

LARSEN VISIT THRILLS DISABLED "NO. 1 FAN" IN TEXAS

FOREWORD: Much has been said and written about the recent concert tour of Lyn Larsen, the cities, the music, the organs, and the triumphs. But instead of recounting the concert adventures in the big towns, we offer the following vignette which, we feel, reveals a side of the Larsen character as important as his musicianship. In so doing we also come face to face with the raw courage of another man . . .

NEWS ITEM

May 11, 1964 — Seriously injured in an auto accident north of Plano last night was Rodney Yarbrough, 25, of Celinas, Texas. Yarbrough suffered multiple injuries, including a broken neck. He was returning from Dallas where he had visited his ailing father.

The life Rodney Yarbrough had known ended on that fateful night. All the effort he had put into building up a pipe organ installation and service business in his corner of Texas — gone — along with a backlog of orders totalling \$100,000. How he had struggled to make his lifelong love of the wind-blown instrument into a trade which would support him and his dreams for the future. And he was very near his goal. He had the confidence of pipe organ owners who needed service and he was in good standing with the theatre organ fans because of his many deeds in behalf of the old giants in Dallas, Houston and San Antonio.

But as of May 11, 1964, Rodney Yarbrough could forget the active life. His injuries paralyzed him from the neck down. Rodney faced the facts bravely but it was a heartbreaker.

In the depth of his despair, a miracle named Charlie Evans appeared on the scene. Charlie had acquired an historic Wurlitzer and he needed Rod's help in making it sound the way it used to in

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CHARLES EVANS, *Rodney's miracle*

the old WLW (Cincinnati) radio studio. So Rod's vast store of technical knowledge was put at Charlie's disposal and while Rod provided the instructions, the hands of Charlie and his volunteer helpers carried them out. It was a great morale builder for Rodney Yarbrough because it proved to him that he could still be useful in his chosen field, although confined to his cot.

The finished organ sounded very much as it had when Lee Erwin played WLW's memorable "Moon River" late night soporific on it, back in the days when radio had programs.

More important than the organ in Rodney's scheme of things was the fact that Charlie Evans became his champion, urging people planning organ installations to take advantage of the young man's skills, telling the Yarbrough story to all who would listen and urging organ enthusiasts to visit Rodney and write letters to him.

Charlie even managed to latch onto a four-rank Robert Morton organ which he and a group of North Texas ATOE chapter members installed in the Yarbrough home. A roll player was included so Rod could hear organ music even without an organist being present.

As convenient as that was, Rodney still longed to hear a fine organist play a dedication concert, perhaps even Lyn Larsen.

Larsen had become one of Rodney's favorites through the medium of recordings, a much-favored Yarbrough pastime. When Rod mentioned Larsen he was just dreaming aloud. He knew of no plans which would bring the West Coast organist to Dallas.

Charlie Evans made a mental note. Later that night he shot off a letter to a friend in Hollywood, someone who knew Lyn Larsen. If Larsen was ever near Dallas, would he consider visiting Rodney? No harm in asking.

Evans had his answer by phone the next day. The message had caught Lyn

as he was packing his dress suit for a concert tour — and the first stop would be Tulsa, just a short air hop from Dallas. And as luck would have it, Lyn had an extra day on his hands between concerts. Sure, he'd be glad to come and play for Rodney. Lyn had wanted to meet Rod ever since first hearing about the courageous young man.

When the plane carrying Lyn set down at Dallas, there was a reception committee waiting for him. Besides Charlie Evans (who is a well-known organist in the Dallas area), there was American Airlines pilot John Beck and Les Burford, Vice-President of the Dallas Power & Light Co., all theatre organ enthusiasts.

The group lost little time in amenities; this was to be Rodney's day. They hustled him right over to Celina.

It's got to be quite a thrill to see one's idol walk in the door. Photos, letters and recordings are one thing, but here was Lyn Larsen — in person! And our BOMBARDE reporter on the scene notes that the admiration was mutual; the two organ enthusiasts established immediate rapport. They were soon deep in discussion of organ stops, installations they admire, recordings, music, maintenance problems — the gamut of pipe-oriented experiences which form a cohesive atmosphere among the most disparate persons. In fact, the two became so engrossed in their discussion that the organ Lyn had come to play for Rod was neglected for a time.

Finally, Rod's mother, Jessie, asked if Lyn would play. She and Rod's dad, Ted, had been hovering in the background, leaving Lyn all to Rodney on this noteworthy day. But as the hours ticked by, they began to wonder if the Morton would even be turned on.



Rodney's mother, Jessie, tells Lyn about the little Morton which Charles Evans and his crew installed for Rodney. Rod supervised installation.

Lyn was willing and added that they could continue the conversation even while he played. The little Morton, rescued from a dark Weatherford, Oklahoma, theatre was located in 1965 by a group which has since become the North Texas ATOE chapter. It has a Tibia, Vox, String and Diapason, with Chimes and Xylophone added. Just right for a home where organs are appreciated. Rod isn't alone in that respect. The elder Yarbroughs share his enthusiasm.



Rodney listens closely as Lyn plays some of the selections used during his concert tour. The shelf of rolls and the audio equipment pictured help Rod while away the hours when there is no one there to play for him.

So, Lyn sat down at the small console and applied the kind of magic which has put his music in great demand, skyrocketing the young man to international prominence in four short years. After a couple of tunes, Lyn closed the swell shutters some and said, "Rod, I've got a problem with my player piano back in Hollywood and perhaps you can help . . ." The music continued under the dialogue.

"Call me on the phone when you get ready to work on it, and I'll describe the steps," replied Rodney. But Rodney had so much to talk about that Lyn finally quit playing so he could give full attention to Rodney's questions. Rod wanted to know all about Lyn's adventure last year in Australia and his plans for this year "down under". He wanted to hear about Lyn's concert tours and the organs Lyn had played.

Lyn described his adventures in the manner of a seasoned storyteller, full of boyish enthusiasm but with an authority which bespeaks a maturity far beyond his years. It is a pleasant experience to have one's idol live up to all the preconceptions our imaginations can weave around a mortal. To be a fine musician is one thing, but to be also a well-rounded, sensitive human being — well, Rod found those qualities in Lyn.

Conversely, Lyn found a kindred soul in Rodney, who is a philosopher in his own right. His inability to engage in physical motion has turned his interest to the riches of the mind, and there seems to be no limit to quests in that direction. Thus, discussion between these very different personalities continued, love of pipes being the common ground and catalyst.

The clock ticked off the minutes relentlessly and as the afternoon sun slanted its rays through the windows, Lyn played another set on the little Morton. Rod is very proud of the organ. He had his friends busy for days tuning and making adjustments so it would be "just right" for Lyn. After all, doing just that is Rod's bag.

Too soon the hands of the mantle clock edged toward 4:30 when Lyn would emplane for his next concert on the following night in Wichita. The two said their goodbyes reluctantly and Lyn was spirited back to Love Field by his "honor guard."

He left a radiant Rod Yarbrough behind. Somehow, the four years of confinement, at least for the moment, didn't seem so intolerable.

— Hal Steiner, Dallas



Rod's eye-view of Lyn Larsen (holding a bottle of his favorite beverage — Burpsi-Booma). The organist was happy to relax between concerts with a most knowledgeable fellow enthusiast.

ORGAN LITERATURE FOUNDATION MOVES

The Organ Literature Foundation, which has been a source of books on organ history, lore and construction since 1950, is expanding. In an effort to improve service to its customers, the Foundation has moved from its long familiar address (Nashua, New Hampshire) to larger quarters in Braintree, Massachusetts. Proprietor Henry Karl Baker states, ". . . the move has enabled us to increase storage space and stock facilities, so we can give 'return mail' service from now on."

Baker added that the Foundation has released an Addenda List (No. 61) which is available to readers who send a self-addressed, stamped (6c) envelope to: The Organ Literature Foundation, 45 Norfolk Road, Braintree, Mass. 02184.

Special Editorial

IT IS IMPORTANT

It is once again time for our annual election of Directors. Every paid-up member will be receiving a ballot by mail. There are four vacancies to fill and we still need a few more candidates. Please submit at once the name of a member who you think would be willing to serve well in this capacity. These people, together with the four remaining board members, will elect our officers (according to corporation law) for the next fiscal year. If you are really interested in this work, please vote and return your ballot as soon as possible. Last year's election had the greatest response so far. Many more people are now showing more interest in ATOE as a national organization as they realize the national is what holds this entire country together. The only way we can get the work done is by volunteers and the only pay they receive is appreciation.

While there is no music without theatre organists, the best organist can't play a note without an organ. While

some decry 'organ politics,' any organization must have rules to function and without them we cannot get together to restore organs to playing condition. The whole country's interest in theatre organ has been through our united actions as ATOE even though there are many worthy organ clubs scattered around the country. There are those of us who can't play a note but serve and support the pipes and without us there would be very few organs to be played. Keep our ATOE great and responsible and we will have theatres asking us to come in.

With your ballot, send any ideas, suggestions or gripes. Maybe you will come up with some vital thought that has been unknown up to this time. So many in our group are new. Our growth in the last few years has been remarkable and I firmly believe we have only begun.

Return your ballot as soon as possible. Let's cast a record number of votes in 1969.

— Al Mason