



as told to Peg Nielsen

*Organist Rose Diamond is a quiet little woman who is seen at many southern California organ doings. At first we didn't connect her with the "Diamond" heard on New York airwaves in the '30s, but she proved to be one and the same Rose. Those cinemagoers who have seen "The Graduate" saw Rose as the befuddled organist in the wedding scene. In view of her continued organ activity over the past four decades, we figured Rose would have a story worth telling. Here it is.*

One of my early encounters with a theatre organ was at the 4-manual Moller in the New York Loew's State in the early '30s. I was one of two organists that handled the organ solos before the acts went on (It was a vaudeville house). There was also a Sunday morning broadcast from the theatre which was part of my job.

Later on I became connected with a local radio station which had no organ of its own so they contacted places that had organs, resulting in remote broadcasts, and in return the organ spots received free publicity. These instruments were all pipe organs, mostly in hotels. Two of the organs used were the 4-manual Moller in the ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, and the 3-manual Moller in their "Peacock Room." The "Barbizon Hotel for Women" also had a pipe organ which we used. Another location for broadcasts was the Kimball organ on the small balcony of the Roxy Theatre rotunda where I'd sit wearing earphones which monitored the program going on the air. The music was of great interest to the hundreds of people standing in the lobby below, waiting to get in to see the next show and it seemed to take their minds off their feet. I also "aired" the Roxy Broadcast Studio 3/11 Kimball.

Once during a Christmas season one of the engineers at the station offered all of us some of what he said was "cider", just before leaving for the Roxy broadcast studio. It was really apple-jack, and quite potent. My reactions usually take a while to get going and after the drive to the Roxy and some rehearsing of a singer and my own numbers, the red light came on and we were "on the air." Suddenly I began to feel very relaxed. During one of my solos, I didn't

like one of the passages, so I went over it. (Now-a-days you call this "an arrangement!") Nobody seemed to notice anything. It was a very Merry Christmas!

As you know, Roxy built Radio City Music Hall and the Center theatre, both with the same policy. The "Center" has given way to what is known as "progress" — the steel ball. It had a gorgeous 4-manual Wurlitzer, similar to the one at the New York Paramount, but a few ranks smaller. My steady job was on a Hammond, at the "Gay Blades" Ice Rink in the Times Square section. They were running a special feature at the Center, and needed a third organist on the sixth and seventh days, besides nightly closing of the house. It didn't conflict with the rink job so I was able to do it. To go back and forth from pipes to the electronic almost gave me ulcers. After playing the exit music at 1 a.m. at the theatre. I remained and played until 4 a.m. — it was heaven. The main organists for that engagement were friends, Alex Richardson and Betty Gould.

In the "legit" theatre, Orson Welles originated the idea of "no scenery" on the stage for his production of "Julius Caesar". The brick rear wall of the theatre was all there was. His company was known as the Mercury Theatre Players and had such names as George Colouris, Joseph Cotton, Vincent Price and Erskine Mansfield in leading roles. These great actors had not yet become as famous as they are today. The musical effects were accomplished by a Hammond organ, trumpet, French horn and a tympanist with a thunder-sheet suspended near him. The musicians were in the wings to the extreme left of the stage and were not visible from the audience. Dissonant staccato chords in low bass registration were played on the Hammond in the rhythm of marching feet. The trumpet and French horn had the battle fanfares and the tympani and thunder-sheet were used for the distant sounds of an oncoming army and volume increased as they came on stage with swords clashing in battle.

*At the Times Square Loew's State Theatre, Rose Diamond's assignment included broadcasting as well as playing for theatre audiences. Note the "carbon" microphone, the workhorse of radio from the beginning to the mid-'30s.*



Came the scene after the assassination of Caesar. As the curtain rose, Orson Welles, as Caesar, could be seen lying in his coffin. George Colouris as Marc Anthony stepped forward, and in the dramatic silence, proclaimed: "Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears . . ." and paused. Suddenly a tremendous rushing sound of water could be heard from the opposite side of the stage from over the switchboard. We heard repeated shouts of "lower the asbestos" — and it came down with a bang. Since they use the asbestos curtain only in case of fire, the sudden "Niagara" denoted just that. The "corpse" jumped from his coffin, looked around wildly, and ran upstairs to the dressing rooms. He finally found one with a chair in the middle of the room with many burned match stubs strewn around. The chair was under one of the sprinklers in the ceiling. It seems that two of the boys became bored while waiting for their call and decided to pass the time by finding out whether the sprinkler-system worked. It did! Orson told them off in no uncertain terms, rushed downstairs and appeared "live" in front of the curtain, before a tittering audience. He asked their indulgence, the show would continue. They shut off the water, hastily mopped up the flooded stage, raised the asbestos and bravely started the scene again. At that pause, it almost became a comedy. He didn't fire the two fellows. They had that prank to live down until the end of the show's run.

Then there was a radio program called "Good Will Court" which originated at station WMCA which fed the New England states and was later broadcast coast-to-coast on NBC. It was a human-interest program with people telling their troubles on the air and on this particular one real "live" judges were used to give advice. Another broadcast I played was definitely "for the birds" — singing canaries.

Dr. Norman Vincent Peal was the personality on still another program and his interest in people was quite obvious. The 2-manual Wurlitzer I used for theme and cue music on these shows was a honey. Dave Barrett recently told me that he always tuned in on these WMCA organ programs from New Jersey. Bud Taylor confided that he used to come to Loew's State Theatre to hear the organ but never came down to say a word. Those were the bashful days long ago. But have you seen "The Graduate"? Bashfulness evidently still exists somewhere. Wonderful to see and difficult to believe.

And so — to my movie "role."

About this experience I had, playing as a helpless-looking, near-sighted organist in the final church-wedding scene of the picture "The Graduate." If the portrayal causes a laugh, that's how director Mike Nichols wanted it.

An unexpected thrill came during the first day. This scene was done on location and much hammering and setting up of the huge lights was in progress. I was playing anything I could think of, mainly to keep awake (I'd been up since 5:30 a.m.). During the waiting period, Mike Nichols came



Here is Rose as she appeared in "The Graduate".

down the aisle and said he'd like to play the organ. He wanted a full sound so I pushed down all the stops and was walking away when I suddenly realized that he was playing the Bach "Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor," but he was doing it in C minor! He went into a Bach Two Part Invention, also not in the written key. This obviously was being done by ear! In response to my amazed questions he said he had never studied organ or piano!

A while later, Dustin Hoffman, the young star of the picture, wandered down and said he'd like to play. He ran through "Take Five" without missing a beat, and a Gershwin Prelude, and then a thing in nine-four (9/4!). I began to feel a little confused until he mentioned that he'd always played piano. In fact, on a TV interview, he said that his great ambition had been to be a professional pianist until he decided in favor of the theatre.

It was all so unexpected and so heart-warming.

When I left New York to live in California well over twenty years ago, I never thought I'd hear a pipe organ in a theatre again. Then one day I was invited to a meeting where an ATOE chapter was being formed. It was then that I became aware of what ATOE really meant. The chairman



Rose is to be seen wherever there is a gathering of organ fans. Here she plays at an LA Organists Breakfast Club session for the other professionals.

asked each person present to rise and tell about the type of organ he owned and how it was installed. I just couldn't believe my ears at what followed. How could it be possible for a business man, or a white collar worker, or a professional man, or a house painter, for example, to know how to install an organ and yet not be able to play a note? What did he need it for?

Then I noted the affectionate tone in the voice of each. They spoke with much pride in acquiring a pipe organ. It was then, too, that I learned that a garage isn't necessarily a place to park a car. And from the "organ talk" I could visualize the poor wife being told, "It may be a little drafty in here for a while, honey, but I really must knock out this wall — — — !"

But for all inconvenience it may cause temporarily, what a wonderful goal for an organization to have — to preserve and cherish the sound of the magnificent theatre pipe organ!

On that day, to my way of thinking, the people at the meeting who expressed themselves so eloquently in behalf of pipes, they became the stars. □