

San Diego Fox

Robert Morton

Given "Trial Run"

The restored Robert Morton in the San Diego Fox theatre (see October 1968 TO-B) was exposed to a portion of the public on Sunday morning, November 23 last, when members of the Convair Organ Club were invited for a demonstration concert to hear the sound of pipes, the first time for a number of those who attended.

Artists for the occasion represented a wide range in styles of music. First to play was the organist who held down the console at the Fox when it discontinued regular use of the organ in 1932 -- Edith Steele. Mrs. Steele, a lively 80, MC'd her concert, and enhanced the music she played with brief program notes. She told her audience in a voice much younger than her years: "I'm not a concert or solo organist -- I'm a picture organist, which takes nerve and imagination. I'm going to try to bridge the years between 80 and 18."

She was referring to the music on her program, movie cue music from her early days as a theatre organist. The most memorable portion of her concert was the playing of dramatic portions from the score of *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, including the sensational tango which helped establish the struggling young actor who played the lead -- Rudolph Valentino. She made the power of the 4-31 Morton known but never let it become overbearing; her preference is toward delicate and transparent registration, understatement to enhance a film score rather than call attention to the instrument or artist. One of her *Four Horsemen* highlights was the music which underscored the arrival of the American Expeditionary Force to join the 1917 fray in Europe -- a rousing brass band *Over There*, and forget about understatement.

Edith Steele, in the course of a few selections had endeared herself to the Convair group. After they had applauded her, they gathered around her to compliment her personally. The petite organist loved every moment of it. "It's the *ham* in me," she smiled.

During intermission, the restoration of the organ was explained by C. E. Lewis, long time organ aficionado and one of the chief sparkers of the gigantic repair and replacement job. To dramatize the toil involved in making the organ playable once more, some *before* and *after* color films were screened. The movies made their point with views of flattened, "pretzeled" string pipes being rolled back into shape by Lewis with his assortment of mandrels.

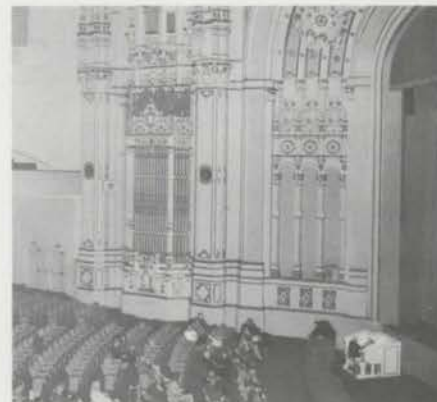
Later the guests were ushered to one of the two Echo Chambers in the rear of the balcony for a look at some of the pipework. The plug-in addicts, especially, were amazed at the amount of room required by pipes -- even in a smallish Echo Chamber.

The post-intermission guest was a young man, who, before joining the Navy, could sometimes be heard playing before the show by early arrivals at the LA Wiltern on weekends. Now stationed at the San Diego naval base, Musician 3rd Class Bob Alder, Jr. plays piccolo in the post band while on duty but off duty his first love remains pipe organs. His approach was quite in contrast to Edith Steele's. Strongly influenced by the current crop of pop organists, Bob broke loose with a rhythmic Dave Rose tune, *The Stripper*, accented by pedal cymbal. Next an artful ballad-in-rhythm arrangement of *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes* and then, for a closer, the 5-to-a-bar *Take Five* which gave Bob a chance to do

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Edith Steele, the Fox's last regular organist, is overjoyed to have the long silent instrument playing again. -- Stufoto



Edith plays for the Convair Organ Club members. -- Stufoto



IT WAS QUITE AN EXPERIENCE! C. E. Lewis recounts a perilous trek to the unenclosed 32' pedal pipes, high up on the stage walls. -- Stufoto



SAILOR IN CIVVIES--Bob Alder likes variety in wind instruments. His capabilities range from Piccolo to pipe organ. --Stufoto

Wright - Baker

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The Aahmes Temple auditorium is a large hall with a high ceiling, a good place for music. At the appointed hour, Don and Bud marched to the twin consoles and played their overture, a duet of *Galloping Comedians*. Then Don stepped to the microphone.

"I'm certain that you in the audience have noticed quite a difference in our ages. In deference to the older man, I'm allowing Bud Iverson to play first." Don sauntered into the wings, leaving Bud looking somewhat nonplussed. But he recovered quickly and went into his first medley, which was rich in tunes by Fritz Kreisler, an Iverson specialty. The organ sounded big and full and there was a lot of registration variety.

Then Don Baker appeared for his first medley. Those familiar with the Baker style appreciate the emphasis Don puts on phrasing and shading in his arrangements. He often brings the volume level down to a whisper, then builds slowly to a thunderous level, and back down to a whisper again. Halfway through his first medley, sounds from a Shriners' event in a nearby banquet hall started interfering with the auditorium show. A combo with an amplified vocalist and a glockenspiel penetrated the soft passages of organ music. It was most distracting to the approximate 700 present but there was nothing to be done; there just wasn't enough separation between the two halls to maintain acoustic isolation. It was a bad scene during light passages.

Of course both organists brought up volume levels to cover the interference but the penetrating power of that glockenspiel was maddening.

The program consisted of pops and standards, expertly registered on the Conn's transistors, performed in two medleys by each organist before intermission, and two afterward. Besides the overture, two other selections were played as duets, *Deep Purple* (with Bud at the concert

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a brief trip through the organ's solo stops (a bright Clarion stood out) while the volume built slowly for a mighty finish. Bob's appearance was limited by the proximity of his afternoon appearance with the post band, so he had to quit after three tunes.

The instrument is now in good shape with a sound not unlike that of the smaller San Francisco Orpheum Morton, and the theatre is planning a series of public concerts with the help of the group which repaired the instrument. The group, as yet unnamed, has a firm agreement with the theatre management and owner covering the future use of the instrument, public and private. No organ club or ATOE chapter is being planned. Concerts will start as soon as the restoration is complete and some name organists have been booked.

— Peg Nielsen, San Diego

grand), and the finale, *There's No Business Like Show Business*.

Don scored with his arrangements of *Blurette*, *Shadow of Your Smile*, *Born Free*, *Mame* and that powerhouse Baker arrangement of *Cherokee*. Iverson played memorable versions of two originals, *Berenice* and *Conn-jetti* (pure apple polishing!), *By the Time I Get to Phoenix*, *Stars in My Eyes* and the descriptive Ferde Grofe piece with which he made solid points at the 1968 Home Organ Festival, *On the Trail*. Fortunately, no one "called for Phillip Morris" this time.

Don and Bud closed their well-received program with an expansive but brief chorus of *Show Biz*, took their well-earned bows and posed for press photos. "Gosh, I feel important" said Don, as the flashbulbs blinded him for a moment. Bud didn't say anything. He was too busy signing autographs for a bevy of pretty girls.

— Stu Green & Peg Nielsen

Gaylord Carter at RKO ALBEE

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Also among the guests were Dr. and Mrs. Jack M. Watson (Dean of the College-Conservatory of Music of the University of Cincinnati). Dr. Roberta Gary, well-known concert organist, attached to the organ department of the College-Conservatory, was introduced to *The Big Chase* and other assorted silent film organ scores by Gaylord. Bach was never like this! Dr. and Mrs. Watson were taken back to earlier days, when they resided in Hollywood, and had listened to Gaylord when he was staff organist at Grauman's Million-Dollar, Egyptian, Hollywood, and others. WKRC-T.V. News Director Bob Jones and his charming wife Janet were present and accounted for. Bob has become identified as the MC for the Ohio Valley Chapter's annual silent film presentations over the past four years at the RKO ALBEE. Bob prepared a "special" related to the *Flicker Fingers* offering, which was aired on his 11:00 P.M. news program, one week prior to the show WKRC T.V. camera crews went down to the ALBEE, and filmed Bob coming up on the big band car elevator; from this impressive position, Bob gave his viewers some background on our beautiful Cinema Palace, as well as on Gaylord and the film *SAFETY LAST*. Our Chapter, as well as persons everywhere who share an interest in theatre organ, are indebted to people such as Bob Jones for their warm-hearted cooperation and assistance in line with the cause.

Other guests included Mr. and Mrs. Walter Barnett and Mr. and Mrs. David Sonenshein of Barnett Organ & Piano Company . . . to whom the Chapter is grateful for providing the *Gulbransen* Rialto theatre model for the show.

Sunday, October 20th, was a beautiful day in Cincinnati . . . made-to-order for a *Flicker Fingers* presentation. By 6:30 P.M., the crowds had started to gather out front and in the gorgeous ALBEE lobby. Stanley-