



ORGAN AT MIDNIGHT

by Bob Ort

At midnight Saturday, June 3rd, Buddy Nolan treated theatre organ fans to the tenth organ program in his series known as THEATRE ORGAN AT MIDNIGHT. Again the setting was the Embassy Theatre in downtown

Fort Wayne, Indiana, with its 4/15 Page pipe organ. Nolan once more enlisted the assistance of pianist Dyne Pffeffenberger to make this concert one of the best yet.

Unfortunately, the theatre's air con-

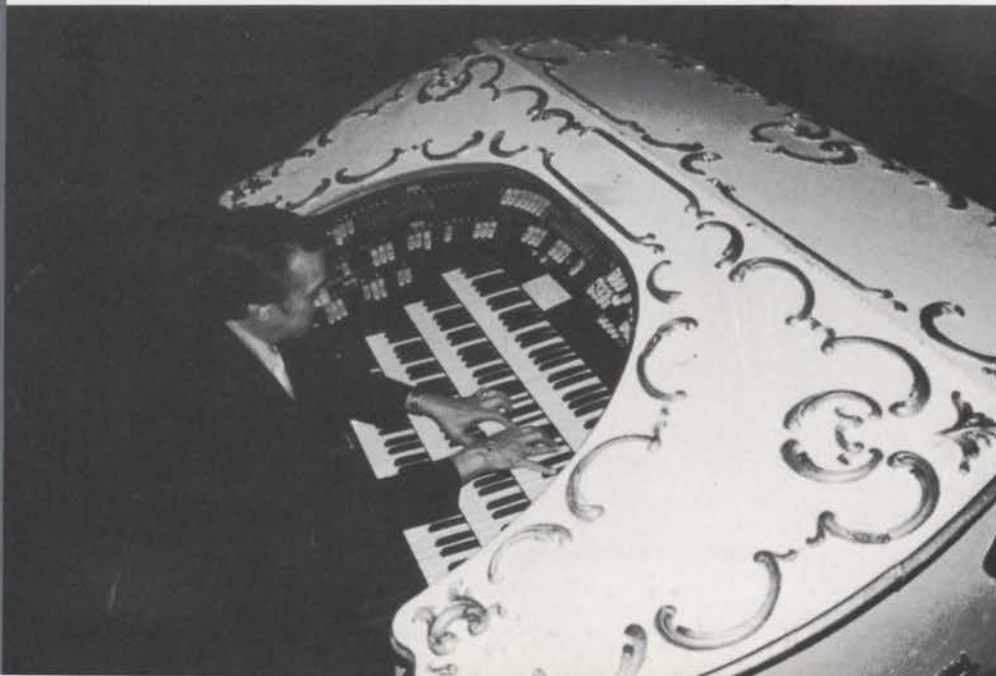
ditioning plant decided to stop functioning that day and the temperature both outside and inside the building soared quite high with the humidity producing a most uncomfortable atmosphere in the auditorium. The Embassy Page and grand piano however, never sounded better, so the audience didn't seem to mind.

A few hours earlier the Page stopped running and simply refused to start, but with technicians Bob Nickerson, Bill Zabel and Ellsworth Smith administering first-aid, the Page started breathing again.

The fact that the Indiana Hotel, in which the Embassy Theatre is housed, is now vacant and up for sale, gave Nolan an opportunity to let the Page sing forth without fear of complaints from hotel guests having their sleep disturbed by Tubas and Posthorns.

Nolan's programs often have surprises of some kind for the audience in the form of vocalists, characters, strolling on and off stage and vaudeville types doing their thing.

Buddy Nolan at the 4/15 Page in Fort Wayne, Indiana.



In every Nolan program, production effects enhance the musical performance with lighting, staging and props. Large flowers brightened the console and a white picket fence with gigantic colorful flowers was set inside the orchestra lift creating a garden-like effect.

The program opened with a caricature of Nolan at the console of an organ projected on the Embassy screen while an unseen announcer made some opening remarks with a statement that before the concert could get underway, the audience would first get a glimpse into A DAY IN THE LIFE OF FORT WAYNE'S OLDEST THEATRE ORGANIST. Thus began a series of color slides showing candid views of Nolan asleep, yawning, sipping his morning coffee, showering, getting into his sports roadster, experiencing mechanical difficulties, driving in the rain with his convertible top down and his umbrella up, entering the stage door and getting ready in his dressing room downstairs in the theatre. All these slides had accompaniment in the silent movie tradition provided by Dyne Pfeffenberger seated at a vintage upright piano on stage, with "Silver Threads Among the Gold"

with other appropriate selections used for the various slides. The final slide was a recent one of Nolan at the Page console, and signalled the first sounds from the 4/15 Page. As the lift brought organ and organist up from the pit, Nolan played a rousing chorus of "Cabaret" while two song slides introduced the lyrics for the audience.

Nolan then welcomed the audience and talked about organ music in the 30's commenting that the late Banks Kennedy had presided at the 3/11 Wurlitzer in the now razed Paramount Theatre a few blocks away. This gave him an opportunity to play an original tune written by Kennedy entitled "I Can't Help Being Jealous", an ideal ballad for a theatre organ. (The Paramount's Wurlitzer left town for Texas in the early 60's and now is being re-installed at The Twenties Restaurant and Lounge in Denver, Colorado.)

Nolan delivered an outstanding program musically as well as visually. For numbers that featured Dyne Pfeffenberger at the grand piano, the orchestra lift was raised to the same elevation as the console. During one piano-organ duet, the curtains parted, revealing a

large, revolving, multi-mirrored sphere which picked up the spotlight beam and sprinkled it throughout the Embassy auditorium.

The entire program was carefully planned to include all forms of music — classic, popular, gospel, and musical comedy. Showmanship was an ever present consideration. The finale produced more of the showman's imagination when Buddy announced that his final organ number would be "Battle Hymn of the Republic". Again the stage curtains opened, displaying a large American flag at center stage with a white spot overhead and alternating red and blue spots spilling from the gray curtain backdrop. As the Page swelled to full voice for the final words, "His truth is marching on", three flash powder charges (one on either side and one behind the flag) were set off making for a highly patriotic closing for a very well-paced musical program.

Buddy Nolan's fans hope that this will not be the last concert for the Embassy Page. She sings much too well to be forced into retirement, but her fate is uncertain at present, as is the fate of the Embassy itself. □

Helen Dell

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