

# BILL UHLER and his Marr and Colton

by Lloyd E. Klos

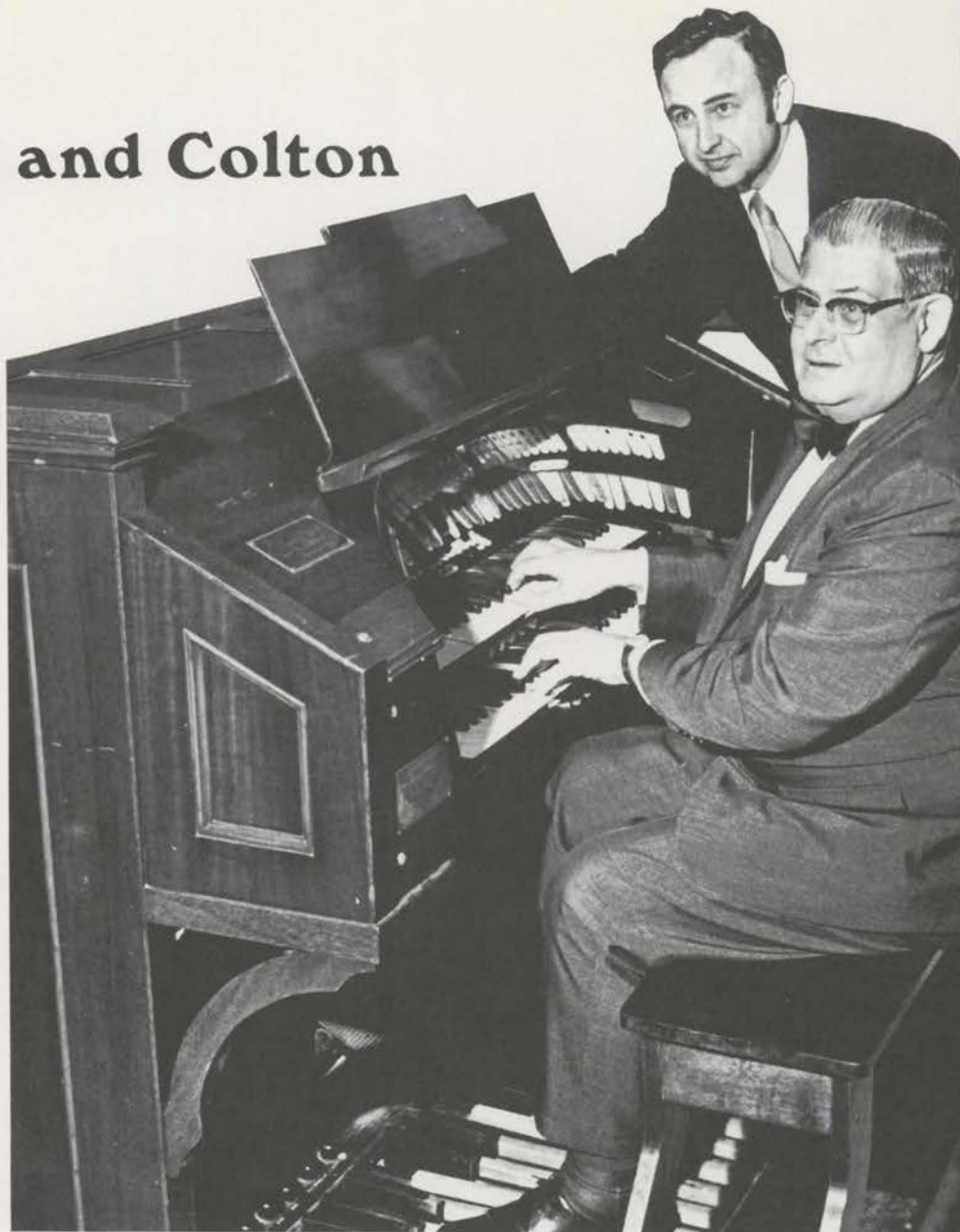
Add the name of R. William Uhler, master photographer of Mt. Gretna, Pa., to the growing list of ATOS members who take their pleasure big by installing theatre pipe organs in their homes. Mr. Uhler has playing a 2-manual Marr & Colton, and it is believed to be one of four in existence having a Symphonic Registrar, a feature of some late-model M&C instruments.

Bill Uhler tells us that this instrument is the second theatre organ he has purchased. He first bought a 2/4 Kilgen which was in the Seltzer Theatre in Palmyra, Pa. The theatre had been closed a number of years, and the console was badly damaged, dry-rot having set in. Pipes, located in one chamber, were in fairly good condition. some Percussions were missing, but chests were OK.

"I also became interested in the Marr & Colton in the Academy Theatre in Lebanon," he says. "During 1965 and 1966, the owners allowed me to go into the theatre in the morning and play the organ. It was about 70% playable, but it sounded just great to me.

"The organ was installed in two chambers. The main chamber at the left housed the pedal Bourdon, Tibia, Diapason, Kinura, Xylophone, Orchestra bells, all the traps and noise-makers and the switch stack. The solo chamber on the right contained the Tuba, Viol d' orchestre, Vox Humana and Harp. None of the pistons was operable and upon investigation, I discovered that the air to the console had been disconnected. Upon hooking in the air, I found that I played an air-conditioned console with a cool breeze (more like a gale) blowing through the pneumatics! Needless to say, I unhooked the air again — fast!

"Upon inquiry, the owners indicated that the organ could not be sold due to some tie-up in the lease. Late in 1966, however, they told me that I could make an offer for the organ, which I did and which was accepted.



Seated at the console is Ed Weimer, last man to play the Academy Theatre organ for an audience. Owner Uhler gets a few tips on playing from the artist. — (Lebanon Daily News Photo)

Before purchasing it, I had discussed the possibility of using the instrument as part of the theatre program, but due to costs of re-leathering and new cable, management was not interested. A few months after I removed the organ, the theatre was sold.

"I started removal of the 600 pipes and the chests on January 16, 1967, almost 40 years to the day it was installed. An original tag from the Marr & Colton Co., which was tied to a cable on the switch stack, lists the date as 1/27/27. I disassembled the organ, and with the help of the assistant manager of the theatre, brought everything to my home in my station wagon with the exception of the switch and

the console which professional movers handled.

"When I had acquired the Kilgen, I began construction of a room to house the pipes. This was finished about the time I purchased the M&C. The chamber is 12' x 18' x 10' high and speaks into our family room which is 14' x 35' by 10' high. The swell shades are from the Kilgen installation.

"Every spare moment I had in 1967 was spent assembling, erecting, cleaning and re-cabling until on November 22, 1967, I had enough done to turn on the blower. A nightmare of sound emerged with innumerable ciphers etc. The chimes sounded great, however, even though I had connected them in reverse.



As one played an ascending scale, their notes descended!

"Not knowing where to proceed from there, I called in a professional organ builder and made arrangements with him to re-leather the two main three-rank chests while I would work on the offsets etc. It seemed like forever until the organ was again ready to speak, finally, in 1969. It sounded not like it did in the theatre, but it didn't sound like a calliope either, for which I was grateful. Four technicians from the organ builder's firm, along with friends, relatives, wife and children were involved at various stages of rehabilitation.

"In May 1970, I invited the student AGO affiliate from Lebanon Valley College to a silent movie and concert by Ed Weimer, who was last house organist at the Academy Theatre."

Ed Weimer, also a pipe-organ-owning ATOS member, lives in Harrisburg, Pa. He started his musical career at the age of six by studying piano, and became a theatre organist. Console artist at the Academy, Jackson and Capitol theatres in Lebanon, he played the silents until the advent of sound around 1930.

"Then, the organ was used only for a few short silent subjects and for music prior to the movie, and for the 9 PM break," Weimer says. "This was during the depression and organists



Marr & Colton Symphonic Registrator Console.

were offered jobs taking tickets, ushering and doing odd jobs around the theatre." He became a projectionist at the Jackson.

With vaudeville still in some local theatres, Weimer played the overture with the pit orchestra. With the end of vaudeville, he'd play the organ before movies and at breaks, even though he was no longer on the payroll. Weimer's biggest thrill was to play on the final program of the New York Paramount Theatre in September 1964, before the Queen Mother of all Wur-litzers was removed. He is still active, playing for clubs and special events, and has a theatre pipe organ, a piano and two electronic organs at home. The AMP Corp. in Harrisburg is his employer.

Bill Uhler continues: "My daughter Wendy is an organ major at the college and she and I had reservations about how the AGO group would accept the concert. However, Ed Weimer (without the aid of a musical score) at the Marr & Colton, and Harold Lloyd, the Keystone Cops and a portion of "Phantom of the Opera" on the screen, were so well received that the event, which had been scheduled to last 1½ hours, continued for more than three! This group asked to have another performance, and it was rewarded by a similar event in May 1971 which was covered by the *Lebanon Daily News*, complete with pictures. Ed Weimer played for "Trail of the Octopus"; a Keystone comedy "Love, Loot and Crash", and a sing-along.

Following the 1970 event, not satisfied with the way the Harp, traps and Chimes sounded forth, Bill shut down the organ during the summer of

1970. He re-arranged the pipe chamber, and also replaced much of the flexible tubing with galvanized piping. With the tubing, the tremulants did not operate consistently. The Harp was placed immediately behind the shutters, and the traps and Chimes mounted on the side wall of the chamber, close to the shutters. The Kinura was placed farthest from the shutters since it is the loudest and most raucous voice in the organ.

The Symphonic Registrator is not hooked up because the cable was cut in the console. Bill has arbitrarily hooked up a few of the stops, particularly "pathetic" ("because I play that way"), but he has no way of knowing how M&C originally had them wired in. Among the SR stops are "gruesome", "chase", "storm", "fire", "riot", "sorrow", "love" and "hate", which allowed the player to capture the mood demanded by the screen.

If anyone has any knowledge about the mixture of voices which spoke into any of the registrator stops, Mr. Uhler would be grateful for the information.

He expects to add the Kilgen voices to the M&C, but just barely has enough room in the chamber.

"Although I never heard this organ accompany silent movies in the theatre, I do remember hearing it used for solo spots and special programs in

Partial view of pipe chamber showing Tibia, Diapason and Kinura ranks in left foreground. Tuba chest right foreground. String offset to rear with chimes, orchestra bells and xylophone.



Mr. Uhler tunes pipes in his home installation. The largest pipe is 9½ feet tall; the smallest is only five inches high. — (*Lebanon Daily News Photo*)







Academy Theatre (Academy of Music), Lebanon, Pa. 2/13/67. Last day console was in theatre. (R. William Uhler Photo)

the 1930's. The theatre paid \$20,000 for the organ. It is estimated that an exact duplicate would cost \$80,000 today. I believe I started getting the organ bug when I was going to photography school in New York City in 1942-43. I went to the Paramount Theatre as often as I could to hear the tremendous sound of that great Wurlitzer.

"I started playing a Hammond chord organ and progressed via a Wurlitzer, an Allen, and now have a Rodgers in addition to the M&C. I am happy at having been able to save and restore the last organ in a Lebanon theatre,

the others being long gone. Last but not least, I cannot give enough thanks and credit to my family for all their help, and particularly to my wife, Ruth, who really didn't believe it was too strange to add another room to the house just to keep pipes in." □

#### Marr & Colton

Tibia Clausa	16' - 2'
Harmonic Tuba	8' - 4'
Open Diapason	8' - 4'
Vox Humana	8'
Kinura	8' (a wild sound)
Viol d' orch.	8' - 4'

plus, Chimes, Xylophone, Orchestra Bells, Harp, Bass Drum, Snare Drum, Cymbal, Tom-Tom, Triangle, Castanets, Tambourine, Chinese Block, Surf, Bird Whistle, Sleighbells, Doorbell, — and everything works.

#### Kilgen

Tibia Clausa	16' - 4'
Flute	8' - 2'
Viol d' orch.	8' - 4'
Vox Humana	8' - 4'

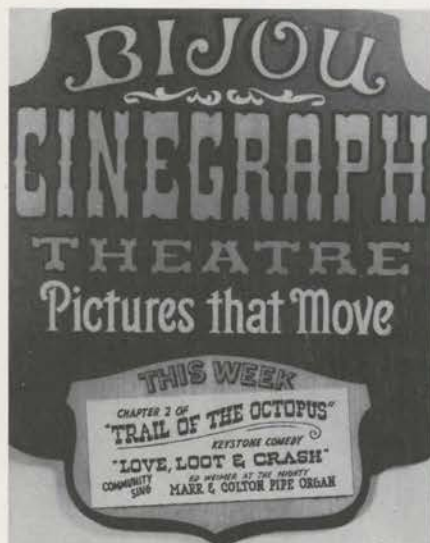
plus Orchestra Bells. This organ had a toy counter, but it had been vandalized before I purchased it. This organ had been installed in the Seltzer Theatre in Palmyra, Pa. in 1927.

I have an original Marr & Colton shipping tag which was attached to the relay board dated 1-27-27. (of the M&C, that is.)

## Almost 6000 Theatre Organs

In a copyrighted article which appeared in the January 2, 1972 issue of *Los Angeles Times*, former Robert Morton Organ Co. factory manager Paul Carlsted, now 80, looked back on his career with the Van Nuys, Calif. firm. Interviewed by *Times* staffer Pat Bryant, Carlsted revealed:

1. Robert Morton was the world's largest manufacturer of theatre organs. The company built "nearly 6,000" for theatres.
2. The Morton factory was the first industry in Van Nuys, Calif. It moved in 1912 to six blocks of land at the corner of Van Nuys Blvd. and Oxnard Street donated by real estate developers in a campaign to attract industry. It was the only industry in town for several years.
3. Morton manufactured the pipes for its organs, both metal and wood, in its factory (unlike some who bought pipework from specialists e.g. Gottfried).
4. It was brought out that the largest Morton in a southern California theatre was the 5/33 in the Los Angeles Criterion theatre. It cost \$40,000.
5. Although he built organs most of his life, Carlsted never learned to play one. The closest he came to making music on pipes was when he operated the 2-pipe "cuckoo" he installed on his Ford in the '20s.
6. He met his wife, Ruth, 57 years ago while she was on a guided tour of the Robert Morton factory. Carlsted was the guide. Marriage overtook Paul and Ruth four months later.
7. Hours and wages? He started as a draftsman at two dollars a day for a ten hour day, six days a week. At twenty cents an hour, Carlsted couldn't afford lunch in a restaurant so he bicycled home to eat.
8. The Morton Co. ceased operation in 1934.
9. When Morton folded, Carlsted went to college to obtain teaching credentials, then taught drafting and woodworking at Van Nuys High School for the next 25 years.
10. Now retired, Carlsted's favorite topic remains organs. □



Poster displayed at Lebanon Valley College for presentation on 5/3/71.