

'GREAT WESTERN REGIONAL'

A Brilliant "Happening"

by Hal Steiner — Photos by Stu Green

To say that it was an ambitious undertaking would be understatement, especially in view of the loss of two showcase instruments, the Rialto Theatre's augmented Style 216 by fire and Harvey Heck's 4/27 Wurlitzer by sale. Yet, two brilliant new instruments appeared to replace the loss. It was such timeliness, good luck and much hard work which made the Los Angeles Chapter's Great Western Regional ATOS Convention an unqualified success.

Registrations numbered 329, yet one of the concerts open to the public



Buses transported conventioners to all events. They maintained a tight schedule under the direction of Bill Exner who handled similar duties during the 1968 ATOS Convention in Los Angeles.

attracted nearly four times that number. After many months of planning by L.A. Chapter officials, which included bus transportation to all events, activities started on Thursday (Feb. 10) with registration at the convention HQ, the venerable but very presentable Alexandria Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. In the evening there was an "open house" at Joe Koons' Motorcycle Shop in nearby Long Beach where Joe's 22-rank mostly Wurlitzer showed off its new Wurlitzer 3-deck console for the first time, with soft drinks, beer



Former Chapter Program Chairman Dwight Beacham played the kickoff concert on the Leet organ in the Culver City Baptist Church.

and peanuts "on the house." Many organists were heard briefly during the 3½ hour session, including Gene Roberson, Lyle Knight, Mike Ohman, Donna Parker and Dick Schrum. Gaylor Carter, suffering from the effects of having tried to use his thumb for a beer can opener, understandably cut his performance time to a one minute version of his radio theme, "Perfect Song" — all quarter notes.

Next morning at daybreak (9:00 AM) the buses left for Culver City where Ross Farmer's pride and joy is



Closeup of Dwight and the Leet console, which appears to be 'straight.' However, the sound is theatrical.

the rare Leets 3/12 organ in the West Culver Baptist church. On hand to play the Wurlitzer-like instrument was Dwight Beacham, a veteran of the 1968 L.A. convention, whose selections ranged from classical ("Trumpet Tune", and "Forest Green" by Purvis) to "Hooray for Hollywood" and "Cabin in the Sky." The concert session was followed by a chamber tour and then because the group was behind schedule, Stu Green was asked to empty the house. A couple of minutes of his best playing had the crowd aboard the three buses pronto.



Bill Field and Bill Coffman pose with one of the visible blacklighted Diaphones of their Old Town Music Hall Wurlitzer.

The next stop was the Old Town Music Hall in El Segundo where old pro's Bill Coffman and Bill Field provided fast moving entertainment of their 4/24 Wurlitzer. Introducing "My Old Flame," Coffman confided that Mae West was never discussed in his very proper home and he didn't learn about her until he ran away from home — "at the age of 30!" Their sure-fire routine included a slide-accompanied sing-along and Fields cueing Laurel and Hardy's "Hog Wild" which left the group laughing while they boarded the hotel-bound buses.



Conventioneers leaving the Harold Lloyd residence stroll toward waiting buses.

The afternoon event was a guided tour of the fabulous Harold Lloyd 16½-acre estate in Beverly Hills, where conventioneers saw the still neatly-kept grounds, the film vault containing



Mike Ohman breaks up while coaxing pretty tunes from the 32-rank Aeolian player organ in the Harold Lloyd living room.

Lloyd's priceless negatives, the playground with kid-size buildings, dozens of fountains, water cascades between rows of stately trees, an old Rolls-Royce and the late comedian's huge home. Mike Ohman presided at the L.A. chapter-restored Aeolian 2/32 residence organ in the living room. Ohman brought out it's best qualities; no easy task.

Back to the hotel to grab a bite, rest a bit and catch the bus for San Gabriel where Lyn Larsen was ready

to play the dedicatory concert on the L.A. chapter's newly installed 3/16 Wurlitzer (transplanted from the Brooklyn Albee theatre).

Lyn's entry, as the shiny white console climbed the white beam of light, caused a ripple — due to his appearance. The handsome young organist has apparently “metamorphosed” back to his original image



The Mission Theatre's illuminated sign hawked these stellar attractions. At some Mission concerts there were three San Gabrielites for each registered ATOSer.

— full dress suit and “establishment” haircut. A far cry from his “Who Am I?” period and he is many pounds lighter. But never handsomer.

His program offered a wide range of music, from a Jessified “Stars are My Windows of Heaven” to “War March of the Priests” (Mendelssohn) from a recent horror film, starring Vincent Price at a musty console.



Lyn Larsen played the dedication concert at San Gabriel.

During intermission San Gabriel's mayor, Helen Kennedy, had nice things to say about ATOS, the L.A. Chapter and especially about Neal Kissel who is largely responsible for making the “Wurlitzer-in-a-public building” a reality.



Man of the Hour was Neal Kissel. He was warmly lauded by San Gabriel's attractive gal mayor Helen Kennedy during the dedication for his work in securing the organ and overseeing the installation from start to finish.

Lyn Larsen then went into Part II which included the theme from the film “Summer of '42” and closed with his familiar “Satyr Dance.” His encore was stopped short by a Great manual cipher (middle C sharp). Lyn expressed thankfulness that it didn't happen earlier. An so to bed — after a half hour bus ride.



Stan Kann talks about his antique vacuum cleaner collection during his Wiltern Theatre concert.

On Saturday morning the “people carriers” (each supplied with a “keeper” to keep the inmates informed) disgorged their eager cargoes at the Wiltern theatre where Stan Kann was about to make his Los Angeles debut.

In the lobby we approached a maroon-coated usher and asked how to get to the Parterre. The “usher” gave us a scathing look and replied “I dunno — I'm new around here. Just got in from St. Louis.” It was Stan Kann, and I learned I wasn't the first to mistake his garb for an usher's.

Stan is a showman/musician and his patter is as compelling as his music. He provided some nostalgia (“Valse Blulette”), selections from “the Jewish Oklahoma” as he called “Fiddler on the Roof,” a Duke Ellington medley, a sultry silent movie “vamp” theme

("The Birth of Passion"), a memorable "When the Parade Passes By" and a thrilling "Knightsbridge March." Stan Kann was a solid hit with his audience.

Back to the Alexandria, some lunch and then off to an unbelievable adventure; the antique auto and automatic musical instrument museum of J.B. Nethercutt - San Sylmar. This private museum is in the process of construction, and even partially completed it's incredible. Our point of interest was one of the upper floors of the six story windowless structure, the floor with the 3/26 Wurlitzer. Builder Dick Villemin and his able assistant, Gordon Belt (now on the museum staff) hurried the installation to meet convention dates. The combination of finely regulated pipework, the live acoustics of the incomplete room and the arresting musicianship of Rex Koury added up to a unique musical experience, Rex, whose artistry was, until this performance, largely unfamiliar to L.A.



Rex Koury created a sensation at the J.B. Nethercutt Museum 3/26 Wurlitzer. The instrument will be enlarged to circa 50 ranks.

hobbyists, took care of that deficiency in one fell swoop. Rex found the reed-rich Wurlitzer "his type" of organ, and he demonstrated with an electrify-



Saturday Banquet at the Alexandria Hotel. Stan Kann (lower right) is the center of attention at his table.

ing "Sabre Dance," a misty "Foggy Day," a "Night they Invented Champagne" with more than a hint of hiccups and a "Rhapsody in Blue" which brought the audience to a standing position in toto. For one group Rex closed with a reading of a patriotic medley he arranged for a tour of the Salvation Army Band, all the old flag wavers in new colors, including the counterpointing of "Dixie" with "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

We forgot to mention that the conventioners were divided into "A" and "B" groups for locations which couldn't accomodate them all at once. The staggered system required organists to play two performances.



Gaylord Carter takes the audience into his confidence during his San Gabriel concert.

Saturday night was "Gaylord night" in San Gabriel and the local citizenry out-numbered ATOSers 3-to-1 in the Mission theatre (the only concerts open to non-members). The musician/entertainer was in particular fine form. Relying sometimes on film clips, Gaylord celebrated the completion of 50 years as a theatre organist by cueing a wild silent comedy entitled "Lizzies of the Field." He offered musical themes from radio and silent movie days, then cued one of the

great movie chases, Harold Lloyd's race (from "Girl Crazy") via a dozen commandeered modes of transportation to stop his girl's marriage to an already married villain. The ingenuity of Lloyd in devising sight gags and the musical skill of Carter in heightening those gags with skilfully applied music were wonders to behold.

After intermission Gaylord cued Lloyd's feature "Why Worry?" which detailed how to win a revolution in a banana republic with the aid of a beholden giant and continual sight gags. Wonderful fun. Back to the Alexandria via bus.

Sunday morning it was on to the Wiltern to hear Jonas Nordwall, a young man who knocks off a real dirty "By Jingo" or "Baby Face." not to mention a very orchestral transcription of Sibelius' "Valse Triste." "Didn't We"; "Rainbow Round my Shoulder" and "For All We Know" were typical of the pops Jonas played but it was the First Movement of Mendelssohn's "Italian Symphony" which gave some indication of the Nordwall musical prowess. For an encore he mixed a Bach-type fugue with "Irish Washerwoman." That requires imagination plus digital skill.



Jonas Nordwall talks to his audience during his concert at the Wiltern Theatre 4/37 Kimball.

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An ATOS-laden bus noses up to the San Gabriel Mission Theatre for the only daytime concert held there.

The final concert was at the San Gabriel Mission theatre on Sunday afternoon, with Bill Thomson playing the 3/16 Wurlitzer. Bill's program was typified by such selections as "Jalousie," Jobim's "Meditation," "Holiday for Strings," "Just One of Those Things" and DeFalla's "Ritual Fire Dance." The organ developed some minor ciphers but Bill ignored them while Neal Kissel's cipher hunters pulled the pipes. The squeakers weren't prominent enough to mar Bill's performance. He closed with a Lehar medley and the convention was over.



Always popular Bill Thomson played the closing concert of the mini-convention on the San Gabriel Wurlitzer.

The master of ceremonies for all events was a personable young man named Jerry Vogel. Jerry not only handled the intros with skill but also took delight in mystifying his audience with card and rope tricks. At 19, Jerry is a professional magician.

The Los Angeles mini-convention was a triumph for all personnel involved, especially for its organizers. Chapter Chairman Chick Landers has a talent for assigning tasks to those best equipped to handle them. The results set a standard which would be difficult to follow.

LOS ANGELES PROFESSIONAL ORGANISTS STAGE 'EXTENSION' TO ATOS BASH

by Elmer Fubb

Although the mini-convention ended with the Bill Thomson concert on Sunday afternoon, conventioners were intrigued by an announcement made during several of the concerts; organ enthusiasts were cordially invited to a Monday night concert at the Pipe & Pizza pasta emporium, sponsored by the Los Angeles Organists Breakfast Club, that fun-loving association whose members play for money — on any night but Mondays.

The Pipe & Pizza, sampled briefly by conventioners, was jammed to the gun's by 7:30 PM Monday, and among the musician pizza chompers was a generous sprinkling of conventioners enjoying a "convention extension."

The first artist was 15-year old Donna Parker who had been seen and heard in cameo appearances during the convention. Donna was defying a 103° "flu" temperature but she gave a fine performance on the 2/10 Wurlitzer and also on a model 650 Conn loaned for the occasion. In the audience was Woody Wise, who revealed he had invited Donna to play a cameo spot during the July convention.

Next on the bill was popular Leroy Davidson, who also played both instruments and included a Stu Green tune to mark Stu and Peg Nielsen's first wedding anniversary.

Then staffer Bob Garretson introduced the piece-de-resistance, music and clowning by veteran theatre organists Arlo Hults and Lloyd del Castillo, aided and abetted by a real, live soubrette. The theme was "St. Valentine's day," and the corn was deep and green as the two hammed it up with duets which always included attempts to throw each other off by abrupt and unexpected key changes. Del scraped a semblance of music from a battered fiddle and was attacked at the console by the show girl on whom he planted a buss and a bear hug embrace. The 2½ hour concert closed with a well performed duet of Tchaikowsky's "March Slav" by the talented pair.

The session provided conventioners an opportunity to observe California's southland "pro's" at play as well as to sample the music of organists not heard during the ATOS bash. □



Donna Parker played a cameo spot during a Convention luncheon at the Alexandria Hotel but she really sparkled during her portion of the Monday night concert at the 'Pipe & Pizza' staged by the L.A. Organists' Breakfast Club.



Like Donna, Leroy Davidson played both the 2/10 'Pipe & Pizza' Wurlitzer and the Conn model 650 shown here.



Pizza parlor staffer Bob Garretson (center) hosted the Pro Organists' bash as he did earlier for the ATOS conventioners. He is flanked by veteran theatre organists Lloyd Del Castillo (left) and Arlo Hults, who clowned for the pro's.