

CONCERT CIRCUIT ★ George Wright in Portland ★

George Wright at Portland Oriental

George Wright returned to Portland's Oriental Theatre Saturday evening, November 4, for his second concert for, and mutual love-fest with the people of the Pacific Northwest. Prior to his first appearance there in May, most of his audience knew him only through his recording work and the now-legendary air-shots of some years back. His opening remarks and running introductions, and his showmanship plus the superb musicianship and technical facility associated with his name, treated the enthusiastic and receptive crowd to a prime and in-depth demonstration of the George Wright School



of Contemporary Theatre Organ Artistry and Concert Platform Charm. And as if that were not enough for any assemblage of organ buffs, the evening also produced a voiced willingness—wildly acknowledged by those attending—to be asked back for yet a third concert during the coming year. Concert promoters Bill Peterson and Dennis Hedberg likewise beamed their approval.

George brought the newly gilded 3-13, Style 240 Wurlitzer up with a non-opener-type opener: "Saturday Night Is the Loneliest Night in the Week"—not because he was lonely, but "simply because it's Saturday. How *could* I be lonely," he opined, "with all you nice people here?"

The tunes, as always, were well selected and ran the usual Wright gamut: classics, operetta melodies, show tunes, popular songs, the real jazz, and, inimitably, his own past recordings of all these. A highlight of the evening was a preview of some of the tunes from his new *Sounds of Love* album (recorded on the Kearns-Carson organ and since released by Malar Records). Comic relief was supplied through judicious use of a highly unified *GW-Repertoire* rank (16-8-4-2' for sure, with a suspected 32' on some of the baser passages). The second tune, for example, was announced with a parenthetical Georgian abandon as "a tender ballad: 'You Made Me Love You' (you got me drunk to do it)." A bumptious 'Mame' and a tender "If He Walked Into My Life" brought on the gratuitous observation that the old broad had really suffered, hadn't she? And a break-neck-paced "old-fashioned finger-buster," "Dizzy Fingers," was briefly interrupted by George's shouted counting of a "1-2, 1-2" cadence when acoustical lag momentarily overtook him. And so it went, with George Wright eminently in control of both audience and instrument, for the next hour and a charming half.

The Oriental Wurlitzer never sounded better. ATOE'ers who remember its high-powered, breathy quality under Mildred Alexander's fingers at the 1966 National Convention could hardly recognize it as the same instrument. As reworked to Mr. Wright's specifications by Portland's Dennis Hedberg, the organ at times produced sounds closely akin to those of the home-base studio installation at Pasadena. With the exception of a slipped stopper—at which George sent Dennis scurrying up "a couple of miles"—and some minor tuning since he was already up there, the organ's performance nearly matched that of the performing artist.

The concert's end found George Wright still apparently attempting to gainsay any lingering traces of a lonely Saturday night, for he took the console down to the strains of a very beautiful "You'll Never Walk Alone." And his audience, walking with George all the way and rising in spontaneous standing ovation, received in return a parting "Goodnight, Sweetheart."



THOROUGHLY ORIENTAL GEORGE—with friends Ruth Carson (on the left) and U Nei-Mit, the main lobby centerpiece at the top of the staircase leading to the first balcony of Portland's Oriental Theatre. "Never have I seen a wilder place," said George in introducing "Lotus Land," his tribute to the Oriental. "Part of it is very beautiful, part extremely hideous, and you put the whole thing together and the result is really a masterpiece of architecture in its own way . . . I suppose it will become a parking lot or a supermarket someday."

Ashley Miller at N.Y. Beacon

On Saturday morning, October 21, the New York Chapter enjoyed the best of two theatre organ worlds at New York's beautiful Beacon Theatre. Chapter members and hundreds of invited guests heard the first straight professional concert of theatre organ music on the reborn white-and-gold 4-19 Beacon Wurlitzer. And what a concert it was—played by one of today's truly great masters of the theatre organ, Ashley Miller. Also for the first time, chapter organists had their first jam-session opportunity to try this superb theatre organ, brought to better-than-new condition by Bon Smith and the Beacon Project crew.

Ashley Miller built his program specifically for a knowledgeable theatre-organ audience who could appreciate the keyboard (and pedal) technique and the registration skill of a master artist,

Ashley Miller in New York ★ Eddie Weaver in New Haven ★



and the range and depth of musical resources available in this great instrument. He pounded pulses with fast, forceful versions of "From This Moment on" and "Of Thee I Sing." He wrapped his listeners in shimmering, plaintive dreams with "Misty" (in a special Miller arrangement), "Autumn in New York" and "Shadow of Your Smile." He brought back the old presentation-house spotlight with "Lady of Spain" and he bounced brightly through today's novelties like "Spanish Flea" and "Gravy Waltz." He played such happy music as "A Wonderful Day Like Today," "Aren't You Glad You're You?" and "Swinging on a Star." He played mood music like "When A Gypsy Makes His Violin Cry" and "Street of Dreams." He played classics: Chopin's "Fantasy Impromptu." He played Cole Porter's "It's D-Lovely."

But, in everything that he played, Ashley Miller made sure that the music stayed in front. Every embellishment, every technical feat, every virtuoso passage was clearly set out to support the requirements of the music. At the close of this brilliant and all too brief 90-minute concert, the Beacon audience was a pleased, happy, and thoughtful group who had obviously experienced and enjoyed a memorable musical event.

**THINK CIVIC
CENTER!!!**

(See pages 8 and 9)

Eddie Weaver at New Haven Paramount

NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT, October 20, 1967—For many, it was just like old times at the New Haven Paramount Theatre, for the Connecticut Valley Chapter, ATOE (Connecticut Theatre Organ Society, Inc.), it was a dream come true. There was Eddie Weaver, group singing with song slides, a silent movie, and a standing room only audience.

The 1,817 seat theatre had been sold out at \$2.50 a seat well in advance, but that didn't discourage the hopefuls who stood in a line nearly a block long on the nippy Autumn night. Not wishing to turn anyone away, the Chapter ad-



mitted 100 people on a standing basis.

This was the first public performance on the newly renovated style H special Wurlitzer which the Chapter had worked on for 17 months, and it drew organ enthusiasts from every corner of the state and parts of New York and Massachusetts. Several busses brought groups from distant points.

That the Connecticut public was ready for a theatre organ concert was obvious. At 8:30 p.m. not a seat could be found. Applause broke out only a minute late of the scheduled starting time . . . moments before Eddie brought up the console with "Everything's coming up Roses". Whether it was the sound of the little Wurlitzer or the sight of the impeccably refurbished con-

sole, or just Eddie, we'll never know, but the applause completely masked the full organ sound.

It was at this very console that Eddie Weaver soared to fame, and his earlier triumphs were being repeated. Looking into the packed house, he joked, "Doesn't look a bit different than thirty years ago . . . except everyone's gotten fatter!" From that point on, Eddie had the audience in his palm, and would have been a hit playing a comb and tissue paper.

Beginning with three Latin tunes which he said he couldn't pronounce, and we couldn't spell, Eddie went into a "Try to Remember" challenge. After playing the hit from "The Fantastics", he played a medley of "September Song" with a shivery wind effect in the accompaniment, "Dizzy Fingers", "Embraceable You", and "The Wayward Wind".

Having set the scene, Eddie then began to recall "Funny things which happened to me." "Narcissus" was plagued with a note which somehow always turned up a semi-tone sharp, much to Eddie's dismay. Then came Chopin's "C# Etude". Now, that top C# just doesn't exist on the manual . . . but Eddie seemed to call it up out of thin air.

The Paramount Wurlitzer not only reacted wonderfully to Eddie's deft touch, but seemed to be putting on a show of its own after a 34 year-long

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period of inactivity. The solo organ arrangement of "Do-Re-Mi" became just that as a bewildered Eddie walked away from the console while it played on without him. A trick which Eddie had used years ago, Mike Foley coached the Wurlitzer along from a slave keyboard backstage, installed specially for the concert.

Eddie next introduced one of Connecticut's fine organists, Joy Zublena, 1957 Miss Connecticut, and asked her to play a solo. Handing her a small bell (suitably amplified) he cued effects for "Petticoat Junction" and "Chattanooga Choo Choo". The latter featured a chugging steam engine which stopped at the station, hissed, and otherwise carried on.

A very clever musical story followed with situations presented by song titles. At one point, Eddie imitated a dog bark, which set off a loud baying from somewhere in the audience. The spontaneous laughter which ensued caused Eddie to momentarily forget the rest of the story.

In spite of the difficulty which Eddie then had with the spotlight operator and projection booth attendant who had the task of putting the song slides on the screen, but specialized in doing it all wrong, the audience sang with much gusto. Although the difficulty was unplanned, Eddie took it good-naturedly, and the audience thought it was all part of the fun. Eddie ended the sing-along with "God Bless America" and took the console down with "Downtown".

Eddie began the second half with "Thoroughly Modern Millie". He then demonstrated a trice "... you can try at home", playing "Dancing Tambourine" and "Secret Love" at the same time.

The 1926 Max Sennett comedy, "Whispering Wiskers" which came next kept us laughing so hard, we forgot Eddie was there until the end credits flashed on the screen and the console rose again to solo level.

Several popular movie themes provided Eddie's closer, and all too soon, the antique white and gold-leaf console was disappearing into its chasm. If the comments overheard in the lobby afterward are any indication, the New Haven Paramount Wurlitzer will surely be heard from again soon ... and very likely with Eddie in the "driver's seat."

—Al Miller

Allen Mills at the Auditorium

ROCHESTER, N. Y., October 24.—Allen R. Mills, who is too young to remember the heyday of movie organs, did a convincing job of reviving the flamboyant style of that era last night in the Auditorium Theater, entertaining a large audience in the process.

His instrument was the "Mighty Wurlitzer" that was rescued from the Palace Theatre wreckers and installed last season in its happy new home by the Rochester Theatre Organ Society. (It was this intrepid group that sponsored last night's concert.)



The Albany organist's performance was partly a recital of the "fun" music of yesteryear, partly a demonstration of the instrument's fabulous resources—everything from the "throbbing tibia" and diapasons to a full complement of orchestral sounds, including a remarkable battery of percussions, and even a piano.

Theatrical "effect" pervaded sight as well as sound last night. During his introductory flourishes, Mills and the ornate console were elevated to prominent position in the spotlight, against a crimson velvet background. Lavender lights illuminated the two organ lofts behind the upper grillwork.

The artist's program had its quieter moments, as in "Misty" and "All Through the Night," but mostly he dwelt on extravagant effect and power, as in a "Tannhauser" excerpt and a medley of tunes

from the '20s (e.g., "Last Night on the Back Porch," "Varsity Drag"), all to the obvious delight of the audience. More than 1,200 attended the concert.

So wrote journalist George H. Kimball about an event probably rare in his current experience. Yet, his words reflect enthusiasm. Encouraging.

Allen Mills is familiar to 1967 ATOE convention-goers through his concert played on the DTOC's 4-34 Wurlitzer in the Detroit Senate Theatre. He is building a reputation as a pop organist through numerous concerts in the East, many on pipes. It wasn't always pops for Allen. His education and background are classical—solid AGO—and classical music currently absorbs much of his ability at the console. Yet, when he lights into a pop tune there is none of the "I'll sully my fingers with junk if you insist" attitude which is happily vanishing as classic and theatre organ enthusiasts grow ever closer in the common knowledge that both types of windjammer need all the support they can get. And his approach to pops has no corners. Allen swings into a pop tune with all the fire of an old-timer at the theatre console, his "straight" technique showing only when the complexity of his arrangements go beyond the usual bag of theatrical tricks. He is an organist-entertainer. Organ fans across the land are currently partaking of Allen Mills' topflight arranging-performing by means of his "Front and Center" recording played on this same RTOS Wurlitzer.

—G. Bandini

The first five paragraphs are reprinted from the Rochester Times Union.

George Seaver at Grant Union

The Sierra Chapter has scored again with a highly successful silent movie presentation. Held at Grant Union High School, October 20th in Sacramento, a Laurel and Hardy comedy, song slides and the 1925 Rudolph Valentino feature film "The Eagle" were presented to an enthusiastic audience of 800. Presiding at the console of the Wurlitzer 4-21, in some of the most precise and pleasing cueing was the Chapter organist, George Seaver. Resplendent in a tuxedo, George displayed a thorough mastery of the instrument, to the delight of the attendees. Jim Hodges, manager of KHIQ radio, served as master of ceremonies,

George Seaver in Sacramento ★ Lyn Larsen in Salt Lake City



did a magnificent job, particularly during the sing-a-long and established rapport with the audience. Due to the non-arrival of the scheduled film "Son of the Sheik", Jim explained the "Eagle" feature film substitution. Club members handled all facets of the presentation with Don Zeller, projectionist; Carol Harris, spotlight; Mac Pharmer, stage manager; June Anderson ticket sales and others. The whole event came off like precision clockwork. As each person entered the auditorium he was presented with a program which included a history of the organ and an application blank for club membership. A highlight of the evening was a color slide of the Sierra Nevada mountains with the Sierra chapter embellished thereon, flashed on the screen during Jim's announcements. This was the chapter's third successful silent movie presentation under the leadership of chapter prexy Larry Weid.

The present Grant Organ was installed over a one year period in the Auditorium, 1938 to 1939. It was presented to the public in a recital by George Wright, Howard Scott and Emil Martin on December 8, 1939.

This instrument was assembled from three theatre organs, originally located in Redding, Reno and San Francisco. They were transported to Grant High School and the best parts were assembled by the students under the direction of Fred Wood, an organ builder from Oakland. George Wright, a graduate of Grant Union, also helped build the organ and added many of the theatre sound effects.

—H. A. Sommer

Lyn Larsen at Bray Organ Loft

At 8 p.m. the house lights dimmed and from the console "Swanee," played in curtain-raising style, was heard, and as the lights brightened Lyn Larsen was playing the fabulous five-manual Wurlitzer theatre pipe organ at the Organ Loft in Salt Lake City, Utah. Upon completion of this first number, Lyn greeted 175 guests and expressed pleasure at having been invited to come to Salt Lake City and present a concert on such a great organ, and hoped all would enjoy the selections he had planned to play.

A favorite melody at the Avenue Theatre in South San Francisco, where Lyn was resident organist for four months, was "Poinciana." The ease with which Lyn performs left no doubt as to his ability to handle this huge instrument. A 1930 novelty piano tune, "Dance of the



Blue Danube," followed by Victor Herbert's "When You're Away," delighted the audience especially when the Tibias and full rolls gave their exciting effect.

"Shine On, Harvest Moon" performed in a Crawford style, sparkled when the Chrysoglot, Tibia and Xylophone were added. A lively, clever arrangement of "Married I Can Always Get" which brought the brass section into play along with the Diapasons was followed by "Doin' the New Low-Down," from "Thoroughly Modern Millie," which caught a few toe-tapping to this catchy rhythm. The tinkling Glockenspiel set the slow, graceful tempo for "Dream"; then Lyn gradually changed to a full registration on the second chorus.

Lyn expressed appreciation to Larry Bray for having such a wonderful instrument and keeping it in tip-top condition, ready to play at all times.

One of the loveliest ballads of the evening, "If He Walked Into My Life," kept

everyone under its magic spell from start to finish. An exciting display of the Post Horn introduced the "Saber Dance" just prior to intermission.

"You—Wonderful You" introduced the second session, followed by "You're the Cream in My Coffee" in the Crawford style, was delightfully refreshing. "Poem," or "Moonlight Madonna," displayed Lyn's unique ability at registration to produce those heavenly tones. In sharp contrast came "Midnight in Mayfair," with the piano being brought into action.

The next number Lyn said he had learned from Scott Gillespie, who had learned it from the late Gus Farney: "My Hopeful Heart." The "Washington Post March" nearly had the audience marching along in time to this rousing number.

Just before Lyn left home on this concert tour he received a manuscript in the mail from George Wright with permission given to him to play this selection. Lyn felt that, inasmuch as the National ATOE was giving birth to the new BEEHIVE CHAPTER this evening, this would be an appropriate time to give birth to . . . "Sonnet," a very lovely ballad.

LeRoy Anderson's "Bugler's Holiday" was kept strictly on a fast tempo, with the trumpet trio speaking clear and distinct on every repeated note. Both feet were brought into rapid action, displaying the exceptional capability and talent of this young artist. The closer, "Bess, You Is My Woman" from "Porgy and Bess," brought a standing ovation for Lyn. He promised that one of these days, soon, he would return, and everyone wanted to know when.

