



3/13 Barton in the Michigan Theatre in Ann Arbor, refurbished by the Motor City Chapter.

**A**nn Arbor, Michigan is one of the most movie-conscious cities in America. The University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor, offers a variety of courses in film history and cinematography, ranging from mass lectures attracting hundreds of undergraduates, to small seminars for the professional. Although the Speech Department is the official home for courses in motion pictures; the English, Art, Advertising, and Education departments offer them also. In addition, enterprising students have formed half a dozen cinema groups which offer full schedules of classic films at low prices throughout the year, and each year young filmmakers from around the world show their latest productions at the Ann Arbor Film Festival held every spring. Indeed, Ann Arbor is "where it's at" as far as film is concerned, unless you happen to be lucky enough to live in New York City.

# RESTORING THE BARTON

## AT ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

by Henry B. Aldridge\*

Michigan Theatre, Ann Arbor, Michigan in August 1972.



The University's enthusiasm for the motion picture is matched by that of the community's. There are four downtown movie theatres and several others in the suburbs. During a typical week, it is possible to see a Chaplin revival, sit in on an Orson Welles festival, hear a lecture on the British documentary, or see the latest Hollywood release.

Dominating the Ann Arbor movie scene is the stately old Michigan Theatre on Liberty Street, just one block from the University campus. Amidst all the current uproar over modern films, the Michigan stands as a lovely reminder of another age of movie madness — the 1920's. Although partly remodelled a few years ago, the Michigan still bears evidence of stage shows, big bands, sing-alongs, and theatre organs. Kept in top condition as a first run house by manager Gerald

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Hoag, the Michigan boasts a two story lobby, complete with double curving staircase, a balcony, incandescent and arc spotlights, full atmospheric projection facilities for starlit ceilings and moving clouds, song slide printers and projectors, an orchestra pit, a rehearsal hall, dressing rooms, elaborate stage machinery, and three grand pianos.

The main attraction at the Michigan however, is the recently restored three manual, thirteen rank Barton pipe organ. Located in the left corner of the orchestra pit, the dazzling gold and red console still rises on a separate lift to six feet above the orchestra floor just as it did on opening night in January, 1928.

Although the Barton was never used to accompany silent films, it did command a separate billing for many years and was featured in solo performance as well as providing a rich accompaniment for sing-alongs. Mr. Hoag, who came to the Michigan as its first manager and has remained there ever since, remembers that the sing-alongs were popular with the college students. On many occasions, he led the audience in performances of popular songs with updated lyrics. The students seemed to take special delight in hearing Mr. Hoag's satirical comments on current happenings at the University. One of Mr. Hoag's instantaneous hits was his tribute to the tearing down of West Hall which stood next to Ann Arbor's First Congregational Church. To the tune of "Thundering Big Men from the North," Mr. Hoag's lyrics wound up with "Betsy Barbour needed a new lawn . . . The next day West Hall was gone."

Although the regular staff organists were dismissed in the 1930's, the Barton was used on special occasions until the 1960's when it made its last public appearance during intermissions for the film *Gone With the Wind*. Even though the organ had suffered extensive water damage which had rendered most of its main chamber (including Flutes, Diapasons, and Tubas) virtually useless, the instrument still sounded remarkably good when the the Motor City Chapter of ATOS began its restoration project in October of 1971.

The first task that the team faced was complete renovation of the two organ chambers. They had to be cleaned and made safe from future water damage and falling plaster. The crew

began work by removing all pipes and installing false ceilings in both chambers. At the same time, the chambers were painted white, chests and wooden supports cleaned and varnished, and pipes which had been cast aside over ten years ago as water damaged beyond repair were completely rebuilt. While the organ was shut down during November, December, and January, console pneumatics were releathered and relay connections resoldered.

In February, most of the pipe-work was back in place, and the crew began the tedious search for air leaks. A large one was discovered in the wind line just below the blower which is seventy feet up over the proscenium arch. When this was repaired, the nine ranks which had been playing prior to the beginning of the restoration project sounded better than ever.

In March and April, the crew restored the Diapasons, Tubas, and Clarinets to working condition and replaced console pneumatics. In the meantime, the console exterior was cleaned and new paint applied. A sneak preview concert for chapter members and the public was held June 11, 1972, the Barton premiering with Richard Shindell of Toledo, Ohio at the console. Over two hundred people attended and gave Rick and the organ a warm reception.

During the weeks following the preview, the crew returned the rebuilt flute chest to the main chamber and completed its rewiring. Second touch springs were replaced in the console and plans were made for the organ's official public debut in September. In August, the Barton was demonstrated for Dr. Frank Beaver's film history class and was the subject of a thirty minute documentary prepared by WUOM, the University of Michigan's FM station in Ann Arbor. It was also heard on National Public Radio's 90 minute daily newscast during the annual ATOS convention in July.

When students returned to Ann Arbor at the beginning of September, finishing touches were being placed on the Barton in preparation for the inaugural concert on Wednesday evening September 20 at which Lyn Larsen will present a concert and accompany the Rudolph Valentino film *Son of the Sheik*. In addition to readying the organ for this concert, the Motor City crew also restored the understage musicians' room and had

the orchestra pit recarpeted.

In scheduling the organ's use, members of the Motor City Chapter have been cognisant of Ann Arbor residents interest in film. They plan to work closely with student film groups and University professors in promoting events at the theatre and in choosing films to be shown. Already Jay Cassidy of the Cinema Guild has expressed an interest in the Chapter's work and in the use of the organ to accompany silent films, since many Ann Arbor film enthusiasts are currently watching these films without any musical accompaniment.

The Michigan Theatre's Barton organ will never be without an interested and aware audience. For film historians, the ATOS concerts will be a rare opportunity to see silent films in their proper setting, and for the younger generation, they will be a first encounter with an unusual and exciting musical instrument. For ATOS, the restored Barton organ will become an important link between the old-time theatre organ music lovers, young filmmakers, and cinema teachers who will appreciate the organ for its major historical purpose as a necessary adjunct to the presentation of great film classics. □

Ben Levy, Motor City member, adjusts second touch springs on the 3/13 Barton.

