

One of the most prolific recording organists on the British scene is *Joseph Seal*, who has some 14 LPs to his credit, with more in the pipe-line.

Yet he has not played in public for 20 years. Not, in fact, since 1951 when he took up an executive job with a big cinema chain.

However, apart from recording, he has also managed to give some 300 radio broadcasts since his departure from public gaze. The question arises – if he is too busy for public appearances, how does he manage to keep his playing up to the mark?

“I was fortunate,” he told me. “I had to practise a lot when I was young and have a reasonably reliable technique. My training was classical. You know, Chopin etudes and the big Bach works. Most of the things I record now are a bit less demanding.”

In fact, he started playing piano when he was five and hard work secured him a seat on the church organ bench by the time he was 12. In his early teens he held three different church appointments in his native country and began to build himself a name as a recitalist.

Then came the golden years and he entered the theatre field with a job at the Regal, Altrincham, near Manchester. An interesting sidelight is that he followed *Norman Cocker* who doubled his theatre job with that of Assistant Organist at Manchester Cathedral, thus proving to the musical snobs that this was possible. *Cocker's* Tuba Tune, classically styled, is a big favorite with today's recitalists over here.

Anyway, *Joe Seal* (as he is more familiarly known) moved on to Carlisle where he started his radio career. After three years, he transferred to the newly-built Ritz, Belfast, staying 15 years and giving more than 1,000 BBC airings to the organ.

Then came the move to a desk job and, sadly, the gradual phasing out of organists in theatres. *Joe Seal*, stuck at head office, has endured some unkind comment from those not in the know who feel he could have done more both for the organists and to save the many instruments which have been sold.



JOSEPH SEAL at Kingston-Upon-Thames.

How unjust this might be was demonstrated to me when the final batch of pedal-pushers got their notice a few months back. It was one of them who paid tribute publicly to *Mr. Seal's* valiant efforts to equate contemporary demand and reality with an understandable desire to keep the organ flag flying.

He certainly does this himself in his broadcasts and recordings. He did about a dozen singles and some EPs but it is the big batch of LPs which merit attention.

In latter years he has used exclusively the Wurlitzer 3/12 in the ABC (formerly Regal) Kingston-upon-Thames. This fine medium sized instrument was opened in 1932 by Reginald Foort and it was he who first recorded it.

It is one of those installations which sounds well on disc. The two chambers are above the stage, with most of the effects in the solo together with English Horn, Harmonic Tuba, French Trumpet, Tibia Clausa, Saxophone and Kinura. The main chamber accommodates Diaphonic Diapason (which can really lend weight to a disc), Violin, Violin Celeste, Oboe Horn, Concert Flute and Vox Humana. A nice compact combination which *Joe Seal* uses with great skill and taste.

A final anecdote. His signature tune is the hunting song “D’ye ken John Peel?” and it was assumed by many that this was another way of saying “D’ye ken *Joe Seal*?” Not so, he

explained recently. “I made my first broadcast from Carlisle,” he said. “They told me I had to have signature tune, so I took this song which belongs to this area of England.”

Ah well, another good story down the drain.

STACCATO SNIPPETS – *Harry Klompe*, resident at the City, Amsterdam, has plans for bring back sing-alongs to the house. With the late *Cor Steyn*, they were a pre-war favorite . . . ; Generally speaking, English parsons have to be convinced that putting theatre organs in churches is a good thing. The Rev. John Harwood, a Bradford nonconformist, has been convinced in advance. He has offered his church to any preservation group wanting to keep a theatre instrument singing . . . *Henry Croudson*, who gained a pre-war fame via radio and records, died in December. His most important appointment was at the Gaumont, Haymarket, London . . . Apart from the strife which hits the headlines, Northern Ireland has also lost its last theatre organ. The floods last Fall wrecked the four-manual Compton of the ABC, Belfast, beyond repair . . . One encouraging note – of late, there have been so many theatre organ recitals to list each month, editors of the hobby newsletters have been heard to grumble about the encroachment on editorial space. For British buffs, there's getting to be a whole lot of goodies to choose from each weekend. □