



Orpheum marquee looking South on 16th Street. The O.U. students who picked up their tickets earlier are moving into the theater. The line south (not shown) extends half way around the next block.—Photo by Irving Heinz

UNIVERSITY OF OMAHA PREMIERE'S PIPES and THE "REEL" MCCOY

BY DR. WALTER BEAUPRE

THE PAUL NEWMAN fans leaving the last show on Saturday night stared owl-eyed at the wall of humanity facing them in the Orpheum lobby. Furthermore this wall of humanity stretched half way around the city block. What the *Hombre* fans didn't realize was that the theatre marquee had been changed while they were inside seeing the western. The marquee now read "University of Omaha presents Bill McCoy at the Mighty Theatre Organ in MIDNIGHT SLAPSTICK." It only took seven minutes to clear out the "hombres" and seat the waiting "afficionados"—some of whom had driven three hundred miles or more to witness the debut of the Orpheum's rehabilitated Wurlitzer 235 Special.

How the April 29th "blast" came about is one of those miracles of cooperation and good will. Omaha University Dean Elizabeth Hill and Director of Student Activities Fred Ray were actually sold on such a concert before the students knew the organ existed. When Ed Workman, Bob Miller, and the rest of the Concerts and Lectures Committee heard the Wurlitzer, they picked up the idea with gusto and slashed through the mountains of red tape. Byrl Richards of the Thomas Organ Company graciously consented to release his staff organist, Bill McCoy, for the event. Organist McCoy was the first choice of the Committee for three good reasons: (1) Bill is

not only one of the best in the business; (2) he is a native Omahan who had attended the University for one year; and (3) Bill has solid following of loyal fans in the Omaha-Lincoln area.

Once the plans had taken shape the ATOE triumverate of George Rice, Stan Gross, and Murray George worked night and day to put the finishing touches on the organ. Any part that even hinted of a potential cypher was torn down and rebuilt. Their perfectionism was not in vain: the 3 manual, 13 rank Wurlitzer was flawless.



Bill McCoy asks for requests—and gets them. The regular Howard seat was removed for the concert and a conventional organ bench substituted because Bill had to see the movie screen. He is holding a hand microphone. The paper on the music rack is McCoy's version of the movie cue sheet.—Photo by Irving Heinz

Bill McCoy flew into town a day before the program to work out cues, lighting changes, and to view the silent film selected. Bill spent the wee hours re-acquainting himself with the organ he had played fifteen years before.

MIDNIGHT SLAPSTICK

Omahans ordinarily don't stay up that late for anybody, so Bill McCoy wisely served up a musical steak-and-potatoes menu complete with one or two beautifully roasted chestnuts. *No Business Like Show Business* got him out of the kitchen. Once the lift had taken him to concert level he quickly poured the white wine of the tibias and strings into *Shadow of Your Smile*. He let his half chorus tango treatment bubble happily for a while and then brought in *Just One of Those Things* on a sizzling platter.

Then came a generous helping of *Sound of Music*. Bill's skillful bridges between each of the seven cameos were exquisite jolts of fresh pleasure. Mr. McCoy proved himself the master of surprise-within-the-expected. We anticipated that *Climb Every Mountain* would cap the medley, but we didn't expect a lovely violin solo to intervene, nor the building excitement of key change upon key change. A second full helping of Richard Rogers was equally charming. Bill featured the tremmed Oboe in *Isn't It Romantic?* followed by *Surrey* complete with fringe and clip-clops, *My Romance*

and vox with glock accents, *Oklahoma!* with everything. *My Funny Valentine* was laced with those intensely personal introspective harmonic patterns which, in this reviewer's opinion, are the hallmarks of Bill McCoy's greatness. There isn't a "square" chord in his entire nervous system. He closed the medley with *You'll Never Walk Alone*, and by this time the "Bravo's!" in the audience were completely uninhibited.

Next Bill satisfied the virtuoso addicts with two furiously driving Latin numbers. Fresh goodies from the contemporary scene were on the way. *Yesterday* was treated as a church offertory—from Bach to French modern, a delightful spoof. Bill featured the golden trumpet in a smash arrangement of *What Now My Love* followed by *Java* with gut-bucket finish. Then *Downtown* in what may best be described as early 20th century British style.

McCoy in 3/4 time rounded out the first half of the concert. *Around the*



Taken from stage right during the concert. The Orpheum seats 2850 people in the orchestra, loges, and huge balcony (not shown). Most of the buggs headed for the front rows of the balcony—where the decibels play!—Photos by Irving Heinz

World ping-ponged back and forth from the main chamber to the solo chamber in grand style. This was topped by another of Bill's incomparable "happenings" at the organ. When he feels comfortable and allows himself to think and feel with that marvelously complex psyche of his, the result is a few moments of exquisite improvisation. *The Boy Next Door* was not an arrangement but a rare moment of musical truth, intimate, close, and personal.

The second half of MIDNIGHT SLAPSTICK began with a 2-reel silent *The Four Orphans* starring Charlie Murray, Raymond McKee, and Mary Anders cued of course by Bill McCoy. The 1922 gem—one of the few uncut and unedited silents—smashed the audience with its clever titles, sight gags, and ancient decor. It also proved the perfect vehicle for Bill's debut as flick interpreter. The Mighty Wurlitzer danced with the apaches, cried with the wit-

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MID-AMERICA STORY, cont.



Foley at the console of the Miller Theatre Wurlitzer, Style 235.

present for the concert including Don Story of Phoenix, Arizona, who was the farthest from home; while others came from Springfield, Missouri; Kansas City, Missouri; Miami, Oklahoma; and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Daylight savings time and a post-concert party managed to cause many of the chapter to get little sleep. Also the need of being up and at Bob Foley's house at 10:00 a.m. for the groundbreaking of the large new studio room to house the 4/22 Morton-Wurlitzer caused others to lose more sleep. Representatives from three A.T.O.E. groups manned shovels to turn the first dirt. Dr. Robert Fray, secretary of the Heart of America Chapter, Kansas City, Missouri; Mrs. Oneta Puckette, representing ATOE'ers from Miami, Oklahoma area; and Bob Foley, Chairman of the

Mid-America Chapter. A good time was had with a jam session on the 3/5 Morton-Wurlitzer.

Final activity of the week was a trip to the Miller Theatre for the regular Sunday morning session. Members and guests alike were well entertained by Bob Foley, Don Story, Oneta Puckette, and Victor Rork.

A Neighborhood Tale, cont.

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This type of conversion is not unusual around the U. S., but in Chicago this was the first time the public had been exposed to theatre organ in a long time. This first public CATOE concert was important for two reasons: the overwhelming public response necessitated returning Pearl to the Barton console on May 18, and secondly, the powers-that-be in theatre management circles were forced to sit up and take notice at the response to live theatre organ. It is now known the public relations man for Brodman and Sherman theatres was aware of the show, and more important, the Balaban and Katz chain knew of it too. In speaking with a B & K executive relating to other matters shortly after CATOE's first success, it was stated B & K "had spotters out" for the show. In response to a question about resuscitating organ activities (notably at their Chicago Theatre) at B & K, the reply was "This is the first time it has been done and we'll have to wait and see what happens if it happens again." Thus where the official silence at B & K about their organs had been as solid as a stone wall, the wall seems to have been cracked. It would seem that nothing succeeds like success.

University of Omaha, cont.

(Continued from Page 18)

nesses, underscored all prat-falls, and raced with dogs, pussycats, heroes and villains. There wasn't a rough edge or a dead spot in the entire twenty minutes of music and effects. Anything after this *tour de force* couldn't have been other than an anticlimax. So Bill obliged with some oldies, played a few requests and said good-night with *San Francisco*—the one with "little cable cars." Spontaneously the entire house rose to its feet for a standing ovation. Bill finally got away by playing *76 Trombones*. Only then did the happy fans head homeward to turn their clocks forward—thus losing still another hour's sleep.

Aside from being an artistic triumph for Bill McCoy—which it was!—the concert has brought about an immediate renaissance of interest in theatre pipe organ music in eastern Nebraska. "Please do it again, soon." say the press, the fans, and those who missed the concert, but now wish they hadn't. And who knows, they might just do that in Omaha.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING— DETROIT, MICHIGAN

9:00 A.M. SATURDAY,

JULY 1, 1967

Meeting opened by President Schrum with welcome and introductions. In attendance were 7 of 8 regular Board members, with Chapter Chairmen and representatives bringing the total to 19.

Briefly, the results are as follows:

Financial report for the period Jan. 1 through June 30, 1967.

Received:	\$20,196.34
Received:	\$20,196.34
Disbursed:	12,749.60
Bal. on hand:	8,042.99

The Board strongly suggests that all chapters take steps to incorporate and obtain liability insurance.

The National insurance policy will be changed to a general liability policy effective immediately.

The Board gave full support to a program of streamlining and standardizing the National structure, aimed at eliminating confusion and unnecessary bookwork, and to improve communication. Details will be in a letter to Chapter officers.

An increase of \$1 was unanimously passed, raising National dues to \$7 annually, beginning Jan. 1, 1968. This was deemed necessary due to increased business and printing costs over the last three years.

A roster was deemed unfeasible at this time due to the cost, and because it is so soon out of date due to constant movement of the members. An alternative solution is being studied.

A new policy regarding selection of future convention sites and dates was adopted. Bids will be called for each spring, and the site and dates will be de-

termined on at the Annual Board of Directors Meeting during the convention. The announcement will be made at the Annual Membership Meeting and Banquet, and subsequently published in the official publication, *Theatre Organ Bombarde*.

It was announced that Bill Peterson is retiring from the post of Publications Director after the August issue of *Theatre Organ Bombarde*. Tom Kaasa, Seattle Wash., has agreed to accept the post. The editorial staff will remain the same, with George Thompson and W. Stuart Green as editors, with the addition of Lloyd W. Klos as contributing editor. Vi Thompson will continue as Circulation Director. A word of thanks was given Bill for his fine accomplishments in the past year.

National elections were held, with the following results:

President

Richard H. Schrum, Seattle Wn.

Vice President

Richard F. Kline Jr., Frederick Md.

National Sec'y

Marilyn A. Schrum, Seattle, Wash.

Treas.

W. "Tiny" James, Alameda, Cal.

A word of appreciation was given to retiring officers Dottie MacClain and Erwin Young Jr., who will remain on the Board.

The Honorary Member for 1967-68 was selected. Retiring Vice President Erwin A. Young Jr. was selected by a unanimous vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 noon by a very unanimous vote.