

VOX POPS



Conducted by Stu Green

Readers are encouraged to submit interesting sidelights on the organ hobby (exclusive of chapter news items) material they believe will be of general interest about local organ activities and installations and the people who work at the hobby. We know "there's VOX POPS in them there chapters" and it only requires a 6¢ postcard to get it to VOX POPS Editor, Box 3564, Granada Hills, California 91344. If the contributor can afford an 8¢ stamp, why not include a black and white photo which need not be returned.

Remember the item a few issues back about the possibility of Bill Thomson and Lyn Larsen playing an encore dual concert on the Bob Power Rodgers "260 Special" in Camarillo, Calif.? Although the date hasn't been set, the concerts are a certainty, probably in September. Those interested in visiting the Power home to hear concerts played on the most elaborate theatre organs may send a large self-addressed, stamped envelope to Lift Records, Box 884, Woodland Hills, Calif. 91364, for information.

Rosa Rio, described by CATOS as "the theatre organ world's answer to women's lib", was interested in the Rochester Convention story in the April issue of THEATRE ORGAN, and especially regarding comments made by John Hammond. "Few persons realize the amount of musical knowledge which a really first-class theatre organist must possess. John Hammond was a terrific teacher and musician!" Rosa continues very actively on the concert circuit and is

anticipating her return to Rochester for her second appearance at the RTOS Wurlitzer on October 12. Hubby Bill also is looking forward to this engagement as he hails from Kodakville.

ATOS' ebullient secretary-treasurer Mary Bowles with husband Skip, went on a 5½-week vacation trip in March and April, which took them into Florida, Alabama, and Mexico. In Florida, they visited Terry Charles and ATOS "Hall of Famers" Reginald Foort and Fred Feibel. Mary's search for silent movie material is progressing, and she is acquiring tapes from willing subjects.

Pert Mildred Alexander is deeply sensitive to the moods of her audiences. She sometimes changes her tune list in mid-concert to better accommodate listener "messages" she seems to receive by "brainwaves" — audience to artist, direct. It happened once more during her June 11 concert played at the Fox Theatre under sponsorship of the San Diego (Calif.) Theatre Organ Group. During the second half of her concert she kept thinking, "... Gershwin ... Rhapsody ... " so she knew there were enough minds giving her the old ESP for that selection to get through to her. But there was an obstacle; the 4/32 Robert Morton has just about everything — except the



Millie at the Fox. The black lace pants suit provided the visual obligato. — (Stufoto)

piano which is so important to "Rhapsody." Casting caution to the wind Millie, garbed in a striking black lace "see through" pants suit, announced she would improvise a "piano" by mixing in some Harp, Xylophone and other percussions over carefully selected pipe combinations. The audience indicated approval and Millie came through with a "Rhapsody in Blue" which left her audience of several hundred howling for more.

Now she must face up to another decision: the concert was recorded and she must decide whether or not to include the bell-happy Rhapsody on the record release.

"What went over during the life of that wonderful magic bond between audience and organist might not be felt by record listeners," said Millie, her caution returned.



LEW WILLIAMS — (Stufoto)

Our correspondent-at-large, Lew Williams, has an encouraging report from Fort Worth, Texas, regarding the 3/11 Wurlitzer (Style 235) in the closed Worth Theatre. A local enthusiast, Howard Walsh, purchased the instrument for a reported \$20,000 and donated it to the Casa Manana, a theatre-in-the-round which stages Broadway musicals. Chambers are being built around the periphery of the circular showcase and the opening is expected to take place in August with a name organist at the console. All of which will be of interest to organist Paul H. Forster, now retired in St. Petersburg, Florida. Paul opened the brand new Wurlitzer with the theatre's debut in the middle '20s. The opening stage headliner was banjoist Eddie Peabody.



Eddie Weaver, the Richmond organist with the ready wit for any occasion, demonstrated this most aptly during his concert in Rochester in April. He had a little trouble with the console lift (Shades of Gaylord Carter's trouble at the Oriental in Chicago last year), Afterward, he said that he had been labeled "one of the best organists in the country. It's when I play in the city that I have my problems."



From the east coast, Thomas J. Stehle reports that theatre organist Lee Erwin returned on April 19th to play his fourth program at New York Military Academy, Cornwall-on-Hudson, N.Y. on the Academy's 4/26 Moller, by popular request of the cadets.

Lee has become a favorite of the young cadets, this year playing his original score for the John Barrymore feature, "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde". His program also featured the Charlie Chaplin classic, "The Tramp". However, the cadets' favorite part of the program is the old time sing-along. As Lee remarked "This is the first time I played for an audience whose singing drowned out the organ."

The Moller, installed in the Academy's chapel-auditorium in 1927, has been undergoing gradual restoration through the efforts of interested faculty, cadets and members of the New York Organ Society. It is used regularly for chapel services and assemblies, as well as for occasional jam sessions.



From Pompano Beach, Florida, Max Schloss offers some insight on the early career of Byron Melcher (see For the Records): "I've seen people lined up for four blocks waiting to get into 'Davy Jones' Locker' in St. Petersburg to hear him play. They would have kept him there permanently if he would have remained. Once Byron caused a traffic jam on First Street North in St. Petersburg when mobs of people gathered in front of the Preston Music Co. to hear him play a calliope. I've heard the very best in my 51 years and Byron doesn't have to take a back seat to anyone." Then the South Florida chapterite provides the stinger: "We called Byron

'the Ham of the Hammond' in those days."

How does a nice Jewish boy rate a name like that!



The entry of Rochester, N.Y. organist Tom Lockwood into the realm of silent movie accompaniment was a great success, judging from the enthusiastic response of over 1000 patrons of the Revival Cinema, a 200-seat theatre of nostalgia in the Lilac City's downtown area. Tom's 2-year effort to procure the original score of "Phantom of the Opera" came to naught so he composed a new score and during the one-week screening of the classic at the Revival in April-May, Tom played it on a plug-in. He also cued "The Great Train Robbery". The theatre closed after his last performance before Tom came on the scene. Thus, 22-year-old Tom joined the ranks of other organists who have closed theatres, one being Gaylord Carter who shuttered a run of Los Angeles' Million Dollar Theatre over 40 years ago.



Bud Iverson, a Festival veteran. He'll be at the Festival this year for Conn. — (Pixehat)

The annual Home Organ Festival to be held Sept. 19 through 24 at Pacific Grove, Asilomar (near Monterey) Calif., has signed eleven brands of electronic organ for display and concerts this year, with a possible twelfth. Chairman Tiny James informs us that Allen, Baldwin, Conn, Gulbransen, Hammond, Kimball, Lowery, Rodgers, Thomas, Wurlitzer, and Yamaha models will be heard

during the five-day bash at the picturesque seaside park.

Concert Record's prexy Bill Johnson will display his electronic organ supplements, which will be demonstrated by Bill Worrall. Artists already signed are Rex Koury, Shay Torrent, Bill Thomson, Tom Sheen, Mildred Alexander, Jonas Nordwall, Bud Iverson, Tom Stark, Ralph Wolf, John McGlyn, Gus Pearson, George Knaedler and Tom Hazleton, with more to come.

Chairman Tiny isn't pinning down the possible twelfth brand of organ but it's rumored that a sensational new electronic church organ being developed by organist Rex Koury for marketing late this year may be it.

For further information about the Home Organ Festival, send a large self-addressed stamped (8¢) envelope to Registrar, HOF, Box 248, Alameda, Calif. 94501.



From Provo, Utah, Brigham Young University student Mike Ohman writes about a horrendous decision he had to make. The storage shed behind his home contained a rank of Brass Trumpets, a rank of Quintadenas and his wife's crystal and china — and the shed was enveloped in flames! He could save either the pipework or his wife's treasures, but not both. Naturally, he rescued the precious pipework.

Mike Ohman admits now that sleeping in the doghouse is a mite uncomfortable.



Mike Ohman has also taken on some silent movie cueing duties at Cal Christensen's Arcade Theatre in Salt Lake City, which boasts a recently completed 2/7 (Style E) Wurlitzer installation. Mike accompanied Keaton's *The General* on July 2nd and 3rd and on the 28th and 29th tackled Doug Fairbanks' *The Black Pirate*. On August 18th and 19th he will cue the Janet Gayner starrer, *Sunrise*. Mike and Cal work together so well that they have incorporated for the next project, a pizzeria in Salt Lake City with a 3/18 (style 260 Special) Wurlitzer, to be enlarged to 3/22 with Mike's collection of extra ranks.

But Mike, where do you find time to squeeze in college?





Dick Schrum, Shorn and "deblubbered", but with more time for important things.

From Seattle ATOS' ex-prexy Dick Schrum, 15 pounds lighter and shorn of facial shrubbery, has acquired sole ownership of the bottle-emptying establishment where he played a plug-in for years, *The Plaid Piper*, a transaction he feels will give him more time and freedom to complete such projects as a renewed concert career and the installation of his 3/10 "snortin' Morton." Dick was recently informed by Yamaha that his taped bid for a crack at the Tokyo finals of their widely publicized organists' competition was one of the top 10 received. Dick went to Chicago in June for the final US-based competition.



BOB RALSTON, Bubbles and Trombones.

The San Jose (Calif.) *Mercury News*, June 25, announced that Lawrence Welk's organist, Bob Ralston would appear at Ken's Melody Inn in Los Altos for a late June Tuesday —

through — Friday stint, playing the former Oakland Paramount Wurlitzer. The item provided some Ralston history, including the revelation that Bob was once a trombonist with the Salvation Army Band. Yes, the famed Welk bubble generator would be on hand to broadcast its soapy splendor, concluded the item.



Gary Connor of Wilmington, Delaware, informs us that the 3-manual Kimball in the John Dickinson High School there, has been enlarged to 28 ranks, "hopefully as big as it will get." In order to achieve better reception of choir singing with the organ accompaniment in the auditorium, a 4-rank portable Kimball is being installed on the stage, controlled by a 3-manual Austin console. The stage organ, housed in a box riding on casters and easily moved by three persons, will also be wired to play 40 stops of the big organ, while the 3-manual Kimball console will be wired to control the stage ranks if desired. Sounds like an ideal setup with two organs being available as circumstances demand.



There is something about a theatre organ which seems to appeal to clerics. The ATOS roster boasts a goodly number of ministers and priests (Rabbis are more difficult to spot on a roster but we hope we have some). The Northern California chapter recently had a sample of what one clergyman could do with a 3/14 Wurlitzer when their meeting was held at the Avenue Theatre in San Francisco. According to our reporter, Dewey Cagle, when Father David Shaw finished his first selection he turned to his audience and asked members "to dispel any preconceived notions due to my clerical garb." The priest then put *The Stripper* through her usual bumps and grinds. Most of the rest of his selections were done in a swinging up-tempo style, says Dewey.

We've often heard the expression "God-given talent." Here's a servant of "The Boss" who shares his gift.



Newspaper stories are still one of the best methods of making our hobby known to the public, a prerequisite to getting public support. Someone in Motor City Chapter is aware of this,

judging from the stories appearing in the local press about chapter activities. The May 16 issue of the Royal Oak (Michigan) Daily Tribune ran a story and three photos of the recent two-evening Lee Erwin concert and movie at the Royal Oak Theatre and credited the chapter with restoring the Barton. A Detroit Free Press reporter and photographer were on hand when veteran organist Lew Betterly dropped by the Royal Oak to get re-acquainted with his long ago mount. And a press team visited the chapter repair crew at the Michigan Theatre in Ann Arbor and caught Tom Grant, Gordon Jewell, Bill Graebel, John Minick, Bill Reiher and Ben Levy in the act of putting a polish on the 3/13 Barton the Motor City lads are restoring, their fifth.



Jack Roberg fondles one of his well-publicized pipes.

Someone in the Connecticut Valley Chapter is also hep to the value of organ-oriented articles appearing in non-organ publications. The January/February issue of the Torrington Company's *The Precisionist* sported a cover color photo of Jack Roberg, one of the restorers of the Thomaston Opera House Marr and Colton/Kimball organ. Inside the bearing company's house organ was a two-page spread about employee Roberg and five more photos. In the same area, the Sunday Magazine of the April 9 *Sunday Republican* devoted three pages and five photos (plus a color cover photo) to John Starr's home installation in Goshen, Connecticut. That's promotion!



Vic Hyde, "The Musical Philosopher" and new ATOS member, reported in April prior to leaving for England, that he had located a theatre pipe organ "scattered all over a farm near La Porte, Ind., the owner

dead, and the tenants stumbling all over the pieces. I'm trying to buy it, but no one knows anything about it. I'll have to find an expert to analyze what is what and somehow become its proud owner."

With Vic in England . . . Hmm . . . Wonder what a ticket to La Porte costs?



Ray Bohr at RTOS Wurlitzer.
(Dick Harold Photo)

Radio City Music Hall's Ray Bohr, making his first Rochester, New York appearance before an RTOS audience, played for 970 in that group's final concert of the season at the Auditorium Theatre on May 12. Perspiring profusely ("You have to put yourself into it"), Ray played selections which were popular in the first 40 years of the century.

From Durango, Colorado, Don Hartley is coming along nicely with the rebuilding and installation of a 2/8 Robert Morton in his "Cat and the Fiddle Bar and Lounge." Don says the Morton was built for the "La Petite Theatre" in Ocean Park, Calif. about 1920 and was moved to the Visalia (Calif.) Theatre about 1927, with some increase in ranks. He's getting technical help from Smith A. Gauntt, who worked for Dan Barton during the Golden Era. Gauntt's assignments included work on the Chicago Stadium 6/62 Barton. The console will be on a lift for two reasons, says Don: (1) sheer drama, (2) to ward off drunks.

Also from Colorado, via a clipping from the *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, is a writeup about the 3/15 style 260 Wurlitzer (opus 2128) now being played in Denver's "The Twenties" restaurant by Bob Goodwin and Lee Eddy. The eatery is the brainchild of owner Norman Markel, who worked up an appetite for pipe organ music while associated with two other pipe-equipped beaneries, Ye Olde Pizza Joynt in Hayward, Calif., and the Three Coins Restaurant in Louisville (near Denver). According to the article, the "Twenties" organ came from the Fort Wayne, Indiana, Paramount. The food policy is novel: pizza on one level, family dining on another, thus making organ music still a possibility for the growing army of anti-pasta organ fans.

In 1957, Sydney, Australia saw the beginning of construction of a new music and opera complex. Original cost was pegged at \$7 million Australian dollars. Plans included a 2750 seat symphony hall, a 1530-seat opera house, a 420-seat chamber music and film theatre, a 150-seat recital hall, and several bars, all housed in a series of concrete shells. Target date for completion was 1963. It is now 1972 and it won't be completed for another year and a half, the cost has climbed to \$110 million! A 9300-pipe organ, now being installed in Symphony Hall, will cost \$600,000.

The newly-restored 4/16 Barton at the Coronado Theatre in Rockford, Ill. has been mentioned several times in this column in recent months. The theatre, every bit as clean and beautiful as it was when opened over 40 years ago, is well equipped to handle stage productions. *Carousel*, featuring John Raitt, was being performed the evening of April 17 when a racoon crawled into a main circuit "bus tie" carrying 12,500 volts, and caused an 82-minute blackout of the entire area surrounding the theatre. There was no panic as 2,000 patrons exited from the darkened house. On May 4, all was in order for the CATOE-sponsored Gaylord Carter concert which attracted another 2,000 to the Coronado.

Mrs. Russell Maguire, ATOS member and former theatre organist, now living

in Doylestown, Pa., has been bursting with pride over the accomplishments of her nephew, Syracuse organist Karl Cole. On May 7, he was featured in New Haven, Conn., representing Wurlitzer, and the response was most gratifying. On May 21, he performed at the New York State Fairgrounds 3/11 Wurlitzer in a benefit concert for the American Cancer Society. Come September 25, Karl will do a benefit in support of leukemia research at the Central Bucks East High School in Doylestown. The school's auditorium has superb acoustics, and Don Baker when performing there in 1971, praised it "tops" of those he has played.



Billy Nalle, Theatre organ music for the greater glory.

No one could deny that organist Billy Nalle is an innovator, with many "firsts" regarding promotion of the theatre organ to his credit. Now he's done it again. On Sunday afternoon July 23, the world's largest cathedral, St. John the Divine in New York, was alive with theatre organ music played by Billy. No, Billy wasn't playing the church's huge straight organ but a Rodgers model 340 electronic and the selections were mainly pops and standards. The church, under the liberal leadership of Father Rodney Kirk, inaugurated the policy of including popular music in its concert series with the 1969 Duke Ellington concert. Organist Alec Wyton is the series' musical director. The sound of Rodgers' most theatrical instrument sounding out in the non-confinement of a great cathedral and played by the South's favorite unreconstructed New York-based rebel, is something we'll cover in detail in a forthcoming issue.

For a hip New Yorker Billy Nalle's "Suthin'" origins are apparent in a number of ways. For example, at home

he sips cocktails from containers in which Confederate money, in huge denominations, has been imbedded in clear plastic sides. "These will make me rich when the South rises again" drawls Billy in an ante-bellum brogue dripping with enough molasses to make North Carolina's Millie Alexander sound like a "damyankee." The drawl is most notable in phrasings conjured when he's loaded with enthusiasm, as he was on returning to Gotham after his recent concert at the John Dickinson High School Kimball for the JDHS Theatre Organ Society in Wilmington, Delaware. He was so pleased with the organ, the acoustics, his treatment by the club and audience enthusiasm, he described the group, including faculty advisor Bob Dilworth, as "Tiffany all the way. I just broke down and fell in love with the whole covey. They've done so much to establish the theatre organ in their area in the finest terms."

Catch Billy's theatre organ column in the straight organ's top monthly journal, MUSIC.



Theatre organ buffs of central New York State are in for a treat during State Fair Week, August 29 to September 5. John Muri has been designated official organist, and will be featured daily at the 3/11 Wurlitzer in the Empire Theatre (Harriet May Mills Bldg). He will accompany Charlie Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* nightly, and during the daytime will play concerts, provide background music for fashion shows, and music for intermissions. Tom Anderson, the prime mover in this effort, tells us that the console now is located on the stage, giving all patrons an unobstructed view of the organist.



From Honolulu, Roger Angell reports on the May 28 rededication concert for his "almost completed" home installation, the 7-rank Morton from the Hilo Theatre (the console was wiped out in 1960 by a tidal wave). The organ is controlled now by a Wurlitzer 2-deck console (reported to be from Jim Gaines "Echoing Antique Shop" in Hollywood). Hawaii's premiere (and most durable) theatre organist, John DeMello, played a brief concert followed by a surprise appearance by Gaylord Carter who was over from the mainland for a concert

"All Things Considered"...



...Considered the Ann Arbor Barton

The 3/13 Barton pipe organ in Ann Arbor's Michigan Theatre was heard nationwide on July 14, when a five minute segment of a thirty minute interview about the organ's current restoration was included on National public Radio's nightly news show *All Things Considered*. The program originates in Washington, D.C. and is carried by over 100 public radio stations around the country.

at the Hawaii Theatre (4/16 Morton.) Between serving refreshments to his guests and conducting guided tours through the Wurli-Morton's innards, Roger was kept plenty busy.



Baseball's bible, The Sporting News, in its June 3 issue had a few words to say about the new Los Angeles Dodger organist. Entitled "Dodgers Have a Beauty", the item said, "The Dodgers' best-looking player during the first month was Donna Parker. She is 16, and the new organist at Dodger Stadium. Nervous at first, she says she has made only one mistake." This gal is no stranger to these pages, as "Stufotos" of her have appeared often during the past two years. Donna plays first base on a girls' softball team when she isn't tinkling the ivories. □

The thirty minute program from which NPR took its segment was prepared by Shirley Smith of WUOM, the University of Michigan's 230,000 watt public FM station in Ann Arbor. The program was produced in June as part of WUOM's weekly *Background* series which is distributed to commercial radio stations in the United States and to the Armed Forces Network in Europe and Southeast Asia.

Mrs. Smith interviewed Henry Aldridge, a candidate for the Ph.D. in Radio, Television, Film at the University of Michigan, and a member of Motor City Chapter of ATOS which is responsible for the restoration work now being done on the instrument. Their conversation included a sound tour of the organ, music, and a discussion of the theatre organ's role in the new wave of enthusiasm for silent films.

This is the second program about theatre organ music that has been produced by the University of Michigan Broadcasting Service within the past year. In 1971, the University of Michigan Television Center produced a thirty minute video-taped interview with John Muri of Detroit. The tape included a short Chaplin film which was accompanied by Mr. Muri on the DTOC Wurlitzer organ at the Senate Theater in Detroit. □