

THEATRE ORGAN MAGAZINE CELEBRATES 10th BIRTHDAY

Four Chapters Reminisce

EASTERN MASSACHUSETTS

In April 1956, four Boston area theatre enthusiasts — Bill Bunch, Donald Phipps, Dave Garbarino and Brenton Tyler, Jr. met to provide the spark behind the formation of a local group of enthusiasts, as outlined in the A.T.O.E. by-laws. The first formal meeting was held on July 20, 1956 at Don Phipps' home in Milton, Mass. with Bill Bunch as featured organist on Don's 2-7 Wurlitzer. The new group had reached 10 dues-paying A.T.O.E. members by the August meeting, so application was made then for a National Charter. A letter received soon after from Judd Walton advised of additional regulations to be complied with. The membership, now at 23 members, was advised of all prerequisites, agreed to same at September meeting again at Don's home, after which all enjoyed featured artist Ralph Woodworth, Jr. (later to become first honorary life member) at the Wurlitzer. Ralph, a former B & K and Warner's organist, gave a brilliant performance. The following officers were elected at the October meeting held at Brent Tyler's home in Waltham (location of 3-7 Wurlitzer-Kilgen):

President — Donald Phipps, Medfield, Mass.

Vice President — Howard Silva, Cambridge, Mass.

Treasurer — David Garbarino, Acton, Mass.

Secretary — Brenton Tyler, Jr. Waltham, Mass.

(It should be noted that Bill Bunch, perhaps the most active "spark plug" of the group, had to decline any office due to pressure of business. Bill, who was a Vice President of Aeolian-Skinner is now President of his own organ company (Balcom & Vaughn) in Seattle.)

Just after the October meeting, Judd Walton was advised that all Charter prerequisites were met. A letter from President Richard Simonton dated October 31, 1956 was soon received stating that the National A.T.O.E. had, effective that date, authorized the issuance of Charter Certificate #1 to the Eastern Massachusetts Chapter. Plans for what was to become a regular annual series of Spring concerts on the magnificent 2-13 Special Wurlitzer (Ex Radio Station WNAC, Boston) in the

Stoneham, Mass. Town Hall were initiated during the November meeting at the Phipps home. The meeting was closed with a superb concert by Stanley Cahoon, of Boston Metropolitan Theatre fame, on the Wurlitzer in Don's home.

The Eastern Massachusetts Chapter, now with 70 regular members, was incorporated May 10, 1968 in the State of Massachusetts as the first educational and charitable chapter in the country. Each year, for the last 11 years, the Chapter has presented a nationally known organist in public concert on the 2-13 Wurlitzer in the Stoneham Town Hall in April or May. Reginald Forte, Eddie Weaver, Don Baker, Leonard MacClain, Ann Leaf, Ashley Miller, Lowell Ayers, and John Seng have been among the finest artists presented in these concerts. Public concerts during the fall of the year have been presented on the Stoneham Organ about every other year. The Chapter membership list has included nearly all of the pipe home theatre organ installations in the greater Boston area.

Chapter membership restoration-maintenance in theatre locations peaked during the early 60's with restoration of the Lynn (Mass.) Paramount 3-19 Wurlitzer. This work was principally performed by a former member/officer Chuck Whitehead, ably assisted by member Eddie Dupuis. Sale of that organ and demolition of the theatre a few years ago started a serious hunt, originated by the author, for a club owned instrument which was realized in the purchase this last year of the 3-13 Wurlitzer, Back Bay Theatre (formerly Loew's State), Boston, Massachusetts instrument. This organ was removed by Chapter members last summer just prior to demolition of the theatre. It is now planned that the Chapter Wurlitzer will be refurbished by Chapter members under the direction of Don Phipps, former chairman/current director, for installation in a location to be formally announced in a forthcoming issue of the "Theatre Organ Bombarde." The organ committee responsible for purchase, restoration, and installation of the new Chapter instrument is headed by Dr. Jim Rockett, currently Chapter President, with Al Winslow, former chairman/current director, Don Phipps, former chairman/current director, and the author.

—Jim Rankin

DELaware VALLEY

The Delaware Valley Chapter of A.T.O.E., now known as the "Theatre Organ Society of the Delaware Valley, Inc.," is just a few months short of being as old as A.T.O.E. itself. It holds charter #2.

First organized on July 31, 1955 under the name of the "Eastern Chapter of A.T.O.E." (according to our records), this organization accomplished a number of things, and has gone through many changes. A few statistics will illustrate the scope of our activities over the years. For example, over 85 meetings have been held to date. In addition to our meetings, we have sponsored numerous Theatre Organ concerts. Theatre Organ music for these meetings has been played by artists who are well known both locally and nationally. In the field of artists, the Delaware Valley chapter has enjoyed the talents of great organists who have performed on many instruments, notable among these was the late Leonard MacClain, who performed countless concerts on a variety of instruments ranging from Spinet plug-ins to the giant Wanamaker organ.

By way of contrast, we have had the pleasure of watching young talents grow up in our midst. For example: Leroy Lewis, Dick Smith, Don Kinnier, Shirley Hannum, Barbie Fesmire and Dennis James, to name a few.

At one time, in the early days, this chapter covered territory which is now under the jurisdiction of many large and active A.T.O.E. chapters, not the least of which is the gigantic New York Chapter. Harking back to these early days, Delaware Valley has to its credit the first A.T.O.E. meetings held at New York's Radio City Music Hall, New York's famous Paramount Theatre meetings and its final concert, the former Brooklyn Paramount, Loew's Kings (Brooklyn, N. Y.), Convention Hall (Atlantic City, N. J.), Irvine Auditorium (Univ. of Penna.), Community Theatre (Hershey, Pa.), and John Wanamaker's Store.

In the area of preserving Theatre Organs, our members have contributed much time and effort to the restoration and maintenance of major instruments that remain, such as: the 3-19 Sedgwick Theatre's Moller, the 3-17 Tower Theatre's Wurlitzer (made internationally famous by recordings of Leonard MacClain, who restored it originally for this purpose), the 3-15 Moller in the Lincoln Theatre in Trenton, New Jersey, the 3-8 Kimball in the Lansdowne Theatre (Lansdowne, Pa.), and the 19th Street Theatre (Allentown, Pa.).



Barbara Fesmire at the Sedgwick Moller in 1964. This organ is now owned by the Delaware Valley Chapter and is in storage awaiting a suitable location for chapter installation.

On the negative side, we must honestly report that we are no different from any other group of enthusiasts in being unable to prevent the sale, or decline of theatres and theatre organs. Notable among these was the loss of the Mastbaum 4 manual Wurlitzer, in one of Philly's real movie palaces. Other instruments are languishing in deserted and leaky palaces such as the Carmen Theatre (Germantown, Pa.) which has been closed for years, the Stanley Theatre (center city, Phila., Pa.) with a vandalized organ, neither time, funds, nor personnel are available to prevent this decline which is more rapid than the growth of A.T.O.E. Nevertheless, we recently became fortunate enough to assist in the restoration of the 3-19 Kimball Theatre Organ in the Boyd Theatre (Phila.) for a final concert to be played by our own Larry Ferrari (T.V. and Radio artist of W.F.I.L.). This organ, fortunately, is to be preserved in a high school in Wilmington, Del. (near Phila.). To illustrate the tremendous loss of theatres and organs, it is only necessary to note that this is the last playable organ in an operating theatre in the city of Philadelphia. All others previously mentioned are in the suburban areas.

Our chapter members have risen to positions of prominence in A.T.O.E. Dick Loderhose, Captain Erwin Young, Allen Rossiter, Ben Hall and Dorothy MacClain have served as national directors and/or officers. Leonard MacClain was the National Honorary Member in 1962, and Captain Erwin Young, in 1967. Talents from our area, we are proud to say, have played many concerts at national and regional conventions, concerts for theatre organ clubs and societies, or have represented us, such as: Lowell Ayars, Larry Ferrari, Dennis James, Shirley Hannum, Dottie MacClain, Don Kinnier, Patti Germaine, Vi Egger, and Esther Higgins.

In the area of pioneering, the Delaware Valley Chapter has to its credit many firsts. We are the first chapter to have sponsored a regional convention, the first chapter to acquire our own 3-19 Deluxe Unit Moller Theatre Organ (currently in storage) that was our chapter's restoration project. We are also the first chapter to produce our own theatre organ recording, made on our own theatre organ, played by a member artist (Don Kinnier), and financed by the chapter. The Delaware Valley Chapter also pioneered sing-along slide shows, and were among the first to feature silent movies, accompanied by theatre organ. Another first — our Dottie MacClain was the first woman chairman of a chapter, and first woman elected to national office.

In concluding this capsule of our activities, we can appropriately quote our present chairman Don Stott who stated in the first issue of our newsletter "The Lift," that "We are proud of our organization, and proud of our affiliation with National A.T.O.E."

—Grant Whitcomb

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Many Northern Californians have been active in ATOE since its inception in 1955. Present at the organizational meeting at Dick Simonton's home in North Hollywood were Frank Bindt, Gordon Blanchard, Tiny James, Bob Jacobus, and Judd Walton (who was elected Vice President). Since that time Northern California people elected to the National Board of Directors have been Dewey Cagle, Vernon Gregory, Tiny James, George Thompson, and Judd Walton (James served as president after Walton, and Ida James as Secretary-Treasurer). Working on Tibia and Theatre Organ Bombarde have been Tiny James, Dewey Cagle, George Thompson, Vi Thompson, Ralph Bell, Betty Jo Bell, Phil Lockwood and Bill Steward. Tiny James is an Honorary Member (1966).

After Nor Cal Chapter charter was issued in February 1957 we hosted a National Meeting with artists Tiny James, Gordon Kibbee, Dave Quinlan, and Bill Thomson doing the entertainment. Our Chapter Chairmen have been (in chronological order) "Bud" Abel, Bob Jacobus, Bob Vaughn, Fran Aebi, Fred Clapp, Jim Rosevere, Al White, Jack Bethards, Ray Taylor and Bob Schmalz.

Organs in our area have slowly disappeared from the theatres, but we have been very lucky to have many installed in public places in the meantime. Listed below are the organs which were in theatres in 1955. The instruments shown in capitals still remain as of March, 1969.

San Francisco: Fox (4-36 Wurlitzer and 3-13 Moller), Paramount (4-33 Wurlitzer), California (4-28 Wurlitzer), ORPHEUM (4-19 MORTON), Golden Gate (3-13 Morton), El Capitan (3-11 Wurlitzer), St. Francis (3-11 Morton), MARINE (2-6 MORTON).

Oakland: Paramount (4-20 Wurlitzer), Oakland (3-14 Wurlitzer), Orpheum (3-17 Moller), Grand Lake (3-11 Wurlitzer), Senator (2-10 Wurlitzer).

Fresno: STANLEY WARNER (4-16 MORTON), WILSON (3-11 WURLITZER), White (2-4 Wurlitzer).

Stockton: State (2-7 Wurlitzer).

Sacramento: Alhambra (3-11 Morton); Mill Valley: Sequoia (2-6 Wurlitzer); Santa Rosa: CALIFORNIA 2-7 WURLITZER; Berkley: UNITED ARTISTS (3-15 WURLITZER). All of the remaining organs are playable with the exception of the United Artists in Berkley.

Other organs installed and playing in our area in public places now include: San Francisco: Avenue Theatre (3-12 Wurlitzer); Lost Weekend (2-10 Wurlitzer); Hayward: Ye Olde Pizza Joynt (3-13 Wurlitzer); Santa Clara: Cap'n's Galley (3-12 Wurlitzer); Walnut Grove: The River Mansion (3-11 Morton); Sacramento: Carl Greer Inn (4-16 Morton), Grant Union High School (4-22 Wurlitzer); Vallejo: Rudy's Supper Club (2-6 Wurlitzer) plus several auditorium, lodge hall and church installations.

Our members have been active, of course, in maintaining many of the instruments. We have concerts about once a month and try to give our members the greatest variety in instruments and artists. ATOE members not affiliated with our chapter but in our area are invited to join us in the fun. We share Northern California with the Sierra Chapter based in Sacramento.

—Dewey Cagle

LAND O'LAKES

HOW IT ALL BEGAN:

During 1957 and 1958 a group of organ enthusiasts were working on the 4-21 Publix #1 Wurlitzer in the Radio City Theatre in Minneapolis, Minnesota (formerly the Minnesota Theatre). The organ was originally dedicated March 23, 1928 by Eddie Dunstedter who continued playing at the theatre to 1933. The stops and unification of the organ were reputedly set up by Jesse Crawford. When the theatre was doomed to destruction in 1958, the organ was purchased by Reiny Delzer of Bismarck, No. Dakota, who accomplished an installation of the organ in his home, second best to the original. The Minneapolis paper did a feature article about the organ and the group working on it. A copy of this article reached Judd Walton, then Vice President of ATOE. Judd, who had been present at the official opening of the Minnesota Theatre, wrote Don Taft, one of the enthusiasts who had worked on the organ, discussing the organ and also suggesting a Minneapolis Chapter of ATOE.



Al Schmitz, former chapter chairman at KSTP-TV, Minneapolis, Minn.

On July 2, 1959, Judd Walton (now President of ATOE), attended the organizational meeting and the Land O'Lakes Chapter was born. The meeting took place at the home of Salle Cargill at Lake Minnetonka, Minn. About twenty enthusiasts attended, six of whom were ATOE members. Nine new members were recruited at this meeting, bringing the membership well above the required ten for chapter formation. Sal Cargill was elected Chairman, Don Taft Sec.-Treas. It was agreed the Chapter be formed to include members from Minn., Wis., Iowa, No. and So. Dakota and such adjacent areas not already served by an existing chapter. All enthusiasts enjoyed an impromptu program on Sal's 3-26 Wurlitzer from the Garrick Theatre in Duluth, Minn. and the State Theatre in Minneapolis. In

1962 Sal succumbed to cancer, the organ was later sold and moved from this area.

During the ten years following this meeting we have enjoyed many fine pipe organs. In the April 1968 issue of *Theatre Organ Bombarde* a listing of organs owned by members was published. We have only one public installation — the 4-23 Kimball Theatre and the 5-13 Concert at the Minneapolis Auditorium. The management of the Auditorium has repeatedly stated their interest in having our Chapter assume maintenance but approval from higher courts is necessary plus a working agreement.

KSTP-TV retains their 3-18 Wurlitzer from the Paramount Theatre, St. Paul. The Powderhorn Baptist Church has the 3-13 Robert Morton from the Riviera Annex Theatre in Detroit. The Calvary Methodist Church has the 2-6 Wurlitzer originally installed in the Homewood Theatre, Minneapolis, and the Norwegian Lutheran Church has a factory installed 3-10 Wurlitzer. The River-Lake Tabernacle, Mpls. has the 2-7 Wurlitzer originally installed in the Biograph Theatre in Chicago in 1924. Chapter meetings have been held at all of these locations. In addition we have

several fine installations available to us for Chapter meetings such as Reiny Delzer's 4-21 Publix #1 Wurlitzer and Chuck Welch's 2-9 Marr & Colton in Bismarck, No. Dakota and Dr. Roland Matson's 2-8 Wurlitzer in Spring Valley, Minnesota.

We ended 1968 with forty-four family memberships and a healthy prospective member list. While we haven't gone beyond the talking stage of a Chapter owned installation, the subject is never written off.

In the meantime . . . Happiness is ATOE.

— Irene Blegen

Mr. Howard Rowe called to confirm the ending of the Valley of the Sun Chapter. The last organ in a public theatre has been sold for removal. Let us hope that the ATOE members in the Phoenix area continue their interest until some new approach can be found.

EXCITING LISTENING

Reviewer's Comments:

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