

A Vacuum Tube Organ

Ahlborn und Steinbach S22

A classical tube-based electronic organ designed before transistors

Giovanni Becattini

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References

The following references are used in this book:

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- [7KS] Tektronix 7000 Series – Elektor Books
- [TREG] Tektronix Oscilloscopes Restoration Guide – Elektor Books
- [TGHP] The Great Hewlett-Packard – free download from www.quacktech.it
- [VRE] Vintage Radio Equipment – Elektor Book
- [MAC] Apple Macintosh – History, Engineering, and Restoration – Elektor Books
- [QT602] The Good Giant – Tektronix DSA 602A Oscilloscope – Quacktech
- [QT11KP] The Last Plug-ins – Tektronix 11000-Series Plug-ins – Quacktech
- [SCLI] Some Classical Instrument – coming soon
- [QTCOL] Collins Classics – KWM-2, 30L-1 and 51S-1: History, Engineering, and Restoration – Quacktech Editions
- [QT324] Two Giants and a Shorty – Tektronix 323/324 - Quacktech

■ This book is the result of a personal effort, carried out as part of the Author’s simple amateur activity, with the purpose of preserving the historical and technical heritage of the equipment described.

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Almost a Pipe Organ



In one of my previous lives, I worked with pipe organs. Not as a musician—unfortunately, I never had much talent for playing—but, as you might expect, on the technical side. For several years I collaborated as a freelance consultant with a government institution, with the task of analyzing, cataloguing, and documenting all the pipe organs in the Florence area. It was a fascinating job, one that allowed me to explore these extraordinary machines from the inside and, in at least one case, to take part directly in a restoration project.

Around the same period, I had the opportunity to acquire an old electronic organ. Not the kind typically associated with rock concerts or popular music, but an instrument conceived according to classical organ principles, and built entirely around vacuum-tube technology.

The organ discussed in these pages is an Ahlborn & Steinbach Type S22, manufactured in Heimerdingen, near Stuttgart. Based on the company's history and technical details, it was most likely produced between 1955 and 1960. Ahlborn & Steinbach K.G. was founded in 1950, and in 1960 the company shortened its name to simply Ahlborn—a small detail that helps to place this instrument in time.

What follows is the story of this organ: from its purchase in 1970, through decades of use and neglect, up to its recent restoration. It is not only the account of a single instrument, but also a reflection on a fascinating transitional period, when electronic technology sought—sometimes successfully, sometimes less so—to reinterpret a centuries-old musical tradition.

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*To my wife
 and my family*