

THE GUYS



PHOTOS:
Dick Stoney and
Bert Brouillon

WHO FIXED

While Watched by
Stu Green



THE ORGAN

IN WHICH WE EXPLORE THE MAKE-UP OF A TYPICAL ORGAN REHABILITATION CREW



What are organ repair crews really like? When it was announced last summer that arrangements had been made for the LA Chapter of ATOE to take over repair and maintenance of the mammoth Robert Morton concert organ in the LA Elks Temple, we resolved to find some answers to the many questions which arise when a crew is assembled to play nursemaid to many ranks of ailing pipework, wheezy chests, sprung wind line, intermittent magnets, popped pouches and the myriad things that can go wrong with a neglected organ—or, for that matter, even a well-maintained one.

Of this particular group of volunteers, some had been with the LA Wiltern 4-37 Kimball crew, and had gained valuable experience under the able leadership of Bob Alder, Sr., who is charged with the brute's maintenance. In fact, the leader of the Elks' Temple group, Dick Stoney, had worked under Alder on the Wiltern organ for several years.

The only way to get the feel of such an assignment is to join the gang and live with them. That was something, too. They decided to work all day Saturday—every Saturday!—the day usually set aside for lawn mowing, getting the car lubed, patching the roof, washing the dog—all those time-consuming little assignments which keep householders occupied on Saturdays. Reluctantly, we gave in.

A goodly number of Saturdays would be spent in the bowels of the Morton. In the end, the decision turned out to be a worthy one. We got the story and more. Normally, the organ clubbers see an artist under the spotlight during a concert, hear the lush sound of the instrument, and give the organist all the credit—without a thought for the bedraggled, dirty characters who, minutes before the audience poured in, finished patching a reservoir which blew just before concert time.

That was the direction our story took as we became more and more familiar with the work of getting an organ in shape. So, this is the story of the unglamorous gang who make the glamor possible—the pipe organ maintenance crew.



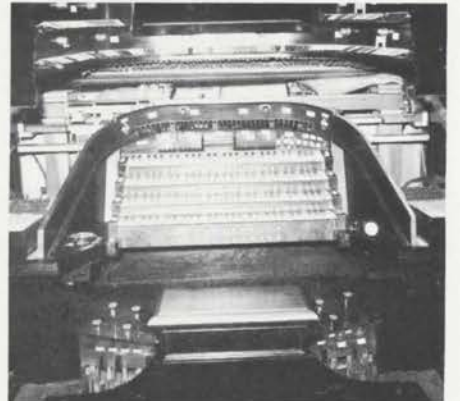
THEATRICAL EFFECTS are provided by Snare Drum, Sleigh Bells, Wood Block and many other noisemakers and percussions. A Bass Drum is out of range, and that's part of the Bourdon below. These are in the Choir Chamber.



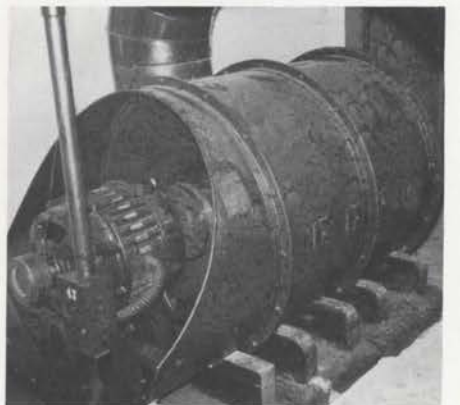
BIG GROWLERS in the Pedal Organ. L. to r.: Trombone, Double Open Diapason, Violone and Open Diapason. These huge pipes occupy considerable space in the left side of the hall. They are unenclosed. Curiously, the instrument has no Diaphone.



SOLO CHAMBER ranks include (l. to r.): Tuba Mirabilis, Orch. Oboe, Stentorphone (metal flute), Philomela (stopped pipes) and a Gross Gamba are in left chamber, above and behind the powerful and unenclosed Great.



THE CONSOLE, with stop rail raised for access to innards. Irving Cosgrove peers from within.



THE HUGE BLOWER is driven by a 25-hp. motor, produces 15 inches of wind pressure. The Echo has its own separate blower.

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GUYS FIX ORGAN (Continued)



CREW CHIEF DICK STONEY listens to the just-tuned Vox Humana, which is mounted on a separate chest above the swell shutters in the Swell Chamber. Cornopean pipes are in left foreground.



RUSS PATTON AND PAUL BIRK assist an unidentified arm to get the "clunk" out of a pedal.



KEN KUKUK examines the 8-inch-thick refrigerator doors which seal in sound. The original specification called for these sound barriers at entrances of all chamber and blower rooms.

First — what type of person is attracted to organ technical work? There's no solid answer to that question. He may be 16 or 60. He may play organ, but not necessarily. And he may prefer to work on an organ rather than listen to it. He may be a high school student, an accountant, an aircraft company project engineer, or an electric power company technician. He may be married—or not. All we can say for sure about our composite is that he is usually mechanically inclined.

The crew members have a few characteristics in common. They are all attracted to pipe organ — obviously. They like the challenge of a project. They enjoy working as a team. This particular crew consists entirely of males. And they are most uncurious about one another.

The majority of them emigrated from other states, mostly from Illinois and Indiana. A couple are those "rara avis"—native Angelenos.

Let's look at the problems this intrepid group of adventurers faced. The instrument is located in the large ceremonial hall of the LA Elks Club. It has a four-manual console (wired mostly as a "straight" organ, but with some unification), some theatre voices, percussions and "toy counter" effects (the buttons for the latter are concealed under a removable wooden cover so that serious recitalists won't be annoyed by such "stops" as "Siren," "Klaxon" or "Bird"). Fifty-eight ranks of pipework (61 if borrowed stops are counted), percussions, traps, chests, regulators and associated equipment are crammed into five tightly packed chambers (one is unenclosed). The instrument was largely designed by famed organist Sibley Pease, who played for Elks' ceremonials in the '20s. But 40 years later the Elks, with ranks thinned by the inroads of TV and suburbanization, haven't the wherewithal to maintain the giant in the manner the giant demands. Enter ATOE, the giant tamers. The organ is complete and undamaged but



IMPISH PAUL BIRK perches on a catwalk above Choir Chamber pipework to touch up tuning on the Doppelflute. Ranks shown (left to right): Cornet, Doppelflute, Quintadena and Flute.

maintenance funds have been sparse over the years. The old giant shows signs of falling apart.

Starting in September, the crew (usually about 10 men strong) started cleaning up 40 years' accumulation of chamber dirt — just cleaning. They flourished brushes and vacuum cleaners for several sessions, just to unearth areas where the problems were. There were plenty — ciphers, dead notes, pipes off voice, air leaks everywhere, ragged wiring, intermittent notes, dying leather — all the things that can go wrong with a rarely used and often neglected organ — and such a big organ!

Because our focus is on the men in the team we are going over what they accomplished in roughly half a month of Saturdays but briefly. It took nearly five of those Saturdays to clean all the switch contacts. Then they releathered one entire regulator, and patched two others. Many magnets were replaced in chests. They releathered the pneumatics on both consoles. (The eight-rank Echo can be played from a two-manual console in the huge stair well, quite separately from the main organ.) They removed many a bottom board from chests to get at blown pouches. Some ranks had as many as ten bad pneumatics out of 61 or more. All 61 switch stacks were dismantled and cleaned, as were the key relays.

Many leaks in the wind conductors were repaired, and one whole ten-foot section of wind line (which supplies the lobby console action) had to be replaced in a barely accessible spot in the walls, high above the four-story stairway-lobby. The crew likened the expedition to the "aerie" with a safari to Shangri-La. Being part mountain goat would have helped.

The entire instrument was tuned and is touched up as often as necessary.

In one respect, the crew was more fortunate than most who tackle such a task: there was no evidence of vandalism, anywhere. Chambers had been kept locked



IRVING COSGROVE, with the Pedalboard removed for maintenance, curls up for a little snooze beside the Console swell-shoes.

and the pipework looked like new. Two slightly damaged pipes were taken to Harvey Heck, who knows the delicate craft of pipe repair, a move which speaks well for the crew: they are aware of their limitations. In short, the organ was put in fine shape for the Richard Purvis concert, the "reopener," which is described elsewhere in this issue. The organ behaved beautifully for Mr. Purvis, but while he played this writer couldn't keep the many days spent with the repair crew out of mind. Somehow, it seemed that they should be standing up there in their chamber-soiled coveralls, taking



ANDY RIMMER, Britain's contribution to the Elks Temple organ detail, examines a pipe in the Choir Chamber.

bows with Mr. Purvis. Yet, not a one of them would think of such a move; they'd gotten their kicks just from working. Let the artists do the bowing.

Let's take a look at the crew foreman first. Dick Stoney is a rare pipe AND electronic organ technician. The latter makes him a living but his heart is with the former. He first got interested while attending South Pasadena High School, which has a small straight organ in its auditorium. He managed to find excuses to hang around the chamber doors while the organ was being serviced—by Henry Pope, incidentally. About the same time,



ROY CASAVANT tightens the bottom board on the Wooden Harp chest, while PHIL DAVIS examines the "hardware": Gong, Tamborine, Tom-tom and Castanets.



STEVE ROSS holding 'em down at the Console.



ROSS FARMER brushes dust from switch stacks. Organ unification switches are among the hardest, most dependable types known, but must be used often to prevent oxidation.

the first George Wright Hi-Fi label records started appearing on record racks. The high school junior became hopelessly "hooked" and has remained so. Stoney is a native Californian, 30, unmarried (but he's looking for a gal—a non-smoker, non-boozer, who likes organs), and recently acquired a building in which to set up an eight-rank Wurlitzer he bought several years ago. Tall, handsome Dick Stoney "got his feet wet" working on the Wiltern Kimball and a natural mechanical aptitude soon provided know-how in all areas of organ maintenance except for repairing and voicing pipes, which he intends to learn. He still lives in South Pasadena with his mother



NEAL KISSEL indulging in two favorite hobbies.

and younger sister, and drives about 20 minutes to the Elks Temple. His other hobby is photography. Some of the photos which illustrate this story were shot by Dick. He is popular with his crew and his leadership is insinuated rather than imposed. Asked why he undertook such a gargantuan project, he replies quietly, "I just enjoy working on pipe organs — that's all." Perhaps his specifications for a girl should include "plays organ" — because Dick doesn't!

Russ Patton is a bachelor, too — although he's been working at it for many years longer than Dick Stoney. Russ has



IRVING COSGROVE trying to recall which pipe he hid his cigarettes in. The tall metal pipes are the bass end of the Aeoline.



BILL EXNER specializes in leathering.



THE PAYOFF — Photo taken during the Purvis concert gives some idea of the size of the hall. The Console is directly in front of the unenclosed Great.

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CHAPTER NEWS, contd.

funny points. It seems they were just one step ahead of the wreckers all the way.

Mary and Don's new home was built around this organ and the whole installation is beautifully done. The cathedral-beamed ceiling in the living room helps give a nice reverb and the pipes speak behind a lovely grillwork in the dining ell. This sound is alive.

A jam session followed the concert, including a few requests by past chairman Denny Unks.

We understand that John and Flo Hobbs are hard at work on that three-manual, eleven-rank Robert Morton of theirs. They may set up a "work night" a couple of Friday evenings each month if any of you experienced organ builders are game.

Things are still happening every Tuesday night at Ken and Karol Shirey's. Everyone starts popping in from 7 p.m. on. The Wurlitzer is going, but there's still lots to be done. Incidentally, while on a trip to the West Coast recently, the Shireys had the pleasure of spending an evening with George and Vi Thompson in their Echo Valley Canyon home near Salinas, Calif. George is editor of *THEATRE ORGAN* and Vi is circulation manager. (The Thompson installation was covered in the Summer 1966 issue of *TOBB*.) It is obvious the amount of work and time that has been spent in making this installation, and the result is a fantastic sound. We enjoyed seeing George and Vi again so soon after Detroit and can only say they are wonderful hosts and have a terrific installation.

We have been able to secure limited access to the Akron Civic Theatre (formerly Loew's) and three members, namely, Denny Richards, Wilson Bruggert and Ken Shirey, have permission to work on the three-manual Wurlitzer there. We are hoping the boys can get it in shape to have a meeting there in the near future.

—Karol and Ken Shirey

WELCOME, NEW CHAPTERS!

- **BEEHIVE**
Salt Lake City, Utah
- **CENTRAL OHIO**
Columbus, Ohio
- **SOUTHERN FLORIDA**
Miami, Florida
- **KAW VALLEY**
Lawrence, Kansas

NOW 31 ATOE CHAPTERS

GUYS FIX ORGAN

(Continued from Page 7)

been an organ fan ever since he heard his first TO at the New Albany Theatre in Vincennes, Indiana, during the silent movie era when he was 16. Russ has been a railroad man most of his life and is now a machinist with the Southern Pacific, which partly explains his aptitude for organ repair and maintenance. He had assumed that the theatre organ had passed into history, unmourned, until the evening he visited the Wiltern Theatre and saw the well-kept console down front. He asked about it and was told about ATOE. He joined in 1963. The first time we interviewed him, he was patiently re-leathering pouches in one of the anterooms in the Temple. During the first days of the project, a colleague said, "He was pure hell-on-wheels with a vacuum cleaner." Russ has the shortest haul of any crew member; he lives only a quarter-mile from the Temple.

Another bachelor (although he has hopes) is Kenny Kukuk (whose last name can be spelled backwards with no change in sound, or even starting in the middle). Kenny got a lot of encouragement from his dad who bought a Hammond for Ken to learn on. Kenny, now 21, attended a jam session at the Wiltern in 1963 and decided pipes were for him, aided and abetted by the artistry of Bob St. John, who was playing when he came in. He has since acquired a 2-6 Wurlitzer from the LA English Lutheran Church and has it playing at home. His specialty is the mechanics of the organ, switches, couplers and motors.

Paul Birk has been married 30 years, but doesn't look it. He heard his first TO in the Eagles Theatre, Wabash, Indiana, at the age of five. He has never recovered and doesn't want to. He says that he has "no trouble at home" justifying the stream of Saturdays he has devoted to the Elks Morton, indicating that the Mrs. understands and doesn't assume the "Wurlitzer widow" stance. "Anyway, this is a Morton," says Paul. Paul, who plays a Hammond at home, specializes in wiring and chest repair. He lives in Palos Verdes Estates, about 35 miles from the Elks Temple, the farthest "commuter" on the crew. Paul is a licensed aircraft pilot which fits in with his vocation — mechanical engineer. He specializes in aeronautics and has done work on re-entry space vehicles. Paul is the kind of guy who will sit through two Radio City Music Hall shows to hear the organ twice. He's done just that — whenever he passes through New York.

The clown of the group is Irving Cosgrove, who describes himself as "the finky type." Irving is also a Hoosier and claims that he was maintaining a church

organ at the age of three in Reynolds, Indiana. He lives in Hollywood, about 20 minutes from the Elks Temple "with a gal I married quite awhile ago." One thing we noted about Irving was his talent for falling asleep. On several occasions we found him at his work station, dutifully holding down a key while others sought out the dead note, and he was snoring gently. He says he likes girls and his specialty is holding notes, vacuuming — and "taking naps." Irving is something of a mascot to the crew. He always has a ready quip, such as "Let's go to lunch." He is the life of the party at Al's lunch counter, a block from the Temple, and during lunch regales the others with quaint sayings and hilarious stories which always end up with the punch line, "That was no lady—that was my wife." He once got locked in a chamber and no one missed him for several days. He turned to organ work to escape from a somewhat lonely home life; his wife spends a lot of time at the zoo, probably trying to find some clues as to how Irving developed into the creature he is. But he's always good for laughs.

One of the youngest members of the Elks Temple "fixit 'n cleanup" crew is Phil Davis, 16. Phil's family moved to Southern California from Tulsa, Oklahoma, five years ago and Phil already had a musical headstart; his mother plays piano and organ. They have a Baldwin plug-in at home and also a piano. Phil plays them both, and also the violin. With all that background, Phil plans a career as a musician, possibly as a teacher (his mother is a teacher of Latin and English in the public schools). As one of the youngest and, therefore, most agile (and wasp-waisted) of the crew, Phil gets the jobs which require a good "crawler," and that includes a lot of area covered by the big Morton. At the present time Phil is a junior in high school, which leaves him his Saturdays free to chart new paths of exploration in the Morton's innards. He plays well, in fact good enough to entertain before the show in a local movie house. He's been with LA Chapter's work crews for about a year.

It would not be cricket to mention Damon without Pythias, so we'll write about another 16-year-old, Steve Ross, next. Steve, also 16, first fell in love with an electronic at the age of 11. A neighbor lady played her spinet with the window open, and Steve would sit under her window and soak up the music. But he shifted his affection to pipes after attending an ATOE concert at the Wiltern played by Korla Pandit. The Glendale native has been studying with Lloyd del Castillo for the past year and a half, and his folks came through with a Gulbran-