

*While engaging in research relative to the Theatre Organ course which was established by the Eastman School of Music in the 1920's, Rochester ATOE member Lloyd E. Klos came across a very interesting textbook. This book, one of the few in existence, was written about 1926 by an Englishman, George Tootell, the first British Cinema Organist. Through the generous cooperation of Dr. Ruth Watanabe, Librarian of the Eastman School of Music's Sibley Music Library, Mr. Klos has been able to extract portions of the book, and thereby make them available to Theatre Organ readers. It is hoped that much of the material will be of benefit both educationally and entertainingly to ATOE members.*

PART TWO

## HOW TO PLAY THE CINEMA ORGAN

A Practical Book by a Practical Player  
by GEORGE TOOTELL

Doctor of Music, University of Durham, Fellow of the Royal College of Organists, Solo organist of the Stoll Picture Theatre, London; The Palace, Accrington; The Coliseum, Glasgow; The Picture House, Douglas (Isle of Man); The West End Cinema, Birmingham; etc.

**What Cinema Audiences Want.** Though the cinema is essentially a business proposition, being purely entertainment, it affords very great artistic possibilities which appealed to me from the first, and eventually induced me to give myself up wholly to a cinema career. In the course of that career, I have enjoyed many and varied experiences, having played to all types of audiences, from one consisting entirely of iron workers to a private demonstration before Royalty; and in cinemas in industrial districts, seaside and holiday resorts, and the West End of London. My experiences in provincial centers especially have brought me closely in touch with various sections of the public and with many varied types of audience, and from these experiences I can very definitely answer the perennial question, "What does the public want?" Cinema audiences want the best they can get; whether they always get it or not is another question, but they expect it, and they appreciate it when they do get it. The public taste for music is surprisingly high in many provincial tenters, and cinema audiences have become keenly discriminating. I have not, in any provincial center which I have visited, heard worse organ playing than I have heard in London cinemas where I have heard performances which were indescribably bad. The worst performance I have heard on a cinema organ was in a London West End cinema; and the best performance (on an inadequate organ) was at Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Studying the psychology of audiences, and the prevailing musical taste in various districts, is an interesting and amusing experience, and is also highly instructive. To the solo player in the cinema, it is a necessary procedure, and one which I have invariably followed with some surprising and amusing re-

sults. Among requests for the performance of certain compositions, I have received: From an engineer-mechanic, Bach's "Toccatina in F Major;" from a police constable, selection from Verdi's "Aida;" from a coal heaver, Beethoven's 5th Symphony; from a bus conductor, The Andante from Tschaiakowsky's Fifth Symphony; from an elderly lady, The Hallelujah Chorus; and from a doctor, "The Sheik" Fox Trot.

I have enjoyed the unusual experience of accompanying the whole of a long feature film with the organ console in absolute darkness, having to feel for my stops which I was unable to see.

In a Welsh town, I have witnessed the presentation of a 5-part film, in which the whole of the second part was run backwards, and the first half of the third part upside down.

I have accompanied a film when the third part was shown before the second part, and no one appeared to be any the wiser! And I have accompanied a 7-part feature film for six consecutive performances, during the second of which Part 2 was omitted; in the third performance Part 4, and in the fifth performance Part 3 was omitted, in each case quite unexpectedly. These few cases will illustrate how variety may be unexpectedly introduced into the cinema organist's work. Happily they are the rare exception rather than the rule.

**Organ's Popularity With Cinema Audiences.** Is the organ popular with cinema audiences? Undoubtedly, when properly treated. My own experience has shown me very conclusively that the right type of organ, in the hands of an expert player, is a most popular attraction in any cinema which possesses such an instrument.

It is all-important that British organ builders should realize the fact that the organ required for the cinema is a distinct type of instrument, especially designed for a special purpose. So long as builders erect the "legitimate" type of organ in the cinemas, so long will they produce failures. This special type of instrument illustrated in the Jardine, Compton and the Wurlitzer organ, demands a specialized player. At the present time, our principal teaching institutions make no provision in their curricula for the special training which is absolutely necessary for the cinema organist; and the student who has finished his usual course, and who desires to secure a cinema appointment, is left to his own devices—with disastrous results. There is a demand for first-rate cinema organists which cannot be supplied, simply because organists who are otherwise excellent players are unprepared for the specialized work required, and are utterly lost when they attempt cinema work. At the present time, there are not half a dozen cinema organists of outstanding ability in all Great Britain, while there is a large number of those who are either mediocre or frankly incompetent.

**Specialized Player Required.** The cinema requires a specialized type of player who must not only be a first-rate performer, but a very able musician. His work possesses unique features which are not encountered in any other branch of the profession; it is in those unique features that he must specialize, and through them that he can legitimately claim consideration as an unique and independent artist. This fact has not received due attention on account of the scarcity of first-rate performers, and the shortsightedness of our teaching institutions in not providing for the need.

I have frequently been described as "the pioneer in this country for this new branch of musical art;" I was certainly the first British organist to play a genuine cinema organ, and have undertaken the responsible task of writing this book with one single purpose before me—that of providing material assistance both to those who intend to follow the career of a cinema organist, and to those who already hold positions as cinema organists, especially in a solo capacity.

This is a practical treatise by a practical player who has for many years devoted his whole attention to cinema music and the cinema organ. I have no doubt that some of the advice given will cause discussion; be that as it may, nothing is recommended or advised which has not successfully stood the practical test, and which is not based

upon my own methods successfully carried out through many years of practical experience as a solo player in the cinema. The cinema has no use for theories which cannot be turned to practical use.

I earnestly hope that the following will provide a useful and practical guide to all who are interested in the cinema organ and organist.

### PLAYING WITH THE ORCHESTRA

**Touch.** The first point to consider is the touch. The notes should be pressed down with a swift and firm finger touch, to ensure promptitude in speech from the pipes and the release of the note is a most important matter. A note will sound as long as the finger remains upon it, and until actually released; a note which remains depressed for even the slightest fraction of an inch will sound; in some organs the touch is so light that dropping a short piece of ordinary pencil upon a key will cause a pipe to sound. Let the player, therefore, distinguish between a swift and firm pressure of the finger, and a blow of the finger, avoiding the latter. Upon release of the note, raise the finger clear of the key to ensure "clean" playing. This principle of touch applies to both slow and rapid legato playing; staccato should be wrist-staccato as in pianoforte playing; not so much a bounce off the keys as a rapid release by quick raising of the hand, the note being allowed to speak properly. Arm movements such as in pianoforte playing, are quite unnecessary, and have no effect whatever upon organ touch.

**Pedal Touch.** In pedaling, the notes should be played from the ankle, the toe and heel of either foot being used. In legato playing, the player is recommended to use the toe and heel of the same foot alternately, for consecutive notes, as much as possible; this obviously cannot be done in playing notes which are more than a third apart. The more flexible the ankle, the greater facility in pedaling; any up and down leg movement should be avoided as much as possible, even staccato touch being from the ankle. A modern pedal action is not heavy, and the player is recommended to cultivate a light touch which is advantageous from all points of view. One sees so many players who appear to kick at the pedals; forcibly attach the manuals (especially in chord playing) in a merciless manner which, one would think, would smash the hammers of a piano; and handle the stops like punch-balls, while gyrating on the organ seat in a most extraordinary fashion; all of which is not only unnecessary, but extremely silly.

No musical instrument can be so merciful or so merciless to the player



ATOE member Bill Werner pauses for a picture while the console of his 3/15 Wurlitzer is steadied by an unidentified assistant. The organ came from the Century Theater, Chicago. Photo by ATOE member John McCarthy.

### CATOE MEMBERS HELP MOVE TWO CONSOLES

With ATOE member Bill Werner at the controls, Larry Coleman, Barney King and Sam Holte (l to r) get ready to load Larry's 3/8 Kimball console. The Kimball is from the Catlow Theater, Barrington, Ill. Photo by ATOE member John McCarthy.



as the organ; it will readily and generously display the technical ability and musicianship of the player, but on the other hand, it will mercilessly and glaringly expose incompetence and ignorance. Treat your organ kindly and with intelligence, and it will readily respond; but treat it unkindly, and it will take a merciless revenge.

**Purpose of Organ in Orchestra.** The organ will be found in most cinema or-

chestras which do not include the full complement of wind instruments; and its purpose is to give body to the combination, and to supply in some measure the lack of wind players. The greater part of the music to be played upon the organ will therefore be of a sustained character necessitating a legato style of playing.

*(Continued on next page)*

## HOW TO PLAY THE CINEMA ORGAN

(Continued from Page 9)

**Legato Touch.** The true organ legato touch comprises a gliding movement from key to key, for it must be remembered that a stop will sound at its full strength of tone so long as the finger remains on the key. If, therefore, a key is released before another is depressed, we shall have a short interval of silence; but, on the other hand, if a key is not cleanly released before another is depressed, for a minute period both will sound simultaneously. The player must therefore avoid, on the one hand, detached or scrappy playing, and on the other, muddy and indistinct effect. To obtain the true organ legato touch, the player must liberally employ the practice of substitution of fingers on notes already depressed, thus being enabled while still holding one chord, to proceed without break and with clearness to the next. This system of substitution of fingers does not affect what has previously been said of touch—firm finger pressure and clean release of notes.

**Organ Music Parts.** Practically all music specially composed or arranged for cinema purposes will include in the orchestra sets, a part for the organ which always appears as a harmonium copy—printed on two staves like piano music; organ music proper being printed on three staves. The organist is supplied with a “harmonium” or “piano-conductor” copy, and we will, first of all, consider the former. The part will consist mainly of sustaining notes and chords, arranged from the wind parts in the score with important solo cues, if the part is adequately arranged.

**Solo Cues.** In the absence of the orchestral wind instrument, all solo passages  
(Continued on Page 14)



**ANOTHER POET OF THE ORGAN?** This little fellow's pose reminds us of that famous shot of Jesse Crawford at the New York Paramount studio organ, taken years ago. The organ pictured is the 3/11 Kim-Wur-Mo-Link in Gil White's house in Derwood, Md. The little boy is Doug White, Gil's grandson.



## Last Minute Convention Notes!!

**MAKE RESERVATIONS NOW!!**

**WE MUST GIVE A GUARANTEE BY JUNE 30TH.**

Above is a picture of the ballroom at Cobo Hall where our banquet will be held. The room is bounded on 2 sides with glass—a tremendous view of the Detroit River with freighters and pleasure boats going by and also the Canadian Shores. We want everyone at the convention to attend the banquet. The room can seat at least 3000 so there will be plenty of room for all. We have been assured of good service and hot food. Due to the Michigan liquor laws, only beer and wine may be served on Sunday and we will have 2 bars set up for our 'social hour'. A short program of entertainment has been planned for the banquet and we should all have a wonderful time. Please—even if you don't send your money in now, make your banquet reservation!!!!!!

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There have been some last minute changes in the recording arrangements for the convention. The Board of Directors at the Detroit Theater Organ Club has given permission for one representative from each chapter to record *during* the concerts at the Senate Theater. Only the recording facilities of the club may be used. Each recorder must be equipped with 1/4" phone plug for each channel to be used. The club has 2 Neumann condenser mikes feeding a stereophonic or monoral distribution system accommodating the telephone jacks. No individual mikes will be allowed. This only applies to the Detroit Theatre Organ Club . . . At all of the other activities—as the Fox, Redford Theatre, Arcadia Skating Rink and Fort Street Presbyterian Church, the Motor City Chapter will make a master tape to be copied for each chapter. Any chapter representative desiring a copy of any of these concerts for their chapter, please mail or bring the blank tape for each concert with a self addressed mailer so as soon as these tapes are copied, they can be mailed. Each chapter representative getting a copy of any one of the tapes of any concert at the convention will be required to sign a waiver for their chapter that the tapes will not be used for any commercial purpose.

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Letters have gone out to each chapter chairman inviting one representative to play at the various jam sessions. If you have not already sent in the name, please do so immediately so a schedule can be set up for this activity.

\* \* \*

There will be 14 home installations available during convention time for those who are interested. A schedule will be furnished with your convention packet.

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The Chapter is requesting that no pictures be taken while an artist is playing. Before or after a number or a concert will be more considerate. There will be containers placed at each site for flash bulbs, etc.

## HOW TO PLAY THE CINEMA ORGAN, cont.

(Continued from Page 10)

**Keeping to the Printed Notes.** I impress upon the student the importance of playing only the printed notes, without any impromptu additions or indiscriminate filling in. Organ parts are usually adequately arranged and with consideration for the character of the piece; it is true that one finds parts which are badly arranged, but such cases are comparatively rare. The player who is not familiar with the piece, or who has not an adequate knowledge of harmony, will be well advised to keep strictly to the printed notes. Unless any particular tone is denoted in the part, the organist should use tops of diapason tone (which is the organ tone most nearly allied to the horns of the orchestra), or string tone, with the addition, as required for volume, of flute-toned stops, avoiding reed stops except in forte passages, or passages which are required to be played with such tone according to the cues given. Organ reed tone will not blend well with any wind instruments in the orchestra.

**The Pedals.** This brings us to consideration of the pedals, and many organists are intrigued, when playing from the harmonium copy, as to when to use, or avoid using the pedals. As the pedals (16 ft. stops) correspond to the double basses of the orchestra, they obviously will sound the lowest notes of the harmony, but in innumerable cases the lowest printed note in the harmonium part is not the lowest note (or actual bass) of the harmony. If, therefore, such a note is played upon the pedals, we have the effect of double basses "divisi"—two different double bass notes sounding simultaneously (one from the organ and one from the orchestra); an appalling effect in soft music which is unfortunately heard only too frequently through the thoughtless act of the organist. Without a thorough knowledge of the composition, or an adequate knowledge of harmony, the player should never pedal the bass unless such bass is obviously the lowest part. No safe or universal rule can be laid down as to ascertaining (from the printed copy) what the actual bass is. Low chords will not be written for organ unless for some special dramatic effect such as may be contrived in certain incidental pieces. The only way to ensure absolute certainty in an unfamiliar piece is to compare the double bass part of the piano-conductor copy with the organ part. In many organ parts of modern publications the desired pitch will be indicated thus: "16 ft." denotes the use of the pedals, and "8 ft. only" no pedals are to be used.

**Piano-Conductor Copies.** It is desirable from all points of view that the organist when playing the organ should play from a piano-conductor copy, in which everything is fully shown and he cannot stray from the patch; from such a copy he can be certain of his pedal bass and of all cues.

**Rhythmic Pedaling.** One other point in pedaling—remember to take into consideration the character of the piece, and do not make it the invariable practice to crawl about the pedals, sustaining notes here and there. Here again, think orchestrally; the double basses are not always holding long notes, so why should you? Your pedals are your double basses; let them act as such. Therefore, in a light intermezzo dance number, march, or similar piece of a light nature, obtain by a mezzo-staccato touch the zip of the double bass, ensuring rhythmic playing with a definite pulse in it. A moment's thought and consideration of the type of music to be played will enable the average player to determine upon either detached or sustained pedaling.

The student is reminded that there are notes on the pedalboard above Middle D; many players appear to forget this, and confine their pedal bass to the notes below middle D, playing with the left foot only. This again frequently produces an effect of double basses playing in octaves, the orchestral double basses playing one note and the organist the octave below.

**Pedals and Manuals Together.** It is important to play the pedal note with the chord to which it belongs, a common fault being that of anticipating a chord with the pedal bass, just as second-rate pianists cultivate the habit (in chord playing) of playing the left hand before the right. Finally, the student is recommended to acquire the habit of looking ahead, and not confining his attention to the particular bar or chord which he is playing. Be prepared for what is to come; there is no time to spare for thinking out stop combinations and effects when you have arrived at the passage, and you can hardly expect the orchestra to wait for you. The eye and brain must anticipate what the hands have to effect.

**Hints.** To sum up —

1. Acquaint yourself thoroughly with the tone quality and power of each stop in the organ.
2. Play cleanly, and with an absolutely strict attention to note values printed.
3. Do not add to the printed notes.
4. Think orchestrally.
5. Add no pedal bass unless the pedals are directed to be used, or you know the piece accurately and are quite certain as to the bass.

6. You may, possibly, be the most important member of the orchestra, but there is no need for you to announce that fact by trying to obliterate the other players. Your presence will be sufficiently felt if you keep due and correct proportion.

sages should be played by the organist (not by the violinist) on the corresponding type of stop, which though it may not provide the actual tone color, very frequently approximates closely to it; thus the orchestral oboe in the organ is often a very close imitation of the actual oboe in the orchestra.

**"Doubling" The Melody.** Great care must be exercised in playing solo passages to avoid doubling the solo melody, at the octave above or below, by the use of an octave coupler, or addition of a 16 ft. stop. The effect of a solo passage played with an octave coupler or 16 ft. stop added produces a topsy-turvy effect in the bass. Of course, if the whole passage is played on one manual, every note will be duplicated at the octave below.

**Unsuitable Stops.** Avoid the frequent use of 4 ft. and 2 ft. stops, remembering that these sound an octave, or two octaves above the touched notes; soft 4 ft. flue stops can be used upon occasion with charming effect, but the use of 2 ft. stops for sustaining chords in music of a quiet character is often distressing in effect. Such stops should be utilized for adding brightness or brilliance. The 16 ft. manual stops should never be used (unless denoted in the copy), excepting in music of a very loud and heavy character, when great volume and body is required; or for some special dramatic effect demanded by the musical director. To sum up these points, the player must think orchestrally, and consider the organ as an instrument which comprises a set of orchestral instruments, from which he derives orchestral effects. If he will think in this way, it will not occur to his mind to produce the effect of four piccolos holding a chord, or (with 16 ft. flue stops) the effect of a quartet of double-basses sustaining four-part harmony.

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