

Artist Al Mitchell's replica of the Chicago Stadium organ console.

A MEMBER'S TRIBUTE TO ATOS

NOW IN RIPLEY'S BELIEVE-IT-OR-NOT MUSEUM!

by Karol Ann and Ken Shirey

Imagine a pipe organ console only 3 inches high! Imagine six pipe chambers in an area only 3'x3'x2' and weighing less than 300 lbs! We usually think of our pipe organ hobby in terms of large . . . huge . . . gigantic . . . colossal! ATOS member, Al Mitchell, however, has spent over 1800 man hours creating a "Palace of Organs" in miniature.

Al has encased the palace in glass with a walnut top and dubbed it "The World's Most Unusual Coffee Table" with its worth being estimated at \$20,000. He lovingly refers to it as his "ATOS PALACE".

Al is a printer by trade but an artist by choice. His use of oils, colors and ingenious methods of creating

glamour from bits of this and that are remarkable; so remarkable that the "ATOS PALACE" entered the Ripley Believe-It-Or-Not Museum the first part of March. The Ripley Museum is located in the Old Town Section, 1500 N. Wells St., Chicago, Illinois. The Palace will be there on display for two years.

'Tis a wonderful place — the world of make believe. For a moment, let's pretend we are in that elusive, magical world of our dreams and enter through the rabbit hole into an 'Alice in Wonderland-sized world' and take a tour through the fabulous "ATOS PALACE". The entrance to the Palace is guarded by Oriental doors and rubies

line the walkway. Above the doorway is an intricate echo organ chamber fashioned from coral from the Suicide Cliff from the Isles of Saipan brought back by Al's father during his wartime service, and smaller pieces from Miami. The organ chamber is reminiscent of a cavern with a large mother-of-pearl shell forming the walls. Many gold-colored pipes are in the chamber. The smaller ones are in reality nails. A dragon with two heads guards the doorway balanced by a serenely beautiful oriental landscape — both painted in oils by Al.

Once we have made our way through the doors, we find five interesting and meticulously done rooms: the Amer-

ican Room, the Mexican Chapel, the Arabian Nights Theatre, the German Hallway and the Russian Sitting Room. Al has used many momentos from his travels and gifts from friends throughout the Palace. Over 500 carats of rubies and garnets are contained in the floors and walls of the Palace. A whiskey glass formerly owned by Adolf Hitler, an antique "peephole" door from Germany, an old Spanish shawl of gold threads are but a few of the treasures Al has collected and used in the Palace.

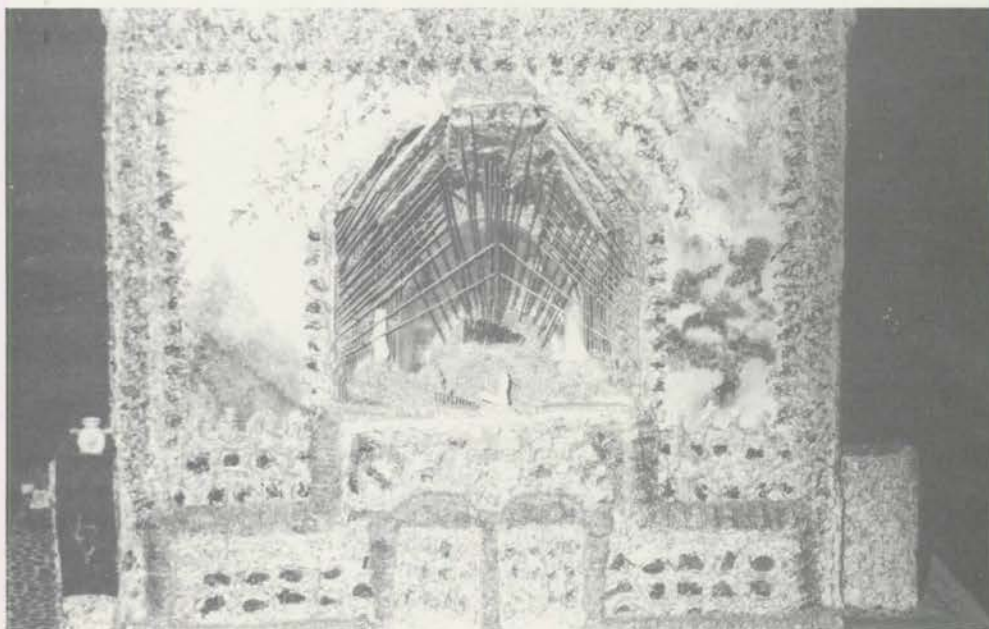
Al's favorite room is the "Arabian Nights Theatre" which is dominated by the colors red and gold and contains the 'Melgard Organ' named after the Chicago Stadium organist, Al Melgard. The ceiling dome is actually a bowl in an early replica of the Czar of Russia's china. The back wall contains five pipe chambers with cultured pearls set in the fascade. Twenty-three marble doves are perched on the chamber fronts. Four finely filigreed gold earrings from hanging chandeliers. A survivor of the Titanic disaster gave a lovely jade necklace to Al's aunt over fifty years ago. Today, it forms the music rack on the organ console in this room. The ceramic and cement used on the chamber fronts was hand-tooled and covered with gold leaf. Since Al is a longtime friend of Al Melgard, it wouldn't seem right not to have a piece of the Stadium organ present in this 'Melgard Organ'. A baffle from the Chicago Stadium's organ is used to hold the organ chambers in place. An antique silver settee and table from Germany invites us to rest and have a cup of tea poured from the silver tea service with turquoise tops from Mexico only 1/2" high. Reluctantly, we leave this Palace of elegance and come back to reality.

Al has also created a larger model replica of the big 6-manual Barton organ housed in the Chicago Stadium and has presented the model to Stadium organist, Al Melgard. Both the Palace and the Stadium organ console replica have been displayed at many CATOE socials and shows.

Al has the honor of being one of the few exhibitors in Ripley's Museum who is alive today. He spends his spare time creating paintings of interiors of theatres and organ consoles. His unusual creation, THE ATOS PALACE, represents an interesting outgrowth of our hobby. □



"The Arabian Nights Theatre" is the most elaborate and painstakingly detailed room.



Oriental front of Palace showing echo chamber using coral chests.

ATOS member, Al Mitchell, and his "ATOS Palace" and replica of the Chicago Stadium 6-manual Barton console.

