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In 1927, this ad appeared
in the "Melody Magazine."

Those Were The Days...

The times seemed to be right for the venture. The decade of the Twenties was the period of post-war inflation, wild spending, illicit drinking via bootleggers as a result of the bluenose Prohibition Law which we returning veterans looked on as a sneaky trick put over on us during our absence, and in general Making Whoopie. The "Noble Experiment", known as the Volstead Act and passed over Pres. Wilson's veto was to last 13 years and usher in a period of unparalleled crime in which rum runners' trucks were hi-jacked to the accompaniment of machine-gun fire, and over 2000 citizens were to die of poisoned liquor. Clara Bow was the "It" girl, Eddie Cantor the Makin' Whoopie boy. We had Mah Jongg, the Cross-word Puzzle, the Sacco-Vanzetti case, the first radio networks, the first "Miss America" bathing beauty contest, the first Motion Picture Academy awards, the sensationally successful series of Ziegfeld Follies, Coue-ism ("Every day in every way I'm getting better and better"), the Charleston, the Bunny Hug, the Black Bottom, women's skirts rising to the scandalous height of 6 inches above the ankle, the trial with Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan battling in court as to whether or not we were descended from monkeys, the Lindbergh Trans-Atlantic non-stop flight, and the Teapot Dome scandal. Caruso, Valentino, and Annie Oakley died. Judge Crater, Amelia Earhart and Aimee Semple McPherson disappeared, the last named only temporarily. The era of symphonic jazz bands was kicked off by Paul Whiteman with a concert featuring a relatively little known composer-pianist playing his composition, "Rhapsody In Blue". And Jesse Crawford moved from Chicago to the New York Paramount, setting the pace for the hundreds of movie palace organists rising on their elevators to play spotlighted solos.

Of more consequence to me, tho I didn't realize it at the time, was the release in 1926 of John Barrymore's *Don Juan* with a synchronized music score and sound effects. It was supplemented by short subjects which featured both singing and talking, but my ears were deaf to the implications. I blithely went ahead with my Theatre

Organ School which the soon-to-be-developed talking pictures were to send crashing down in flames. Paramount-Publix and I agreed to part, and on my 24th birthday, April 2, 1927, I ascended the Metropolitan elevator for the last time to play my farewell slide solo, "Goodbye", which included lyrics the only line of which I remember was: "teaching other organists to play like this, in my brand new Theatre Organ School." The tolerant Met management allowed me to brashly get away with it.

The press was very kind with free publicity. The Diapason gave me a column which consisted largely of abstracts from my brochure. The Boston Traveller invented the theory that I was leaving theatre work to devote more time to composition. Variety, which can always be depended upon for inside dope, informed its readers that "Del Castillo, the 'Jesse Crawford' of New England when he was featured at the Metropolitan, Boston, has a waiting list of 140 prospective trick organists, all intent on acquiring the fancy money paid feature organists in the picture houses. The picture house presentation slant is the only explanation for the heavy call on Castillo's services." This fiction had previously been outdone in the *Exhibitor's Trade Review* wherein it stated that "Castillo, judging by his record of changes, is in the nature of a "missionary" for the Publix chain, having recently been at Shea's Buffalo and the New York Rialto. The operating plan is to send Castillo, who is a master innovator of organ novelties and presentations, to a theatre to establish his popular brand of entertainment which, when smoothly in operation, can be left as a guiding policy for the organist who succeeds him, while he goes elsewhere to carry on the good work." Nat Finston must have had a good laugh when he read that one. And so would Arthur Martell, who had already been booked into the Met to succeed me.

At any rate I was now committed. I had burned my bridges behind me and taken on the responsibilities of a business man. Lew White and Emil Velazco were opening similar schools in New York, and there were doubtless many more in other parts of the country that I never even knew of. I had a seizure of virtuous indignation when I came across the brochure of a school in Rhode Island which had



Del Castillo about 1950 during his TV days. — (Del Castillo collection)

brazenly copied mine. I despatched a sarcastic letter to my rival, and received an injured answer in which he said he thought I would have been flattered. I was a lot younger then and had a lower boiling point than I have now. I think.

Actually the Variety story, exaggerated as it was, had some basis of fact. Applications had been coming in before the studios were finished, and I opened the doors to a quite respectable enrollment, and at one point in the next year actually did have a waiting list. By that time I had added another 2-manual practice organ and Earl Weidner as a second instructor, and was able to publicise a list of 11 graduates working in New England

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1927 ads from "Melody Magazine" stress the demand for Theatre Organists.

theatres. My total enrollment was around 125, and doom had not yet descended on me in the form of the first all-talking, all-singing feature picture — Al Jolson in *The Jazz Singer*. When it did, it was to come with a rush, and in the course of 10 months I would see my enrollment drop from over a hundred to less than ten before I locked the door and threw the key away. I have in my scrap book a

modest ad in *The Etude* issue of Sept. 1929. The name was shrunk to just "Del Castillo Organ School". The appeal has widened to include preparation for Theatre, Hotel, Broadcasting, Church, Concert and Residence organists. Practice periods are available for non-students, and the erstwhile proud owner is now "available for concert engagements." That was my swan song. I returned the two

practice organs to the factory in exchange for the unpaid notes, sold the 3-manual to Station WEEI and my services along with it, and heaved a sigh of relief at no longer having to juggle cash balances with due bills.

But in between I had a ball. I liked to teach and have continued to do it. From the start I instituted the 40-minute lessons that have always seemed preferable to me. Longer than

the too-short half hour, but not as strung out as the hour, and giving me a 5-minute breather on a 3/4 hour schedule. I had of course realized that I had a natural promotion outlet in radio programs, and from the first month maintained regular evening programs from the School, first with the new Boston Transcript station, WBET, which Ted Husing was imported to manage, and later with WNAC. I started the telephone request gimmick but had to discontinue it when the phone company complained it was tying up their switchboard.

I did concert engagements all over New England in cities and small town clubs and churches, clanking out with chains on in the dead of winter. At one church I was paid off entirely in small coins. At another I relinquished part of the cash payment to acquire a cocker spaniel puppy who was part of the menage where I was fed dinner, and who was to remain part of our family for the next fifteen years. And in between I would preside at the opening of new organs in picture houses, adapting my teaching schedule as necessary. I played a wedding service on the radio as an emergency request from a former Harvard football star who was having a home wedding at the time my request program was on. I did a two-organ program with Eddie Dunham at the WNAC studio organ and me at my studio organ, each of us of course using earphones. Inspired by the success of this stunt, we expanded it to a 3-point pick-up by adding the WNAC orchestra playing from its downtown studio, and I'm sure would have been willing to go on to a 4-point pick-up if we could have found the facilities and the performers. I organized the Boston Theatre Organists Club and voted myself in as first President. Frank Cronin, one of the finest theatre organists I ever heard and at that time playing a 4-manual Skinner, was Vice President. And in between I actually *did* do some writing: the little novelty "The Cuckoo Clock," which Fiedler used on the Boston Pops and recorded, a Concert overture performed by him and by the Boston Civic Symphony, and more of the potboilers for picture use that I had been writing some time for the Jacobs publications.

The last six months were the difficult time. My students and my profits were fading fast, and at last my eyes were opened as to what the



Lloyd demonstrates the art of accompanying song slides before a class at his organ school in Boston. Pictures of the east front of the U.S. Capitol, Old Ironsides and Del himself, adorn the walls. — (Dell Castillo collection)

"talkies" were doing to me. I sought other avenues, and naturally turned toward radio, which I had already used so extensively. Fortune favored me. The Edison Co. was building a new station, housed on the two top floors of their new Edison Building. I closed a deal to sell them my 3-manual Estey, and become their staff organist. Their architect apparently didn't know about freight elevators, and everything had to be delivered in the passenger elevators, to which padded walls had been added. This did not expedite the organ installation, so for six months I shared temporary programs with Roy Frazee, who was feeding organ programs into WEEI from a department store which had built a glassed-in

studio with a Frazee organ for the entertainment of the store patrons. My days as an organ school impressario were over.

A couple months later, seized by nostalgia, I visited the late Del Castillo Theatre Organ School. The space had not been leased, and my name was still on the door. It was unlocked and I went in and looked around. There was a gaping hole where the organ chambers had been, and a littered floor that had never been cleaned up. There was a sheet of music that caught my eye, and I picked it up. It was a copy of my old theme song, "Ah, Sweet Mystery Of Life." I put it in my pocket, and left for the last time.

But it was fun while it lasted. □

Lloyd shows how motion picture accompaniment is done, using one of the Estseys in his organ school. — (Del Castillo collection)

