

ATOE's 14th ANNIVERSARY

by Grant Whitcomb

A gala two-day birthday celebration took place during the weekend of Feb. 8th and 9th. Both ATOE and Robert Hope-Jones had their birthdays remembered. Through the efforts of the New York chapter and some cooperation from the National Board of Directors, a series of concerts were arranged. The magic word was Wurlitzer and three were on display including the largest.

The opening concert was held at the Beacon Theatre, an upper Broadway house which boasts a 4-19 Wurlitzer. Genial Ben Hall promptly introduced Allen Mills as the console came up with the strains of "Give My Regards to Broadway" followed by a medley of the roaring twenties tunes accentuated by Allen's spectacular footwork. Some 'schmaltz' then a funereal "King William March" followed by a choral "Waters Ripple and Flow" with the closing "Lady of Spain" for the first half.

The Beacon presents a challenge to the artist as it is a high, two balcony house with the organ chambers across the proscenium speaking directly to the second balcony. The sound is simply tremendous in the balcony while the orchestra doesn't receive the 'highs' or the full bass effect available higher up. This makes a real trial for the artist with such a time delay factor. It is a compliment to Allen Mill's ability that he was able to control this organ with the minimal time available for practice in this busy first-run palace.

A stentorian Bach type fugue as Allen's opening for his fast-paced "Tico-Tico" brought the audience back for more of the musical varieties and when he closed for the morning with his version of "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," the applause would have warranted more than one encore had time permitted.

While the Stanley in Newark, New Jersey is technically no longer a theatre, it is the home of the Italian-American Cultural Society under the auspices of Seton Hall University. The 3-11 Wurlitzer has been restored by Walter Froelich. The house has a ceiling of twinkling stars.

Bob Balfour, the chairman, welcomed us to an open console party starting with Bill Gage. This is an important part of ATOE as many fine artists have been found for future con-

certs in this fashion. As the formal part of the program began, Fr. Monello of the Society praised Walter Froelich presenting him with a scroll from the Society for his work in restoring and maintaining the organ.



— Photo by Richard Neidich

Lowell Ayars at Stanley 3-11 Wurlitzer

The artist for the afternoon was Lowell Ayars. Having played for ATOE conventions and other meetings for years, Lowell is well known in ATOE. A trained musician, church organist and a fine theatre organist, his impeccable phrasing and registration came through crystal clear whether he was using a rhythmical cymbal or a sobbing tibia. The combining of "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" with "When the Organ Played at Twilight" was done in excellent taste. Lowell pointed out that in the early days there were singing organists and then demonstrated by singing two songs. This is a challenge few organists of today can meet so well. The organ was turned over to more enthusiasts who did not have to return to New York.

After a dutch treat dinner at the Statler Hilton, the National Board met for the semi-annual meeting. A resume of the meeting appears elsewhere in this issue.

We awoke Sunday morning to what was to be one of New York's biggest snow storms in years. Undaunted by the weather, over 300 enthusiasts made tracks to the Radio City Music Hall for a special program. Ben Hall, master of ceremonies, introduced Mr. John Henry Jackson, director of stage operations at the Music Hall. Mr. Jackson demonstrated the controls for the mammoth curtain, told several anecdotes and for a finale, knocked a newspaper out of brave Ben Hall's hand with a whip from 10 paces.

Ex-President Dick Schrum opened the musical program with a swinging full-organ rendition of "How About You" followed by a musical demonstration of the glorious voices of the newly restored King of Wurlitzers. The applause that followed showed the ATOEers' appreciation.

Next came Dr. C. A. J. Parmentier, one of the original organists at Radio City Music Hall. He was previously organist at the famed Roxy and proved to be the King of Theatre Organ improvisation. He closed with his 'disarrangement' (to quote the Dr.) of the Liszt "Hungarian Rhapsody #2." Any deviations were compensated by sound and harmony.

Finally arriving at the theatre by dog-sled, Ashley Miller took the anchor-man position in this triple concert, opening with the moving "S Wonderful" going on with the difficult "Take Five" then thru several other numbers. Ashley then took the mike to recall a day when the organ developed a cipher and he had to play around it for 20 minutes. The cipher dutifully and promptly started again so Ashley began "It Had to Be You," successfully camouflaging it. The curtains parted on the opposite side of the theatre and the second console rolled forward with the cipher turning out to have the name of Dick Schrum. They closed the show with a wave of dual harmony. The only flaw seemed to be that each deserved a full concert by themselves.

Following the concert, many old friends met and chatted while waiting for the regular program to begin with staff organist, Jack Ward, playing the organ interlude.

The closing concert at Calvary Episcopal Church is reviewed elsewhere but the rapidly deepening snow was the major concern by this time. Many were isolated on the island of Manhattan with the worst snow storm for many years.

ATOE owes a vote of thanks to the New York Chapter, its chairman, Bob Balfour, the hard working secretary, Allen Rossiter, the moving spirit of Claude Beckham plus all the grimy enthusiasts who keep the glorious instruments playable. However, a vote to celebrate any anniversaries in warmer weather would carry unanimously.