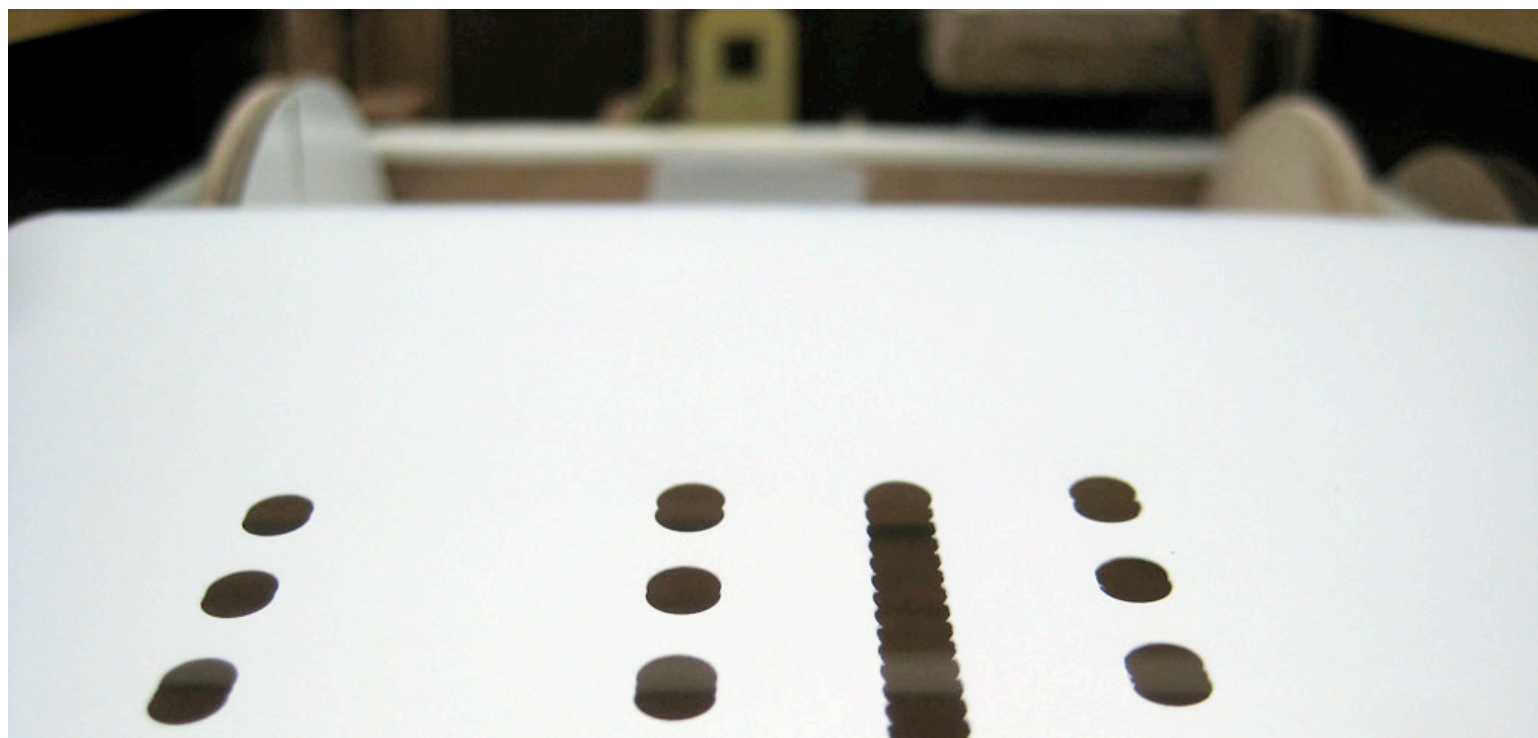


# Der Vogelhändler

Mark Prier

Saskatoon 2014  
August 13 – 17, 20 – 24



## PROPOSAL

For ten days over a two week period, an organ grinder will walk River Landing paths, weaving throughout the Market Walk, Cultural District, and Riverfront, cranking a busker organ, a device often used by street musicians, typically immigrants. These devices were quite common as recent as the first half of the 20th century. The organ plays music and spits birdseed out onto the path below to feed the birds. The birdseed mix will be carefully selected to be ecologically friendly and composed of non-invasive seeds. The music pouring forth from this organ is a rendition of Carl Zeller's opera "Der Vogelhändler" (the Bird Seller), a song about people from different cultures learning to live together. "Der Vogelhändler" is an historically common organ grinder song.

This performance refers to River Landing's unique history as a resting place for both wildlife and humans, spanning many centuries and cultures, from aboriginal to immigrant. Adding the ability to broadcast seeds to the busker organ additionally refers to both the instrument's original use as a high-tech device for teaching canaries to sing, and points to Saskatchewan's agricultural importance.

This dynamic performance will interact with the summer bird populations along and near the river, and will meander past Saskatoon tourists and residents alike at the street level. Taking the approach of Guerrilla Theatre or street spectacle, the performance will not only bring art to the public, it will engage and interact with them.

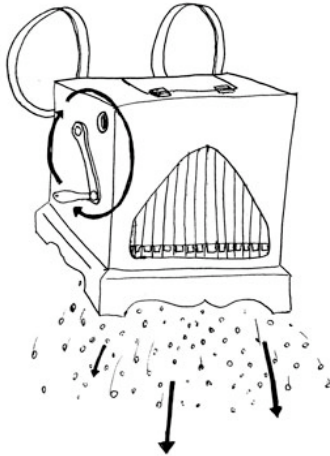
The performance could potentially take place at the same time as the River Lights Festival in July or Saskatoon Fireworks Festival in August, as they both take place in the River Landing area. The performance itself would occur on ten days within a two week period, and can be scheduled to lead up to these events.





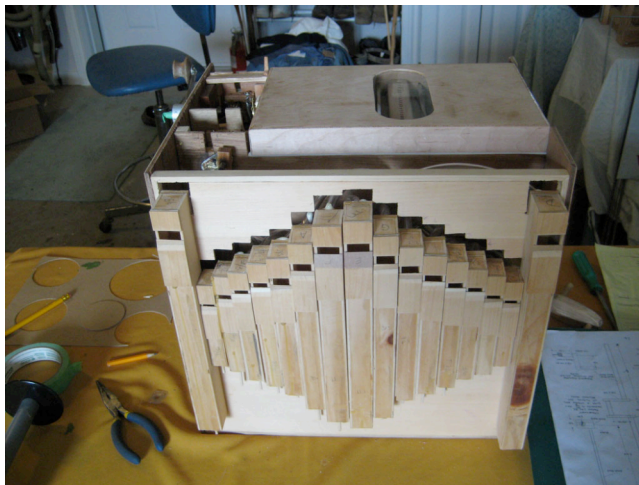
## RESEARCH AND CREATION

This project began in 2011 with a proposal to create a hybrid busker organ-seed broadcaster for a performance in Mississauga, Ontario's Riverwood Park. This particular park was a favourite for birdwatching, and birders were some of the primary users of the park. The proposal was well-received, though local conservation officials had concerns about the music's potential to disturb the bird populations within the park. The proposal was set aside and an entirely different proposal for Riverwood Park was drawn up.



Despite its rejection in the context of Riverwood Park, I continued to research and work towards creating this hybrid busker organ-seed broadcaster. I settled on a small type of busker organ, called a "John Smith." The organ was small enough to be carried around, but large enough to play complex melodies. I purchased plans from the patent holder—John Smith himself—and set to work making the organ, planning my own modifications along the way.

From January 2012 until June 2014, work continued on the busker organ-seed broadcaster. I built the organ pipes, tuned them, built the bellows system that pumps the air through to the pipes, and generally made great gains in deciphering the often-vague plans I had received. I purchased a music roll from a manufacturer in England and tested the organ—it worked. Along the way, I also acquired an antique seed broadcaster that I planned to modify and use.



As the busker organ-seed broadcaster approached completion, it became obvious that it had grown in size, despite attempts to keep it compact. It was light enough to be carried for short periods of time, but too heavy to carry for several hours, as proposed for the Placemaker Program. In response, I designed a cart for the busker organ-seed broadcaster, a change that positively increased the device's presence. Around this time, all attempts at a quiet mechanical solution to operating the seed broadcaster via the organ crank were thwarted. All of these attempts were so loud as to overpower the music itself. In the end, I settled on using a quiet electric motor to drive the seed broadcaster during short performances (when the device would be carried) and a simple drop-chute solution for dispensing seeds away from the cart during long performances.





The final development for the performance was to decide upon a suitable ‘costume’ for me to wear during the performances in Saskatoon. I settled on a formal appearance—dress shirt, dress pants, a tie with a clip, and a panama hat—that would suggest yesteryear’s buskers while keeping my attire contemporary.







## PAPERWORK/PRESS

### Project schedule for the time in Saskatoon

Date	Duration	Event	Location
August 13 (Wednesday)	10:00am – 4:00pm	Walking performance	Downtown and orientation
August 14 (Thursday)	7:30am – 2:00pm	Walking performance	Downtown: Civic Plaza – 222 3rd Avenue North; 23rd St, Transit Mall
August 15 (Friday)	10:00am – 4:00pm	Walking performance	3rd Avenue - Meewasin Valley Centre to 23rd Street
August 16 (Saturday)	11:30am – 7:00pm	Walking performance	Spadina Cres - Broadway Bridge to University Bridge
August 17 (Sunday)	10:00am – 4:00pm	Walking performance	River trails from Circle Drive Bridge to Broadway Bridge
August 20 (Wednesday)	10:00am – 4:00pm	Walking performance	Riversdale 20th Street West – Start at BID Office at little chief station
August 21 (Thursday)	10:00am – 4:00pm	Third Thursday	Broadway Avenue - Start at BID Office on Broadway
August 22 (Friday)	11:30pm – 7:00pm	Rock the River; Meet the Artist (12:00pm – 1:00pm)	21st Street - Spadina to 1st Avenue; Meet the Artist at Barney Kutz Pocket Park, 21st Street East between 1st and 2nd Avenues
August 23 (Saturday)	9:00am – 2:00pm	Farmer's Market	414 – Avenue B South
August 24 (Sunday): <b>Rained out after 10:00 am</b>	9:00am – 3:00pm	Show & Shine	Downtown - 2nd Avenue, 3rd Avenue, 21st Street, 22nd Street

**Press Release sent to media**  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Artist scattering birdseed and song across downtown Saskatoon**

Since August 13<sup>th</sup>, visual artist Mark Prier has been walking Saskatoon streets and trails while pushing a busker organ-seed broadcaster. As he cranks the handle, the miniature pipe organ plays selections from Carl Zeller's operetta 'Der Vogelhändler' and sends hulled birdseed to the ground below. His performance, also titled 'Der Vogelhändler,' will be happening throughout downtown Saskatoon until August 24<sup>th</sup>.

Busker organs are mechanical devices historically used by street musicians, typically immigrants. They were quite common as recent as the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, this organ is a little different—it also drops birdseed out onto the path below to feed the birds.

"Originally, these were high tech devices to teach canaries to sing," Prier says. "Eventually, some enterprising individuals figured out that they could use them to make money."

Now, the artist refers back to these origins with the music from 'Der Vogelhändler'—German for 'The Bird Seller.' This operetta is about lovers from different cultures coming together, also bringing together their different communities. The artist adds that his performance "celebrates Saskatoon's unique history as a resting place for both wildlife and humans, spanning many centuries and cultures, from aboriginal to immigrant."

A Meet the Artist Event has been set for Friday, August 22nd, 2014 at noon. It will take place at Barney Kutz Pocket Park, 21st Street East between 1st and 2nd Avenues.

The upcoming schedule for the performances is as follows:

- Wednesday, August 20th, 10 am to 4 pm: Riversdale along 20th Street West.
- Thursday, August 21st, 10 am to 4 pm: Broadway Avenue (Third Thursday).
- Friday, August 22nd, 11:30 am to 7 pm: 21st Street, from Spadina Crescent to 1st Avenue (Rock the River).
- Saturday, August 23rd, 9 am to 2 pm: Farmer's Market at 414 Avenue B South.
- Sunday, August 24th, 9 am to 3 pm: Downtown along 2nd Avenue, 3rd Avenue, 21st Street, and 22nd Street.

**Mark Prier's** multimedia art examines the interaction between culture, ecology, and survival. Working from diverse sources, such as folklore, geology, history, and botany, he rearticulates this examination into various media, including installation, new media, performance, sound, and video.



His exhibitions include shows in Canada, Mexico, United Kingdom, and the United States. He splits his time between Hopeville and Mississauga, Ontario, Canada. Further examples of his work can be seen at [www.markprier.com](http://www.markprier.com).


‘Der Vogelhändler’ is a part of the City of Saskatoon’s Placemaker Program, a program that enhances civic spaces within commercial districts through the placement of temporary public art.

‘Der Vogelhändler’ was created with the support of Ontario Arts Council, an Ontario government agency.

-30-


For more information, please contact Genevieve Russell at [genevieve.russell@saskatoon.ca](mailto:genevieve.russell@saskatoon.ca) or 306-975-2620.

## Facebook Event and posts




'Der Vogelhändler' performance in Saskatoon







**Mark Prier**  
[Edit Profile](#)


MY EVENTS

 Upcoming

5


 Calendar

 Past

 Create


THIS WEEK


[Fine Art Classes](#)  
Tomorrow at 10:00am




AUG  
13

'Der Vogelhändler' performance in Saskatoon

 Open Invite · Hosted by [Mark Prier](#)

 **August 13 - August 24**  
Aug 13 at 10:00am to Aug 24 at 3:00pm in CST

 **Saskatoon, Saskatchewan**

[Show Map](#)

I will be performing 'Der Vogelhändler' in downtown Saskatoon from August 13th to 24th, walking city streets and trails while pushing my busker organ-seed broadcaster.

As I crank the handle, the organ will be playing selections from Carl Zeller's 'Der Vogelhändler' and sending hulled birdseed down a chute to fall on t...

[See More](#)



**Mark Prier** updated the event photo.  
August 5 at 3:44pm



Like · Comment

Julie René de Cotret, Amber Christensen, Sonja Hidas and 3 others like this.



Write a comment...



**Janet Bellotto**  
August 5 at 4:50pm



Wish to be there in person, love it!

Unlike · Comment

You like this.



Write a comment...







Mark Prier

August 5 at 4:08pm



Mark Prier  
'Der Vogelhändler'  
2014

Created with the support of Ontario Arts Council, an Ontario government agency.



Like · Comment

Julie René de Cotret, Cyrus B, Gareth Lichty and 13 others like this.



**Boris Yurinov** Not only is this a wild idea, the artistry is gorgeous. Bring it to Ontario would ya!

August 5 at 7:56pm · Unlike · 1



**Philip Robbins** Looks great

August 7 at 8:08pm · Unlike · 1



W Thursday, August 7, 2014 at 8:08pm



Mark Prier

August 5 at 4:08pm



Like · Comment

Julie René de Cotret, Todd V Prier, Jillian Parsons and 3 others like this.



**Cyrus B** Call 'Dragon's Den'

August 9 at 11:58am · Unlike · 1



**Julie René de Cotret** video please

August 13 at 11:56am · Like



**Mark Prier** Soon, I promise.

August 13 at 7:04pm · Like

m.752684971462437&type=1



Mark Prier

August 13 at 7:32pm

Today I finished the first performance of 'Der Vogelhändler,' walking the busker organ-seed broadcaster all over downtown Saskatoon. Now, as promised, here are the tentative dates and locations for the next performances (keep in mind that while these are the intended areas, I will stray in and out of these areas):

Thursday, August 14th, 7:30 am to 2 pm: Civic Plaza, the Transit Mall, 3rd Avenue North and 23rd Street environs.

Friday, August 15th, 10 am to 4 pm: 3rd Avenue from the Meewasin Valley Centre to 23rd Street.

Saturday, August 16th, 11:30 am to 7 pm: Spadina Crescent from Broadway Bridge to University Bridge.

Sunday, August 17th, 10 am to 4 pm: Trails along the river, from the Meewasin Valley Centre to Circle Drive Bridge.

Wednesday, August 20th, 10 am to 4 pm: Riversdale along 20th Street West.

Thursday, August 21st, 10 am to 4 pm: Broadway Avenue (Third Thursday).

Friday, August 22nd, 11:30 am to 7 pm: 21st Street, from Spadina Crescent to 1st Avenue (Rock the River).

Saturday, August 23rd, 9 am to 2 pm: Farmer's Market at 414 Avenue B South.

Sunday, August 24th, 9 am to 3 pm: Downtown along 2nd Avenue, 3rd Avenue, 21st Street, and 22nd Street.

Like · Comment

👍 Melissa Creasey likes this.



Write a comment...



Mark Prier

August 13 at 8:03pm

For an idea of what to expect, here's 'Der Vogelhändler' in the countryside of Ontario.



Like · Comment

👍 Adam Frank, Lnd Chng, Julie René de Cotret and 8 others like this.



Cliff Creasey That was enjoyable

August 13 at 8:47pm · Unlike · 👍 1



Write a comment...





Mark Prier

August 15 at 9:57am

On Saturday, I will be starting my day at the Meewasin Valley Centre at Heike Fink's workshop for creating felted pebbles. These woolen pebbles have been (and will continue to be) felted in workshops and will be combined into one piece of art at River Landing during Cultural Days on September 27, 2014. She's doing the workshop from 11-4 on Saturday, so come down at check it out.

Like · Comment



Write a comment...



Mark Prier

August 20 at 7:54pm

I'll be on CBC Radio's Saskatoon Morning tomorrow (Thursday) talking about 'Der Vogelhändler.' The show runs 6 - 8:30 am MST. You can listen in from the CBC website or locally on your radio at 94.1 FM.



### Saskatoon Morning - Saskatchewan - Local Shows - Radio - CBC Player

CanLit expert Aritha van Herk on why the racy, recently viral novel Bear is actually a good read. Wrestler-turned-yogi Diamond Dallas Page on his journey from the ring to the mat. Best of Q: Alain de...

CBC.CA

Like · Comment · Share

👍 Cliff Creasey and Melissa Creasey like this.



Write a comment...



Mark Prier

August 15 at 9:27pm

The Meet the Artist Event has been set for Friday, August 22nd, 2014 at noon. It will take place at Barney Kutz Pocket Park, 21st Street East between 1st and 2nd Avenues.

Like · Comment

👍 Barbara Amos likes this.



Write a comment...







**Mark Prier**

August 20 at 11:18am

Some first-person documentation of 'Der Vogelhändler' last week.



Like · Comment

👍 Barbara Amos, Joshua Richardson, Melissa Creasey and 7 others like this.



**Joshua Richardson** Will we get to see it in action here?!

August 20 at 8:04pm · Like



**Mark Prier** That's certainly a possibility.

August 20 at 8:34pm · Like



Write a comment...



**Mark Prier**

August 21 at 7:14pm

CBC's online piece about 'Der Vogelhändler.'



### Organ grinder Mark Prier brings German opera to Saskatoon

Mississauga, Ont. artist Mark Prier has been wheeling his handmade organ...

CBC.CA

Like · Comment · Share

👍 Amber Christensen, Stephen Paul Fulton, John Goßelin and 10 others like this.



**Mark Prier** On the left hand side of the article you can see an audio player that says 'Listen.' This will play the radio interview from this morning.

August 21 at 7:18pm · Like · 👍 1



**Sharon Frayne French** Congratulations Mark! You do a great job with the interview, and the performance is so intriguing.

August 21 at 8:08pm · Unlike · 👍 1



Write a comment...



I will be performing 'Der Vogelhändler' in downtown Saskatoon from August 13th to 24th, walking city streets and trails while pushing my busker organ-seed broadcaster.

As I crank the handle, the organ will be playing selections from Carl Zeller's 'Der Vogelhändler' and sending hulled birdseed down a chute to fall on the ground below.

Exact venues and times TBA.

'Der Vogelhändler' is a part of the City of Saskatoon's Placemaker Program, a program that enhances civic spaces within commercial districts through the placement of temporary public art.

'Der Vogelhändler' was created with the support of Ontario Arts Council, an Ontario government agency.

Thanks to: [Amber Christensen](#), [Stephen Paul Fulton](#), [Sonja Hidas](#), [Doyle Prier](#), [Alejandro Romero](#), and [Genevieve Russell](#).

#### POSTS

 [Write Post](#) |  [Add Photo / Video](#) |  [Ask Question](#)

Write something...



**Mark Prier**

August 25 at 9:11am

Excepting yesterday's rain, 'Der Vogelhändler' went off without a hitch. Now it's time for the journey home. And additional thank you to Karen Polowick for being an excellent host, and to the City of Saskatoon for being so friendly!

[Like](#) · [Comment](#)

## CBC Article & Interview

**CBCnews** | Saskatoon

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# Organ grinder Mark Prier brings German opera to Saskatoon

Mississauga, Ont. artist in city until Sunday

By Trevor Pritchard, CBC News Posted: Aug 21, 2014 12:02 PM CT | Last Updated: Aug 21, 2014 1:17 PM CT



Mark Prier pushes his handmade busker organ through Saskatoon's Riversdale neighbourhood. The organ dispenses birdseed and is part of the city's Placemaker public art program. (CBC Saskatoon/Trevor Pritchard)

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If you come across Mark Prier wheeling his wooden music box down one of Saskatoon's sidewalks, don't ask for a hot dog or an ice cream cone.

Prier's not in the food business, even if the sounds coming from his old-timey busker organ might suggest otherwise.

Rather, his ear-catching performance piece, called *Der Vogelhandler*, was one of seven projects approved for 2014 by the city's Placemaker program, which curates and installs new public art all over Saskatoon.

### Feelings of yesteryear

"Of all the public performances I've done, this one has attracted probably the most positive response," Prier told Saskatoon Morning.

"It does bring up and kind of elicit these nostalgic feelings of yesteryear."

The Mississauga, Ont. artist has been in Saskatoon for most of August, pushing his organ — a musical contraption more associated with Victorian times than the 21st century — through the city's downtown and along the riverfront.

The organ features a crank on one side, which plays off-kilter music from the German operetta *Der Vogelhandler* when Prier turns it. A chute in the front dispenses birdseed as Prier walks — which may seem odd until you realize the title of this project translates as "the bird-seller."

Music boxes, Prier adds, were also used historically to teach canaries to sing.

### Temporary art has its place

'I think it does speak to a bygone era.'

- Mississauga, Ont. artist Mark Prier

### External Links

- [City of Saskatoon's list of 2014 Placemaker artists](#)

(Note: CBC does not endorse and is not responsible for the content of external links.)

Prier says he's frequently been approached over the past few weeks by people wondering what he's up to.

Along with handling misguided requests for ice cream, Prier said he's also met residents who remember when organ grinders worked Saskatoon's streets.

"I think it does kind of speak to a bygone era. People are also quite fond of mechanical devices that don't require electricity."

And while public art is traditionally associated with permanent works like sculptures or murals, Prier says that society's changing tastes give temporary public art projects their own value.

"They can run the gamut from traditional to experimental without really endangering [the look of the city]. Because you're not stuck with it."

Prier will only be in Saskatoon for a few more days, however. On Friday, he'll be part of a "meet the artist" event at the Barney Kutz Pocket Park on 21st St. between 1st and 2nd Ave.

He'll also be at the Saskatoon Farmers Market on Saturday and will be giving the organ one last spin downtown on Sunday.



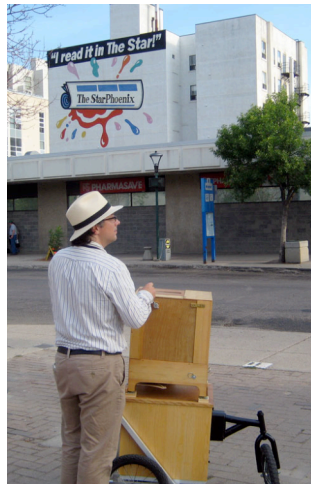
Mark Prier says people enjoy the nostalgic feelings that come from seeing an organ grinder make his way through the city's streets.

Link to online article and radio interview:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/organ-grinder-mark-prier-brings-german-opera-to-saskatoon-1.2742969>



## PERFORMANCES



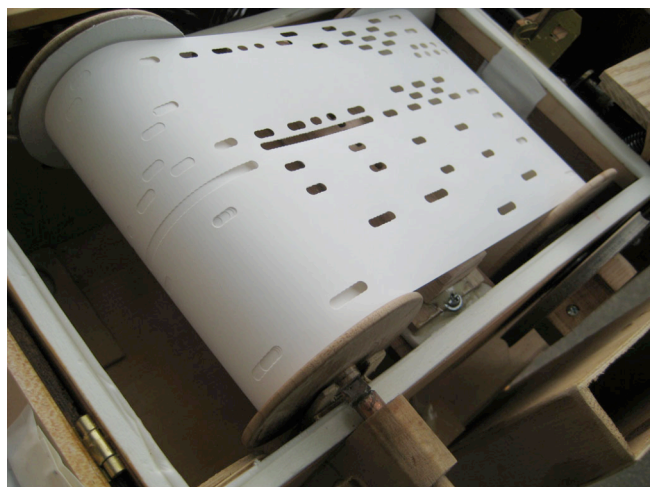




















### **Public reactions**

Most often members of the public wanted to know what the device was. I would respond by explaining: "It's a busker organ that also broadcasts seeds." For some, this was enough. For most, I would also show them how the crank pumped the bellows, how the music roll allowed the air from the bellows to flow to the pipes, and how the seeds dropped down on to a chute to fall to the ground. Occasionally, people wanted to know what the performance was about, whereupon I would respond by explaining the reason for the music selection and giving an overview of the performance's content in relation to Saskatoon. At least one person a day asked why I was doing this, prompting me to explain the City of Saskatoon's Placemaker Program.

Overall, public reaction to the performance was positive—"We need more of this in Saskatoon," "we need more music in this city," and "thanks so much for doing this" were voiced in one way or another. When encountering joggers and cyclists, I was often given a thumbs-up. Children were encouraged to try cranking the busker organ, and often wanted to hold the birdseed in their hands. In a few cases, I developed a rapport with people I frequently encountered on city streets. With these individuals I, for a time, became a daily part of their lives, regularly wandering by.

On one occasion at the transit mall, when a street preacher was loudly exhorting the crowd to repent their sins, a group of heckling teenagers turned to me as I went past, with one declaring, "now this—this I can stand!"

## **ARTIST BIO**

**Mark Prier's** multimedia art examines the interaction between culture, ecology, and survival. Working from diverse sources, such as folklore, geology, history, and botany, he rearticulates this examination into various media, including installation, new media, performance, sound, and video.

His exhibitions include shows in Canada (The Rooms, Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre, White Water Gallery, Contemporary Art Forum Kitchener & Area), Mexico (Kunsthaus Santa Fé), United Kingdom (the Lost O), and the United States (City Without Walls, and [Untitled] Artspace).

He has received grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Newfoundland & Labrador Arts Council, and the Ontario Arts Council.

In 2008, he travelled to Gotland, Sweden for the Brucebo Summer Residency; and, in 2012, he travelled to Crowsnest Pass, Alberta for Trap/door Artist-Run Centre's Gushul Studio & Collaboration Residency.

A 2004 graduate of University of Toronto's Visual Studies program, Prier also took part in HotBox Riverwood's mentorship program with Reinhard Reitzenstein in 2011.

Prier splits his time between Hopeville and Mississauga, Ontario, Canada.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

Mark Prier

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