

The Welte D Brisgovia orchestrion pictured on page 86 is the largest Brisgovia known to exist. It once entertained visitors to Harmony Hall, William H. Miner's private manor house on his estate in upstate New York. Miner, who made his fortune in railroad car equipment, owned three Welte orchestrions, parts of other instruments, and many rolls, possibly acquired when Welte's factory assets in Poughkeepsie, New York, were sold in 1919.³⁰

In 1962, the Miner estate was being razed. A sheriff was directing traffic nearby because of congestion caused by the demolition equipment. A music roll fell off a truck on its way to the dump. The sheriff took the roll to his friend Arthur E. Pierce, a radio announcer and player piano hobbyist from Plattsburgh, New York. He mentioned that many similar rolls were being destroyed. Pierce saw that the roll was an odd size, but said he might want the others if he could find something at the estate that would play them. He recalls:

My encounter with the orchestrion began in the fall of 1962. I learned of its existence through a friend, a county sheriff who brought me one of the rolls. I followed up on it and discovered that the building it was in was being destroyed and that I had little time to get it out of there. First I had to acquire it.

I approached the head custodian of the William H. Miner Estate properties. He told me the orchestrion had been turned over to a junk dealer who was gut-

ting the building for salvage. I then called on the local legal counsel for the Miner Foundation who, after some pleading on my part, interceded and had the orchestrion released to me for \$100. I believe that he turned in my favor after I informed him of the destruction of two other orchestrions. These were in two other large guest houses that had already been torn down and burned, as practice for area firefighters.

The last building to go was Harmony Hall. The orchestrion was located in a very large room, a combination banquet hall and ballroom with rather low ceilings. The pipe chest and pipes were above the floor, but the lower part of the chassis was in the room below. A stairway near the orchestrion led to the lower room, where the butler went to change rolls.

The orchestrion was encased by a three-sided paneled wall. The panels were made of heavy canvas painted with beautiful scenery. The building had been vacant for a long period. The whitewash that someone had applied over the murals was flaking off, revealing the artwork underneath.

The sheriff, a deputy, a fellow announcer, and I went to remove the instrument on a Saturday morning with a large borrowed truck. Within eight hours we had cut and removed all the lead tubing, disassembled the machine, and carefully packed it all into the truck. Men were working on the floors above us removing pipes and radiators, causing plaster to fall constantly.

By 8:30 that evening we had it piled in pieces in a large second floor bedroom in my home. I was so excited! For the next year and a half I spent much of my off-duty time piecing the orchestrion together.³¹

Arthur Pierce sold the Brisgovia to Robert Johnson of Rossville, Georgia. In 1976, Johnson leased it to the Smithsonian Institution for the spectacular exhibit in the Arts and Industries Building called *1876: A Centennial Exhibition*. Flags, bunting and fresh flowers decorated the balcony surrounding the orchestrion. Throughout the exhibition, the grand old building resounded with Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*, Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 14*, and patriotic tunes like *Rally 'Round the Flag* and *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*. After the picture on page 86 was taken, the Brisgovia was restored, with a new cabinet made in the style of an original.



Illustration 4-29: The Welte Brisgovia D. Brisgovia cabinets typically featured mirrors, art glass, or reverse painted scenes instead of the clear glass of the Cottage and Concert orchestrions, so it was unnecessary to arrange the pipes symmetrically. The wooden flute pipes in the front row comprise the octave rank, pitched an octave above the melody violin and trumpet pipes. The long tapered silver pipes are the oboes, which speak an octave below the melody violin. Part of the zinn rank shows behind the oboe.

4-29: Welte Brisgovia D. Freiburg, Germany

- Gilson Collection (1989); Burton Collection (Malibu, CA, 1977); Burton Burton (Pasadena, CA) and Donald Barr (Santa Monica, CA); Robert Johnson (Rossville, GA, circa 1964); Arthur Pierce (Plattsburgh, NY, 1962); William H. Miner (Plattsburgh, NY, circa 1919); M. Welte & Sons factory (Poughkeepsie, NY)
- Restored by Hayes McClaran (after this picture was taken)
- #3,050; chassis #WS 9552/53
- Made circa 1912; Welte Brisgovia orchestrions popular 1907-1920s
- \$5,200 in 1912 = 24,760 hours
- 11'10" x 9'8" x 4'6" (without cabinet)
- Plays Welte 100-hole orchestrion rolls
- 341 pipes

Melody: 34 each of wood violins (8'), wood flutes (8'), harmonic flutes (8'), piccolos (4'), zinn pipes (8'), brass trumpets (8', free reed), and oboes (16'); 27 trumpets (8', beating reed). Certain highest and lowest pipes in reed ranks are flue pipes.

Bass/accompaniment: 18 each of stopped bourdons (8'), cellos (8'), octaves (4'), and brass trombones (8'); 4 coupled bassoons (16')

- Piano with mandolin attachment, and xylophone
- Bass drum, tympani effect, snare drum, cymbal, and triangle
- Pipe and xylophone solo capability (automatic register for piano)