

# Frederick's Man-of-the-Hour

## Dan Weinberg

by Ray Brubacher

Much has been said in the August issue of THEATRE ORGAN about the recent Annual Convention held in Washington, D.C. Artists and organs received their just due. However, it is the purpose of this narrative to bring to light a bit of background concerning a gentleman who played a most important part in making the convention the success it was.

Dan Weinberg, owner of the Tivoli Theatre in Frederick, Maryland the home of the last operating theatre organ in the state, is one of these people in the motion picture theatre industry who like many in the organ industry has made it a part of his life since an early age. Born in 1909 Weinberg entered the theatre business with his father who was a pioneer in the field operating nickelodeons, at the age of sixteen. Together they built one of the largest local theatre circuits in the Shenandoah Valley area of Virginia. When in the 1930's

Dan's father sold out his interests to Warner Brothers, Dan went on to New Jersey to manage theatres owned by Skouras Brothers.

Returning to the Virginia area to build and operate more theatres, Dan turned his attention during the war to the overseas service of the American National Red Cross and became Field Director for Honolulu, and later Island Field Director for Saipan in the Marianas Islands.

With the war over Weinberg took up residence in Frederick with his wife and two children and pioneered in the development of the outdoor movie drive-in. In 1950 the old Opera House in Frederick was added to his listing of theatre holdings.

In 1959 he acquired the Tivoli Theatre on Patrick St. in downtown Frederick. It was at this time that Dan was to discover that in the Tivoli lived a pipe organ that had lain

neglected under numerous layers of dirt and canvas covers. Soon after his acquisition he was approached by Dick Kline (whose own 4/28 Wurlitzer was a highlight of the convention), with the idea of restoring the instrument. Weinberg, unlike so many theatre managers we know, became immediately interested in the organ and gave permission for the chapter to commence operations. However, it was not until 1970 that complete restoration was carried out on the organ. Again, Mr. Weinberg saw in the restoration of the Wurlitzer an opportunity to try to reinterest the local population in the glories of the silent film with organ accompaniment and brought in Lee Erwin from New York to rededicate the instrument. Without his cooperation and enthusiasm the organ in Tivoli would have been removed long ago leaving the entire state without an in-theatre instrument.

Tivoli Theatre — Owner, Dan Weinberg inspects progress on restoration of the Tivoli Wurlitzer.





It was on July 10th, however, opening day of the convention, that Dan became the "man of the hour", for everyone who attended the concert held the 11th at the Tivoli. At 10:30 a.m. on the 10th, the damage done to the organ blower motor by heavy rains three weeks before, the likes of which had completely flooded the blower room in the basement to a depth of ten feet, caused the motor to catch fire and burn, destroying bearings and windings. A heroic effort was made to secure a replacement motor from Marvin Lautzenheiser of Springfield, Virginia, but when the motor was delivered it proved to be the wrong specification and could not be used. The author of this narrative had visions of eight hundred convention goers with nothing to do on the afternoon of the eleventh.

When informed of the disaster, Mr. Weinberg literally took over the operations. The heavy motor was loaded into the trunk of his car and was taken to the M.&M. Motor Service Shop in Frederick. On entering the premises it was apparent that we were not the only ones with a problem. The rains had created havoc with about three hundred other motors of the industrial type. However, undaunted by the "are you nuts or somethin'" look given us by the service manager, Dan insisted that the motor be completely rebuilt and in our hands by 9 o'clock the following morning on an "expense be hooted" basis.

What occurred after this is now ATOS history. By ten o'clock the following morning the Tivoli Wurlitzer's lungs were in better shape than ever for guest artist Hector Olivera and for the cheering throngs of conventioners.

Certainly everyone who attended the convention and heard this magnificent small Wurlitzer must credit Dan Weinberg for saving it and taking the intense personal interest in the welfare of the organ and of the Potomac Valley Chapter.

As a closing note, Mr. Weinberg has decided to retire from the theatre business and has leased his holdings in this field to the RC Corporation in Baltimore. Officials of the corporation are to be credited in making the Tivoli available to us on the same basis and for their cooperation with the chapter on the convention. □



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**REFLECTIONS OF A GOLDEN ERA, Ray Frazier playing the Grant Union High School 4/21 Kilgen/Wurlitzer, Sacramento, Calif. Stereo No. CR-0116. Available postpaid at \$4.89 from Concert Recording, Box 531, Lynwood, Calif. 90262.**

An organ new to records makes its debut along with the recording debut of the organist. Ray Frazier, a student of the late great Floyd Wright, is well known in the San Francisco area as a teacher. He has played concerts at the Home Organ Festival and is currently president of the Bay Area Professional Organists Club. His style at the console is easy-going in the manner of the oft-lamented late night radio organists of the past. He aims to satisfy the listener rather than dazzle him. On this disc he is quite successful, with only a few spots we'll question. His harmony is mostly conventional and he applies it with skill to lush combinations that carry the slow rhythmic ballads which prevail in these grooves.

The organ is truly a hybrid, having been assembled in the late '30s from three theatre organs. It is played from an especially-built Kilgen console and it is living proof that a fine sounding instrument can be assembled from "parts" (mostly Wurlitzer) if done

by skilled hands such as those of organbuilder Fred Wood of Oakland. His work crew included several students then attending the school, one being a lad named George Wright who participated in the opening concert on Dec. 8, 1939.

Ray Frazier's console style is mostly his own, with perhaps a touch of his teacher, Floyd Wright, plus a hint of Crawford. He leans to Tibia-rich registration (the organ has three, separately "shaken") and his lagorous tempos make for dreamy listening through such ballads (some with a gentle beat) as "It's Never Too Late"; "Am I Blue" featuring solo reeds, "Why Don't You Behave?" on color reeds and Tibia/Glockenspiel, Ray's own melodic "Serenade," "Diane" (as lushly performed as we've ever heard it), "Whispering", surprisingly played as a slow ballad, and "Just a Kiss Apart."

Three selections in up-tempo add contrast interspersed among the ballads: "Love is Sweeping the Country", "I'll Get Along Somehow" and "Me and the Man in the Moon." There is only one selection we can find much fault with, the familiar "Perfect Song." Ray plays it tempo rubato with far too much rubato, not unlike Gaylord Carter's "all quarter note" version he uses when in a hurry. This, plus some melodic inaccuracies, may mar enjoyment among those who know the tune.

Ray is partial to the big organ sound, which compliments both his style and what he's trying to say in his music. The instrument has such a lush sound in full combinations one doesn't miss the variety of solo voices available. Arrangements are generally uncomplicated and there are no key changes within arrangements, which in no way diminishes their enjoyment in the "late night broadcast" parameters.

Summary: Good "easy listening".

**LEON AND THE LION, Leon Berry playing his 2/7 studio Wurlitzer. Custom Fidelity stereo, No. CFS-2953. Available postpaid at \$5.50 from Leon Berry, Box 493, Park Ridge, Illinois 60068.**

Leon Berry is back, riding his "Beast in the Basement" Wurlitzer which now roars from 7 ranks of pipes (it started life as a 4-rank style B). It's been a long time, nearly 20 years, since Replica released the original "Beast" LP. It caused quite a furore