



The Mildred Graves Clubb Story

by Lloyd E. Klos

Before she was six years of age, Mildred's parents started her on piano with a teacher who had moved to her home town of Farmington, Mo. from New York. She took two lessons a week, summer and winter, and she is of the opinion that this is the best way to hold a child's interest.

Learning music came naturally to the youngster, as she says that all of her family were talented. Across the street from her home was the Methodist Church, and at the age of 13, she became assistant organist. She spent many hours there in practice, eventually becoming a full-time organist. If the weather were warm, she'd open the windows and really "turn loose" on that pipe organ!

Editor's Note: A recent addition to the ATOS roster has been organ teacher and former theatre organist, Mildred Graves Clubb. She was prevailed upon to supply information on her musical life which would be of interest to THEATRE ORGAN readers.

It was here that she had a humorous experience. A lover of cats, she had several. One Sunday morning, while playing for the services, the large congregation began to titter. Looking into the console mirror she spotted two of her kittens (Her mother said afterward that there were four), parading down the aisle. They parked near the minister and started washing their paws. The family nearly passed out! The ushers gently removed them and for some time, Mildred was known as "Mil and her cats."

In high school, her musical talents were used considerably, and she played so much for music classes (even though they had a musical director), the board of education gave her a full credit when she was graduated. She attended the University of Arkansas for one year. Then came marriage, and she moved to Jonesboro, Ark. She attended Arkansas State where there was a wonderful music department, but when she was studying for concert work, it was difficult because she had some very stern instructors.

At Jonesboro, she met M. A. Lightman, president and general manager of Malco Theatres Inc., a chain of 43 theatres in Arkansas and Tennessee. Recognizing Mildred's talent as a organist, he installed her in the 1000-seat Strand Theatre in Jonesboro where she played for some time. The organ was a large Kilgen. Each day, she played before the first movie, and did spotlight solos. She also played for sing-alongs, using slides with the popular songs of the day. For this purpose, she used a microphone in talking with the audience.

"I played before the 7 PM movie", she says, "and one evening, a little boy and girl came down the aisle and asked me if they could sing. I was so amused, I agreed to allow them to sing in the first spotlight. I can't remember what they sang with the organ, but they were very cute, and the audience gave them a big hand."

While at Jonesboro, Mildred served as studio director for station KBTM in the Noble Hotel for some time. "It was a lot of work, but fun also." She

also served as organist at the Methodist Church which had about 3,500 members, and attended the University of Tennessee for a special course.

"While playing in the church in Jonesboro, I had an amusing experience one evening during choir practice. The large choir stopped singing and began to laugh. Looking around, I spotted my imported black sheep dog 'Black Boy', walking down the aisle. He somehow had followed me, and chose to sit near me until practice was over."

Next, she moved to Memphis where she was associated with the Malco Theatre. This theatre still uses its 3/13 Wurlitzer. Stan Kann, St. Louis Fox Theatre organist, played a concert on it not long ago.

Following her theatre days, Mildred returned to her home town, Farmington, and started teaching organ and piano, an occupation which she has pursued to the present. She is organist at the Lutheran Church in Flat River, Mo. Though she would rather play than teach, she fully enjoys the latter, instructing from ages six to seventy-five, including teachers, in her home studio.

"I have some very good students. One boy, Bryan Williams, is studying theatre organ style, and doing so well that I hope to present him in a recital. I wish I had six more like him! Right now, that is one of my greatest desires — to present a student with whom I have worked so diligently. Two phases of musical training I emphasize are transposition and improvisation. As a teacher, however, I believe every organ student should first have a good foundation in piano as I did.

"I would like to see more parents who will give their children the opportunity to play a musical instrument, thereby becoming a source of pride to their families as I was to mine. There are so many potentially talented children who are not taking lessons.

"I have had many young students whose parents have pushed them on in their studies until they finished high school, and some were very good. But today, things are different. If they wait until they are in high school to start lessons, they seem to lose the desire, and have no push from their parents.

"The only sad part of my life was the losing of three members of my family in three years. It was all very disturbing to me as we were a most devoted family. But, I fell back on my music, sitting at the organ and playing for hours at a time. This was a real life-saver for me and I thank God for my talent.

"I have heard several church members say that they knew I played in theatres. I can't go along with the idea that if you play in a church, you can't play in a theatre. I could always play a church, then go straight to the theatre. I only wish I were able to play in a large theatre again. If you know of any in need of an organist, please tell the management about me.

"I am very proud to be a member of ATOS, and believe it is a most wonderful society. I also thank those who have written me such lovely letters, and hope to meet every writer soon. To me, the wonderful art of the theatre organ (or any pipe organ) will never be lost."

Mrs. Clubb regrets she has no old-



Hector Olivera, a sensation at the national ATOS convention at Washington, D.C. in 1972, playing at the Tivoli in Frederickburg, MD, has been booked heavily since that time and has succeeded in amazing every audience for which he has performed.

Hector has been engaged to play two organs for the Hammond Organ Society of N.J. on December 18. He will perform on a Hammond and on a Rodgers Church Model. To hear Mr. Olivera is a gratifying experience.

The planned concert has limited seating, therefore, anyone interested should contact ATOS member Peter Polito, 810½ Fourth Avenue, Elizabeth, N.J. 07202.

time pictures to offer for publication with this story, but when she moved back to Farmington, her pictures, all of her music, some diplomas and other mementos were stolen. She didn't get any of it back.

She recently saw an item in THEATRE ORGAN which stated that it was very difficult for a church organist to become a theatre organist. "That, I cannot go along with, maybe because I was started so young. Since I was 13, I have been both. I was blessed with the talent, and I had a marvelous education, too. In college, I was both a concert organist and pianist. Later, I sat in with different organists and closely observed their styles."

Besides her ATOS membership, Mildred Graves Clubb is also a member of the International Society of Music, the Missouri Teachers Association, and the National Teachers Guild. □

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