

At Violinos Music Farm, near Ashburton

At Violinos Music Farm is the brainchild of Ruth Hall. Developed in 2010, the farm contains a wide range of home-made and imported musical instruments. From a collection of more than 100 Swiss cow bells, a marimba, Chinese gongs, boomwhammer, a Milner & Thompson Patent action piano, to outdoor lawn games such as a merry-go-round, checker board, nine men Morris, and croquet.

The organ in At Violinos Music Farm is a composite of two different Positive Pipe organs. The pipework is from one instrument and the rest of the organ is a separate instrument. The carcass of the instrument has the opus number 129. The history of this organ leads back through two private residences in Christchurch to St. Martin's Presbyterian Church, Christchurch, where it was installed by the Revd Dr Ross Wards, having been purchased from Matla & Son. At this stage, the history of the instrument is unknown. The pipework that was on the instrument was definitely not original to the organ, being an assortment of wooden and metal pipes (some in the same rank). One rank was even a *Gambiana* 8 — the bottom half of the pipes being cut down Gambas, with cut Dulciana tubes soldered on to provide the correct speaking length (if not the most accurately matched scaling). Four Stopped Diapason pipes were made of oak, with other sections of that rank of oak pipework discovered in two other private collections of pipework that had been purchased by SIOC.

The opus number 129 indicates an early Positive Organ Company instrument in New Zealand. Opus 226 was Holy Trinity, Lawrence, which was opened on 6 September 1901.¹ The only other earlier opus numbers are opus 133 (currently in St. John the Baptist Anglican Church, Hunterville). The earliest reference to a Positive Organ in New Zealand through a search of the National Library's Papers Past comes up with a piece in the *Otago Daily Times* from 5 March 1900, which mentions the organ in St. Martin's, North East Valley, Dunedin as "being the first of its kind ordered from Home for New Zealand." So combining that with the earliest opus number, it can be a reasonable (but not conclusive) deduction that the organ carcass is the oldest in New Zealand.



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The pipework on the Positive Organ installed in At Violinos is from another later instrument. This was a Positive Pipe Organ opus 949, pattern 48 which was opened in St. Andrew's on the Terrace Presbyterian Church, Wellington on 22 February 1923. This was sold in September 1928 to the Mosgiel Presbyterian Church.² In 1970 it was sold to Lennox Willett of Christchurch, and he then converted it to electric action. In the 2010-11 earthquakes the organ was damaged when the building frame gave way, squashing the pulldown magnets under the soundboard. The instrument was sold to the SIOC, who repaired the pipework from opus 949 and fitted it to opus 129. The organ was repaired and restored by a group of local volunteers for the Music Farm, lead by the Ashburton engineer Lester Hobbs.

MANUAL		Transposer (+/- 2)
Bourdon Bass	8	Melodic
Open Diapason	8	
Melodic Diapason	8	
Gedackt Bass	8	
Gedackt Treble	8	
Salicional	8	
Dulcet Bass	4	Action: Mechanical / Pneumatic
Dulcet Treble	4	Compass: FF – c. 43

The Positive Organs are designed as *faux* two manual and pedal instruments. The melodic system on them is activated pneumatically, and has the effect of only sounding the top note of the melodic stop that is drawn, or the bottom note in the case of the Bourdon Bass. This is achieved by daisy chaining the pneumatic action so that the highest note played cuts off the action wind to all lower notes. So a player on one manual can play accompaniment part, melody line and pedal line, and have the use of a transposer if required.

As a Positive Organ Company brochure stated: "Thus without any effort or special training the most humble performer who can play a simple tune, chant or anthem, as written, can produce the effects of pedal playing, melodic reinforcements as by a second manual, and transposing – effects hitherto attainable only by the highly trained organist of a large and costly organ."³



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- 1 Papers Past - *Tuapeka Times*, 7 September 1901 p.3
- 2 Littlejohn, Charles P. ed. *St Andrew's The first 150 years*. (St. Andrew's on the Terrace, 1990, Wellington) p. 26
- 3 Positive Organ Company Pamphlet (undated) – Maidment Collection