

A BOMBARDE FEATURE

# WHAT'S NEW... ON THE AVENUE?

starring

Vern Gregory, Ed Stout, Tom Hazelton,  
Jim Roseveare, Lyn Larsen, Emory Stevenson,  
and a Host of Others, and FEATURING  
the MIGHTY Style-240 WURLITZER Theatre Pipe ORGAN

♦ Written, Produced, Directed and Partly Acted by  
Dewey Cagle

—CAST—



DEWEY CAGLE



VERN GREGORY



ED STOUT

It was 1937, the Depression was in full-swing; "talkies" had been playing the theatres for almost ten years but there were still a lot of theatre pipe organs to be heard in their natural settings. Discouraged by a "jobless" Pacific Northwest, this writer "sought his fortune" in California, found a job in San Francisco and, at the very first opportunity, visited the Fox Theatre on a Premiere night and heard both the foyer-installed Moller and the huge "Crawford Special" Wurlitzer. They never had one like that in Seattle!

During one of my lunch hours, a chance conversation with one of the other patrons in "Rosie's Cafe" was to lead to a long friendship, for it was the wide range of interests of Vernon Gregory that coincided with my own. My forte was electronics and Vern's was chemistry, but we both dabbled in each other's

field. Vern was working in a print shop and was intent upon developing some chemical innovations for the printing industry. We really became enthused, however, when it was found that both loved the theatre pipe organ. Both of us had worked in theatres at an earlier time, Gregory as an organist, myself as everything *but* an organist (although I admit I could really play the rolls on the Photoplayer). We were both convinced that we were riding a "dead hobby horse", for the TO was certainly dying, and the public couldn't care less. We knew no other organ enthusiasts, which gave us a real smug feeling of being unique in our perception. Little did we know of the wide-spread interest which would eventually be "jelled" by the organization of ATOE and other theatre organ groups.

*(Continued on Page 12)*

—CAST—



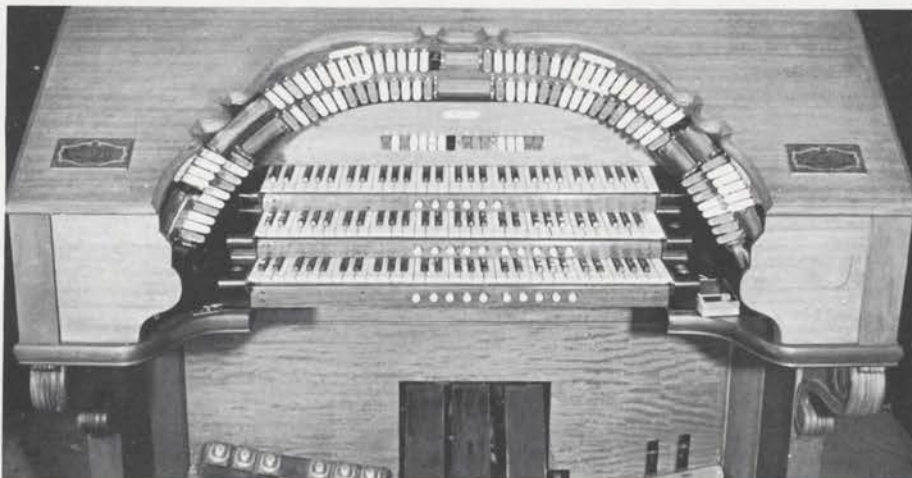
TOM HAZELTON



LYN LARSEN



JIM ROSEVEARE



DOUBLE STOPRAIL CONSOLE has room for 26 additional stop-keys. Pneumatics to activate them are already there, installed at the factory long ago.

## THE AVENUE (continued)

After a World War II stint in the U.S. Navy (in electronics, of course), my first civilian job was with the brand-new Gregory and Falk Company, of which Vern was a half owner. It was here that the Gregory "Deep Etch" Lithograph plates were first made, and they revolutionized a world-wide industry. But it wasn't for me, so I left as soon as a job in the electronics field materialized.

It was about this time that Vern announced he had bought a theatre pipe organ that had been in storage. (For the story of this organ, see the February 1967 issue of THEATRE ORGAN/BOMBARDE). Naturally, I helped set up the instrument on a vacant floor above the Gregory and Falk place of business. During the ensuing few years, Vern acquired parts of several other organs and two complete Wurlitzers; one a Style 210 of nine ranks which had been in the State Theatre in Fresno (Calif.), then in a radio station, later in Bob Kates home in Berkeley (where three LPs were made by Bob on the instrument); the other a Style 165 Special from the Muir (Sequoia) Theatre in Mill Valley (Calif.). The first organ was stored and the latter installed in the Palmer Studio in San Francisco.

The presently owned Wurlitzer was discovered "for sale" in the State-Lake Theatre in Chicago in 1959 by Vern's youngest son, Bob. It was a late model, in mint-condition (Style 240, 3 manuals and 13 ranks), and room had to be made for it in San Francisco. By this time, however, Gregory and Falk were expanding onto the "organ floor" and with a gigantic new camera ordered it was obvious that organ activities would have to move to another building. The 3-13 Wurlitzer-Smith was sold to Fred Beeks in Reno, Nevada; The 2-9 Wurlitzer to Babe Marsh in Vallejo (it's now in the Pizza Joynt in Hayward with 4 added ranks and the Fox Warfield console from San Francisco), and the 2-6 was sold to the Bell Friends Church in Bell, Calif.

At about this time, Eddie Stout, (who had restored the Paramount Wurlitzer on Market Street only to have the organ sold and the house demolished) and Gregory formed a partnership with the goal of finding a home for the State-Lake organ and installing it for public use. The new partners first rented the very ancient New Potrero Theatre on S. F.'s Potrero Hill, did extensive remodeling, installed a "lift" for the console, and then (when the Avenue Theatre became available) abandoned the whole project.

The Avenue Theatre was in better condition, was in a better location and was an "operating" movie house. It was kept open in the hope of providing income during the organ installation. Although the theatre had once housed a small Wurlitzer and had two small chambers, it was decided to install the instrument across the stage.

With enlargement of the 13-rank instrument in the offing, future wind power requirements had to be taken into consideration. At various times, plans were in the wind to heist the pipe-work to over 40 ranks, an idea now abandoned. But if it should be revived, there will be enough pressure to blow the extra pipes. Here's how it happened.



LEFT-TO-RIGHT (above): Veteran theatre organist ALICE BLUE hams it up for an Avenue audience; BOB GREGORY found Avenue Wurlitzer in a Chicago theatre; (below): EMORY STEVENSON, a fine composer, accompanied silents at the Avenue; VERN GREGORY makes with his steely-eyed "Wm. S. Hart" stance during a performance.

When the State Theatre (earlier the California) on Market Street was razed (circa 1960), most of the Wurlitzer organ was salvaged at the last minute, and parts of it are augmenting organs all over the State of California. Left in the house were the 32-foot Diaphones and the huge blower. The Diaphones went down with the house, mashed into rubble by the worst enemy of precious architecture—the steel wrecking ball.

But the fate of the blower was unknown—until rumors filtered back to the Avenues that there was a big one languishing in the city dump. A crew went out to investigate. There it sat in the rain, rusting atop a pile of debris. But the fan turned easily by hand, indicating it hadn't been damaged. There was no sign of the motor.

A quick deal for the "junk" ensued and soon the blower was in the Avenue Theatre, putting out 54 inches of static wind with only the addition of a 25-hp blower motor. The pressure was far too high so one blower stage was moved to

obtain a pressure which the regulators could handle. Another blower stage would be removed much later.

It was in August 1966 that the Wurlitzer was first heard by the movie customers. Tom Hazleton played during intermissions and shortly thereafter (when the house went to organ-oriented programs four nights weekly) he became resident organist. The four-a-week schedule was soon cut to two-a-week because of the scarcity of customers. Sundays were usually devoted to the showing of foreign films, but without the organ.

An "All Star Concert" with Alice Blue, Tom Hazleton, Tiny James, Bill Langford, Everett Nourse, Emory Stevenson and Larry Vannucci met with good success. The Pacific Council For Organ Clubs held a concert meeting at the Avenue with Alice Blue, Lyn Larsen and Bill McCoy featured. Gaylord Carter came in with a "Flicker Fingers" show and pulled a good crowd despite poor publicity. And then, the electronic organ clubs started meeting at the Avenue. During this period several organists played for the silents, interlude, and after-movie concerts, including Alice Blue, Scott Gillespie, Lyn Larsen, Bob Mack, Jim Murray, Jim Roseveare and Emory Stevenson.

And there were lighter moments.

Last summer Eddie Stout came in to what he thought was an empty house one day, and heard noises above the ceiling. As he stood pondering this, a complete stranger (to him) came down from above the ceiling. Shaking in his boots, Eddie challenged the interloper, who proved to be "friendly". It was one of Mack Wurtsbaugh's helpers. Mack and cohorts had hoped to surprise Eddie by rerunning the conduit and relamping the dome lights. Well, Eddie had his surprise! That weekend patrons saw the dome lighted in varying colors for the first time in many years. As Gaylord Carter painted musical pictures at the console of the Wurlitzer, Lyn Larsen (turned lighting man for the occasion) controlled the house lighting as only a sensitive musician could.

As is often the case in starting a new enterprise, once the project is ready there are no funds to promote the venture. Some free publicity in local newspapers, radio and TV had "shot-in-the-arm" effects, but was too soon forgotten. So, in October 1966 the house had to close and removal of the organ to storage was started. The partnership between Gregory and Stout was legally dissolved, with Gregory assuming all assets and liabilities of the former association. Upon encouragement from

(Continued on Page 16)

# CONCERT CIRCUIT

## Jim Roseveare — SF Banker Rates High Interest at LA Wiltern Concert

Los Angeles, March 24—Jim Roseveare visited the Los Angeles Chapter today and captivated a 600-plus Sunday morning audience with his sound musicianship and boyish charm.

The young man who put the huge Vollum (ex-San Francisco Paramount) Wurlitzer through its paces at the Portland ATOE Convention two years ago with such finesse (while insisting that he was a non-professional), played a program of offbeat memory-joggers for the Angelenos. His registration was notable for its crystal-clear transparency; not one muddy phrase was in evidence. Registration variety was aided greatly by the comparatively low volume level of Roseveare's output, a trick which permitted exploration of the many beautiful soft combinations and also seemed to make the Kimball's one, small Tibia seem louder.

The concert was introduced by Program Chairman Neal Kissel, who asked a distinguished visitor to take a bow — Eddie Dunstedter. Jim brought the organ up with a *Fabulous Places* riser in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, an approach quite different from the usual high-kicking and fast show-tune introduction. His MC technique is on the pixie-ish side; he sounds and appears much younger in the spotlight than his 25 years. He credited the organ maintenance crew, then swung into a sweeping waltz, entitled *I Dream Too Much*, by Kern. Jim took pains in compiling his program to steer clear of the hackneyed, the very temporary and the overplayed chestnuts. His *Swinging in a Hammock* was pure 1928 Guy Lombardo. The Roseveare enthusiasm for the moody tunes of Robert Farnon is well known; for this show Jim played two by the Canadian composer, *Journey Into Melody* and later, *A Star Is Born*, which

### PEARLS (Cont.)

ning *Melodies From the Movies*" and went directly into the "Poet and Peasant overture as an opening for the third film — Charlie Chaplin's "The Rink". At conclusion of the film, a few short "Sweet Dreams" melodies brought the program to a close at 11:15 p.m. Stan Dale again thanked Hal Pearl and especially CATOE for presenting another glorious evening for organ music. Hundreds gathered at the orchestra rail for autographs and for a last look at the lowered golden console.

—Bill Benedict  
Publicity Director—CATOE



IN THE SPOTLIGHT—Jim Roseveare's easy-going approach to the MC chore and his "pastel plus" music warmed his audience quickly.

to Jim is a musical synesthesia of a panorama of Hollywood. Later, his admiration for Movietown was expressed in more direct terms, *Hooray for Hollywood*, which middle-aged radio listeners may recall as the "Hollywood Hotel" radio-cast (1937) closing theme.

The Broadway of the Gershwin era was reflected in *Liza*, which found the left-chamber Xylophone talking back to the right-chamber Kinura in a stereo argument. A more recent broadcast theme was *A Romantic Guy I*, from the Bob Cummings show. One of the schmalziest interludes was a tune lifted from an ancient Nat Shilkret RCA-Victor salon orchestra record, *Just Like a Butterfly Caught in the Rain. Tears!*

Jim's beguine offering was *The Night Has a Thousand Eyes*, then he went *Ridin' High* on the Cole Porter chorus line show stopper. Typical of the man was his selection from the memorable score of *Gay Divorcee*, a show which brought us *The Continental* and *Night and Day*. But as we all know, these tunes have become standard organ fare and Jim strives for the unusual. So, from the same show, he played *Needle in a Haystack*. Tres jolie!

We have saved the best for last: Jim Roseveare's specialty is recreating the old 78-rpm recordings of Jesse Crawford, and he does it with amazing accuracy. Sprinkled throughout the programs were such Crawford favorites as: *A Broken Rosary*, *Masquerade*, *I Love To Hear You Singing*, *Miss You*, and a thrilling *My Sin* which cued the downward ride of the big white console. Later, while mingling with his admirers in the lobby, Jim was heard to say, "I'm a banker — not an organist!" He must be a wonderful banker!

—Peg Nielsen

### AVENUE (Continued from Page 12)

many sources Gregory decided to re-install the organ. General and foreign films were shown during the reinstallation period. The organ was again playing in February of this year and the Northern California Chapter of ATOE spent an afternoon there. Plans are underway for major organ concerts as well as regular use of the organ for silent movie showings.

As originally installed in the Avenue, the Wurlitzer was one of the better sounding installations we have heard. The re-installation is even better, as blower rumble has been eliminated (by removal of a second blower stage), pressures more carefully adjusted and regulation improved. Chambers installed across the stage have proved (as in Detroit) to be ideal. This could not be done in the days of vaudeville. No longer is it necessary to sit in the middle of the house to get a balanced sound from the chambers. All seats are equally good. The organ sounds excellent on recordings (FM station KBAY broadcast tapes made at the Avenue last summer, to rave response from the listeners).

The work done thus far at the Avenue is a tribute to the unselfish devotion of a mighty crew whose members have worked with no compensation except the satisfaction of contributing to a worthwhile endeavor. Some of the persons involved in a variety of ways are Mack Wurtsbaugh, Rick Marshall, Bob Gregory, Claire Elgin, Kay Chenoweth, Rod Burton, Pati Murray, Carl and Jo Bareis, Blanche Ehat, Lorraine Cagle, Phil Messner, Paul Messner, Alex Santos, John Johnson, Ken Eaton, Jim Crank, Les Perea, Gene Hanford and Steve Levin. Many, many others have been involved in sundry ways, of course.

Our story ends on a note of hope. Just before we went to press, a flyer arrived from the Avenue Photoplay Society, the successor to the original Lyric Photoplay Society. The flyer announces that memberships in the previous society will be honored, also that the theatre has reopened and is showing "regular" movies, catering to neighborhood audiences, a move designed to keep the wolf from the door until the project can be fully reorganized. Vern Gregory makes a bid for community-wide support for the new society, asking for help in all areas of theatre operation as well as in the running of the Society. Vern will move slowly, feeling his way until he "gets the feel" of the situation as it jells. Soon, organ concerts will be resumed. The rest is up to the community of organ enthusiasts. With their help, the project can succeed.