

# Too Much Success?

by  
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Did you ever hear of a series of musical programs, involving the theatre pipe organ which was so successful that it had to be terminated? Incredible, you say? That's exactly what we thought when, upon returning from the Portland convention, we read the opening lines of a newsletter sent us by Bert Buhrman, organist of the School of the Ozarks in Point Lookout, Mo.

The story of the organ installation was covered in THEATRE ORGAN in February 1972. In three successive years, starting in 1971, concerts were held on successive Sundays in July, with increasing attendance each year. This year, the crowds attracted were simply astonishing. But, let Bert Buhrman take it from here.

"This news may be difficult to believe, but at least, it's a different type of story. The crowds were so large and unmanageable that this is the last series I am going to do. The first week, security counted over 400 cars turned back from the campus gates which they estimated carried over 900 persons, since usually two or three are in every car. We have had endless static from disappointed people.

"The only reason I created this 'monster', was to make friends for the school, but if we have 1,000 friends on a Sunday and that many disappointed folks who are angry, my whole purpose is defeated.

"It certainly shows the power of theatre organ, nostalgia, etc. I believe also one thing which keeps them coming is that we do so much besides organ solos. I get some complaints about that, but I was raised on the old show business principle of 'leave them wanting more', and it works. It's boring to hear too many solos on too many shows.

"On July 22, I used the 4/43 Skinner and the Wurlitzer at the same time for the "St. Louis Blues March"; sound on sound, recording the Skinner ahead of time. It was one heck of a sound! Fortunately, all went well, and I didn't foul it up. On Saturday, they had started having trouble with the

tape players, and went through four of them before they got one to work.

"As to the future, it looks as if we will perhaps do some specials on TV and that way we can handle the masses. We thought of closed circuit TV on campus, but there wasn't time to get the cable and allied equipment installed. Secretly, I'm delighted. Three years is enough of this and I always believe in quitting while I'm ahead. That's the reason I left New York at 47 while I still had work! We've proved our point with this series, and now can move into another field.

"We haven't a car count or survey from where the people came as the fire boys who handle the traffic have been so busy and tired because of the traffic rush. I know we had visitors from Alaska the first Sunday, and people have been down from Chicago. The stories of people driving several hundred miles and not getting in are enough to drive one crazy!

"Bob Dilworth from Wilmington's John Dickinson High School came

through with a group on the way to the Portland convention, via Los Angeles. What a long trip! But as he was the first link in our getting the Wurlitzer through Walter Froelich of RKO, we were very glad to meet him.

"Six persons drove over from Wichita, Bob Foley, David Dillon, and two couples from Wichita Chapter ATOS. They were here about two months ago when the Tulsa and Wichita chapters chartered buses and spent the day here. About a 600-mile round trip for the day. They have more energy than I would have!

"For those in ATOS who are connected with publicity and advertising of organ programs, we got a whole page in color of the cast in the *Springfield Sunday paper*. The main TV station sent a cameraman down here to do spots, and the other stations did studio spots. We personalized radio spots for 12 stations. I guess it's too much publicity (?), but I'd rather have a mob than a half-full house."

There you have it, friends. Though this particular series is over for the School of the Ozarks because of more-than-average publicity, coupled with the public's being drawn to the theatre pipe organ, we are quite sure that Bert Buhrman and his associates at the school will devise other plans to utilize their Wurlitzer. They have come too far to allow this magnificent instrument to collect dust. □

The participants in the School of the Ozarks "Music For a Sunday Afternoon" series at the Wurlitzer console. In the rear are (left to right) Jean Parnell, Dr. John Mizell, Mary Elizabeth Bradley, David Blake and Bill Larramore. In front are Jean Fry and organist Bert Buhrman. — (Ozark Visitor Photo)

