

Chaney talks to Christine. This is the first appearance of the Phantom, (Lockwood Collection)



Christine (Mary Philbin) hears a sweet voice, just before she sees the Phantom. Hand at left is Chaney's (Lockwood Collection)



Christine recoils at the sight of the Phantom. (Lockwood Collection)



The Phantom at the 2-manual drawknob organ console. (Lockwood Collection)



IN SEARCH OF THE PHANTOM

by Thomas Lockwood

Editor's Note: In 1969, Rochester ATOS member, Tom Lockwood, developed an obsession. He would conduct an exhaustive search for the original score of the silent movie The Phantom of the Opera. In the following, Tom gives a history of the famous movie and describes his efforts to locate the elusive score.

Many people have asked me: "Why are you looking so deeply into this one film when hundreds were produced in Hollywood?" I suppose the answer is an obsession, a personal fulfillment in finding something which may have been lost to everyone else. The answer is two-fold. For one, the portrayal of Lon Chaney as a fiend, the extraordinary makeup, and a man's feeling towards his profession. And secondly,

even though the film is being shown around the country now, people are taking silent films for granted, not realizing the potential wealth of information, time and money spent on these classics.

To start research on an old film with very little to go by, I began to write letters to museums and people I thought might be able to shed some light on which way I should direct my efforts. It was a slow 18 months, and I wasn't satisfied with just bits and pieces; I wanted cold, hard facts.

Some replies were encouraging and others didn't give me the courtesy of a reply. Some who did reply, didn't encourage me and I must admit this was heart-breaking. One in particular wanted to know why I was researching the film, and yet, he said he never heard of it! On the other hand, I did receive one letter from a very nice lady who said she was very sorry to tell me that she did not have anything on the *Phantom*, but she did remember that her father had published a score to the film in 1925. I was encouraged!

To delve a bit into the history behind the film, in 1922 Carl Laemmle was given the script of the popular book, *The Phantom of the Opera*, by Gaston Leroux. This book is based on a real-life experience of a "ghost" in a Paris opera house in the 1800's. When the opera house was being excavated, workers located a skeleton deep in a catacomb which was believed to be the ghost.

In reading the script, Laemmle kept in mind the one man who could portray a fiend as only his imagination could... Lon Chaney. At this time, Chaney had completed *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

Immediately, Laemmle sent four architects to Paris to design the complete opera house, with seven blocks of streets to be used for the movie set. Seven costume designers were also included in the retinue. *Hunchback* was the biggest production to come out of Hollywood up to that time. Laemmle realized that the *Phantom* had to be bigger and better.

Some complications arose as production was underway. First, the opera house, 100 feet high, was too high for the present studio. So, Laemmle went out to a 250-acre ranch on which part of Universal City was situated.

Six months were spent in intensive preparation before a single shot was

taken. Eleven months were spent in actual production. The camera technicians built special lenses in order to secure some of the unique photographic effects. Besides the principals, there were 5,000 extras in the cast. A staff of 150 technical experts assisted the director, Rupert Julian. Included were architects, mining engineers, cameramen, artists, musicians and ballet dancers. Three hundred stage hands were continually employed during the production. Eleven sculptors spent many weeks making frescos and statues for the Paris Opera House settings.

This was the first setting ever built to incorporate structural steel. This was necessary to support the great weight of the Opera House which would contain 3,000 persons. From the ceiling was suspended the greatest crystal chandelier ever built. Forty feet in diameter, it weighed eight tons! The fall of the chandelier in the picture is one of the most amazing feats in motion picture history, and no one was hurt.

Ten 700,000-gallon tanks were built for the underground scenes which showed flooding of the torture chambers. The five tiers of cellars, the lowest containing a vast subterranean lake, was actually tunneled out of "Mt. Laemmle" on the ranch. For six weeks, 12 pneumatic drills dug the tunnel. The caverns were reinforced with steel and concrete. The largest single order of lumber in the history of Los Angeles up to that time was used - 175,000 board feet.

Two hundred and fifty trained dancers from the Metropolitan, Chicago and other opera companies were brought to Hollywood and rehearsed for four weeks for the ballet scenes under the direction of Ernest Belcher. A 100-piece symphony orchestra, under the direction of William Tryoler, formerly a Met conductor and director of the Hollywood Symphony Orchestra, was used in the opera scenes. Real opera stars, including Alexander Bevani and Virginia Pearson, appeared in the "Faust" scene.

Lastly, Lon Chaney, in the role of the Phantom, spent three months in preparation, experimenting with make-up. Its application required three hours to apply. By his contract, no still pictures were allowed of him before the fifth reel was shown.

Chaney was dissatisfied with many of the directors who worked on the film before Julian, so he directed most



Tom Lockwood, whose 3-year search was finally rewarded by receipt of the original score of "The Phantom of the Opera."

of his own scenes. Julian did seem to understand the temperamental artists, however.

It was late 1923 when the film was complete and a select group viewed the most talked-about film in history. The people said it had too much horror, so the film was returned to the studio where some of the horror was cut, and scenes of comedy were put in. Again, a mixture of comedy and horror just didn't suit the viewers.

With all the cuttings and revisions, the final masterpiece is just various scenes which survived the cutting room. The copyright date is April 1925, two years after production began. The premiere was Sunday evening, April 26, 1925 at the Curran Theatre in San Francisco. The theatre still stands today. Built as a legit house, it is still used for plays and musicals today.

The Curran outbid all the big theatres of New York and Chicago, and it cost only fifty cents to one dollar to see the movie. When the film was shown around the country, small hospitals were set up in the back of theatres to revive those with faint hearts and weak stomachs. The beginning of the fifth reel was the nurses' busiest time.

There were four versions made of this movie. The first was the original.

Second, a long-lost version made in 1930. This one I discovered was part talkie and silent.

Editor's Note: This was actually a re-issue of the original with sound effects added, a common practice in the early "talkie" days.

The third version was released in 1943 with Claude Raines. The fourth was made in 1961 with Herbert Lom.

Continuing my quest for the original score wasn't easy! Almost every big silent film had a score or cue sheets to help set a mood. One had to be written for this film, and the search was exhausting. As said before, some claimed there was no score, and a bare minimum would admit to any score at all.

On September 4, 1972, Mary Bowles, the ATOS super sleuth in finding memorabilia for the ATOS library, called to inform me that she knew a lady in Philadelphia who was reported to have the original score. The lady's name was Vi Eggers, an organist, who obtained the score in question from a lady whose father was in charge of booking films and scores in the silent days. The score wasn't returned with the film, hence it eventually came into her possession.

I had located it!

The score is 87 pages in length and was compiled by G. Hinrichs and M. Winkler, copyrighted by Belwin Music Co. of New York. Among the musical passages are "The Conqueror" by Baron and "Faust" by Gounod. The famous unmasking scene is "Mystery Drama Prelude" by Baron.

All well and good. Had I been successful only five months sooner in locating the score, I wouldn't have had to write my own when I played *The Phantom* for one week at Rochester's Revival Cinema. I used a Hammond H model, set up in the rear of the 250-seat theatre, and the picture enjoyed a most profitable week.

My three-year experience in tracking down this one score leads me to wonder, how many other scores are still hidden in attics, basements, closets and trunks. ATOS members can serve the cause most admirably by keeping their eyes and ears open for such material. I am most receptive toward material of this nature, and copies will be sent to the ATOS Library which is under Mary Bowles' supervision. □

HANDS ACROSS THE SEA

Photo Report by Michael Candy



Al and Betty Mason framed by the console of the Les Rawle organ, at "Wurlitzer Lodge", Northolt, Middlesex, England during their recent visit.

Lowell Ayars seated at the 2/6 Compton, Classic Poly Cinema, Regent Street, London. Lowell participated in a Cinema Organ Society Meeting / Recital during a visit to England this summer.

Lowell and his wife, Reba, were vacationing in England. While there, Reba was stricken and underwent surgery in London. They are loud in their praises of many British friends, especially Edith and Les Rawle, who came to their rescue during the ordeal.

