

"A common attraction to the incomparable majesty of the theatre organ" inspired them.

Based on an article written for the Omaha World-Herald by staffer Fred Thomas; Photos by Pat Hall and Stanley Gross.

A VOICE from the innards of the darkened theatre called out from great distance, "Try the Chinese Gong." A great "Pooooiinnngg!!!" filled the theatre and it must have rattled Tom Harvey's ear drums because he was standing beside the huge brass disc when it let loose. But before its sustained tinnabulation had died away Harvey was back asking for more, "Now give me a trumpet fanfare!"

Two octaves of Brass Trumpet bells vibrated with the blast of a fanfare with enough majesty to serve as the introduction to an Errol Flynn movie. Down at the console, George Rice smiles, "What sturdy ear drums Tom has." And still Tom kept asking for more.

"Bass Drum . . . Horses Hooves . . . Auto Horn . . . Sleigh Bells . . . now, slug the chimes." And George did. Each effect came through loud and clear from the chamber four floors above. That part of the job was finished.

Tom Harvey descended the ladder, the only access to the chamber, and joined Dr. Walter Beaupre on the balcony. Finding their way by flashlight in the darkened house they inched toward the center of the balcony where a couple of visitors had been observing the proceedings. The two men sat down by the visitors and called out, "Play for us, George!" And



**CONSOLE UP** — The 13-rank Wurlitzer floods the 2850-seat house with music at a perfect volume level, so no additions are anticipated. It's the last of 20 large theatre organs which once entertained Omahans.

George obliged with a medley of vintage oldies, *Linger Awhile*, *Shanty Town*, *on Harvest Moon* and *War March of the Priests*, to which he added a jazzy ending.

"Sometimes we get so carried away with the music we don't get much work done" said Tom Harvey, his ears still ringing with the echoes of crash cymbals and bleating trumpets.

These Omahans, prowling around in the darkened Orpheum theatre, are deeply in-

## THE PIPES ARE PLAYING AGAIN IN OMAHA

volved in a labor of love which has already absorbed more than 1800 hours of their time and an undetermined amount of money. They have restored the Orpheum's long-neglected organ, the last of the great Wurlitzers in a city which once boasted twenty large theatre organs plus a number of smaller ones in the 36 houses in operation there forty years ago. This is the last playing instrument and that didn't come about easily.

The small group of thus far unorganized enthusiasts centers around George Rice, a bio-chemist by day and organ loft prowler by night. Walter Beaupre is a professor at the University of Omaha while Tom Harvey teaches instrumental music in the public schools.

Another "regular" is Don Olson, a sanitary engineer. Curtis Cox, a computer programmer at the University of Omaha, rounds out the unlikely crew which is joined together by love for the theatre organ.

It started several years ago when George Rice first moved to Omaha. Long a theatre organ devotee, he looked around for an instrument to play and was appalled at what he found. Organs were rare and those remaining were in poor shape. The 2850-seat Orpheum's Wurlitzer seemed like the most promising. It's a style 235 special with 13 ranks of pipes, including a prized Brass Trumpet. It's a 3-chamber installation with upper and

*(Continued on next page)*

**SQUAWKERS.** Tom Harvey is assigned the trying task of tuning the Kinura pipes, which seem a little self-conscious in the presence of the Majestic Brass Trumpet on the next rack.



## THE PIPES ARE PLAYING AGAIN IN OMAHA, continued

**GEORGE PLAYS FOR HIS CREW**—While George plays pretty ditties, his fascinated crewmen look on. These men (plus some not shown) have invested 1800 hours among them during the past four years in bringing the style 235 Special Wurlitzer back to top playing condition.



Left to right, they are Donald E. Olson, Dr. Walter Beaupre, Thomas Harvey and Curtis Cox.

lower Solo chambers on the left side of the Proscenium and a Main on the right side. The upper Solo chamber contains the Kinura, Trumpet and Oboe; the lower Solo houses the Tibia Clausa and Tuba. Starting alone, George soon started to attract helpers. One was Stanley Gross



**TINKLERS!** George Rice adjusts a Glockenspiel hammer. Above are the Tuned Sleighbells.

who did a beautiful job of rebuilding the console. Many layers of paint were removed and the surfaces finished in a gleaming polished mahogany. But refinishing was only a small part of the job—releathering, refelting, all stop key contacts replaced, all pedalboard contacts replaced plus a number of contacts on the manuals. And the combination action was rewired.

Missing parts were borrowed from other organs, ones beyond repair. The group found theatre owners sympathetic to the project of having at least one good playing theatre instrument in Omaha. They donated parts.

The amount of work was "somewhat staggering," as Curtis Cox puts it. With more than 1,065 pipes to check, work which couldn't be accomplished in the chambers had to be lowered in a bucket and later hauled back up again to be re-installed. The four stories which separate console and chamber caused many an aching muscle as the pipes, traps and pneumatics made the round trip. And paint, leather and felt (all supplied by the group) had to be moved up, too. But patience won out. The group became used to working during odd hours when the house wasn't in use, the often all-night sessions playing havoc with day-time work schedules.



**NO IMPEDIMENT**—What appear to be heavy drapes over the stacked Solo chambers are actually "fish net thin" curtains, just heavy enough to conceal the swell shutters. Similar concealment is provided for one-chamber Main at the other end of the balcony.

Then, when success seemed within grasp—disaster! An organ's worst enemy, next to fire, is water. There was a flood backstage and while wiring suffered (cutting off all power to the chambers),



**HE STARTED YOUNG**—By the time he was 13, David Rice knew about such organ paraphernalia as bottom boards, pneumatics and magnets, having caught the "bug" from his dad. Here he inspects the Orpheum Tuba pipes.

the organ console was spared. The damage has since been repaired.

Within the past year, great strides have been made toward "polishing" the treasure. The chambers have been cleaned and painted. All pipes have been cleaned. The console lift has been rewired and on the console proper, the second touch action has been adjusted, toe studs connected and push buttons tied in. So now that everything works "all we have to do is to use it," says Rice.

The group, which is considering the formation of an ATOE chapter, has noted the efforts of ATOE to make the theatre organ come alive throughout the country. They would like to try a silent movie show, with a "singalong" session played by a famous organist whom they would "import." That's for the future. Meanwhile, the group is happy to sit around the console and call out requests to George Rice, who seems to know all the tunes asked for. But if things should get dull, there's a 3-19 Kimball in storage which might fit the denuded chambers of the Omaha theatre down the street. Now—let's see! . . .



READY FOR A BLAST!—The prize Brass Trumpet gets a check by George Rice. The rank in the foreground is the Oboe.



## CHILEAN TO PANAMA HILTON

Panama City After shopping extensively (including in the USA), Charles Aron, General Manager of the El Panama Hilton Hotel, announced on March 17 that Bill Coffman's successor at the 3-27 Wurlitzer in the "El Bombarde" room will be Pepe Bustamente of Santiago, Chile.



The BOMBARDE reviews organ recordings for official ATOE publications. Manufacturers, distributors or individuals sponsoring or merchandising theatre pipe organ records are encouraged to send copies (Monaural, if possible) to the BOMBARDE, Box 5013, Bendix Station, N. Hollywood, Calif. 91605. Be sure to include purchasing information, if applicable.

Frank Olsen at the Hilsdon Theatre pipe organ, Picture House, Paisley, Scotland, Concert Recording CR-0011; regular release of the Organ of the Month Club, \$4.50 postpaid ("Stereoflex" only). Also available on 7½ ips tape at \$7.50. Order from Concert Recording, Box 531, Lynwood, Calif.

This 3-10 instrument, survivor of two unit theatre organs made by Hilsdon, is an original installation which opened with the Picture House in 1930. It was used until 1954 and has been maintained ever since. The tone is somewhat strident, lacking the lushness usually associated with theatre instruments, but the originality and ingenuity of the artist more than offsets any reservations we may have regarding the seeming emphasis on higher-middle frequencies.

Mr. Olsen offers 16 selections, most with novel arrangements. There's a lot going on during *Moon River* in the accompaniment while an intriguing combination carries the melody, solo style. *Dream* gets lots of assist from the Marimba-Xylophone which accents the accompaniment while the second chorus offers a "whistling" counter theme.

The first chorus of *Autumn Leaves* features a mellow reed solo combination plus the "4-to-the-bar" pedal beat which Olsen favors for rhythm tunes. *Solitude* makes good use of the Tuba Clarion both as a melody carrier and as a vehicle for melodic variations. The intro to *Edelweiss* is "big cathedral" while the reedy Vox gets a workout later. The rarely heard *Wedding Processional* by Richard Rodgers gets dignified treatment by this often churchy instrument but its just as much at home playing *When You Wore a Tulip*.

*Never on Sunday* gets a lively playing with a conversation between strings and

brass. There are several additional less familiar tunes, plus the Olsen treatment of the old Scotch tune which he has re-labelled *Tripping Through the Rye*—which it does in jazz tempo. All are a delight from the arrangement viewpoint. The instrument is different; well worth adding to the collection.

The jacket offers notes on the instrument and artist as well as photos of both.

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101 Plus Strings - T. Mortier (Antwerp), 101 Key Dance Organ (played mechanically). Available on "Stereoflex" disc only. Concert Recording CR-0012. Released by Organ of the Month Club. Purchasing information same as for previous record reviewed.

Here is a recording which reproduces faithfully the music of the biggest hurdy-gurdy we've ever seen (18½ feet tall, 26 feet wide, and presumably loaded with pipes and traps). Now reposing in an English museum, it once supplied dance music at European fairs and carnivals.

A mechanical organ is comparable to a computer in that it may be programmed via perforated tape to obtain the desired result. The program offered here ranges from Strauss to sambas; the waltzes it performs well but it seems rather uncomfortable when the tape specifies "boogie." Yet, it all comes through (mostly in one key) and sustains enough interest to fill both sides of this LP without becoming tedious. If there's one sound which stands out, it's a set of stopped pipes which produce a "whooping" effect, something of a burlesque of the Tibia sound. It's overblown and "chop-trem'd," yet it adds a certain contrast when played against a mass of unrefined pipework ("strings" and open "flutes" plus a lot of percussions which are never too loud).

Among the selections (18, in all!) are *Jezebel*, *Papa loves Mabo*, *Perez Prado's Patricia*, *Botch-a-Me*, *Persian Market*, *Skater's Waltz*, a samba medley, a swing medley and others. This one is for a special audience and is a gem of its kind. Not for all organ enthusiasts but for those who enjoy the old-fashioned "corn" associated with long ago country fairs. There's nostalgia here—and whoever gets the brassing gets a free ride!

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First Annual Christmas and Pop Concert, Jim Orcutt at the 3-10 Robert Morton theatre organ in the Cathedral of the Christian Crusade, Tulsa, Oklahoma. On one 7½ ips stereo tape, \$5.00 postpaid from Jim Orcutt, Box 145, Coweta, Oklahoma, 44429.

This is the first recording made on the recently installed Morton theatre organ in the Tulsa church (Lorin Whitney was instrumental in the project). It was made during a public concert played by the

(Continued on Page 40)