

BY THE time of Rudolph Valentino's death in August, 1926, there were over fourteen thousand five hundred motion picture theatres in the United States. Of these, some one thousand were in Illinois, almost two hundred in Chicago alone. William Emmett Dever, Mayor of Chicago, upped that figure one by opening the "Spanish shrine of silent art," the Patio Theatre, on January 29, 1927. Chicago in that January bought bread at seven cents a loaf, the auto show featured the Marmor and Kissel, and Ronald Colman and "2500 others" were starred in Paramount's *Beau Geste* at the Auditorium Theatre, strange fare for the most acoustically perfect theatre in the world.

Searchlights scanned the sky at the corner of Austin and Irving Park as the Patio Symphony played for its first audience. The first nighters saw the ceiling "stars" twinkling and the "clouds" floating by in the fifteen-hundred and seventy seat atmospheric house even though the night outside was a wintry one with snow in the air. George and John Mitchell, who had started with a nickelodeon in 1914, breathed a sigh of relief as their Patio was launched and the program got underway. Only six weeks later, but twelve hundred miles and five thousand seats apart, another former nickelodeon owner would breath a similar sigh of relief as another theatre, the New York

Roxy, was launched. It is ironic that the Portage Park neighborhood of Chicago still has its Patio Theatre and its Mitchell brothers while New York is without "Roxy" and his Roxy? Perhaps the reason was that the Patio was a neighborhood house, part of the backbone of the film industry then and today. The Roxy's fate was sealed by its six thousand seats. The Patio plays on, drawing the children and grandchildren of the neighborhood people that made up the audience the first night the golden-voiced Barton pipe organ sang out.

It is uncommon to find a neighborhood house with an organ as large as the one installed in the Patio. Dan Barton was obviously a good salesman, for here in a neighborhood house with limited stage facilities is an incredibly large instrument of three manuals and seventeen ranks. And whoever rode the all-gold console up on its four-post lift had an incredibly fine seventeen ranks with which to work.

In 1932, true to the fate bestowed upon him, the \$150 a week organist was let go. No one remembers who he was just as no one remembered the \$25,000 pipe organ he left behind.

No one that is until William Rieger, a man from the neighborhood, talked to the Mitchell brothers. So it came to pass in March, 1966, that this neighborhood movie house was to have its un-neigh-

borhood-like organ restored by a neighborhood patron.

Rieger was helped in his task by a fellow electrical engineer, Robert Mueller, who has a more neighborhood-sized style D Wurlitzer in his basement from the Bryn Mawr Theatre. Amid the expected dirty, dead rats, popcorn, and candy, the pair also found something which they thought to be unusual, a pork



Marquee of Patio Theatre on Irving Park Road tells a recurring story: 'S. R. O.' Hal Pearl's first show at the Patio Barton was also a sell-out.

chop bone in the console. But no matter how they tried, they couldn't get it to replace the Cymbal or two missing pipes from the Clarinet rank. Many Saturday and Sunday mornings were devoted to resoldering relays and junction boards. The glockenspiel, orchestra bells, and toy counter needed to be releathered.

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## George Blackmore, con't.

"sparklets." The *Mancini Medley* started with a hand organ intro to *Charade*, developed into a solid boogie-woogie for *Baby Elephant Walk*, and closed with *Moon River* which sported a Tuba lead for the first chorus.

The South American group included *Brazil* (with tambourine accents and out of the ordinary harmony), and the first non-Ethel *Tico Tico* heard in these parts for many a moon.

Next, George assumed the plight of a one-tune artist who must play for dancing all evening yet providing variety. The tune he selected was *I Could Have Danced All Night* which he played as a Polka, (strongly similar to the *Petite Waltz*) a thumping Strauss waltz with *Blue Danube* frippery, a brassy, exotic Tango, a very-Ethel Samba, a cornball 1920s "jazzeroo" with a *Modern Millie* ending, a heavy-footed military march with bells, drums and cymbals and, for the finale, a high-kicking Can Can. The first installment closed with another tune from his Concert Record platter, the *Carousel Waltz*, heard exactly as on the record. How did he do it? By "cheating"; George is one of those musicians who can read music and isn't ashamed of it. Throughout the morning he played his

concert selection "by the book" but, except for special arrangements, he used sheet music mainly as a guide on which to base his performances of pop tunes.

After a brief intermission, the sound of a lively *South Rampart Street Parade* brought George Blackmore back to the limelight. The toe-tapping *Dixieland* rhythms found listeners rushing back to seats so as not to miss a single note played by this remarkable organists.

The second half was even more studded with variety than the first half. There was a big, majestic *Exodus*, a dithyrambic *Sabre Dance*, a *Cavalleria Rusticana*—*Intermezzo* rife with grandeur and a reading of *In a Clock Store* best described as timely—and cute. After all the alarm clocks had sounded off, the hour struck by grandfather's clock and all the merchandise wound up, George offered a British tune dating from World War I—*Keep the Home Fires Burning*, including the verse of this rarely-heard selection.

It was back to pops for what George called an "off the cuff" arrangement of *Somewhere My Love* which included lots of heel-and-toe pedalling. We noted that the Blackmore playing shoes were well-rounded at the heels, denoting a great deal of "heel-and-toeing."

*The More I See You* brought in a some-

what petulant exchange between the Kimball's right-chamber Kinura and the left-chamber Trumpet, while a set of Castenets added some extra Spanish to the well-known *Flea*, a tune which had George pacing the pedals.

The Blackmore touch made *Winchester Cathedral* almost for real; he didn't boot it around but he did manage to generate a high-pitched cipher. The squealer was hunted down and silenced by Bob Alder's able cipher hunters while George told a story.

Next came a delightful march-improvisation on *Waltzing Matilda* and then a "Roaring '20s" medley which included such memory joggers as *Bye Bye Blackbird*, *Don't Bring Lulu*, *Doin' the Raccoon* and even *Hello Dolly*. This peppy closing set sparked one of the few standing ovations we've witnessed at a Wiltern concert.

Later, Mr. Blackmore showed up in the lobby to autograph copies of the *Marble Arch* record which the Organ of the Month Club had on sale. He chatted with his legion of admirers and seemed to be having a great time. So were the concert goers. George Blackmore had proved to be someone very special, and his early return would be eagerly anticipated.



Organ restorers Bill Rieger and Bob Mueller discuss program with 'Xylophone' Hal Pearl as CATOE Secretary Geannie Nachtwey hurries back to man the information table.

The console and lift platform were re-finished. John Shanahan dropped by and fixed the diaphones. The ten horsepower Spencer blower does not "wind" the Hammond solo pedal unit added to improve tonal clarity on the pedals. A Bartola thirty-note electric action xylophone was installed open on the balcony below the left chamber. Non-organist Rieger has rigged up a piano action to the console which does everything but set stops.

And so after all these years, the Patio's organ speaks again, a monument to Bill Rieger and Bob Mueller who fixed it, to the Mitchell brothers who wisely guarded it, and to the Patio Theatre, its neighborhood home for so many, many years.

Special thanks for supplementary material goes to Bill Rieger, Bill Benedict, Tony Tahlman and Vox CATOE, and to Norman Mark and the Chicago Daily News.

But the Barton in the Patio was not meant to be a silent monument. So on April 6, 1967 live theatre organ returned to Chicago as the Chicago Area Chapter ATOE presented Hal Pearl, ex-staffer at the Aragon Ballroom, in concert. Close to 400 disappointed nostalgia seekers were turned away at the door when the house sold out. After saying more peo-



With 1570 filled seats and a many-mirrored 'wonder ball' casting reflections about the walls of the atmospheric Patio Theatre, Hal Pearl plays CATOE's second sell-out public concert in as many months.

ple had danced to the music of Hal Pearl at the Aragon than to the big bands, chairman Fred Kruse left the stage, the house faded to blue and Pearl came out of the pit aboard the Barton playing the *Warsaw Concerto*, the symphonic-like theme of the 1942 movie *Dangerous*



Former Aragon Ballroom organist Hal Pearl at the console of the golden-voiced Barton 3-17 in the Chicago Patio Theatre, during his second sell-out concert.

*Moonlight*. From then on, through his Spanish style *Salute to the Patio* and *Memory Lane* medleys, to the sing-along and silent comedies, the audience stayed



Singalong feature for both Patio shows included novelty slides Pearl used at famed Aragon Ballroom in Chicago when he was a staffer there.



Ben M. Hall, in Chicago to present his 'Movie Palace to Popcorn Parlour' lecture to a CATOE banquet, speaks to the assembled nostalgia seekers in the Patio Theatre about the 'good old days.'

to hear *Xylophone* Pearl. One teenaged skeptic heard mumbling in the lobby was obviously converted; he was last seen writhing in laughter as he watched Laurel and Hardy's *Two Tars*.

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Organist Hal obliges fans with autographs after console is once again safely settled in the pit.

#### SYNOPSIS OF RANKS

Barton 3/17 Theatre Organ, Patio Theatre, Chicago, Illinois

RANK	PITCHES	NO. PIPES	CHAMBER	PRESSURE	TREMULANTS
Trumpet	8'	61	Solo	15"	Solo
Solo String	16', 8', 4'	73	Solo	15"	Solo
Tibia Clausa	16', 8', 4', 2-2/3'	85	Solo	15"	Tibia
Solo Vox Humana	16', 8', 4'	73	Solo	7"	Vox
Oboe Horn	8'	61	Solo	10"	Solo
Saxophone	8'	61	Solo	10"	Solo
Quintadena	8'	61	Solo	10"	Solo
Kinura	8'	61	Solo	10"	Solo
Diaphonic Diapason	16', 8', 4'	85	Main	15"	Main
Clarinet	8'	61	Main	10"	Main
Viol d'Orchestra	16', 8', 4', 2'	85	Main	10"	Main
Celeste I	8', 4'	73	Main	10"	Main
Celeste II	8'	49	Main	10"	Main
Dulciana	8', 4'	73	Main	10"	Main
Flute	16', 8', 4', 2', 2-2/3', 1-3/5'	97	Main	10"	Main
Tuba Profunda	16', 8', 4'	73	Main	10"	Main
Vox Humana	16', 8', 4'	73	Main	7"	Vox

**Percussions:** Chrysoglott Harp, Xylophone, Glockenspiel (Orch. Bells on re-it), Chimes  
**Traps:** Bass Drum (Kettle Drum on re-it), Snare Drum, Cymbal, Tambourine, Tom-Tom, Castenets, Wood Block

#### EXPRESSION SHOES:

Main  
Solo  
Master  
Crescendo

#### TOE STUDS:

Sforzando  
Thunder  
Fire Gong  
Siren  
Auto Horn  
Steamboat Whistle  
Bird Whistle

Combination action pistons available for all manuals and pedal

The Great has a synthetic 8" "Orchestral Oboe," a combination of String, Flute and mutations.

## 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.

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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.