



Early 1972 view
of the organ
with
Tiny James, organist;
Barney Gould, impresario;
Ron Downer, technician.

SAN FRANCISCO ORPHEUM MORTON SINGS AGAIN

by Donald Stuert — Photos by Bill Nakahara

It was 1926 when Charles Hershman's crew installed a 4/22 Robert Morton in San Francisco's Pantages Theatre. The organ arrived at the theatre just 28 days before the new 2500 seat house was open. And — it was fully installed and playing for that Market Street opening night.

By 1931 the Orpheum on O'Farrell Street closed its doors and the Orpheum name and circuit shows were moved to the more modern and larger house that had been the Pantages. Several organists were featured for many years including Henry Labell, Don George and Eddie Horton. The

organ continued in regular use until the mid 1940s, when Don Anderson and his spangled jacket would rise on the rotating lift at the center of the orchestra pit. For many years after that, the organ was only heard occasionally. The mahogany console had been painted an off-white, the Doppel Flute had been replaced with a Wurliitzer small-scale Tibia and the Trum-pet moved from the under-stage Foundation chamber, to one of the upper chambers.

The house then became the home of Cinerama, and manager Sam Perlman, an organist himself, brought in

Tiny James and Everett Nourse for press previews, opening nights and other special occasions. By then the orchestra pit had been filled with assorted heat-exchangers and sub floors, almost completely blocking the organ pit. The lift could no longer be rotated, as the stage-apron which was added blocked all but vertical motion. Even this limited access would have been denied had not Ernie Langley insisted that the console be accessible.

Starting in 1960, Ron Downer, fresh out of the Navy, started maintaining the organ. In the early sixties both George Wright and Gaylord Carter

presented programs at the Orpheum. The ATOS Regional Convention presented Johnny Seng and Ashley Miller at the Robert Morton. After Cinerama closed, the house became a catch all for live performances, forty-nine cent movies, etc. But mostly the house was closed. Ron kept at the organ, but there was little incentive to really keep it in top shape.

Now enters the villain! In 1966 one of the chambers was broken into, and the English Post Horn was removed to places unknown. The Orpheum Building Corporation was insured, and a claim for replacement of the rank was processed successfully. But the rank, then available at the price quoted to the insurance company, was not replaced and the money drew interest in the General Fund.

Always on the lookout for a chapter project, Northern California Chapter of ATOS started negotiating to restore the organ so that it could be used publicly again. Chairman Warren Lubich appointed Dewey Cagle (as Chairman) and Ron Downer to the NCATOS Organ Preservation Committee early this year. Officials of the Building Corporation were approached and eventually the insurance money was released and a Moller English Post Horn was obtained and installed. Simultaneously with this effort, a new

organization was formed by impresario Barney Gould to reopen the Orpheum as a legitimate house. The new San Francisco Arts Projects, Inc. planned an opening show and wanted to use the organ. With the help of Tiny James, Gary Baumann, Bill Petty and others, the Orpheum Organ Committee started work in earnest, as time was short. Phase One of the project was finished in time for the opening of "THE BIG SHOW OF 1936", a vaudeville presentation which had been touring the USA. Featured organist was Tiny James. Then Gaylord Carter brought in *The Phantom Of The Opera* for a Halloween show.

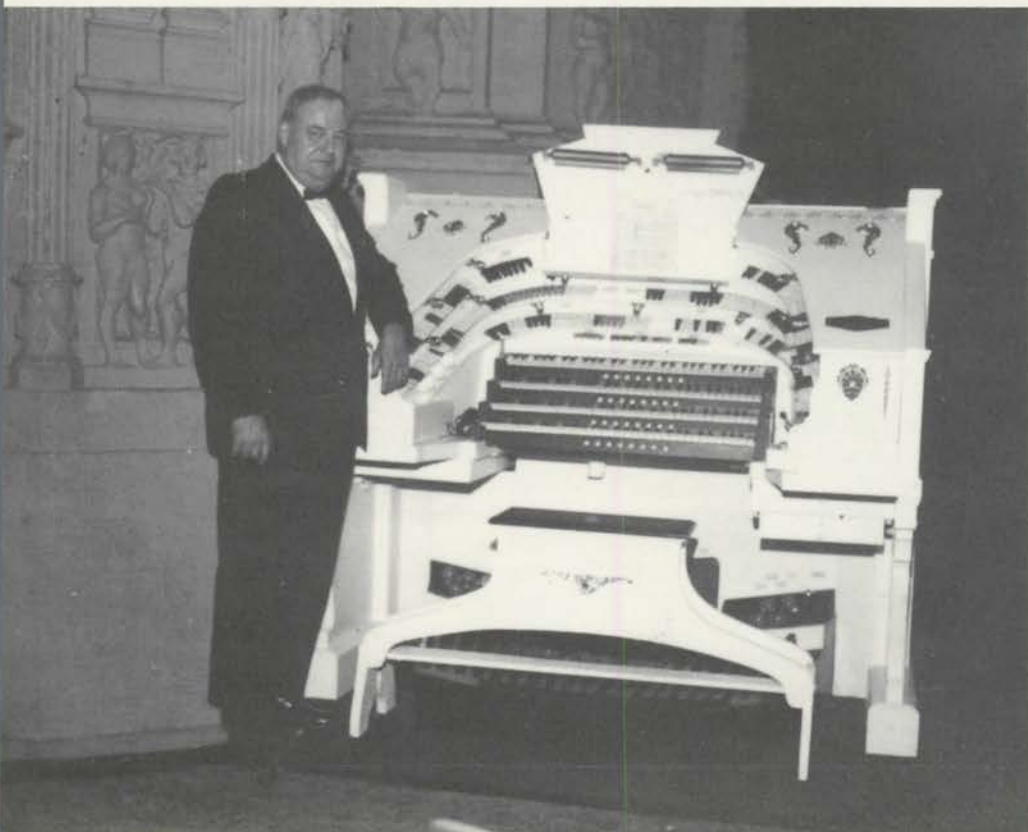
During Phase One the following work was done: all dead notes were fixed, the organ was completely tuned, 80 stop pneumatics were releathered, manuals were adjusted, the traps and effects were relocated from the buried percussion chamber to the upper left chamber, the organ was moved from the almost defunct lift and placed on a dolly at the left of the house, the console refinished in ivory and gold, decorative ormolu was installed on the console, a new wind line run to the console and many pneumatics and regulators releathered or patched. Special kudos to Louise Childs of the SF Arts Projects for the console refishing, and Dewey Cagle for the

new music rack!!

Phase Two, if money becomes available, will involve releathering of 800 relays and 14 regulators, plus many miscellaneous jobs to bring the organ to reliable condition again. If, as we hope, the orchestra pit is restored then rebuilding of the lift would be in order. Any future work on the organ is dependent on the success of the operating company's efforts to bring live entertainment back to Market Street.

Ron Downer's efforts at the Orpheum for the past 13 years is to be commended. He is typical of the truly devoted ATOS member. Special mention must be made of Charley Hershman who installed the organ in 1926 and who helped repair it in 1972. Hat's off to Tiny James and Gaylord Carter who played it so beautifully — making all that work worth the considerable effort. Long may the Morton sing!!! □

Late 1972 view of the organ with Tiny James and the Robert Morton in their "working clothes."



**A
GREAT
NEW
RECORD!**

DON SIMMONS

"Swingin' Pipes"

Recorded on the Wurlitzer
at the Oaks Park — Portland

- Songs include —
- Jambalaya
 - Lil' Darlin
 - Funny Valentine
 - Birth of the Blues
 - Just One More Chance
 - Cherokee
 - Satin Doll
 - Over the Rainbow
 - I Ain't got Nobody
 - That's All
 - Georgia on my Mind

Album No. D-103-S—
\$5.50 postpaid in USA

**OTHER SIMMONS RECORDS
STILL AVAILABLE**

Album No. D-102-S— "Session With Simmons"
Album No. D-101-S— "Big Band Jazz"

Any 2 records — \$10.50 postpaid
All 3 records — \$15.50 postpaid

Order today from . . .

BILL PETERSON

4993 S.E. 30th Ave., Apt. 98
Portland, Oregon 97202