



Letters to the Editor concerning all aspects of the theatre organ hobby are encouraged. Send them to the editor concerned. Unless it's stated clearly on the letter "not for publication," the editors feel free to reproduce it, in whole or part.

Address: P.O. Box 2329
Livonia, Michigan 48150

Dear Sir:

I was pleased to see mention of my old friend and fellow-Compton worker, Leslie E. A. Bourn, in December's "Vox Pops" column.

However, unless Mr. Bourn was doing it in secret, other than an organ for his own home, he was not a pipe organ designer for Compton.

Bourn is the inventor of Compton's famous electro-static "plug-in" and, in my opinion, the most brilliant electronic organ designer in the world. In the late 20's and early 30's, Bourn held English Patents and some American Patents on every system of electronic design — long before anyone else visualized the many possibilities of electronic generation of organ sounds. So — let's give credit where credit is due.

Cordially,
Orrin A. Gustafson

Mr. Editor:

Lest any historian read Lloyd Klos's page 17 reference to the Buffalo-Niagara Falls High Speed Line, it was the other Buffalo-Lockport interurban which bounded the Wurlitzer plant; and I wonder how many organs were shipped out over the interurban railway which held a 999-year lease on the ERIE??? The New York Central had a line nearby, true; and the station name "Wurlitzer" was doubtless a tribute to a freight customer.

Patriarchal Editor Freeman Hubbard of *Railroad Magazine* has been forced to note the overlap in hobbies as railfans are organ buffs and vice versa, as illustrated by that British rail-and-TO disc, by E. J. Quinby's eulogy to

late ATOS Wickersham, by the dual hobbies of Alden Miller, etc. Unfortunately some members of each clan are jealous of their one-hobby status!

John Muri may be 99% right as to lack of promoting organists against pit orchestras, but that wasn't true in Buffalo. The 1926 *Buffalo* advertised its resident organists (Henry Murtagh and Herbie Koch) about as fully as its resident conductors (Herbert Straub and Lou Breese); the defunct *Lafayette*, usually band-less, certainly plugged C Sharpe Minor when he came; and the demolished *Great Lakes* certainly made the most of local Carl Coleman, including live programs played into the WKEN city studio upstairs.

Wm. C. Kessel
Hamburg, N.Y.

Dear Sir:

Huzzah for Stanley Hightower and his letter in the current issue. I have been feeling that maybe I was all alone in my distaste for all these cute ideas, and even more so, my distaste for cute or gushy writing. I think, for instance, of the thoroughly horrid article in the February issue, ostensibly written in the first person by the organ itself. I have seen this sort of thing done by parents in home movies of their babies, but this is the first time I have seen an organ personified and I do hope it is the last.

My reaction to it, in fact, was well described by the late Alexander Woollcott who said "tonstant weader frowed up."

Can't the editor of this magazine . . . Simply tell your contributors to "tell it like it is" and forget the fancy writing, and cute ideas?

Now, after the brickbats, some bouquets. Compliments to Bill Exner for the Orgoblo story in the August issue. And huzzah to Judd Walton and Jack Bethards for the article on higher standards of installation in the October issue. These articles contain useful information, not gush, and they don't need fancy writing to make their point. This is how the whole magazine should be . . .

John S. Carroll

Dear Editor:

The current issue of *THEATRE ORGAN* really brought back memories to me when *THE HARRY BLAIR LEGEND* caught my eye. I never met Mr. Blair but through a combination of circumstances his influence could

have altered the course of my life considerably, I think. In our part of the country there were few theatre organs and fewer big name theatre organists. While visiting my aunt in Flushing, Long Island, I visited the Keith theatre there and through her influence got to take some lessons from the long time organist there. This organist was the same Bernie Cowham mentioned in the Blair article. This was in 1934. Every summer I would visit my aunt and get pointers from Bernie. In 1937 I entered Baylor University to begin my freshman organ studies. TWO DAYS after I registered I received a letter from Bernie saying there was an opening at Duke Univ. theatre for an organist to play their 3/10 Wurlitzer. He added that they used his slides and that if I was interested I should write and tell them HARRY BLAIR told me to write. (Bernie was marketing slides through Shapiro-Bernstein and Harry Blair was with that firm at the time. I did write Mr. Upchurch at Quadrangle Pictures, Duke Univ. and, it seemed, would have had the job as one of the last chances to play a theatre organ with song slides but my parents thought it best to stay at Baylor and pursue my music studies. (The Duke job was not connected with the music school or Chapel organ job in any way and I was already enrolled at Baylor Music school). I am, therefore, indirectly indebted to Mr. Blair for a once in a lifetime chance and I never even had the opportunity of meeting him!

I am now a teacher at Tyler Junior College and avidly reading every word in *THEATRE ORGAN*. Other names in the Blair article bring back memories. Through Bernie Cowham I met many organists who were using his slides. Arlo Hults, then playing at the 86th St. theatre, Leo Weber at the 58th St. and Johnny Winters at Loew's Valencia in Jamaica, L. I. One of



Bernie's best ideas was to take each week's news and write complete parodies for sing-alongs. To my knowledge, he was the only featured organist at Keith's in Flushing. He came there from Wisconsin and was the last regular organist there. His work in Flushing began in 1928, I think, until health forced his retirement in the 40's. He died in 1949. Once, in 1939, I mentioned I wanted to buy a Howard organ seat and asked him for advice where to look for one. His answer was "I don't know where you can get one, but I'll will you mine when I decide to bump off this earthly planet." In the summer of 1949, I received a letter from an attorney informing me I had been willed "one Howard organ seat from the estate of Bernard Cowham." The seat is still here and I'm hoping some day to have something besides a Hammond so that I may put it to proper use.

Thanks for helping bring back memories!

Sincerely,
Lawrence Birdsong, Jr.

To The Editor

It appears to me that Mr. Hightower's letter (letters to editor, Dec. 1971) covers three points. I should like to comment upon each one but not necessarily in the order presented by him. First, he condemns outdoor organ installations, particularly the Ensele's "Alice". The attack is not justified. For several years I have maintained the large Austin at the Bohemian Grove in Northern California. This organ has been played with great success for the past 51 years. It is in first class condition and has never had a major re-build. It withstands very difficult winters amid a redwood forest at the edge of the Russian River. It is completely satisfying tonally, considering the intent of its specification. It speaks directly into open air . . . the most perfect "studio" possible. After all, there can be no "room sound" outdoors! The tone carries well and there are no resonant frequencies. All in all, despite what one might assume, this outdoor organ is a most valid instrument. Outdoor organs can be good and from personal observation I can state that "Alice", when finished should be another excellent example. The chambers are NOT shacks. They are very well constructed — much better

done than many indoor theatre organ installations. The instrument has excellent balance and carries well considering that tonal regulation has just begun. One interesting note is that the "woods" seem to improve effectiveness of the swell shades and help dissipate unwanted static noise. This organ will be worth hearing, Mr. Hightower.

Second, Hightower criticizes the style in which the article is written. I disagree with his basic thesis. THEATRE ORGAN has a fairly wide readership among wives, casually interested enthusiasts and other non-technical people. To many of them it is interesting from time to time to read a general interest article, such as Doris Ensele's, written in a light manner. It provides a way for these people to share some of the interests of the more serious hobbyists. Certainly, this type of article should not take the place of "deeper" pieces, but once in a while it provides a good change of pace.

Third, and most important, is Mr. Hightower's plea for high standards in the content of THEATRE ORGAN. With this I fully agree. In general, a

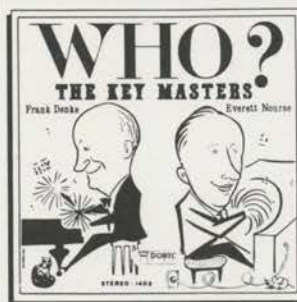
good job is done in this regard; however, once in a while below standard material does appear. I think that our friend from Memphis misdirected his comments. The article on page 40 of the August, 1971 issue (right across the page from "Alice") is a much better (worse!) example. I refer to the type of article which describes and often praises the most amateurish efforts of organ hobbyists. Incorrect and misleading terminology is used, improper procedures are often given credibility by appearing in print, a few days spent in cleaning, trouble shooting and rough tuning is many times overly dignified by the title "rebuild", gross errors in care of organ components are often glossed over with a laugh. The efforts of enthusiastic hobbyists deserve credit if the work accomplished improves the condition of "needy" instruments. However, let's not print in THEATRE ORGAN material that could give people, especially those new to the hobby, the impression that amateurish workmanship is applauded by ATOS. The article, "High School Organ Speaks Again" does no service to Dan Tenerowicz, who I am sure deserves kudos for his hard work.



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One would hope that the work was done more expertly than the article, with its strange terminology, would indicate. To sum up, the Ensele article covers the trials and tribulations of the organ hobby in a light fashion, but it does project the feeling that the owners are trying for professional results. However, the other article projects the feeling that any organ work is good organ work. (For example, "The Oboe was more 'oboeized' while the Diapason (swell) was increased in volume", would make any experienced organ man shudder at the thought of hundreds of amateur organ builders out "oboe-izing" and worse!)

A closing thought. Perhaps it would be a good idea for material to be more thoroughly screened before publication in THEATRE ORGAN to be sure that statements which might encourage below standard organ work are not given a "stamp of approval" by appearing in these pages.

Sincerely,
Jack Bethards

Editors:

While I hate to criticize anything that is said or done by as competent and as dedicated a man as Allen Miller, I am disturbed by the lack of reservation with which he recommends electronic aids for "Painless Tuning."

Although I'm sure he knows better, his article implies agreement with the popular misconception that if the *fundamental* frequency of a musical note is in tune, then the note will sound right with other similarly "in tune" notes. This is seldom true, except for electronic instruments. Normally, problems arise because of inharmonicity, a situation wherein a second harmonic, for example, is somewhat higher in frequency than exactly twice its corresponding fundamental frequency. If out-of-tune upper harmonics are of sufficient loudness (which is frequently the case), beats between them will be faster and more offensive than the negligibly slow beats between the fundamentals. Thus, other than for temperament tuning, it is usually desirable to tune the upper harmonics, if present, rather than the fundamentals.

Inharmonicity can best be demonstrated with a piano (perhaps the worst offender) and a strobe-type tuner. If a string is tuned so that the octave band corresponding to that

note is stationary, higher octave band patterns can simultaneously be observed moving in the "sharp" direction; the higher the octave, the faster the motion. Since one or more of these "inharmonic" harmonics is going to be of primary importance in tuning, it does little good to filter them out (a piano which is "perfectly" in tune will have a scale of fundamental frequencies which is "compressed" from the theoretical scale on either side of the temperament octave).

Inharmonicity with regard to vibrating strings does not show up in most physics books because, for reasons of simplified mathematical analysis, the string is assumed to have complete flexibility. A piano string, on the other hand, is quite rigid, and it is this rigidity in the vicinity of the bridges which produces inharmonicity.

Similar inharmonic characteristics can be observed in organ pipes (although to a considerably lesser degree) for reasons known in acoustical and electro-magnetic propagation theory as "fringe effects." This has to do with the manner in which the acoustical impedance of the organ pipe is terminated at the pipe's extremities, and is one of many distinguishing differences between pipes and plug-ins. This type of inharmonicity is worst with large-scale pipes, but luckily the loudness of the harmonics which are affected generally decreases with increasing scale. A thin-scale string pipe, for instance, is rich in harmonics but, because of its thin scale, there is almost no inharmonicity. For this reason it is always advisable to use such a string rank to set a temperament (which may be done quite easily with any electronic tuning aid), and then use this rank as a reference to tune the remainder of the organ. Because of the string's rich harmonic content, it is usually possible to octave-tune the entire balance of the string rank using a single octave temperament as a reference, and thus avoid the compounding of errors which is mentioned. Ranks of pipes physically adjacent to the string should be tuned from the string pipe at least an octave below the pipe being tuned in order to avoid "pulling" the string away from its original frequency.

The piano experiment suggested above should adequately demonstrate some of the major drawbacks involved with strobe-type tuners when used to tune instruments (or ranks) displaying

a high degree of inharmonicity. Audible-type tuners with clarinet tones, on the other hand, are nearly as rich in harmonics as string pipes, and as such are much more useful for putting all the significant harmonics into proper perspective.

One last comment concerns a technicality involved with using an earphone in connection with an audible-type tuner in order to amplify the tuner's sound. Neurologically, it is almost impossible for a beat to be produced "inside the head." Two sounds, in order to beat against one another, must be algebraically added either acoustically or electronically *before* they reach the eardrum; the brain is incapable of performing this addition. This can be demonstrated by hooking a pair of tight-fitting stereo headphones to two independent audio oscillators, and then trying to tune one oscillator to the other by "zero beating" it. Removing the headphones and positioning one ear between the two phones will make a much easier job of it. The procedure described in the article will work, however, providing that the acoustical path from the earphone to the ear canal is *not* sealed tightly enough to exclude the sound from the pipe being tuned; i.e., sound from both the tuner and the pipe must be allowed to strike the *same* eardrum simultaneously.

While many of these comments are perhaps beyond the normal technical scope of our magazine, I feel that at least a superficial exposure to them is almost essential if the amateur tuner is to avoid unnecessary frustration and disappointment. To neglect the mention of such things allows the reader to assume that they don't exist — or worse, to inductively "formulate" erroneous theories in order to explain the trouble he experiences in tuning.

William P. Zabel
Fort Wayne, Indiana

