

Lee Haggart observes very deceptive organ-orchestra coloration.

I WAS THERE

by Lee Haggart, Burbank

It was the usual exciting Sunday evening in 1921 at Miller's California Theatre in Los Angeles*. The grand orchestra, the stage presentation, in keeping with the theme of the (silent) feature picture, had been thoroughly entertaining. For weekends the 35 man orchestra was augmented to 75. The aggregation gave powerful musical underscoring to the main titles of the feature film—after which the organ took over.

As the final curtain of the stage show closed, Carli Elinor, the dynamic director of the "augmented 75 member California Theatre Orchestra" motioned for a quick decrescendo. The grand curtain paused momentarily and opened again, revealing the thin screen curtain, or "scrim", over the great glassbead screen. The trademark of MGM studios, "Leo" the lion, appeared on the curtain and Carli Elinor signaled for full "forte" as the scrim pulled away and the feature picture title appeared.

We were watching this evening, fully determined to catch the great master

*at 9th and Main Streets; long gone

organist, Arthur G. Shaw, in a "fade-in" from orchestra to organ. Many times before we had tried to pin-point this elusive trick, the moment of crossover, which had been worked out by Carli Elinor and Mr. Shaw shortly after Mr. Shaw had been appointed "top" or solo organist at the California Theatre.

The "fade" from orchestra to organ was, of course, done in many "presentation" theatres and was often well done. But if complete illusion is a criterion, the Elinor /Shaw crossover would be the far-in-front winner.

We looked to the center of the orchestra pit where the three manual Robert Morton console was located. Mr. Shaw was not visible, and because the house was quite dark and the console in total blackness we could not be sure. Well, it just made the test more difficult anyway.

The type of musical legerdemain we were to try unravelling requires a consummate musicianship and an accurate balancing of tonal and sound level values. A real challenge to an organist!

We checked the "wing" drapes on stage right to see if they had been drawn back for the organ to sound clearly. (the great Robert Morton was installed on stage right in a double-decked set of chambers) Good! The drapes were clear.

We returned our gaze to the orchestra.

The sleight-of-hand magic in music was starting! Musicians from the percussion and brass sections of the orchestra were silently making their way toward the "green room" door under the stage.

The music-rack lights were now out and the remaining orchestra members were playing without visible notes.

The hard listening was now at hand. We closed our eyes and concentrated on the beautiful sounds. Violins, clarinets, flutes, an oboe, 'cello and double-bass, all playing softly now. We sneaked a look at the podium; Carli Elinor was still there directing; more intense listening—now just the double-bass, violins, 'cello and flute could be identified. We concentrated—the supreme test! Were these the sounds of orchestral instruments or those of their organ counterparts? No-still the orchestra, we decided! Carli Elinor would be furious, we were sure, with the organist this late!

Better check the podium; we opened our eyes. The podium was empty! The organ console stop-rail lights were very dim, but enough light outlined the master organist to prove that he had fooled us completely once more.

What a wonderful musical experience! Two decades later we still clearly remember the amazing artistry of the Australian Master of the Theatre Organ, Arthur G. Shaw.

-Lee Haggart, Burbank

HOLLYWOOD CAVALCADE

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book by Richard Lamparski (Crown). Hollywood's youngest and best silent era researcher, John Virzi, contributed photographs to the interesting book . . . Howard C. Shaiffer who played "Butch" in the *Our Gang* comedies passed on early this year . . . Jetta Goudal, who was a soft-sell silent screen siren, enjoys the Southern California social whirl.

MARY CARR, now into her 90's, is reported still living in the North Hollywood area. Mary, who made famous the role of mother in *Over the Hill (1920)*, was the most self-effacing, frail, homey actress ever to play a tragic mother role.

HAPPINESS is giving part of yourself to others. Few of the great film personalities have learned this secret better than Harold Lloyd. He practices this philosophy in daily living. He travels 15,000 miles a year for his beloved Shrine charities which bring health and happiness to youngsters in Shrine hospitals. He's active in his own film activities. He has high hopes that this autumn will

find a new generation enjoying his silent classics when they are shown to American college students.

BUSTER KEATON'S widow, Eleanor, recently said that in 25 years of marriage to the kind man she never heard him tell a joke around the house.

THE FIRST great screenplay writer of them all, Frances Marion, is putting the finishing touches on a book about Hollywood. Miss Marion won the first Oscar for screenplay writing . . . Reader Don Caye points out that Gloria Swanson, Lillian Gish, Stuart Holmes and Henry King have been active in films for 50 years.

WHOSE WERE—Mary Miles Minter, whose petite china-doll like charm fascinated fans of the '20s, shuns most former film friends, refuses interviews and finds comfort in religion in her Santa Monica home . . . Louise Glaum lives in quiet retirement in Hollywood and recalls her 50 years in Hollywood. . . A reader in Las Vegas asks us the whereabouts of Greta Nissen. Does any reader know? Please advise.

CLAUDETTE Colbert made at least one silent film (and probably more) when she appeared with Ben Lyon in *For the Love of Mike* in 1927 for First National.

COLLEEN MOORE, who brightened the silver shadow stage in the '20s, is ready to publisher her cinema adventures under the unglamorous title of *Silent Star Colleen Moore Shoots Off Her Mouth* (Doubleday).



Membership cordially invited — USA — \$3.00 per year, includes a regular news magazine containing news items, record reviews, articles on electronic organs and specifications of theatre organs in all States of Australia.

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