



ROLAND POMERAT TODAY—He went "baroque" for a bit of rice.

A NEW ENGLAND ORGANIST REMINISCES

ACT III

Time:

End of November, 1929.

Scene:

Opening of new Paramount Theatre—Mayor and dignitaries and "by invitation only" guest list. Opening scheduled for 8:30 p.m. At 7:00 p.m. carpets still being nailed down. Wild disorder. Console of "Giant W Wurlitzer Organ" on elevator platform, not yet placed in correct position. Manager Herb Chatkin bites finger nails to the quick while Art Cudy, Paramount Eastern Division manager, gives an imitation of a caged lion, pacing back and forth in Lobby. Hy Fine, musical director, Metropolitan Theatre, Boston (now Music Hall), paces backstage. Music is heard at 8:20 p.m. through background noise of hammering in the distance. The music trembles softly, possibly due to the Wurlitzer tremolos, but also the trembling fingers of the organist. The music swells as the console of the Wurlitzer rises in a pale blue spotlight. The slide announces "JOE ALEXANDER at the console of the new PARAMOUNT THEATRE ORGAN, here after an extended stay at the Paramount Theatre, Birmingham, Alabama."

I had won the audition and was the new House Organist. Joe Alexander, a wonderfully sensitive and gifted player, was the first of a series of Solo Organists. Joe was a product of Chicago, reared in the tradition of Jesse Crawford and the name organists of that city. I will remember sessions with him listening to recordings of the Paul Whiteman orchestra and then hearing him, at the piano in the organists' dressing room, repeat what we had just heard, note for note, strange harmony and all. His stay in Springfield was rather short and he went to Portland, Maine. I was asked to play the solos until another guest organist arrived. This was a very frightening experience. A few months later Brad Braley came to us, a charming

person who played ballads beautifully, almost always in the key of D-flat major, as I remember it. Others included Marsh McCurdy, an extremely gifted player who was a New York Loew's feature artist. At this time the theatre featured the serving of tea in the Mezzanine lobby, complete with maid in black silk uniform with white mini-apron. As the trailer on the screen announced this, McCurdy asked the booth to fade the sound track and he played "Tea for Two" on the Wurlitzer instead. He never played it twice the same way and I was so fascinated by this that I never failed to listen to him playing "tea" from some part of the house. Eddie Weaver then came to us from the Paramount New Haven. He was a dynamic, energetic and forceful player who was well liked. Word came that the Metropolitan Theatre, Boston, was replacing its Skinner organ with a four-manual Wurlitzer. While this was being done, Arthur Martel would be with us in Springfield. Arthur's specialty was that he could make any audience sing!!! He proved that, amply. Although he was beset with various and sundry trials and tribulations and family problems, he was invariably cheerful and was very well liked. Because he had to be in Boston on business for two days one time during his stay with us I had to fill in for him. Rather than write a new solo I continued to play his, ending with one of his specialties, "Tiger Rag" complete with that flat-of-the-hand slap on both sides of the console top (above the stop-rail). All stops were down and chromatic runs were played likety-split for a "flash finish!" Unfortunately Arthur came back in time to hear me do it the last night and he was a bit annoyed. I thought it had been good fun.

Martel was followed some time later by C. Sharpe Minor, who was a showman first and an organist somewhat later. People enjoyed him. Meanwhile I was doing five broadcasts a week for West-

By 1928, Roland Pomerat still hadn't decided whether or not to go the full theatre organ route. True, he had been playing in Massachusetts theatres for several years. For example, Col. Harry J. Jenkins, who carved quite a career as a theatre organist in New England during the "golden days," recalls Roland as the young man who played "relief" at the Strand Theatre in Holyoke, Mass. But young Pomerat, while fully capable at the console, wasn't fully "sold" on theatre organ, not as much as he was involved in church organ work. There was that "Vitaphone" horror that was silencing organs in many areas, and the future in that direction didn't look at all promising.

Then, something happened that was to change Roland Pomerat's life, something which would draw him to the theatre organ and provide him with a career which lasted six years into the bleak '30s at theatre consoles in his home area of New England. The "happening" was no more than a view of a brand-new theatre organ console being exhibited in a music store window.

The BOMBARDE finally located Roland Pomerat, still making music, but at a "straight" organ at a Texas university. We asked him to tell his story "first person" style. The result was not only an account of his theatre career but his story is intertwined with vignettes of some of the "greats" who played in New England theatres back in the '30s.

ACT I

Time:

Early November, 1929.

Place:

Springfield, Massachusetts.

Set:

Music store display window: Saxophones, drums, guitars and a Giant Wurlitzer Unit Orchestra Theatre Organ Console "soon to be installed in the new Paramount Theatre."

Cast:

Pedestrians, jaywalkers, small boys, dogs—and Roland Pomerat, who stares in wonder and amazement at Giant Wurlitzer.

ACT II

Time:

Soon after Act I.

Scene:

Boston, Massachusetts, Lloyd del Castillo's Theatre Organ School. Roland Pomerat practicing elementary glissandos in the dead of night.

POMERAT (Continued)

inghouse WBZ and WBZA, using so much music per week that I allowed my memory to atrophy somewhat. Well, the point is to this day I can't play even the Star Spangled Banner without notes! It was all fun and I enjoyed every minute of it for six full years. Finally there were only about two of us playing along the East Coast. Diminishing theatre attendance and the depression ended my era at the 3-11 Wurlitzer and I went back to church organs. I was fortunate to have a new five-division Austin organ at Christ Church Cathedral where I remained for the next fifteen years. During this time I studied the carillon with Dr. Kamiel Lefevere at Riverside Church, New York, and played two large and beautiful carillons until I moved to Houston, Texas. I am now organist (Baroque organ built by Charles Fisk of Gloucester, Mass.) and carillonneur at Rice University in Houston. I am happy in my work but happiest of all when I receive my copy of THEATRE ORGAN BOMBARDE and read every word. I enjoy listening to my recordings of "organ charmers" Ann Leaf, George Wright, Eddie Dunstedter and all the others—including the new ones like Lyn Larsen who have been inspired to play instruments and music which were meant to unashamedly appeal to the heart as well as the mind and to remind us of a world that was happy, even though we didn't really know it at the time—did we?

LOST & FOUND

NUGGETS from the GOLDEN DAYS

"These stray NUGGETS list some New England organists active in 1928. Lloyd and Jason do their regular thing on page 34 of this issue."

Here are some New England organists in May, 1928: ALFRED ANZALONE, National Theatre, Boston; BESSIE BEASLEY, Bijou, Boston; LOUIS J. ALLARD, Colonial, Nashua, N. H.; CHARLES W. COTTRELL, Strand, Lowell, Mass.; NANCY LOCKLIN, Bradley, Putnam, Conn.; LEO WEBER, Le Roy, Pawtucket, Rhode Island; EVELYN AUCLAIRE, Rialto, Maynard, Mass.; MANUEL DE HAAN, Massachusetts Theatre, Boston; VELMA GOODWIN, Strand, Quincy, Mass.; MURIEL HARRIS, North Shore, Gloucester, Mass.; MARY HEALY, Majestic, Worcester, Mass.; JACK LEWIS, Scenic, Rochester, New Hampshire.

—Lloyd and Jason

THE BROOKLYN

A STOP ANALYSIS

FOX THEATRE

4-37 CRAWFORD
SPECIAL

There has been a revival of interest in stop-lists of exceptional organs recently. There was a time when organ magazines carried little else. Page after page of stop-lists, from 3-rankers to 62, and more. Finally readers yelled "uncle." But the "suggestion" lines on new applications for ATOE membership—those spaces which encourage the new member to subscribe what he would like to read in his magazine—these have reflected a renewed interest in stop-lists. Or perhaps it's just because the applicants are new to the hobby and haven't yet seen an imposing stop-list.

What we have here isn't actually a stop-list. The stop-list records every stop-key and pushbutton on the instrument, one by one. To do that with such a giant as the Brooklyn Fox Wurlitzer would require a lot of space. Instead, we contacted the Brooklyn Fox Theatre and received a reply from Danny Bernstein. He would be glad to send us a stop analysis of the instrument. The stop analysis simply lists the ranks of pipes, chamber

by chamber, and the number of pipes in each rank. Danny felt that publication of such an analysis would help to clear up misconceptions about the organ; it is being rebuilt professionally and is not for sale at any price. It is the largest of five organs in the "Crawford Special" class, having a 37th rank consisting of a Flute Celeste in the Main Chamber. It has Main and Slave consoles, located at both ends of the pit. The Main console is at the pit's left end. The pipework is in seven chambers. On the left side is the Main, with the String chamber stacked directly above it. On the right side are two stacked Foundation Chambers. Spread across the proscenium top are (left to right) the Solo, Orchestral and Percussion chambers. The 32-foot Diaphones are divided, with some located, unenclosed, above the String chamber and the remainder above the upper Foundation chamber.

The Brooklyn Fox organ will be the subject of an in-depth report in a future issue. Meanwhile, here's a list of the goodies we'll be reading about.

STOP ANALYSIS:

Fox Theatre, Brooklyn, New York
Wurlitzer 4-37 "Crawford Special"

MAIN DIVISION

7 ranks, 3rd floor left
Krumet, 61 pipes
Tuba Horn, 85 pipes
Open Diapason, 85 pipes
Horn Diapason, 73 pipes
Concert Flute, 97 pipes
Lieblich Gedeckt, 73 pipes
Flute Celeste, 61 pipes

STRING DIVISION

5 ranks, 4th floor left side (above Main)
Viole d'Orchestre, 85 pipes
Viole Celeste, 73 pipes
Salicional, 61 pipes
Dulciana, 61 pipes
Vox Humana, 73 pipes

SOLO DIVISION

11 ranks, proscenium left (9th floor)
Tibia Clausa, 97 pipes
Quintadena, 61 pipes
String Ensemble 2 ranks, 146 pipes
Trumpet (Bass), 61 pipes
Saxophone (Brass), 61 pipes
Kinura, 61 pipes
Orchestral Oboe, 61 pipes
Oboe Horn, 61 pipes
French Horn, 61 pipes
Vox Humana, 73 pipes

ORCHESTRAL DIVISION

5 ranks, proscenium center
Vox Humana, 73 pipes
Solo Strings (25"), 73 pipes
Tibia Clausa (25"), 97 pipes
English Horn, 85 pipes
Tuba Mirabilis, 85 pipes

FOUNDATION DIVISION

9 ranks, right
Solo Trumpet, 61 pipes
Clarinet, 73 pipes
Musette, 61 pipes
Vox Humana, 73 pipes
Tibia Clausa, 85 pipes
Harmonic Flute, 73 pipes
Gamba, 73 pipes
Gamba Celeste, 73 pipes
Diaphonic Diapason, 97 pipes (32' to 4')

PERCUSSIONS

(All over the theatre)
Cathedral Chimes, enclosed, Percussion chamber
Tower Chimes, unenclosed, Percussion chamber
Xylophone, enclosed, String Div.
Xylophone, unenclosed, Proscenium Div.
Xylophone, unenclosed, right side
Marimba, enclosed, String Div.
Marimba, unenclosed, Proscenium Div.
Sleigh Bells, enclosed, Percussion chamber
Glockenspiel, enclosed, Percussion chamber
Chrysoglott, unenclosed, right side
Chrysoglott, enclosed, Percussion chamber
Piano, unenclosed, left Box
Tuned Tympani, enclosed, Percussion chamber
32' Diaphone: "C" side unenclosed on left
"C#" side unenclosed on right
Toy counter is divided between String and Percussion Chambers
2—50-hp blowers, 2-4 manual consoles