



The line of concertgoers begins to form. The Capitol's manager, Don Lindner, was determined to make a success of the Erwin concert as the marquee advertising proves. Notice the red carpet from door to curb. — (Bill Lamb Photo)

## DAVENPORT PREMIER... A SELLOUT!

by  
Lloyd E. Klos

One of the newest chapters to be added to the ATOS family is the Cedar Rapids Area Theatre Organ Society. As a result, Davenport, Iowa is now a full-fledged city on the theatre organ concert circuit, thanks to a highly successful event, starring Hall of Famer, Lee Erwin on May 17 at the Capitol Theatre. And, judging from the response of the concertgoers during the affair and afterwards, it was only the beginning of a glorious future.

A focal point of CRATOS activities, is the 3/10 Wicks which was installed in the Capitol in 1928 at a cost of \$30,000. Prime movers in the restoration project were Bob and Carolyn Beck. Bob, though he confesses to not being an organist, had played the Wicks once a week, beginning in 1964, as a means of preventing corrosion of the electric contacts. In 1969, Stan Zimmerman of Moline, Ill., started working with Bob on its restoration. There were others

who assisted from time to time, but Bob stayed with it.

He inherited his love of music quite naturally. His mother was famed organist, Gladys Gooding, who played the Loew's circuit, Madison Square Garden, and Ebbetts Field for the old Brooklyn Dodgers.

Over 50% of the Capitol organ was dead when restoration began. Bob and his crew worked on Saturday and Sunday mornings. A worker at ALCOA, he transferred to a later shift to free his mornings for work on the organ. He had no knowledge of the workings of a pipe organ before he tackled the Capitol's instrument, but he had studied electronics while in the service, and that helped.

"When we started working", he says, "we found the two pipe chambers had been damaged by water leaks through the roof. Mice, dust, corrosion and other factors were prevalent from years of disuse. Since I like the noise-makers, the first thing I did was to

work on the chimes. The leather covering was shot, so I replaced it with a rubberized cotton material which is cheaper and easier to work with."

As is the case of all restoration projects of this kind, Bob Beck is not paid for his services, though he has purchased materials and parts. Other parts have been donated by CRATOS members. Intensely dedicated to this project, Bob says, "I must have expended a couple hundred dollars a year on the organ. Many people spend more on their hobbies. This organ is my hobby."

For the benefit of THEATRE ORGAN readers, the solo chamber on the left side of the auditorium contains the Tuba, Tibia, Kinura, Orchestral Violin, Diapason and Contra Bass. The main chamber on the right houses the Concert Flute, Violin, Violin Celeste, Gross Flute and Vox Humana. The Toy Counter is also in the main chamber and includes Auto Horn, Bass Drum, Castanets, Cymbal, Marimba-



CRATOS member Howard Burton plays his portable pipe organ in the Capitol Theatre lobby. — (Bill Lamb Photo)

Harp, Snare Drum, Tambourine, Tympani, Wood Block and Xylophone.

The Becks joined ATOS in 1957. When CRATOS was organized in 1969, they became members, thus becoming fully "organized." Besides

maintaining the organ, Bob serves as treasurer of the chapter, and his wife handles publicity. Other dedicated buffs who have worked on the instrument are Howard Adams and Brad Starcevich.

Of course, the project couldn't have

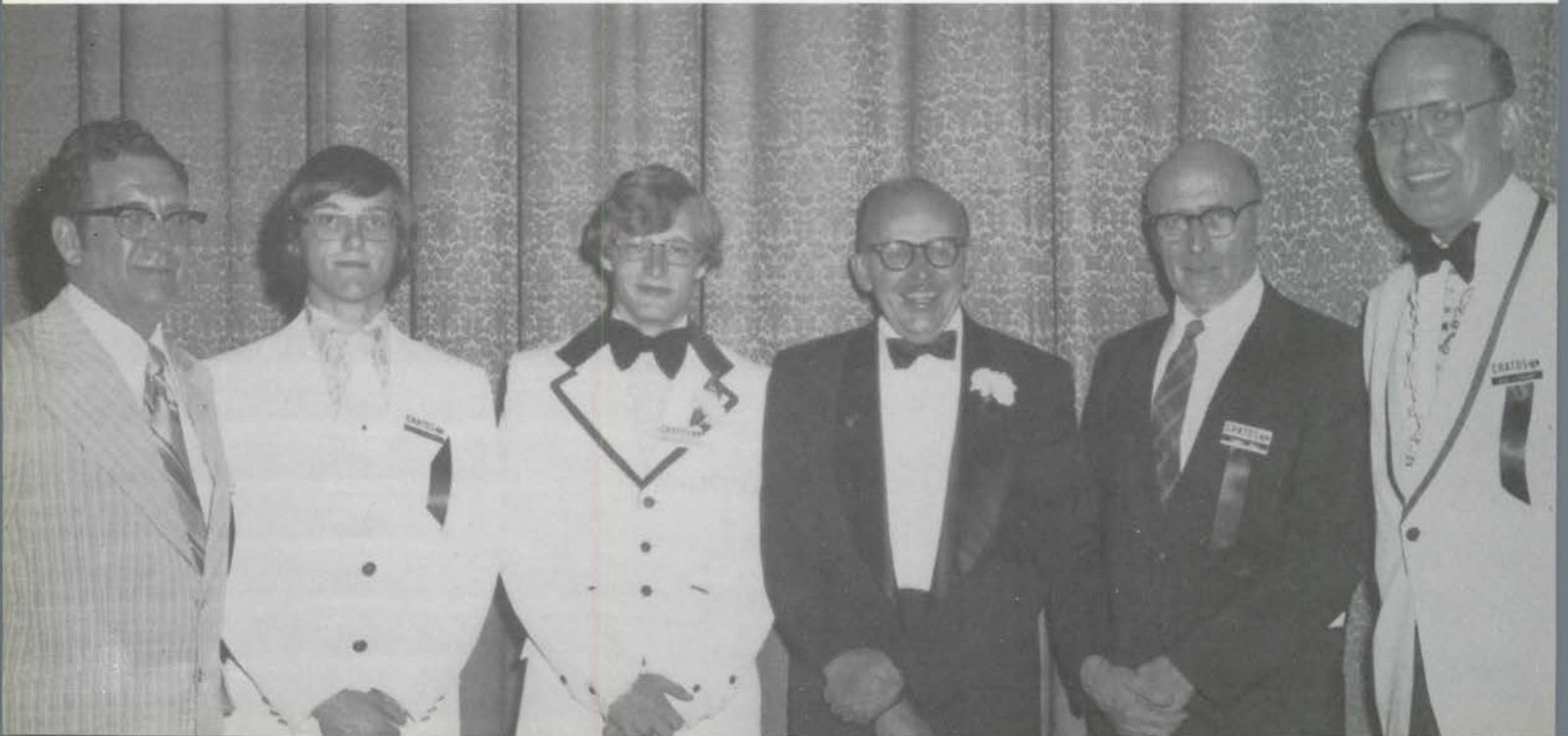
been brought to fruition without the approval and encouragement of the Capitol Theatre's manager, Dan Lindner. He had attended a concert, sponsored by the chapter, in Cedar Rapids and came away so enthusiastic that he wanted to put on a similar event at the Capitol. However, it was felt that the organ was not in good enough condition. After Lee Erwin played a November 1972 concert in Cedar Rapids, he was brought to the Capitol for his appraisal of the instrument. Believing it to be well along the way to complete restoration, he agreed to a date of May 17, 1973 for the initial concert.

There must have been someone from CRATOS who attended this writer's seminar at the 1972 convention in Washington, and heeded his advice on the great value of thorough advance publicity. Carolyn Beck was in charge of tickets and publicity, and what a job she did! The newspapers, radio and television stations tried to outdo each other in giving the concert publicity.

"I had to go to the theatre the morning of the show because the manager couldn't handle the phone calls! We were sold out by 11 AM!", says Mrs. Beck.

Picture the scene at the Capitol that historic evening: Lines of people waiting for the doors to open... A Hollywood-style searchlight oscillating

A happy sextet poses backstage at the Capitol. (Left to right): Howard Adams and Brad Starcevich of the organ maintenance staff; Paul Adams, master of ceremonies; organist Lee Erwin; Bob Beck, dedicated organ restorer; and Dave Lindner, manager of the Capitol Theatre. — (Bill Lamb Photo)



against the night sky . . . A busload of organ enthusiasts arrives from Cedar Rapids . . . A red carpet is stretched from the theatre's doors to the curb . . . Ushers sporting tuxedos . . . ATOS Staff Photographer, Bill Lamb snapping pictures of the first-night activity . . . Howard Burton performing on his portable pipe organ in the lobby . . . All the glamour and excitement of a real Hollywood premiere!

Lee Erwin had arrived a couple days earlier for practice sessions and combination settings, which is the hallmark of a dedicated musician. From the time he played the opening number he finished accompanying the final scene of Buster Keaton's *The General*, the 1610 persons who comprised the SRO audience (500 were turned away), were completely enthralled. They were there to forget the cares of the world for a couple hours, and when the announcement was made that similar programs were being considered, it met with loud applause.

The event was covered thoroughly by the press. Cameramen and interviewers were present, and the 10:30 TV news featured the show. The rivalry among the media was extreme to say the least, and the chapter basked in the attention spotlight. How sweet it was!

Ten days after the show, it was still discussed in the papers. A preliminary accounting by Mrs. Beck disclosed that



Lee Erwin talks to his audience at the Capitol. — (Bill Lamb Photo)

1610 \$2.50 tickets were sold. After expenses, the chapter made over \$1,000. The money will be used for maintenance and additions to the organ. The CRATOS board has authorized refinishing materials for the console and the purchase of a Chrysoglott. It is planned to place the console on a 3-foot lift so that the audience can see it better and to observe the footwork of the organists.

The money in the CRATOS treasury is used to maintain three organs —

the Capitol Wicks, the Cedar Rapids Paramount 3/14 Wurlitzer, and the 3/14 Barton in the Iowa Theatre in Cedar Rapids. All concerts have been self-supporting. Other costs are connected with the concerts — theatre rent, projectionist, stage help, artists' fees, tickets and advertising. Some cash is invested in savings certificates, and there is a contingency fund in case of cancellation of a concert for any reason.

Bob Beck says, "Dubinsky Brothers owns or leases the three theatres in which we hold our concerts. We lease the Paramount organ from them, and our legally-oriented members are working up an agreement in which we can lease the other two, with option to purchase in case the theatres are closed or razed. Right now, we have a verbal agreement.

"We are also planning to buy a private organ to place in a high school or civic auditorium. Theatre organs must be in locations where the public can hear them."

With the success already realized by this chapter, and with ambitious plans for the future, is there any reason to doubt that the Cedar Rapids Area Theatre Organ Society is firmly a part of the theatre organ's renaissance? If dedicated people who believe in high standards of organ maintenance, good artists, and extensive publicity of their programs, are given a fair chance, the success of the organization is guaranteed. □

Extensive advertising and promotion were responsible for the success of the Lee Erwin concert. This ad appeared in the Davenport Times-Democrat.

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