

"HAPPY" VALLEY LEADS THE WAY

Connecticut Valley Begins New Era

by Allen Miller

Early in 1969, the Connecticut Valley Chapter, under its incorporation as The Connecticut Valley Theatre Organ Society, finalized legal and accounting arrangements which culminated in a Charitable and Educational Federal income tax exemption as an organization described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. To us laymen, this means that the Connecticut group can accept donations, and more important, perhaps, that the donor can write off such donations on his income tax report.

Initial chapter studies showed that the State incorporation as a Charitable and Educational organization does not place an organization in this tax exemption category. Further study showed that no Theatre Organ group had previously applied for such a qualification, and that a special filing would be required.

As a result of much hard work by Chairman Stillman Rice, and his whole Executive board, some of whom took a day or two off work to help compile and file the required "book", the chapter was granted the exemption retroactive to the beginning of 1968.

Shaskan 3/22 Wurlitzer Donated to Chapter

The IRS tax ruling enabled the ConnValChaps to accept a most generous offer from member George Shaskan, who found it necessary to sell his beautiful estate, including the organ studio which housed the 3/22 Wur-

litzer, a favorite gathering place for the chapter. The instrument, which was a prize possession of Mr. Shaskan, includes choice Brass ranks and a Post-horn as well as several soft string ranks not normally found on Wurlitzers of this size. The instrument with its Kimball console had been rebuilt and installed professionally, is in excellent condition, and will be placed in a suitable auditorium where it can be heard publicly.

Programming Gets New Lift

When Program Chairman, Mike Foley took office, he promised us a new and exciting schedule which began at our April meeting. Commencing at Clinton's in New Haven, our business meeting was followed by a slide-sound presentation of the chapter's progress with the Thomaston Opera House 3/10 Marr & Colton installation. Pictures of the restoration of the chapter organ, and the chambers under construction in the Opera House taken by various members, had been assembled by Al Miller, who added a synchronized sound track.

Education Chairman Angelo Mastagni then set up a technical panel discussion aided by four of our chapter technicians, Roger Davis, who handles Allen electronic sales and maintenance, Phil Stock, owner of the 3/19 (now 29 rank) Lynn (Mass.) Paramount Wurlitzer, Bert Clough, Wurlitzer theatre installer, and Al Miller, Asst. Vice President of Austin Organs.

The panel was bombarded with questions from the membership which ran the gamut from Second Touch to a discussion of leather deterioration as it affects theatre organ rebuilding projects. Even our guest artist, Lowell Ayars joined in the lively discussion which finally had to be cut off so we could adjourn to the New Haven Paramount for a private concert by Lowell Ayars.

Mr. Ayars is well known to ATOS for his musical talents, and his concert on the chapter rebuilt 2/10 Wurlitzer, augmented with the Post Horn from the Shaskan Wurlitzer, included some of the best playing we had heard. Lowell's program was well planned, varied, and inspired . . . topped only by his superb use of the instrument. This reviewer left the theatre feeling that he had really heard the Paramount organ played to its fullest artistic advantage, and the two standing ovations given Lowell for his presentation were well earned.

June Meeting Sees Farewell to Shaskan Wurlitzer

Thanks to the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Rieck, the new owners of the George Shaskan Estate, the Connecticut Valley Chapter was able to hear a farewell concert on its second Chapter organ. If this doesn't sound unusual, just imagine that you have just moved into a fabulous estate, and right in the middle of your home is a room full of "drainpipes" and other "plumbing" connected to a box which looks like three pianos set on top of each other. You have never heard this thing, and you know nothing about it except that some group owns it and will take it out.

Then you get a phone call, and someone wants to arrange for 100 strange people to come into your home and listen to a concert on this thing, which you are told is a theatre organ. Would you agree? The Riecks did!

At the New Haven Paramount. L. to R.: Mike Foley, Ev Bassett and Phil Stock.



After taking advantage of an open console session at the Weavers' 3/19 Marr & Colton in Bethany on Saturday afternoon, June 14, chapter members assembled at the installation of our 3/22 Wurlitzer in the Rieck studio. Members who desired had a last chance at the instrument before its removal, after which a short business meeting was held. National President, Al Mason, and Secretary, Betty had flown in for the event. Al received a copy of the IRS portfolio filed by the chapter so that the information could be made available to any other chapter wishing to apply for the tax classification now that a precedent has been set. President Mason made several comments during which he referred to us as "The happiest ATOE chapter I know."



Chairman Stillman Rice presents I.R.S. portfolio to Al Mason.

And happy we were a few minutes later when guest artist, Dennis James took his place at the instrument for its farewell concert. If you have not yet heard Dennis, you have missed one of the young generation of theatre organists who shows the most potential.

When we heard George Wright say how good Dennis James was during George's last concert in Rochester, we had to hear for ourselves. Dennis, now 18, has studied music for 11 years. His theatre organ debut was at the 1967 Detroit Convention, and he has just finished his first year at the Indiana University School of Music where he is working towards a Bachelor of Music Degree in Classical Organ.



Dennis James during farewell concert — Shaskins 3/22 Wurlitzer.

Dennis James style contains the best of traditional technique mixed with the theatre organ sound of today. His program was well balanced and faultlessly played with careful and imaginative registrations. Add a natural console personality, and the ability to establish an immediate rapport with his audience, and you have a rising young artist who can't miss.

Outstanding in Dennis' program were his selections from "West Side Story"; "Slaughter on 10th Avenue", which was reminiscent, especially in registration, of George Wright's recorded version; and a rousing group of George M. Cohan songs played with a spirit that would have made a group of Hippies feel patriotic.

Just before the organ was shut down prior to its removal, Dennis played a special concert for the Riecks, who we are sure became instant theatre organ enthusiasts.

Thomaston Opera House Installation Progressing

Many hours of hard work culminated in the joint signing of a contract between Connecticut Valley Chapter ATOS (Conn. Valley Theatre Organ Society, Inc.) and the Thomaston Opera House Commission on October 7, 1968. The contract provides that ConnVal will install its 3/10 Marr & Colton organ in chambers which will be provided in the 84-year-old structure as part of its restoration, and maintain it in return for its use of the Opera House for meetings, practice sessions and concerts and will provide an artist for an annual concert to benefit the Opera House.

It is believed the Connecticut group is the first ATOS Chapter to install a theatre organ in a civic auditorium as a chapter project.



Exterior Thomaston Opera House. ConnValChap organ — 3/10 Marr & Colton installation.

The old Opera House is filled with nostalgia and reminders of touring New York companies weeping their way through productions like "Two Orphans" starring Pauline Markham. From the sweeping 'golden horseshoe' balcony with exposed bulbs along its edge, one can really appreciate the beauty of the frescoed ceiling, plush red and gold decor, and unmatched acoustics of the auditorium. It is being restored to its original glory, and a recently acquired chandelier with flickering electric candles will replace the old gas-fired one that hung in the center of the auditorium.

The organ, which was rescued from the Danbury Palace Theatre two years ago by the chapter, will go into chambers on either side of the stage where two false grilles are now located. New acoustically transparent grilles harmonizing with the 1884 decor will extend the full width of the chambers from floor to ceiling with chamber depth kept shallow to take advantage of the excellent acoustics and give the organ an intimate sound which will be enjoyed throughout the auditorium.



Interior of Thomaston Opera House. Organ grilles will replace small fake grilles either side of stage.

While chambers were planned with restoration architects, a full-scale program of organ restoration is well under way at John Angevine's studio where the organ is now stored. There is plenty to be done and ample working space to do it with access to power tools and wind supply and organ current for complete testing — and John's own 3/10 Robert Morton installation makes for ideal working conditions and atmosphere. The men have had previous experience in restoring the New Haven Paramount Wurlitzer and pitched in with maximum effort.

Plans call for the addition of an English Post Horn, a 12-note Diaphone extension in the pedal and a piano. The organ already boasts an unusual 16' Gamba extension.



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Members of Connval responsible for the Thomaston contract include: Chairman Harold Weaver, who has a 3/9 Marr & Colton in his home; John Angevine, also an organ owner, who assisted in the rebuilding of the Garden Theatre 3/8 Marr & Colton; Everett Bassett, who owns a 2/4 Robert Morton; Jack Heavens, who assisted the Weaver's project; Allen Miller, a design engineer with the Austin Organ Company who is building an original 3/8 theatre organ in his home; and Mrs. Eleanor Weaver, who serves as secretary of the committee and has worked extensively on the Weaver, Paramount and other Chapter projects.

Restoration of all chestwork, percussions and relay, including refinishing, adjusting and testing has been completed at the Angevine studio, and we have begun to move equipment into the Opera House for installation.

The console team headed by Frank Manion has expanded the stoplist of the organ to include coupling and unification desirable for modern theatre organ technique, with the major switch layout and wiring changes completed. The console facilities are being completely rebuilt and expanded to accommodate the additional stops, and the combination action and switches are

being recovered in a synthetic which has recently found acceptance by major organ builders as a leather substitute.

Installation of the 3/10 Marr & Colton has been broken down into teams which will handle certain portions of the project. This division of specific tasks, which was one of the reasons for our successful restoration of the New Haven Paramount Wurlitzer, lightens the responsibility on our most technically proficient members, and enables a larger cross section of the organization to become involved in some phase of the project with a better system of coordination and supervision. □

L. to R.: Preston Miller, Kathy Angevine, Al Miller, Bea Miller and Madeleine Manion clean magnets on the 3/10 Marr & Colton.



Gerry Patzold, Al Stevenson and Ev Bassett work on Thomaston Opera House Marr & Colton.

