

THE HERSHEY'S COMMUNITY THEATRE

by Lloyd E. Klos

When Milton S. Hershey returned to the Pennsylvania area of his birth in 1903, he laid the foundation of the largest chocolate and cocoa manufacturing firm on earth. From the two small buildings he built then, the Hershey Chocolate Corporation has expanded to 26 separate buildings with two million feet of floor space and several thousand employees. Hershey, Pennsylvania, is a mecca for tourists, and approximately 700,000 of them visit the city each year to tour the factories which turn out chocolate bars and kisses by the millions.

Stand at any intersection and your nostrils will tell you what is made here. The traffic officers wear chocolate-colored uniforms, and the street lights are shaped like Hershey kisses. However, Hershey is more than just an assemblage of buildings for candy manufacturing. It is a model community, a summer playground, and the golf capital of Pennsylvania.

At the intersection of Chocolate and Cocoa Avenues stands a six-story building, constructed by Mr. Hershey during the depression for culture, recreation and entertainment. It houses the 2,000-seat Community Theatre, the 650-seat Little Theatre, game rooms, indoor pool, gymnasium and library. Movies, dramas, concerts, ballets, Broadway musicals and legitimate theatre are presented here.

The Hershey Community Building cost about two and a half million dollars, and the theatre turned out to be its crowning glory. Everything in it is of the best, cost not being allowed to stand in the way of the selection of any of its furnishings or appointments.

When Mr. Hershey laid plans for the Community Theatre, he knew just what kind of organ he wanted, as he was given the idea by the organ in the Westchester Community Center at White Plains, N. Y. It was a 4-95 Aeolian, installed in 1930. One of its features, the Ancillary Fanfare Organ, was copied exactly for the Hershey instrument.

Mr. Hershey appointed Mr. Charles F. Ziegler, manager of the Hershey Estates, to select and purchase an organ suitable to its surroundings. Both were agreed that a unit organ would be entirely out of the question. A concert organ of "dignity and power" was installed.

Mr. Ziegler called in Dr. Harry A. Sykes to work up the specifications and select the builder. The present 4-80 Aeolian-Skinner organ is the result of their efforts.



INTERIOR of 2,000-seat Hershey Community Theatre, showing Aeolian-Skinner 4-80 console. Swell and Choir divisions are in the chambers to the left, others to the right.

The console is mounted on an elevator to the left of the orchestra platform. Swell and Choir divisions are to the player's left, with Choir under the Swell. The tone of the Choir Organ, therefore, is close to the organist. All other divisions are on the other side. There are no proscenium boxes, the organ chambers occupying this space.

The two walls from which the organ speaks are reasonably parallel. There is some little flare, widening toward the audience, but the tone of the two sides congeals remarkably in the ensemble. The audience can sense the source of the solo stops, but this is rather an advantage. They enjoy locating the more colorful voices.

Dr. Harry A. Sykes, who gave the dedicatory recital in September of 1933, had this to say about the Fanfare Organ: "The single feature which is perhaps the most valuable is the Floating Fanfare Division. Each manual stop-control division has a fanfare draw-knob, making it a simple matter to bring these glorious reeds in with whichever division seems desirable. The fanfare 'sub' and 'super' couplers come along with this arrangement, if they happen to be on at the time. To be able to have the solo Tuba on its own manual, contrasted with the flary fanfare reeds played from another manual, at the same time, having ready the brilliant swell and solid great, is a most satisfactory tonal experience.

"As would be expected, the solo stops are of the quality we have for so long associated with the Skinner Co. They are characteristic and of great beauty."

According to Mr. Lawrence C. Burris, manager of the Hershey Community Theatre, "Many renowned organists have presented concerts on the organ, including Jesse Crawford, Dick Leibert, Lew White and Virgil Fox, to name a few. Over the years, a number of regular organists have been employed, including J. Atlee Young, now retired; Carl Henke; and our present organist, Fred Sullivan.

"Our theatre is not limited to showing of motion pictures, but is more widely known in Central Pennsylvania for the presentation of outstanding stage attractions, such as "Hello, Dolly," starring Ginger Rogers. When legitimate attractions are not available, we show pictures Monday through Saturday; two evening performances weekdays, three on Saturday. An organ program of five to ten minutes duration is presented between showings, depending upon the running time of the picture.

"Every Sunday morning, the organ is used in conjunction with the worship service of the Milton Hershey School, and during the year it is utilized during high school and college commencements, choral presentations, and the like."

In August 1962, the theatre was a feature of the first Eastern Regional Meeting of the ATOE. Featured organists were house organist Carl Henke, and Leonard MacClain, who entertained with silent film accompaniment of two comedies.

Visitors to Hershey, Pennsylvania, will find much to interest them, and to ATOE members in particular, here is a fine theatre with a big organ.