



**A**S THE CHAMPION of SILVER, William Jennings Bryan, earned a little gold by orating on the miracle of Miami saying, "This is the only city in the world where you can tell a lie at breakfast that will come true by evening," and also conducted the world's largest outdoor Bible class on Sundays, the Florida land boom had practically reached its peak on the way to becoming a milestone in the annals of Americana. Promoters were pointing the way in a niagara of ecstatic prose to the tropical paradise they were creating in the southeast corner of the USA. The Florida boom had begun to form in 1921 and by early 1925 the pace

## A MOON OVER MIAMI

by G. W. GERHART

It was in 1922 that the Leach's joined forces with Famous Players-Lasky of New York to form Paramount Enterprises of Miami with the Leach's enjoying about a 51% majority. Publix wanted into Miami while other majors seemed to shy away, and in reviewing many situations around the country this seems to have been a Publix procedure wherein an interest was maintained while the "home folk" outwardly ran the place. Some years later Publix would own all of them outright anyway.

With the movie palaze craze sweeping the country it was only natural that a crowning achievement should now be realized by Harry Leach and Paramount Enterprises of Miami. Plans were begun through the New York group with Robert Hall and John Eberson collaborating in the construction and design. A one and a half million dollar OLYMPIA THEATRE; Miami's "ne plus ultra," sprang up at the height of the land boom in 1925. The ten story theatre and office building rose in downtown Miami on the site of the old AIRDROME theatre. This had been



Stanleigh Mallotte at the Olympia console during 1933.

was unbelievable. Everyone was encouraged to "come on down."

Ten years prior to all this real estate halocaust a gentleman by the name of Harry Leach arrived in Miami and in association with his father, a sister and brother, acquired half interest in the FOTOSHO operation. In time the Leach interests would assume full control of the FOTOSHO and be on their way, in the grand manner of the forthcoming boom, to becoming the movie entrepreneurs of Miami as several film operations were to be opened.



James Barnett Olympia house manager since 1952.

an open-air operation covered with wire netting, dome-shaped like a bird cage to hold up canvas that was rolled out in the event of rain. Originally the theatre was going to be named MIAMI, but the real estate leaseholder held out for something more "dignified" out of which came OLYMPIA.

The 2100 seat edifice turned out to be Miami's largest, naturally, and is a genuine Eberson atmospheric, being the first in the South to have controlled weather by Carrier. Without a doubt the OLYMPIA is truly an inspired setting in a city that is symbolic of the outdoors, of sunshine and climatic salubrity. Upon opening it set the pace for the entire South—the final word in theatre comfort, convenience and environment.

The auditorium was done according to John Eberson's finest specs. It could be described as an Andalusian Courtyard, Spanish style architecture with Italian influence. Design held a bold departure as each side was different rather than symmetrical. The left is a reproduction in min-

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Alys DeMuth Swords was associate organist at the Olympia when it opened in 1926.



John Steele, organist and G. W. Gerhart console weight.

ature of moorish Spanish style with turrets and towers while the right side topping a tier of canopy covered boxes, reflects Italian influence. The proscenium arch has been referred to as an entrance to a Transylvanian courtyard framing the "curtain of a thousand jewels." At the rear of the balcony arched French doors resemble the upper windows of a castle while directly above a huge arched pergola is hung with swinging lanterns. On the mezzanine floor the foyer promenade has a balustrated open well in the center with the usual statuary and paintings about the walls. One statue, located on the upper right side of the main auditorium is unique in that it claims title to "Goddess of Amusement" done in a sitting posture holding a tamborine and Florida orange.

Opening night arrived February 18, 1926. The golden hour was at hand. Advance tickets went to the public at \$5 per and then there was the usual horde of local and visiting dignitaries. Outside, the spired boxoffice of antique wood trim and silken hangings was sparkling along with the immense vertical corner sign (65x12) which shown ever so bright as Who's Who of the movie and theatre world arrived for one of Miami's showiest nights. Since February was and still is the height of Florida's tourist season they were ALL there enmasse including Adolph Zukor, Jesse Lasky, Flo Ziegfeld, Billie Burke, Arthur Hammerstein, Dorothy Dalton, Marcus Loew, Ben Lyon, Sam Katz, Sam Harris, E. F. Albee, Tom Meighan, Al Jolson, Johnny Hines, Philo McCullough, F. F. Proctor, John Hertz of Chicago and Mayor E. C. Romph plus Miami society in a body. Harry Marx, director of Publix physical operations, had brought Walter Lloyd of Chicago here to train the theatre staff of 40 on the floor.

As the audience was seated in this Venetian court beneath a deep blue sky with twinkling stars, a moon moving slowly

## the movie palaze craze and A Moon Over Miami . . .

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across the firmament with drifting billows of cloud, the curtain was withdrawn from a typically picturesque stage and two trumpeters dressed in Spanish costume appeared at each side, their bugle calls formally opening the program, leading into the overture.

The overture ended, Harry Marx acting as M. C. brought on Mayor Romph who introduced dignitaries and spoke at length of Miami as the promised land. The OLYMPIA 25 piece symphony orchestra under direction of E. Manuel Baer then got under way with the *1812 Overture* during which lighting effects fitting in well with the tone harmony were used. Following this the WURLITZER Concert Pipe Organ was featured with C. Stanleigh Mallotte playing *Verses From Brook & Wave* by Longfellow set to music with fitting scenes being shown on the screen. A very special entry followed as Baroness Lavrova Royce-Garrett, coloratura soprano, literally took the house by storm after which Paul Whiteman and orchestra made this one time only appearance. Whiteman was currently appearing at nearby Coral Gables Country Club. The indefatigable news weekly went next followed by the feature movie which rounded out a very liberal opening night program. In the boxes, orchestra and balcony soft lights from hidden windows had shed their lustre on the hundreds of faces glancing eagerly indeed from stage to interior. It was heralded as the most attractive social function of the season. Miami hasn't seen anything quite like it since.

Conditions were bound to run their course and 1926 was the year the big Florida boom burst like the proverbial bagfull of water, with the coup de grace being a very famous hurricane which sent a hotel flagpole through the OLYMPIA roof and also twisted the huge \$14,000 vertical sign into a \$50 piece of junk. All was replaced and the OLYMPIA continued to operate.

A Deluxe show policy went into effect following opening night consisting of straight screen presentation with, of course, the symphony orchestra and organ and continuing in this manner until talking pictures arrived. The OLYMPIA did not subscribe to Publix stage revues at any time. In 1929 a policy of vaudeville and screen show was adopted with the organ featured in novelty spots. The organ was to be dropped in the mid-thirties as were stage shows for a while. The years sped by with Publix assuming full control of the Leach interests in all their Miami operations. Stage-screen revues re-entered during January of 1939 with the biggest names of the entertain-

ment world gracing the OLYMPIA stage. Names like Sophie Tucker and Jackie Gleason, backed by Les Rohde's stage band, were not uncommon until October 1954 when OLYMPIA vaudeville departed this earth. It was one of the last along with New York and Chicago. The house closed three months pending negotiations for coming back as a first-run film situation which it remains to this day. Since that time there have been special road-show appearances by the likes of Elvis Presley and Julius LaRosa on the stage and once in a while a fleeting appearance by the star or stars of a premiering movie.

An extra special effort to bring back live stage frolics was made for one week in December 1964 when a Latin-American revue presented itself in colorful and sprightly array. Despite this brilliant try-out along with a second-run film the independently produced stage show resulted in financial disarray and is now a loving memory in the OLYMPIA scrapbook.

Mr. Al Weiss, veteran OLYMPIA man, has always prided his organization in having booked their own vaudeville shows, never having been part of any traveling circuit arrangement. Mr. Weiss, who was house director when the theatre opened in 1926, can be given credit for the theatre being maintained in essentially the original decor. His regional position today has allowed him a voice in opposing "modernization" of the OLYMPIA auditorium. These up-dating gestures usually indicate use of huge quantities of cloth, solid coatings of flat paint or both. In 1966 the OLYMPIA still reflects the grandiose decade from whence it came. Spot facelifting has therefore been the guideline. In the early fifties the 65 foot corner sign was removed from outside the building due to a city ordinance, the old boxoffice was modernized and the current marquee is its third. Inside, some palm branches and miscellaneous shrubbery have disappeared over the years along with the moon and clouds, but stars twinkle busily in the still deep blue sky and all around re-lamping is a regular thing. There is also popcorn in paradise.

Coming on the heels of the Publix trust-bust an organization known as FLORIDA STATE THEATRES operating former Publix interests was formed on paper with the OLYMPIA continuing as the south Florida flagship. This group is a wholly owned subsidiary of American Broadcasting Companies.

The Wurlitzer Company heralded this installation as "the grand Olympia organ —the owner's choice, our pride. America's deluxe organ for deluxe theatres." Opus #1198, a 260 (3/15), was shipped from

Both Jesse Crawford and Eddie Dunstedter are supposed to have made guest appearances at the OLYMPIA. Crawford insisted that the console be hiked up during his stay in order that everyone be able to see as well as hear. Audiences on the orchestra floor are unable to see any footwork in the normal console position.



John Steele at the console, shown with Jerry Conrad organ crew member.

North Tonowanda on November 6, 1925 to Paramount Enterprises of Miami. Charles Holchek of the New York office did the installation for Wurlitzer.

Out of more than a dozen theatre organs installed around the Miami area the **Olympia** Wurlitzer was distinguished in being the largest and most deluxe in all respects. The inclusion of piano and 32' Diaphone section was special enough, but what turned out to be slightly more unique was the installation of Main and Solo chambers stacked on the left side, console on the right. These settings are when looking from orchestra to stage. The **Capitol** in Washington, D.C. was identical but in reverse order sans piano and 32's. As in many installations elsewhere, the piano and 32' section are not under expression at the **Olympia** with the piano being behind a wall, uncovered, to the left of the proscenium and next to the main chamber, the 32's in the ceiling to the proscenium right and directly above the console.

There are some who would label this installation as a partial transgression against good organ layout as "soloing" at the **Olympia** doesn't quite reach expected heights. In many cases during the design

and building of theatres there was a definite lack of coordination between various interests, mainly building designers and organ builders. Here at the **Olympia** where much room was provided the main chamber very little was allowed the solo on top. Space is lacking for sufficient tone openings since the swells, aside from being abbreviated in height, are at floor level which is to say reservoir level. This took place due to a back slanting front wall which starts about four feet above the floor and was done due to design of the outside facade, i.e., the grill, turrets, etc. So for the sake of a proper looking minaret and grill the solo organ was "botched." Aside from seven ranks of pipes the solo room also is crammed with the toy counter and relay racks.

The **Olympia's** proximity to sea level and therefore vulnerable location discouraged the builders from incorporating the usual pit and elevators for in-front-of-stage activities. Instead, the floor was slightly depressed accommodating the symphony and a console in a stationary manner. This area has long been "seated over" but the console is quite prominent in its right side position protected by can-

vas cover and railing. There is an abbreviated type sub-basement directly under the front stage where two doors allowed musicians access to the area. A small side room contains the organ blower.

The brigade of organists here started with Stanleigh Mallotte who, along with Alys DeMuth Swords as associate, opened the organ and continued for some years with spotlighted novelties and movie accompaniment. Mallotte's wife Fern also played occasionally. A typical novelty by Mallotte might have been entitled *Au Reservoir But Not Goodbye* or *Back From The Cold North* while Mrs. Swords would *Keep Smiling*. Mallotte had been around Miami for some time as a prominent musician whereas Mrs. Swords had recently arrived from New Orleans where she appeared at the Strand and before that at the Chicago Lake Shore. Auditions were held for **Olympia** second organist at another theatre which contained next thing to a straight organ. It was here that Mrs. Swords played *Nola* and won over 26 others. The person holding the audition never had heard anything quite like it on an organ! Mrs. Swords held second position at the **Olympia** for about two years when a family addition forced resignation. After this was properly cared for she continued in substitute service at various theatres around Miami as her style was and still is much in demand. Her deft ear for modern music and appreciation of life in general have left an indelible imprint on those who are fortunate enough to know her. This graduate of the American Conservatory is today busy as ever playing Hammond and piano and instructing the young folk.

Stanleigh Mallotte stayed at the **Olympia** for several years, left and came back again. Later he played elsewhere in Miami and eventually left apparently for good. Indications are that he had a stay in Birmingham for some time.

With stage and screen shows going strong in the early thirties organ song-fests or novelties were a popular item at the **Olympia**. Mallotte, Don Miller and Roy Parks were pumping the Wurlitzer at different times. During World War II years the Dr. I. Q. radio show made a few broadcasts from the **Olympia** at which time the Wurlitzer breathed anew under control of **Clark Fiers**, staff organist for WIOD radio, the NBC affiliate. Clark was no newcomer to theatre organ, this being another story by itself. Other than these bursts the only billed appearance from the thirties to this day was for Larry Leverenz, a Philadelphian, who had a nov-

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Main chamber, (lower chamber)



Solo chamber-(upper chamber). The top of the swell frame is shown on the left.

ely along with the regular stage-screen show for exactly two weeks some time during the big war, or occasionally a member of Les Rhode's stage band would manage an impromptu stint at the console.

Organ maintenance in the early years of course belonged to the Publix staff. It was several months following the *Olympia's*

opening in 1926 that **Dan Papp** was installing a Style E in Ft. Lauderdale (for Wurlitzer) that he accompanied **Tom Brown**, a Publix serviceman, to the Miami *Olympia* for some touchup tuning after which he returned to New York to assume a 40 year stay with Publix at the Times Square Paramount.

In later years the "faithful followers" have appeared on the scene to try something in the way of organ maintenance. One such invasion left the second touch action completely removed and over the years magnets have been removed from the pizzicato relay to serve as replacements in pipe chests. Console fanciers would have seen the original black turn to gold with loss of builders plates, followed by a billious white as it stands today. Generally speaking the console is most decadent and in contrast the pipework appears to have been installed today. Preservation in the loft has been remarkable.

A few years ago a concerted effort to bring about a decent sort of rehabilitation was started by organist/technician **John Steele** along with Gerry Conrad and joined occasionally by the writer and sundry other visitors from time to time. Emphasis was placed on replacing dead magnets, releathering and general cleaning, etc. The sordid details won't be gotten into here as this is usually the crux of every organ rehabilitation article ever written. Actually a goal was at hand here since the house manager Mr. **James Barnett** had sanctioned use of the organ for public performances during the 1962 holiday season.

Work progressed on the organ at a feverish pace until Mr. Barnett was advised by his superiors that arrangements could not be made for use of the organ during public performances. Naturally, interest lagged, and now except for tuning and maintenance, very little work has been done.

Occasional private concerts are held, with Dr. Steele presiding, for those of us poor souls who need to hear the wind turned on once in a while. In any event Mr. Barnett, our manager, is certainly to be lauded as protector of the *Olympia* organ. His cooperation is always tops toward those of us who have the interest of the organ at heart. He is of the rare breed who appreciates his environment as well as the boxoffice reports.

Meanwhile, the fabulous *Olympia* is now "over 40" and the Miami moon shines intriguingly tonight as that night in 1926 when a star was born on Flagler Street.

\* \* \*

Complete specifications are available under any Wurlitzer style 260 listing.

Actual ranks will be given here.

#### MAIN CHAMBER (LOWER)

16' Boudron-flute  
16' Tuba  
16' Diaphone  
8' Violin  
8' Celeste  
8' Solo String  
8' Clarinet  
8' Vox  
Chrysoglot

#### SOLO CHAMBER (UPPER)

Brass Saxophone  
Oboe Horn  
Tibia Clausa  
Orchestral Oboe  
Quintadena  
Brass Trumpet  
Kinura  
Marimba  
Entire toy counter

Upright piano not under expression.

32' Diaphone section not under expression.

## CARTER'S BEACON THEATRE CONCERT REVIEWED IN "BILLBOARD"

Of interest to all ATOE Chapters, particularly those that have working arrangements with theatre managements for use of organs still in theatres, is a full two column review of Gaylord Carter's recent New York concert at the Beacon Theatre. The excellent writing appeared in *Billboard Magazine*, the trade journal of motion picture exhibitors. Written by Jim Watters, the article tells of the 2000 persons that attended, and told of the weeks of work that the New York Chapter of ATOE had spent on the restoration of the Wurlitzer organ. Mention in the article was also made of MC Ben M. Hall's opening comments that traced the history of the Beacon Theatre, and a complete review of the excellent program which followed.

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