

# Snippets from England

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Bad News — Good News jokes (and Good News — Bad News ones) have been all the rage in Britain lately. So let's start off with some bad news, which is certainly no joke so far as local organ buffs are concerned.

The ABC cinema circuit, owned by the EMI conglomerate, announced a vast rebuilding and re-organisation programme early this year. As a result, almost all their remaining organs are being removed from the theatres.

Even the famous Wurlitzer 3/12 of the ABC (formerly Regal). Kingston-upon-Thames, which was broadcast and recorded by *Reginald Foort* in the early years and by *Joseph Seal* right up to now, is to go. It will move to a well-known musical museum at Brentford, near London.

Some of the standard 3/6 Comptons which that company installed in large numbers for sing-alongs during the 30s have been bought by organ builder *Gerald Carrington*. In fact, he now has quite a stock of this make of music machines in all sizes and is currently advertising them in the musical press for sale as complete installations.

Fate of all the organs is not yet known, but it is sad to see the end of an era. ABC were the most organ-minded of the circuits in later years and kept a few players on their staff until a year or so ago. Now many of their theatres will be twinned or tripled — or leased for other uses.

Now for the good news. One of the few ABC organs not in danger for the moment is the Compton 3/8 plus Melotone at Plymouth, from which *Dudley Savage* airs the granddaddy of all radio's console capers. *As Prescribed*, a request show for the sick, begins its 25th year of broadcasting this summer.

Since we are counting our blessings, let me just mention in passing a veritable cornucopia of pipes platters enlivening the British recording scene. And the preservation bit goes from strength to strength.



There's been a fair bit of organ activity in Holland these past few months. Checking it out on an all-too brief trip the other day, I gleaned the following items:

*Harry Klompe* quit the residency of the famous City Theatre, Amsterdam, early this year. His successor at



Back to pipes after many years — Guus Jansen at the Tuschinski, Amsterdam.

the 4/17 Strunk will be one *Mijnheer van Hoorthuysen*, pupil of the late, great *Pierre Palla*. Harry, by the way, is still teaching plug-ins in the Dutch capital.

Also in that beautiful burg I was glad to note the Dutch Organ Federation is thriving. The group embraces both theatre and church instruments and players and has been arranging informal concerts. I caught one at the Tuschinski Theatre, where a big attraction was the first grapple with pipes for many years of *Guus Jansen*.

After an impressive display on the lovely Wurlitzer/Strunk 4/11, he told me: "I was resident at the nearby Rembrandt Theatre for eight years — that was destroyed in the war — and now I mostly teach." He might have added that he is also a respected composer. One of his works had been featured in a British theatre organ broadcast only a few days previously.

Also playing that day was *Rene de Rooy*, one of the two residents at the Tuschinski (the other is *Jan Mekkes*, now active again after a bout of illness). The North Holland organist *Taco Tiemersma* contributed a set and we also heard the Federation chairman, *Dr. L.H. van Oijen*.

During an intermission, *Dr. van Oijen* told me that the little Vlier 3/5 of the Capitol, Amsterdam (which I had written off a couple of years ago) is to be restored and will be available to the

Two manuals and just four ranks — Jan Slingerland at the Colosseum, Rotterdam.





Federation. The theatre has been bought by the municipality and it's probably no coincidence at all that one influential alderman happens to be an organist.

Down in bustling Rotterdam, I was able to fulfil a small ambition and visit the Standaard 2/4 in the Colosseum Theatre.

Alas, it was not in the best of voices. But in its day, this mighty marvel has charmed many patrons and it has been played by most of the Lowlands' top names in its time. Let me be honest and admit that, on this occasion, my host, *Jan Slingerland*, was able to get better noises out of the little box of whistles than I could.

*Jan's* own project right now (apart from moving house and taking his own three-manual five ranker with him) is the restoration of the Standaard 3/10 in the Passage, Schiedam. This house, also became municipally owned, is to be an arts centre but funds have been set aside for a virtual rebuild of the organ.

Also due for restoration, they tell me, is the Standaard 3/13 in the VARA radio studios, in Hilversum. This will give Holland's Radio City three working theatre organs (others are the Moller 5/27 formerly toured by *Reginald Foort* in England and now owned by the NRU, and the AVRO studio Compton 4/22 which is about to re-open after an overhaul). One good thing about the VARA news is that it is possible an approved roster of performers may be allowed regular practice facilities.

Anyway, that's the Dutch organ scene. Quite an optimistic one – and here's a point to ponder. The aforementioned Tuschinski movie palace was 50 years old last year. In Dutch law, that makes it an historic building which must be preserved. If anybody wanted to knock it down, they would have to replace it with an identical one. To me, that sounds like a good law.



Any day now, the last of the Standaarts will be moving into its new home.

The firm of Standaard were to Holland what Comptons were to England (and Wurlitzer Stateside). Between the wars they put many fine instruments into Dutch theatres and even exported a few to Britain.

Their last unit organ, however, was put into a night club in Leeuwarden in Friesland – which is to Holland what Scotland is to England, a fiercely independent province with its own language and traditions. This was as recently as the 50s.

Anyway, a few years ago there was a change of ownership at the club and it was decided to repalce the Standaard with an electronic.

Hotfoot to the rescue came ATOS member *Taco Tiemersma*, who regularly broadcasts another Standaard in the city's Pneil Hall. That one had been saved out of the Odeon, Schiedam by his father before him.

When I paid him a visit earlier this year, he showed me the plans for rebuilding his home so that the last of the Standaarts might be housed and playable again.

Summer saw the building of the pipe chambers – and a nice new kitchen for *Mevrouw Tiemersma*, so that everybody was happy. And now that they have dried out properly, the Amsterdam firm of Fonteyn and Gaal (who took over the Standaard business) are moving in to get things singing again.

The Dutch, as you may know, have a heart-warming habit of not drawing the blinds on their living rooms at night. For some months those who passed the *Tiemersma* house at number 9, Raadhuisstraat, Leeuwarden have got used to the sight of an immaculate three-decker console all waiting to be wired up to its pipes. It won't be long now.

STACCATO SNIPPETS – Fears that the famous Granada, Tooting, might be steel-ballad were temporarily dispelled early spring when a provisional preservation order was placed on it. So the picture palace and its Mighty Wurlitzer are well on the way to being listed as being of historical interest . . . Currently stored in the Playhouse, Edinburgh is the Christie 2/9 from the ABC (ex-Lonsdale), Carlisle. It will be the Cinema Organ Society's Scottish organ and probably go into a hospital recreation hall . . . Lancastrian Theatre Organ Trust, whose aims include preservation of the Wurlitzers in Manchester's Odeon and Gaumont theatres, have found a new "best-seller". They have arranged guided tours through the organ chambers for members, with a spell at the console for players. This is "once only" but regular Saturday morning sessions are being arranged for promising young talent . . . Last new organ to be installed in a British theatre before the renaissance, the Marshall Sykes 3/15 in the Cecil, Hull (opened in 1955) has now got its own local preservation group . . . The North Lincolnshire preservation boys have now bought a Compton 2/5 to restore, and transplant. It was in a Grimsby theatre . . . Two "golden age" performers died recently – *Henry Croudson* and *Joseph Flitcroft* . . . First theatre organ recital to be officially sponsored as part of an Arts Festival in England – *Andrew Fenner's* at Clayhall, Ilford, as part of the Festivals of London. □

Taco Tiemersma at the console of the last of the Standaarts.

