

BOB VAN CAMP (Continued)



manual, eight-rank Kimball at the West-side Theatre, and broadcasted over Station WGBI.

The war found Bob fighting the battle of Wright Field behind a desk in Dayton, Ohio. During this period he managed to broadcast over WHIO, Dayton. Following the war Bob returned to Scranton, working for a brief period as organist for a roller rink on a Hammond. It was this instrument that brought him to Atlanta in 1947 to play on WSB radio. Bob lost no time in discovering the Fox Theatre and upon starting there as organist found the magnificent instrument in a sad state of repair. At that time the organ was used for brief periods, usually to get the movie screen raised or lowered. When Noble Arnold

became general manager, he brought in Eddie Ford and Stanley Mallote, trying to revitalize interest in the organ. However, when their engagements ended, the mighty Fox organ became a sleeping giant for ten years.

In the winter of 1962, ATOE entered the rather dismal scene in the persons of Tiny James and Erwin Young. After several conferences with Mr. Arnold, an agreement was reached on February 14, 1963, that the organ could be inspected for the possibility of restoration. The details of the restoration of the organ have already been reported in the association's journal. By the Fall of 1963, the organ was in first class condition, thanks to the capable administration of Joe Patten and the many chapter members who worked with him, and Bob one day received a telephone call and still recalls that the words spoken over the phone were, "The Fox organ is going to be used for a show and you are going to play it." So began a busy schedule of working out arrangements, and by November 22 all arrangements had been completed for the great golden console to rise from the orchestra pit when the tragic news of the assassination of President Kennedy was received. It was decided to delay the opening until Thanksgiving Day, an opening that would be a complete, unannounced surprise. That opening went like this.

In the darkened theatre there appeared on the screen the word "Listen" as two

soft notes on the left side of the theatre played. The words "Listen Very Carefully" appeared on the giant screen as two wispy notes on the right side were sounded. Then as the mighty console began its ascent with Bob playing "Georgia On My Mind," the legend on the screen proclaimed that the mighty Fox organ was again in full voice ten years after its silence to delight the thousands of Atlantans who remembered, as well as the thousands too young to remember. The response to the organ was that of overwhelming enthusiasm.

Bob is still very much on the air, having served as musical director and chief announcer for WSB radio for twenty years. His Monday-through-Friday morning six-to-nine program is an institution in Atlanta. However, he still finds time to augment his very hectic schedule by frequent concerts and public appearances. He has been very active in ATOE affairs with concerts in Chicago, Detroit, and Richmond, and when the idea of recording, for the first time, the mighty Moller at the Fox was suggested, there was an immediate conclusion that no one else except Bob could put the instrument on wax. One must live with the instrument as he has done to fully understand it. Having heard the master tape, I can endorse it as a recording to be considered truly a monument to the art of the theatre organ and to the artistry of Bob Van Camp.

The Days of Wine and Roses

"Good afternoon! This is your organist and host, Bolton Holmes, with 25 musical moments at the console of the Grand organ of the Lincoln Theatre in downtown Trenton."

The tune of "I'll Always Be In Love With You" came through the radio. This show always made Sunday afternoons a little nicer. It featured Mr. Burton Holmes at the console of the 3/16 Moller in the R-K-O Lincoln Theatre. The great show has been recently taken off the air.

Not many organs have a history such as the Lincoln's Grand Moller. A 1928 vintage giant, the big ivory and gold console had a tragedy happen at its key-boards. When the Lincoln first opened in 1928, the man who put the first breath into the magnificent Moller was an organist named Stanley Rhodes. At one of the first performances, Mr. Rhodes died at the console.

After this tragedy, an organist named Charles McConnell took over the job of playing the pipes. Just before and during W.W. II, the theatre was used for War Bond rallies. Mr. McConnell helped the late Ernie Kovacs sell bonds by play-

ing the beloved songs of the G.I.'s as Ernie would walk through the aisles graciously accepting payments for the bonds. (Ernie got his start in show business at the Lincoln.)

Following the wartime use the organ was forgotten until 1948, when the great Moller was given back its voice. It continued to be played for the next few years by Mr. McConnell, until he passed away. At this time, Bolton Holmes carried on the duty of bringing the movies to the silver screen and sending them off with a majestic chord. Mr. Holmes has been organist at the Lincoln for 18 years. During this period, the "Lincoln Rockettes" (actually the Lincoln Steppers) were accompanied in their dance routines by the organ. He also helped the "Ballet Rouge" flutter back and forth across the stage. In addition to all this, there was a symphony orchestra to add to the spectacular sound and stage show. Unfortunately, that is all past. The organ still fills the theatre with sound from the "Golden Era" under the guidance of Mr. Holmes' adept hands and feet. Since cold weather has come, quite a few ciphers are evident, but they are being taken



care of. The behemoth is still played every Saturday and Sunday before the matinee.

The Lincoln Moller seems to be the sister organ of the 3/19 Moller from the Sedgwick Theatre in Philadelphia. The consoles of the two organs are exactly the same.

The Lincoln Grand Moller has had three generations of tuning and repair. A Mr. Ben Lenore from Philadelphia first worked on the organ. His son-in-law took over and carried on the work. Now Ben Lenore's grandson keeps the monster in shape. (What devotion!)

The writers have come to the conclusion that this organ is not an antique, but an historical monument to the "Days of Wine and Roses."

—by Charles Balogh and Harry Schroeder