and the hurdy-gurdy to General Sarnoff's mechanical marvel, an electronic "maestro" that is capable of making Caruso's voice sing "Unchained Melody," which he never did in real life, if anyone cared to so degrade Signor Caruso's great voice or so demean General Sarnoff's enormous gadget.

Ingenious carillons of long ago used cylinders of wood or iron studded with pins or pegs (many holes, for elaborate melodic patterns, were made, to accomodate the pins or pegs.) The organ roll--the short repetitious tunes are a heritage from the hurdy-gurdy cylinder -- which antedated the player-piano roll, was inspired by Jacquard's (1802) perforated cardboard silk loom.

Little cylinder organs (Serinettes) were used in the 18th century to teach melodies to songbirds. Eppinger of Augsburg constructed a mechanical organ with a robot figure of Pan playing his pipes. This rustic Pan was praised for the "proper articulation, the correct staccato and legato" (of the music.) And (General Sarnoff please note) almost two hundred years ago a Jesuit Father presented to Parisians a Clavecin Electrique, a sort of carillon with keyboard, actuated electrically!

A certain Father Niemecz, a friend of Haydn's, built an elaborate mechanical organ with 112 pipes. This organ played selections by Mozart and Haydn with, a contemporary observed, "the greatest precision, sounding like a big organ." Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven all wrote music for flute clocks as well as for other mechanical music devices. Indeed, it is told of Beethoven that he frequented a certain Vienna restaurant so that he might listen to the music of a flute clock as he dined!

The Pan Harmonikon, with its imitations of various instruments, is most certainly a member of the same ancestral family as the band organ of the merry-go-round, and on a distinguished branch of the family tree, at that, since illustrious composers deigned to write for it. This anticipator of automation provided the works, from the snare drum to the flutes, and a handsome job by an inventor named Maelzel included facsimile musicians and maestro as well, everything but the Union delegate!

Beethoven undertook to write his "Battle Symphony" for this extraordinary combination of a mechanical music-maker and a waxworks contraption. However, a falling out with Maelzel induced Beethoven to change his plans. He completed the score, as we hear it today, for a live orchestra. Maelzel, however, had a real "twisteroo" up his sleeve. At the premiere, December 8, 1813, of Beethoven's "Battle Symphony" and of the exuberant and beautifully articulated 7th Symphony, the audience was treated to a "grotesque intermezzo"-- two marches (by Dussek and Pleyel) played by Maelzel's mechanical trumpeter in as "pure and agreeable a tone, as the most skillful virtuoso is not able to produce."

SOUNDS OF THE CARNIVAL

The carousel merry-go-round) derives its name and appurtenances from separate but related survivals of more sanguine encounters. "In the twelfth century," William F. Mangels writes in "The Outdoor Amusement Industry," "Arab horsemen used to play a game in which they threw a fragile clay ball, filled with scented water, from one to another. Spaniards and Italians who saw the game during the Crusades adopted it. They called it carrosello, meaning 'little war'. The game became popular at tournaments, and little by little began to change in character. The French called it carrousel, and developed it into a lavish display of horsemanship. These tournaments, in their refinement, were a sharp contrast to the bloody jousting matches indulged in by royalty in previous centuries." The Place and the Arc du Carrousel, in Paris, are named for an elaborate and costly entertainment of this nature held there in 1662.

The sport of ring-spearing, that distinguished the carrousel at the height of its fashion, developed from "jousting" and other "combat" sports, and can be traced back to the 13th century. In England, from whence it was brought to the United States by the early settlers where it was especially popular in the South, it was known as "tilting at the Quintain," or "running at the ring," from the Italian correre alla quintana. "The game," Mr. Mangles remarks, "consisted of spearing a ring suspended from a post, with a lance, by a mounted rider traveling at the full speed of his horse."

He continues: "Out of the diversified entertainment which was grouped together under the name carrousel for several centuries, the merry-go-round as we know it today emerged in a peculiar way. For the purpose of training young princes for the tournaments, elaborate contrivances were installed in royal courts. They consisted of an ornate post with wooden arms extended outward, like wheel spokes, from the outer end of which wooden horses were suspended. These the young princes mounted, and, as the device was rotated by two servants pushing on the wooden arms, they attempted to spear small rings, held an arm's length away from them, with miniature tilting lances." This is, of course, the origin of the brass ring, that gives the one who spears it with his finger, a free ride on the merry-go-round.

Since only the Nobility participated in these spectacles, and only their children "played at" carrousel, it remained for a Parisian toy maker (accd. to Compton's Picture Ency.) to set hobby-horses on a platform and create, for the children of Paris, a make-believe carrousel. Crude of construction, except for its steeds, it turned slowly with man-power or horsepower to move it, but it delighted the public then as it does now. (Most New Yorkers do not know that their merry-go-round in Central Park, now the pride of the park with a fine old band organ, was operated by mule power until 1912! It now has an electric motor and even loudspeakers for recorded carousel music. "The sign says, 'carousel,' but the kids say 'merry-go-round,'" the mechanic informed us with a grin.)

In 1850 Eliphalet S. Scripture of Green Point, New York, patented a device that gave a gallop to the "flying horses". This overhead system was subsequently improved by others, notably W.F. Mangles of Coney Island. Various types of merry-go-rounds, including the Tonawanda machine -- inspired by an 18th century English roundabout and a copy of which (the Tonawanda merry-go-round) may be seen in the Ford Historical Museum at Dearborn, Michigan -- are dicsussed in "The Outdoor Amusement Industry" Also of particular interest in this connection is the chapter on merry-go-round music. This treats of hand organs, mechanical organs and organ-makers. In an account of Italian, German, French and, finally, American organ-makers, the music and the craftsmen who have enabled us to hear it, follow a roughly parallel pattern to that of organ music--particularly in its Italian, German, French, English and American phases.

In the riding devices used to train young aristocrats in skill with a lance and a ring, music, beginning possibly with only a drum, accompanied the revolving wheel. Thus, a drummer supplied the rhythm, slowing down or speeding up the pace of the men doing the pushing. Cymbals and flutes were soon added and such a combination of instruments often supplied music for the early merry-go-round, played by live musicians. But it wasn't long before the primitive cylinder organ was beating their time. This wheezy excuse for automata, cranking out the same short tunes interminably, with notes missing or off-true here and there, like the teeth of an old crone, had all the shortcomings of a beat-up hurdy-gurdy (the hand organ we know by that name; the real hurdy-gurdy was a stringed instrument and none of its charm. Inventors, however, expanded the instrumentation, first to 32 keys, then to eighty and more, thus making possible the military band organ.

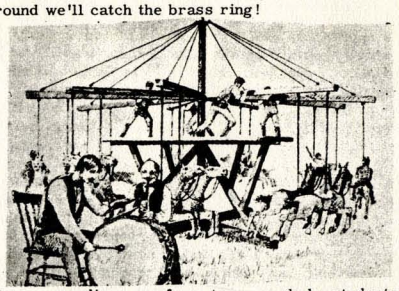
The music of the merry-go-round seems always to be evocative in quality, even when recent tunes are played. This is due in part to the fact that it is essentially a band organ (Unless one is intimately acquainted with organs and organ music, one does not think of the organ on concert pieces as comprising or simulating so many facets of the orchestra. On the contrary, many listeners object to orchestral transcriptions of organ music.) But listen to the merry-go-round of Royal American, on Side 2, and you immediately think of specific instruments, beginning with the drums. This simulating of instrumental sounds is something other than imitation yet without the "rendering" of brass band sounds, it would fail utterly of its purpose.

As it is, a vast body of folk and popular music is brought to mind: the hand organ we know familiarly as the hurdy-gurdy, roving street musicians, parade bands like those that stimulated jazz growth, the small brass bands (Italian-American) of many of our cities, that played for feast days and funerals alike, and the music of polka bands, whether of Bridgeport, Pittsburgh or San Antonio, Texas.

In listening to the merry-go-round, musical associations swirl about like the twists and turns of a highland skirt. There is, quite appropriately, the suggestion of a ground bass; the shade of Maelzel's trumpeter with a display of triple-tongue technique; and there are snare dum effects like cymbals, as you hear them sometimes in polka bands. The tunes, also, are a pot-pourri of popular, theatre, brass band and folk selections, as one may note by the titles on this particular record. Moreover, these are sometimes reminiscent of the short, repeated choruses of the old cylinder organs. The merry-go-round is a beautiful grab-bag of musical memories.

Attempts to win over the small fry to newer, more novel and more stupendous innovations, including such mounts as barnyard fowl and jungle beasts, found the merry-go-round mob either backing off in fright or putting up a clamor for their "horsies". It would be salutary to conclude that this country-wide response to a threatened change-over represented an intuitive feeling for the old, an eye for the patina of tradition, but it hardly requires a child psychologist to perceive that familiar and non-familiar concepts had more to do with it. Ducks are for quacking and only a crazy mixed-up adult would be fool enough to ride a tiger! Horses and ponies are to ride....

So the merry-go-round remains much the same in appearance as it did at the turn of the century, though it runs by electric power and may have new calliope pipes. Looking at stirrup and flaring nostrils, it still seems a long way to the saddle. Nor is the crenulated superstructure much changed; it still reminds one of a crown, or of an illustration of one by Teniel in a dog-eared copy of "Alice In Wonderland". And the wooden ponies, still wearing the fancy harness of tournament mounts, prance and plunge to music made possible by scores of organ makers, known and unknown. Maybe the next turn around we'll catch the brass ring!



These recordings are from tapes made by students of the Chicago Institute of Design, who did a documentary film of the Royal American midway. Producers of the film and recordings were Mary Dornheim, Howard Alk and Boris Yakovleff. Recordings were done by Martha Van Dorn, Boris Yakovleff. Eric Ramberg and others.

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