

The Hunt for Invicta

Do you know the origins of your favourite song? Perhaps you're an ABBA fan and you know what inspired their music; every time you hear "Slipping Through My Fingers" you think of its story: a mother lamenting her daughter growing up, and the time she's losing with her as she leaves for school. Maybe you know about the artists themselves, and when you hear Fleetwood Mac's music you think of the affair-driven lovers' quarrels (in)famously prevalent within the band. When we really love a piece of music, we tend to want to learn more about it. But what if your favourite song isn't quite so popular? What if the sticky earworm caught in your mind has no readily available information to be found online? What if your favourite song is a march recorded on an idiosyncratic instrument, a piece barely digitized, and nearly lost to time? What is the "Invicta March", who composed it, and what mysteries surround its convoluted history?

Fairground organs, or band organs as they're known in the US, are a type of mechanical instrument (think player piano, or music box) which were primarily used in (as the name suggests) fairground settings and attractions, often alongside carousels. They're a true marvel of craftsmanship; gorgeously ornate hand-carved facades bellowing a full menagerie of different instruments— not just an automatic organ! They're absolutely spectacular not only to look at, but hearing the music they produce nearly moves me to tears. Not necessarily because of the compositions themselves, but rather, thinking of all the passion and expertise that went into hearing one in the modern day; every decoration hand-crafted, the music first composed— then someone else hand punched the books (or rolls) which play the pieces, the instrumental components meticulously crafted as well; restorationists, composers, mechanics, musicians, and

more— it absolutely floors me how much collectively went into a singular recording of *one* of these jovial tunes. The grandeur of the fair, and all its memories witnessed by dozens of brass horns gazing not-unlike the many eyes of a biblical angel, condensed alongside the *unspoken* touches of dozens of people... And yet, these pieces are criminally underappreciated by the layman. Don't misunderstand, there are avid fans, collectors, restorationists, craftsmen, and general enjoyers of this music in the modern age, but it certainly isn't likely one will hear "Entry of the Gladiators" played on a Gavioli on the radio (save for a specialty station, of course). I love fairground organs. The origin of my love for them is long-winded, and convoluted in its own right, and entirely unrelated to Invicta, but it did lead me to finding a recording of it one fateful day when adding tracks to a fairground organ centric Spotify playlist.

Invicta on the album *Mechanical Marches (Vol. 1)* by The Marengi Fairground Organ (notably not the artist, but the instrument) was unceremoniously found when absentmindedly clicking from "artist" to "artist". I listened to it, and I *loved* it. I shared it with friends and streamed it on loop (enough to singlehandedly get it into the top 5 most streamed songs for The Marengi Fairground Organ!). I had a bit of a bias towards organs produced by Charles Marengi & Cie; a French fairground organ manufacturer whose instruments' facades I preferred to others, so I was thrilled to bits to find recordings of a Marengi available on Spotify. I haven't got the technical knowledge or vocabulary to describe why exactly I enjoy the piece so much, but listening to it feels, if nothing else, well thought out. It starts simple, progressively building excitement with drums and additional instruments, before entering a repeating (but not droningly repetitive) melody, interspaced with crashing cymbals, before flowing light and smooth, sweetly, into its other sections. "Invicta" is melodious, but it is also brash. It commands your attention, powerfully, but cascades with trickling bell-like chimes that feel swift, soft, and weightless.

Recorded on a fairground organ, it sounds like a performance feels to watch. In a way, it is seeing someone do what they were *made to*, and it is both so very much, and so very *right*. Here is a machine, made with the love and care of a village (so to speak)—not unlike a child—solely to “sing”, to play its music and invoke *something*. As a piece, it feels impressive; like hearing Queen’s “Bohemian Rhapsody” for the first time, it almost emanates energy, and listening to it, to me, is almost a legitimately moving experience. Naturally, as infatuated with the song as I was, I had to know more.

My initial search was brief, casual, and relatively fruitless. Searching within the Spotify desktop application for “Invicta” found many tracks with similar names, yet none were the same piece. Google brought its own issues, as I quickly found Invicta to share a name with not only a watch company, but also Invicta Fighting Championships, an all-pro women’s MMA league. Simply searching “Invicta” brought only results of the former, and “Invicta March” brought only results for the latter, with nothing but information and videos of matches taking place in the month of March. This also made it impossible to search for any recordings or tracks through YouTube. This worried me. Was Invicta lost media? Lost media, in general, terrifies me irrationally. I cannot pin down what makes it so unnerving to me, as a category. Perhaps it’s the idea that someone’s hard work, their passions, their joy, their art can be completely lost to time unless they’re lucky. Perhaps it’s the fact that this phenomenon isn’t isolated only to media, but to people and their legacies just as much. That something could matter so much to so many, only to simply be lost- not even necessarily forgotten, but perhaps misplaced, perhaps locked behind a hazy shroud of old and unreliable memories. Oral traditions, music, art, history- from the burning of the Library of Alexandria to mysterious seemingly nameless snippets of songs desperately hunted for by clusters of people on the internet. But Invicta existed, in one way or another, as

visibly as on Spotify, so surely there was information available about that recording if nothing else.

I changed my tactics, searching instead for information related to the Marengi Fairground Organ album, finding a website called AllMusic with information related to the discography. From here I found my first major piece of information: the composer. AllMusic listed one James Ord Hume under track 19: *Invicta*. But a precursory search on him found only two relevant results, a Wikipedia page, and a page on Chandos.net, a website centred around classical music artists and sales. The latter, more comprehensive, went over details of his musical career: born in 1864 and deceased in 1932, a Scottish composer, conductor, musicologist and cornet player, he composed over 200 pieces, some under several different pseudonyms, and his feats in conducting were similarly prolific. The former lists him as a Lieutenant, having been born in Edinburgh before joining the Royal Scots Guards, composing at least 100 marches for military band during his time in the services. He was “credited as the greatest single influence on the standard of Australian brass band performance”, and, according to this source, composed over 300 pieces in his lifetime. A 1933 publication of the Australian newspaper *The Mercury* wrote: “Instrumentalist, composer, arranger, adjudicator, he will for ever be remembered as the greatest figure ever known in the brass band world.”

And yet, with this found and my curiosity mildly sated, I only became increasingly frustrated. No mentions of Ord Hume included *Invicta* and searching for any combination of James Ord Hume and *Invicta* with search operators only brought up the Marengi recording. I’d run out of luck with Google, it seemed. Resolutely, I changed my gears once more, hoping to talk to someone rather than continue my endless feedback loop of fruitless searches. But who? I considered my options. A local library would have analog media, but *Invicta* was composed in

Europe, and I doubted any resources in our relatively small community would be so in-depth as to include obscure overseas military marches. I considered contacting a professor of some sorts overseas, one with an expertise and focus in Military Music, or marches, or anything of the like, but I couldn't find anyone to fit the bill. Then I remembered AllMusic. AllMusic listed all those who worked on the album, not just the composers of the pieces. I looked to the credits; the album was released in 2008 so, unlike Hume, there was a very good chance I could actually communicate with those listed. I carefully considered who to contact. Sound Engineers, Assistants, Producers, and Release Coordinators were highly unlikely to know anything about the pieces themselves. But my eyes caught Kevin Meayers, listed for work on Organ and Tuning. I'd assumed someone who worked closely with Fairground Organs would both appreciate and have knowledge of their music, considering the extensive efforts necessary to maintain and tune the machines, and to prepare music in the format suitable to be played. Searching for his name immediately resulted in a website titled Kevin Meayers, with the URL meayersorgans.co.uk; surely this was the same person! Opening the website filled me with a personal joy, immediately greeted with images of organs and punching machines. Kevin Meayers even sold perforated music for the machines, specially arranged and manufactured, sold under an associated company: A. Ruth and Sohn Ltd. Hopeful, I clicked "Contact" and began to fill out the form:

Name: Sage Glover

Email: [redacted]

Select: Other

Message: Hello,

My name is Sage Glover and I am a second year student at Peninsula College in the US. I'm currently writing an essay about the piece "Invicta" by James Ord Hume, the most recent digital recording of which appears to be on "Mechanical Marches on the Marengi Fairground Organ" of which one Kevin Meayers was listed in the credits. Do you happen to have any information at all about this piece- or perhaps any leads so to speak in finding information? There is little to no information at all about it

available online. Perhaps the name or contact of someone that might know, or images of a book/roll of the piece? Anything at all would be much appreciated.

If at all possible, I am also interested in any information that may be available about the Marengi the recording is of- how many keys does it have? Is it still in production? My hunt and interest began due to my own interest in fairground organs and other mechanical music.

Thank you very much for your time,
Sage Glover

With the email sent, and nothing to do but wait, I decided to get back on the horse and try to further my online research in the meantime. This day, February 7th 2024, marked not only the date of my first proper contact in this line of research, but also the day I made my most shocking discovery.

There were very few things I knew about Invicta, but of what I knew, I had been certain. Invicta was a Military March. Invicta was frustratingly elusive to get my hands on, information-wise. Invicta was composed by one James Ord Hume, a Scottish composer and military man. Invicta being composed by James Ord Hume, as a discovery, had been the biggest thing I'd found at the time, and it was *wrong*.

The first thing post-email send I'd found in relation to the search, which had made me incredibly happy, was another recording of Invicta. Rather than being referred to as "Invicta", "Invicta March" was found by chance through Google, another Spotify track. Found through something along the lines of "Invicta" "Military" and "March", it was just the discovery I needed to boost my morale. Curiously unavailable *anywhere* else on the internet, the track, on the 2016 compilation album *The Band of the Coldstream Guards, Vol. 12: Marches No. 2 (1902-1922)* was a recording of an actual marching band, The Coldstream Guards, listed alongside a few other names I assumed to be those who assembled and distributed the recordings (and not Ord

Hume). This recording was much different than the fairground version, with the sort of tinny vintage feel only found on 78 rpm records really hammering in the fact of the piece's age. It reminded me that it was old, sure, over 100 years old if the album's name was anything to go by, but it also instilled a new hope. Those alive in this era weren't that far gone, all things considered- parents and grandparents of grandparents. Invicta was old, but within reach. Using the newfound momentum brought through my happiness gained by this discovery, I pressed on. I found myself using Google Books, as the keyword function was incredibly helpful in finding information. It was here that I found "Musical Opinion and Music Trade Review, Volume 43", dating to late 1919, early-mid 1920. And in it both "Invicta" and "James Ord Hume" were mentioned... yet not together. Invicta, in fact, was accredited to one Ian Playfair, "The March Success of the Year", "Invicta March is being played by every band of note". Playfair, Playfair, Playfair, and then I saw it: "Ian Playfair's "Invicta" March will shortly be issued on "His Master's Voice" records". I had to find it, had to confirm whether it was the same march.

The next few discoveries came quickly. With a look at his Wikipedia page, the only initial result for his name, I found out that I. S. O. Playfair, or Ian Stanley Ord Playfair was a military man as well, being even more accomplished than James Ord Hume. He was a British officer, who wrote several books about his time fighting in both WWI and WWII. He received several awards. The Wikipedia page did not mention any music. At this point I wasn't sure if Ian Playfair and I. S. O. Playfair were the same person. The shared "Ord" between Playfair and Ord Hume was incredibly intriguing, perhaps there was a familial connection? I then found "The Royal Engineer's Journal" published in 1972, which contained a memoir of Playfair on page 154. This page, notably, mentioned "His march Invicta was played by the RE Band at Buckingham Palace", confirming that this was in fact the same Ian Playfair mentioned in the

music review. “He was a keen musician, able to orchestrate and conduct”, it stated. I found *Invicta* in a catalog of copyright entries, “*Invicta*; march, by Ian Playfair [of Great Britain]” from Mar. 22, 1920. I found mystery sheet music titled “*Invicta March*” on an old blog, attributed to neither Ord Hume nor Playfair. And then I found a recording of the aforementioned His Master’s Voice record on The Internet Archive, Publication date 1921, attributed to Playfair, and played by THE BAND OF H.M. COLDSTREAM GUARDS. I pressed play, only to be hit by a strange sense of something akin to *déjà vu*. I had heard this before- not only was it, in fact the same piece *Invicta*, but also the same version I’d happened to find on Spotify, just in poorer quality. I quickly booted up Spotify, finding and playing *Invicta March*, and sure enough, it was the same recording, only remastered. I noticed something too, as I stared in shock at the screen. Ian Playfair was *credited* on the recording; I’d just glanced over his name as I’d been certain James Ord Hume was the composer and assumed him to be someone working on the album. *Invicta* wasn’t by James Ord Hume at all.

Finding this out now was the biggest discovery I’d made, though it opened many more questions. At which point, or for what reason did the march become associated with James Ord Hume? Was it only a coincidence that they shared the “Ord” in their surnames? I had two theories: Ord Hume conducted it at one point or another and it was mistakenly documented as his own piece, or the Ord surname had also confused someone along the line and Ord Hume, being more accomplished, was attributed instead. With nothing to do but continue, I began once more to search. I went to Discogs, an online marketplace and sort of archive for physical music, and found another recording of *Invicta* from 1967, again attributed to Ord Hume, an LP titled *Marching with the Mammoth Gavioli*, another fairground organ. From there I was able to find a video on YouTube of “Whites' Mammoth Gavioli", the very same instrument, which did in fact

play the correct Invicta. I ordered the LP. I also found what appeared to be 2, perhaps 3 versions of the march available for request on mechanicalmusicradio.com, a specialty radio station.

On February 8th, 2024, I received one of the most exciting emails of my life, subjectively on par with college admissions, gallery exhibition approvals, and awards. Kevin Meayers had actually responded. His email included sheet music, given to him from the factory of Chiappa Ltd. London. Organ Builders., whose complete archive of sheet music dating back to 1864 he had access to. It was used by Louis Blache, the resident music maker at Chiappa Ltd to make their music books of Invicta, music books of which he attached photos as they were in his possession at Amersham Fair Organ Museum. He also let me in on it being falsely attributed to James Ord Hume, but rather belonging to Ian Playfair. He put in a request to MCPS in London to see if “Playfair” was a pseudonym of Ord Hume, something I hadn’t even considered. He was only able to find one mention of Ian Playfair outside of Invicta, the same Wikipedia page for I. S. O. Playfair I’d found prior. He too found the “Ord” coincidence puzzling. Through him I gained several more recordings of the piece, one on his website, and one he recorded and sent to me as a video played on an 89 key Marengi at Amersham Fair Organ Museum. Less so related to Invicta, he dropped information that left me shocked somehow- the organ the Invicta I’d found initially recorded on wasn’t a Marengi, but rather a Gavioli with a Marengi façade. My own personal bias towards Marengi organs shattered in that moment. “It is a life long favourite march of mine” he wrote, “I hope this helps a little with you [sic] project, nice to know this March is still thought of even as far as USA.” “I will let you know what I find out about Mr.Playfair, its always been a puzzle for me so you may have instigated us knowing the answer for sure.”

To say I was thrilled was an understatement. I carefully reviewed the attached photos and watched the videos with the giddy excitement I assume other girls in my age group get hearing their favourite bands, a passion I'd always been just a little envious of as I'd never experienced it for any artists myself. I even screenshared with a friend, and we both gushed over how incredibly *cool* the machine playing Invicta was. I shared the information I had with Mr. Meayers, and he shared his own back with me. "Good evening Sage, I am glad you are pleased with my scraps of information! Your hard work is amazing finding all this info. MCPS, have no record of Mr.Playfair. Which is amazing. I did find a photo of him, if you haven't got it I'll send you the link. I am also passionate about these nearly forgotten pieces and composers. So much has been lost!" I'd found someone just as passionate about both Invicta, and the hunt for lost and nearly-lost media. Incredibly, the organ I'd been talking about, the Mammoth Gavioli, was one they'd been working on over the past few years, and he sent me both photos of the organ, as well as a recording of Invicta on it, and another video recording of the organ in his possession. "I have loved this March since I was about 5. Quite a while as I'm 63 now." he wrote. Here was a march with almost no digitized information to be found about it, with a passionate lifelong fan. While I hadn't found the march at 5, this message filled me with a joyous feeling. I, too, would enjoy the march, my favourite march, for most (if not all) of the rest of my life. I'd already shared it with friends, and no doubt would share it with more in the future. In the future, I might share with more family, cousins of cousins, nieces, family friends, friends of friends. Perhaps one day I might be the one regaling my love for the piece to someone younger than I. Invicta meant so much to him, and meant so much to me, and the thought made me oddly emotional. How many pieces had existed, over the course of humanity, and had brought joy and connection. Who would have thought I'd be in communication with someone on the other side of the globe, in a

completely different stage of life, over the shared interest in a rather obscure military march? I played the recordings on loop, much to the annoyance of my father trying to paint in the same room.

I tried to research more, but I seemed to have hit another roadblock after finding so much information. I'd somehow found another Ord Hume, though he'd been alive far later than the other two. Arthur W. J. G. Ord-Hume was an author that had published on a wide variety of mechanical instrument related topics. Music boxes, automatic organs, organettes, pianolas, and more- as well as perpetual motion and a lot of aeroplanes. I was unsure if he was at all related, but that name coincidence, again, struck me as odd. I thought it might have been similar to how Paul Eakins' (who had a vast collection of mechanical instruments here in the states) was familially related to Carlisle Music Company, run by a nephew who now distributed recordings of his late uncle's collection, as well as maintained some organs himself. I wondered if there was a family link- though likely a stretch (I had no idea how common a name it is/was), the dates of their births and deaths certainly allowed for it. I'd also found evidence of another 1920s 78rpm recording, by Pathé rather than His Master's Voice, in a 1923 music review and order catalog titled *The Gramophone*. Yet no matter how much I searched online, hitting the end of Google Books' results several times with several search operator combinations, I could not find any other information of this recording. Nothing in archives, nor for sale, not on Discogs or Ebay or Etsy. Pathé records are near impossible to find in the US anyways, and 78s are largely thrown out or sold in massive lots due to their lack of monetary value. This drove a metaphorical stake in my heart to think about. Someone's joy, their passion- hard work and, to an extent, their very legacy completely lost to time due to a lack of perceived value. Woefully out of the hands of those who *do* care, any 78 in the wrong place at the wrong time could very well be the last of its

kind, never archived or digitized, and destroyed, damaged or otherwise. Impermanence scares me, and the unreliability of memory scares me just as much. I'd gone to a catholic grade school for 5 years, and yet I now cannot remember in detail how the sink in the bathroom looked. It bothers me. For a while I would daydream about re-visiting the school, coming up with all sorts of harebrained schemes to get into the bathroom, just to see the sink. Realistically, the sink has likely been replaced by a newer model, something that unnerves me even more. All these things that mattered, even in the most trivial of ways, have been lost. My father has a chest of drawers in his room that nobody pays any mind, yet I can't help but wonder who designed it- who owned it before him, who did this matter to? Every object, song, poem, story, every *spoon* has mattered to someone, was created by someone, and yet these voices, these legacies, are left unknown and are lost. How many songs have been lost? How many marches weren't as lucky as *Invicta*, how many names and pieces did I skim over during my research, did I fail to consider?

I ended up going to Tim Williams, Peninsula College's librarian for help. I gave him the run-down: what I'd found, what I wanted to know. He was equally passionate about the hunt, even if he had no personal interest in *Invicta*, and told me he'd attempt to find some resources I could not access. Namely libraries of Military Music and other scholars, the fancy kind with Doctorate degrees and classes in big universities, to contact. He found only the latter, Dr. Thirst. He copied me on an email, asking the same questions I could, and offering the "Ord" similarities as a "tantalizing coincidence". "Do you have any insight as to whether or not these are the same or unique compositions?" he asked, "Do you know of other subject matter experts who might be consulted on this particular topic?" "We appreciate any guidance you offer. We've looked far and wide for answers." Dr. Thirst replied at last, after some time, with no new information- in fact, less information. "No relationship as I can find and I'm sure that the two marches are different

and by each of them". He linked the Marengi recording, and another 2015 recording of some other unknown "Invicta", unrelated to the hunt. At this, my frustrations all boiled to a head. How could a *Dr.* have missed all that information I'd found myself, an [REDACTED] year old with no formal training in research and a *whim* to find information about a piece of music I loved? I copied the two on a polite response:

Hello,
Copying both now (sorry for the mistake earlier!)

I am absolutely certain they are the same march. Invicta is mentioned in "Musical Opinion and Music Trade Review, Volume 43"
(<https://books.google.com/books?id=zQhKAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA502&lpg=PA502&dq=%22j.+ord+hume%22+%22invicta%22&#v=onepage&q=%22j.%20ord%20hume%22%20%22invicta%22&f=false>) numerous times, all accredited to Playfair. Also mentioned in this text is that "Ian Playfair's "Invicta" March will shortly be issued on "His Master's Voice" Records, played by The Coldstreams.

The Internet Archive just so happens to have a digitization of this 78 record through their "The Great 78 project". It is the same piece that is played on The Marengi Fairground Organ.
https://archive.org/details/78_invicta-march_the-band-of-hm-coldstream-guards-playfair-lieut-r-g-evans_gbia7000127a#

I have reached out to Kevin Meayers of A. Ruth and Sohn Ltd, who worked on the organ which was recorded, and has personal interest in this piece's odd history. He has access to the original books that he has used to create his own arrangements for different fair organs. He has also confirmed that they are the same piece, and that the composers are mistaken. This is an issue that is recorded at least as far as 1967, as Ord Hume is credited for Invicta on "Marching with the Mammoth Gavioli", a Vinyl released that year in the UK. This is also the same piece (personally confirmed through purchase of the record)

The YouTube video linked of a different Invicta is truly fascinating to me, as it has added a third false Invicta to this search! In my research I found two other "Invicta March" pieces, which are not the same piece at all either. I think this is just due to the name "Invicta" having such an applicable meaning to marches, and its use therefore being widespread.

Thank you so much!

And now it is today. I've reached a dead end. I've reached the limits of my capabilities in finding information about Invicta, and I've reached my time limit to finish this essay as well. Perhaps this essay is a bit too meta, a bit too unconventional, a bit too long-winded, to truly be a research essay. I might have chosen a topic I was too passionate about to write anything concisely, but if not for that passion, who would have found this information? I asked myself a seemingly obvious question as I wrote: What do I want from the reader? Naturally to appreciate Invicta, to learn about Invicta, and a bit selfishly, to appreciate fairground organs. To follow, engaged, on a hunt for Invicta, a piece they'd almost certainly know nothing about, one *I* knew nothing about. But the hunt started to get complicated and convoluted for reasons other than Invicta having so little information to be found about it. But perhaps that is what made it so intriguing; not allure from the unknown, but the strange almost existential questions that came along with the search. That one must settle into the realization that art is impermanence, that one day someone will think of you for the last time, and one day someone will forget your favourite song for a final time, perhaps forget *your* song for a final time, and yet the all the love, the passion, surrounding it existed. It existed, and it was appreciated, and that is enough. Things come and go. Invicta very well may not have been thought of in academic or research related context for decades until now, or perhaps it has, and I'll never know. But passion is what drives not only research, but also connection. Invicta is a military march copywritten by Ian Playfair in 1920, often mistakenly attributed to James Ord Hume, and it is a piece of music that has touched people, left impact on their lives, even more than 100 years later.

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