

'72 Convention Highlights

Gee, Dad . . . it's a computer! "Jenii" will make her debut at the 17th annual convention of the American Theatre Organ Society July 10-14 in the Washington, D.C. area.

Jenii is a computer-operated Wurlitzer, created by convention co-chairman Marvin Lautzenheiser. It will never replace the live organist, but it would take eighty fingers to match its capabilities.

Host for this year's national convention is the Potomac Valley Chapter of ATOS, which is the center of one of the nation's most active areas in the theatre organ revival.

There are five in-theatre installations, four of them in their original locations. And, there are well over twenty home and studio locations, many of which will be open for conventioners.

Organists include such well known concert and recording artists as Rosa Rio, Lee Erwin, Eddie Weaver, Ray Bohr, Tiny James, Everett Nourse, Jimmy Boyce, Dick Smith, Ray Brubacher and John Steele.

A major highlight of the convention will be a trip to nearby Richmond, Virginia, which has three working instruments in theatres: Loew's 3/13, the Byrd's 4/17 and the Mosque's 3/17 Wurlitzers. All are used regularly for the public as well as ATOS. Richmond has never been without live theatre pipe organ music. Eddie Weaver is probably the area's best known personality in show business, and his brilliant career goes all the way back to the silents.

Home base for many convention events is Woody Wise's 3/11 Barton. It fits so perfectly into the Virginia Theatre, it looks as though it was originally installed there, although it began life in the Norfolk area. Since being transplanted to the Virginia Theatre, it has received public support through regular screenings of silent films, and is used nightly for intermission concerts.

The biggest organ in the convention is Jimmy Boyce's spectacular 4/34 Wurlitzer in the Alexandria Arena. It was originally in the now-gone Center Theatre, which was the sister of the Radio City Music Hall. The spacious

Arena provides a perfect setting for what many consider to be the richest theatre organ sound in the nation.

Spectacular is also the word for Dick Kline's beautifully restored and augmented 4/28 Wurlitzer which was the last in-theatre instrument to be heard in Washington. It is from Loew's Capital (now a book store). The setting for the organ is a huge two-story high studio adjoining Dick's home. It overlooks a picturesque quarry, and the scenery matches the sound. The studio is every bit as large as many theatres of the day.

Dick Kline is also the man who helped bring the Tivoli's 2/8 Wurlitzer back to life. This Frederick, Maryland theatre is like stepping back in time. It is maintained in like-new condition, from the marquee to the stage.

The WXLN studio theatre 2/11 Moller is probably the only radio installation used for daily live pipe organ music in the nation. The station features "the Golden Age of Radio" with drama, comedy, music from the 30's and 40's and the daily 90-minute show with ATOS member Doug Bailey, who owns the organ. There will be a live convention broadcast from the organ, and ATOS members can keep up with what's going on with regular news coverage of the convention.

George Merriken's 3/22 Wurlitzer (formerly at Warner Brother's Tivoli in Washington) is in a barn in suburban Maryland that is filled with theatre memorabilia; Stump Miller's 2/12 Wurlitzer is in a home filled with a spectacular collection of antique clocks; George Johnson's 2/7 Wurlitzer was once in the Richmond Theatre in Alexandria; and Lem Keller's 4/17 is an original instrument that is a great example of creative expertise. Marvin Lautzenheiser's 3/13 Wurlitzer will also play as a conventional instrument, as well as performing with the computer.

For early birds, there will be a pre-convention concert at the Alexandria Arena on Sunday, July 9 at 5:30 P.M.

There will be workshops and seminars, with Lloyd Klos and others, and ample opportunity to tour the Nation's Capital. Certainly there is no better chance for sight seeing than that afforded by this year's convention.

Convention headquarters is the spacious and convenient Twin Bridges Marriott Hotel on route 1 and I-95, a few minutes from Washington via the 14th Street Bridge, and almost as close to the Virginia Theatre. This will be the scene of the banquet on Wednesday, July 12.

There will be a convention store for the sale of albums and other pipe organ related items. (See separate story.)

Certainly a new star will be born, with the premier performance by Jenii, the computerized Wurlitzer.

Marvin Lautzenheiser conceived the plan five years ago, bought materials four years ago, and heard her make the first recognizable sounds this January.

He invented a new computer language called "musictran", which translates a score into a number and letter scheme. These punch cards are read into a magnetic tape reader, which controls 500 functions and handles up to 80 activities at one time.

Everything on the pipe organ is under Jenii's control, including all three manuals, all stop tabs, swell pedals and percussions. It can change keys and switch manuals and octaves between any two measures. The metronome speed is continuously variable. It does more than eight organists could do, since all of its "fingers" are working at the same time.

Unlike a player-organ, there is no human performance involved at any time.

The name "Jenii" has many derivations. The word relates to "music generator", "genius", the fabled Jenii from the bottle who could work miracles, and Marvin's wife, Jean. She'll be playing a concert during the convention, but is limited to ten fingers and two feet, although she does very well.

"Also," explains Marvin, "I needed a girl's name for the computer, since I spend so much time with her."

Advance registration forms have been enclosed with this issue of THEATRE ORGAN. This affords a discount price for both registration and air-conditioned bus transportation. Rooms can also be reserved now. While this is not required, it is recommended. □