

New Central Ohio Chapter Masterminds as ...

Theatre Organ Returns to Columbus

By Roman Walek

To the swelling refrain of "Romance," Roger Garrett returned to the Loew's Ohio Theatre, Columbus, Sunday noon, November 12, 1967, under the auspices of the Central Ohio Chapter, ATOE, after an absence of 25 years.

It was a nostalgic moment, indeed, to see the magnificent ivory and gold console heave into view to the resounding applause of 2,500 pairs of hands.

Due to the unfailing enthusiasm and perseverance of impresario Tom Hamilton, chapter treasurer, the two-hour concert was a phenomenal success.

Mr. Garrett held down the Howard seat of the four-manual, 22-rank Robert Morton for ten years until Uncle Sam beckoned him in November, 1942.

The artist has an inimitable style and catholic taste in music which was reflected in the program offered. From the "Donkey Serenade" with the echoing clomp, clomp of the critter's hooves through the delightful Rodgers and Hammerstein tunes from "South Pacific," it was apparent to the listeners the mastery the performer had over the 202-stop-key monster.

To demonstrate the resources of the instrument Mr. Garrett took the crowd on a musical tour of the two organ chambers, one on each side of the proscenium of this 3,000-seat flagship of the Loew's circuit in Columbus. The house is under the stewardship of Sam Shubouf, city manager, who made it possible to have the event take place.

Those old enough to remember the mighty voice of the theatre pipe organ were also rewarded with a sing-along—slides and all. The audience participation was resounding—shades of Henri Keates! (An aside to John Muri: I still agree with you.)

After a brief intermission Mr. Garrett opened the second half with "Valencia," then on to the "Sleigh Ride" although the weatherman did not cooperate for we had a delightful fall Sunday as only we central Ohioans can enjoy. Then on to the schmaltzy music of Strauss and "The Emperor Waltz." A chronological examination of the motion picture theme songs from the '20's through the '40's then followed. Again the audience was able to exercise its collective vocal cords with the inevitable contest between the dolls and guys. In keeping with the character of Columbus as the football capital of the world, the college songs so dear to the ears of the crowd were included

in the medley. I would be remiss if I did not mention Grofe's "On the Trail." The concluding selection was "Marche Slav" by Tchaikovsky. As Eddie Weaver would have put it, this really shook the dust off the huge chandelier. Once again to the strains of the Garrett musical trademark, the console descended into the pit accompanied by the thunderous applause of a standing ovation.



ROGER GARRETT AT CONSOLE—This was a familiar sight to Columbus audiences for more than 10 years prior to his leaving for WWII. This concert represented a 25th anniversary return engagement to delight the ears of the more than 2,500 people who attended.

None of this could have taken place had it not been for the Herculean efforts of Carlos Parker, Jr., in conjunction with Carl Armstrong and Tom Hamilton, who undertook to bring to life the glorious voices of the Morton installed in March, 1928. In the protective custody of Mr. Charles Purcell, and more recently Mr. Joe Worman, stage manager, the organ had not suffered from the ravages of grasping fingers so that all the resources were intact.

How It Happened

In the intervening years since Scott McKeon "cased" the organ on behalf of the Western Reserve chapter which had received a request from Mr. Buddy Nolan to see if the instrument was in playable condition, the organ maintenance trio spent many hours, not to say considerable money, to hone the organ to its present state of perfection. Since early 1966 Mr. Parker and Mr. Hamilton have alternated in presenting a short interlude prior to the last performance on Saturday evenings.

As the knowledgeable reader may recognize, a function such as this can only be successful when many hands partici-

pate. Under the youthful and energetic leadership of chapter chairman Robert Ridgeway—a theatre pipe organ "affectionado" if there ever was one—a committee consisting of chapter vice chairman Bill Hunt, Frank Babbitt, Jack Flynn, Stan Krider, Mike Traisci, Mike Williams, as well as Messrs. Hamilton and Ridgeway, had the venture airborne in a few weeks.

With an able assist from popular local TV newscaster Mr. Chet Long, Mr. Garrett was introduced to TV viewers in a Friday evening newscast prior to Sunday's concert. Mr. Johnny Jones, a byword among central Ohio newspaper readers, devoted a column plus pictures in the preceding Sunday morning's paper, while Mr. Ben Hayes, editorial page columnist for the daily morning paper, also had a squib. In addition, the popular "On the Way Home" radio show, MC'd by Mr. Gene Gerrard over WOSU, also spread the good word. So well, in fact, that the writer's house guests for the weekend from a community 65 miles away, on entering the house Friday evening, said, "We know where we are going Sunday noon." Although the guests came to see OSU defeat Wisconsin, they acknowledged that the highlight of the weekend was the Garrett concert.

In response to the favorable poll taken regarding availability of discs and tapes of this organ-bash, the chapter is negotiating to have both available. The master tapes were made on professional equipment with condenser mikes suspended so that the full majesty of the organ has been captured.

The avalanche of mail to the theatre, the artist, and the chapter has been such that this may well become an annual event. ATOE guests from the Motor City, Ohio Valley, and Western Reserve Chapters were among the identifiable "nuts" present.

In the meantime the chapter enjoyed the 'twixt-Christmas-and-New-Year's party on December 29 at the McKeon hostel, eats prepared by the "ladies' auxiliary" of the chapter, chaired by Mrs. Frank Babbitt, who is chapter secretary. The ranch-style dwelling houses a three-manual, fifteen-rank 1928 vintage opus 5212 M. P. Moller theatre unit in an environment which must be heard to be appreciated.

The above should be sufficient answer to the inquiry, "What are you guys doing in the Central Ohio Chapter that is newsworthy?"