

Museum helps visitors recall their skating memories through music

By James Vannurden, Director & Curator, National Museum of Roller Skating

As everyone knows, music is an essential part to a great roller skating experience. When the sounds from instruments or electronic equipment hit the air, skaters receive that extra burst of energy to continue gliding along. Here at the National Museum of Roller Skating we provide our visitors a chance to experience three distinct types of instrumental music. We house a Gramophone, a band organ, and a Hammond Organ. These three specific sounds help our guests tap into their auditory memory and re-experience their skating days once again.

Our first rink instrument is the 1906 Gramophone. When roller skating was in its infancy, people skated in the parlors of large homes. When this "parlor skating" needed audio accompaniment, many households turned to the gramophone. This small musical instrument resembled a phonograph and played one-sided records. Its small size lent its use to household rooms and gave enough sound to fill the space while also being loud enough to overpower the clanks of the wheels.

The museum acquired its gramophone



A Hammond Organ (left) and a band organ (right) from the National Museum of Roller Skating's music collection.

phone through the generous contribution from the Anderson family, board members of the museum. Our hand-

crank gramophone can play the duration of one song before needing additional cranking power. While the wooden casing had been refurbished, the rest of our gramophone uses original parts.

Our second music instrument used in roller rinks is the band organ. Band organs were mainly used prior to the 1930s. Many entertainment venues used some form of a band organ. Parades, carnivals and circuses were other public festivals that used band organs. Some were smaller and could be carried by two men; others were quite large and needed to be pulled by a team of horses on the back of trailers. Whichever form of band organ was used, the instrument projected a large sound to an audience through multiple types of small instruments. These could include, but were not limited to, the following: guitars, drums, symbols, xylophones, horns, bells, whistles, and other types of percussion instruments.

The band organ in the museum contains many instruments. It uses both a base and a snare drum; a triangle and tambourine also give the percussion area more sound with its open air concept. The pipes and xylophone round out the sound of our band organ, while enclosed inside the framework. All of this is powered through electricity, which turns the air compressor to provide the air to each instrument. One can see the black tubing traveling to each individual instrument. Our organ is coin-operated; for 25 cents our visitors can hear one of ten songs on the organ as the music is played through a player

piano type music reel.

Finally, our newest instrument came to us from California after a long travel stint as the instrument played for the indoor National Roller Skating Championships. Museum board member Dominic Cangelosi personally delivered his own Hammond B3 Organ to the museum recently. Cangelosi used this specific organ while playing dance music for the championships from 1969 until 1985. The long run proves how important the Hammond Organ was to the sport of roller skating. Organs like this were played in rinks all across the country for mood music. Skaters flocked to the rinks to enjoy the many sounds of the Hammond Organ.

Our new Hammond Organ was totally refurbished and runs like new. Its two sets of keyboards are accompanied by a grand set of foot pedals. It can change sounds with the push of a button. Long, powerful, drawn-out notes can quickly become short and peppy. This type of organ was a favorite among competitive dance skaters.

These three examples clearly show how important rink music is to the museum and its overall goal of providing the best experience possible in learning about the great sport of roller skating.

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