

Myrtle Revisited

PROLOGUE

It was on October 25, 1958 that "Myrtle" became the star of the first official Annual Meeting of A.T.O.E. Myrtle began her career as a style D Wurlitzer (Opus #909) in Petaluma, California. She played 'silents' for many years, then, with the advent of sound, she was left in her memories until found by Joe Chadbourne of Fairfield, Calif.

Joe had also known the silent movies as a theatre organist. With the coming of "talkies" he turned to the land as an orchardist at Fairfield. A loft in the barn on his property became the home of "Myrtle" and with the careful attention of Chadbourne, Judd Walton, and Bob Jacobus, she became one of the sweetest sounding organs in the San Francisco Bay area.

Judd Walton stepped from Vice President to President of A.T.O.E. in 1958 (the group had been functioning for three years). It was decided to have a National Meeting and the barn containing Myrtle was the logical choice since seating was ample (about 200). Also there was very little, if any, cost

involved. It was felt that the 153 Charter members plus the newer members could be easily accommodated.

The first annual meeting was a triumph for Myrtle. Although only a one day affair, this meeting more or less set the format for all national A.T.O.E. meetings held since. Following the afternoon session of music, the Board of Directors met to take care of the routine business, old and new, and elect the officers for the new year. After the banquet and business meeting in Vallejo, all returned to the barn for the evening and more music. For the record, it should be stated that "Myrtle" sang on that October day under the capable fingers of "Tiny" James, Everett Nourse, Bill Thomson, Dave Quinlan, and Gordon Kibbee.

Jesse Crawford was selected as the first Honorary Member of the year (1958/1959) at this, the first Annual Meeting of A.T.O.E.

"MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE BARN"

Myrtle had been neglected. Her master had been ill and seldom entered the loft at "The Barn." Especially tough on Myrtle was the extremely warm weather each summer. Her tibia stoppers slipped to the bottom of the pipes and her leather dried out and became brittle.

Then, it happened! Her 80-year-old master, Joe Chadbourne, was feeling better. He decided to renew the regular community programs which he had held regularly until a few years ago. But Myrtle wasn't ready, or willing! So Joe called in the "doctors," Judd Walton and Bob Jacobus, and in a few weeks Myrtle was again ready to sing.

The ranch was swamped with cars parked under the apricot trees and beside the barn as they came from 100 miles around to renew acquaintance with Myrtle and Joe. And Joe was again the chipper host of years gone by. He introduced all the "acts," greeted old friends as they came to the head of the stairs, and was generally busy all afternoon. It was good to see and hear them again — this devoted pair: the former theatre organist and the former theatre organ.

The entertainment was varied, and good. A French Horn player from the Vallejo Symphony, a very talented marimbaist, two fine vocalists, a well trained choir of youngsters. But — the real treat was to hear Myrtle again as STANLEY KOYAMA, EVERETT NOURSE, TINY JAMES and DAVE QUINLAN presided at the 2 manual console of this originally Style D Wurlitzer. It was a most rewarding afternoon for Joe! And for the audience, too! □

LOEW'S OHIO THEATRE IS SAVED!

by Frank Babbitt

When it was announced last January that Loew's Ohio Theatre in Columbus was to be demolished to make way for a new office building, local ATOS members and other interested citizens were up in arms. This magnificent theatre had been a Columbus showplace for 41 years and the thought of its destruction was more than the local gentry could tolerate. (See Page 9 April, 1969 TOB).

Realizing the potential of this great theatre and the need for preserving it, a group of Central Ohio Chapter ATOS members and others, headed by Tom Hamilton and Paul Noblitt launched a campaign to "Save the Ohio Theatre." After weeks of frustrating effort to raise the necessary \$1.5 million while at the same time dickering with the real estate firm that held the title about giving us an option, showing them how to build their office building above the Ohio and pleading to give us more time, it appeared that we were beaten. Then Robert Karlsberger, a local architect

who had been a part of our effort, joined with other architects and formed the Columbus Association for the Performing Arts (CAPA) and in a desperate move, took out full page ads in both local papers announcing that a day of shame was about to fall upon Columbus. This ad, which contained protest coupons to mail to City and County officials, seemed to turn the tide and through the generous cooperation of local business organizations, financing was arranged and the title was purchased from the real estate company. While there is still a sizeable amount of money to be raised through public subscription, it appears that the theatre is safe for now.

Several stage shows are now being booked and many more will come this way as contracts expire with other local playhouses.

The grand opener since the theatre's rescue was Saturday, October 11 with the presentation by HBG Enterprises of Gaylord Carter at the Mighty Mor-

ton, playing his own inimitable program including two Harold Lloyd silents. The evening was a delight with Gaylord at his best plus a good turnout of happy Columbus people bursting with pride at seeing the beautiful Ohio lighted again and fairly sparkling in all of its splendor.

HBG, ATOS and CAPA all combined to make the theatre shine through many days of preliminary work in cleaning, painting, bulb changing and other necessary activity. And there was a real cliff hanger in connection with this: The Ohio's screen had been accidentally damaged and a new one, ordered from New York, was still on its way the morning before the Carter concert. Finally, at 2 p.m. it arrived and at 10 p.m. it was laced in place just in time for the projectionist's trial run and the next day's show.

HBG Enterprises, composed of Central Ohio ATOS members Tom Hamilton, Frank Babbitt and Neil Grover, completed its fifth presentation with Gaylord Carter and are now planning two more programs this Winter and Spring. □