

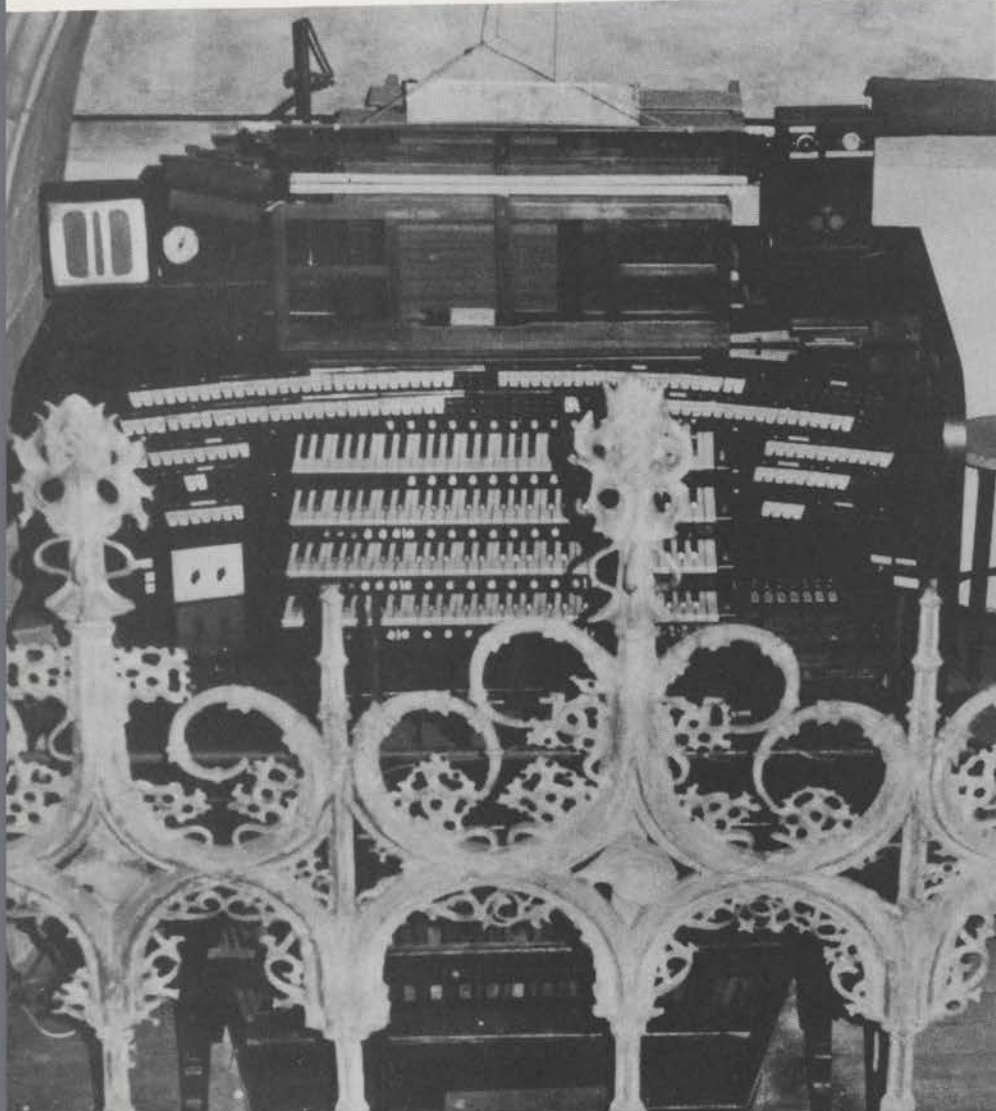
World's Largest Movie Organ?

by Al Winslow

Although the huge pipe organ in the Hammond Castle at Gloucester, Massachusetts is world-renowned as a concert instrument, it would not be surprising if in the near future it became known, also, as the world's largest silent-movie organ. Over the years since construction of the stone castle in 1928 specifically for the

purpose of housing Mr. Hammond's dream organ, virtually all of the world's great artists have performed at the 4-manual semi-horseshoe console controlling its 144 ranks of pipes and 6 divisions. But the year 1970 saw a first within the high cathedral walls of the castle's Great Hall and its famous instrument. Lee Erwin put on

The Austin-built four manual semi-horseshoe console in the Hammond Castle at Gloucester.



a silent movie show featuring the *Phantom of the Opera* with music composed and played especially for the occasion by Lee himself. The show was a terrific success, evoking a repeat performance on the following evening. Although putting on this type of show in the stately castle was Mr. Erwin's idea and promotion — (Could it have been an excuse, Lee, to try out this great instrument?) — the interest it generated led the management to propose the presentation of similar movies during 1971.

Two words of explanation are due at this point. Despite the size of the organ and the Great Hall, concert seating capacity is limited to about 250. For movies, the total is nearer 200. After all, Mr. Hammond's interest was the acoustical effect of 12,000 pipes in a smallish stone cathedral rather than profit! However, since Mr. Hammond's death in 1965, the castle's perpetuation has depended somewhat on its success as a public museum. On this basis, a ticket sale of \$400 to \$500 is hardly sufficient to cover costs, if we include artists' travel expenses.

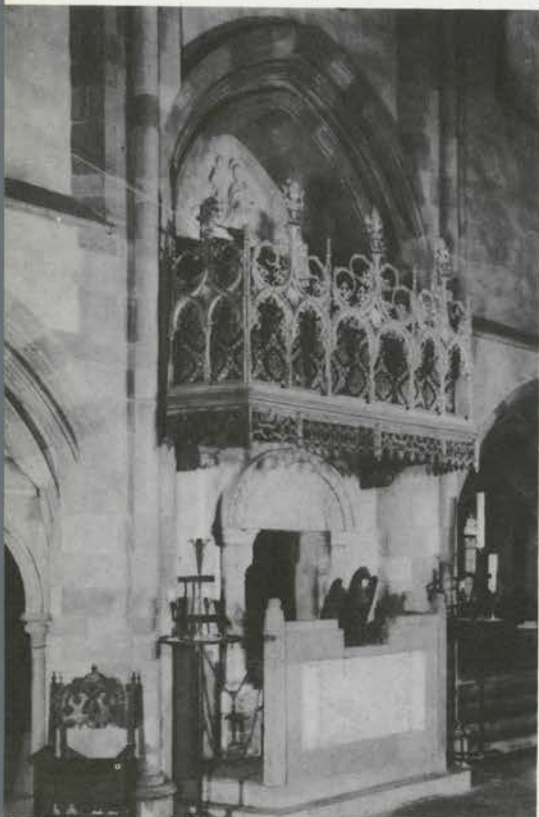
The second point to explain is why I was selected. While it is true that I happen to be one of the few remaining silent-movie organists in this area, it is also true that I've been practicing engineering these last 35 years. Music has been reserved mostly for hobby status with only occasional lapses into church work and an occasional "pops" concert. But it is also true that I've been a member of ATOS for almost 15 years, and that periodically our Eastern Massachusetts Chapter has availed itself of Mr. Hammond's generosity in sharing his castle and pipe organ with us for club meetings and concerts. Mr. Hammond (and his two Siamese cats, also, strangely enough!) appeared to enjoy my brand of jazz so scrupulously eschewed by the "long-hair" performers at the Castle. Would you believe Mr. Hammond also prized his autographed portrait of our own Hope-Jones?

There is no doubt that the theatre organ influenced Mr. Hammond in more ways than merely the Austin-built, modified horse-shoe console in his design concept of this, the "largest privately-owned organ in the world". It has a Tibia, a glorious though somewhat soft Vox, and a Trumpet chorus that knows no peers among Posthorns!

There are 7 Trumpets graduated in volume in the chorus, usable separately or collectively, and playable from any keyboard. It has about 30 reeds of every type imaginable (plus a Hecklephone (?) you can't imagine!), a copious supply of Flutes, Diapasons (of course), squealers and mixtures; however, the predominant flavor of the organ, if the reeds and squealers are avoided, is string, as with the symphony orchestra. And what a family of lush, beautiful String Celestes! Thirty ranks of them!

Believe me, it wasn't at all difficult for me to say "Yes", when asked if I'd play for more of the movie shows Lee so graciously introduced to the *Castle-by-the-Sea*. We put on 3 shows during 1971, all sell-outs, and for '72 two were scheduled; April 29 and June 10. On July 29, about mid-point in their summer Classical Concert Series, your correspondent will be putting on a pseudo-pops affair, possibly another first. You can bet this concert will be slanted toward the theatre organ type of programming; light classics, overtures, jazz fantasias built around my 10 years as jazz pianist, and one or two silent-movie tear-jerkers. Who knows, maybe I'll be the one to bring to the Castle the title of the "Largest Movie Organ in World"! □

The console in the Great Hall of the Hammond Castle is located in its own balcony. Intricate stonework is prevalent throughout the magnificent structure.



Al Winslow at the Hammond Museum 4/144.

The Hammond Museum . . . a 1928 version of a medieval castle, complete with drawbridge and moat.

