

A MAN...A CASTLE ...AND A WURLITZER

by
Lloyd E. Klos

One of the last remaining theatre organs in Canada has found a permanent home in the famous Casa Loma in West Toronto. The story of this installation is a most fascinating one. The backgrounds of the builder of Casa Loma, the castle itself, and the organ will be covered separately so that the reader may gain the proper perspective of this magnificent undertaking.

THE MAN: Sir Henry Mill Pellatt, CVO, DCL, VD. The builder of Casa Loma was an extremely wealthy man — he had to be! The landmark which he created stupifies the imagination in all areas: cost, magnitude, quality of construction and furnishings.

Sir Henry was born on January 9, 1859 in Kingston, Ontario and spent his life as a resident of that city and on farms he owned nearby in King and Whitby. His father had come from England and was a senior partner in the brokerage firm of Pellatt and Osler. The son, after attending Upper Canada College, went directly into his father's firm and his business career began when he was fifteen years of age!

The firm was eventually dissolved, and father and son established Pellatt and Pellatt. The son began to make some very shrewd investments, the greatest being his acquisition of stock in the Northwest Land Company at a time when few businessmen had faith in the northwest. The young man

Sir Henry Mill Pellatt poses at the entrance to the Casa Loma stables. A lover of horses, Sir Henry had each of his steeds' names imprinted in gold letters above its stall. — (Kiwaniis Club of W. Toronto)



Editor's Note: We thank James W. Lahay, secretary of the Toronto Theatre Organ Society; H. Clealan Blakely of Picton, Ontario; and Ronald W. Sclater, Historian of the Kiwanis Club of West Toronto for supplying the bulk of the information for this feature, and to Bernie Venus for most of the pictures. Without their generous assistance, this article would not have been possible.

became widely known in financial circles as "Pellatt, the Plunger", and would buy Northwest stock any time, picking it up at \$12 or \$14 a share. Others were glad to unload it on him. But when the wheatlands opened and settlers poured into the territory, the stock doubled, tripled and quadrupled in price, the young investor realizing a profit of between \$3 and \$4 million.

Foreseeing the huge potential railroad traffic in grain, Henry next bought heavily in stock of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Again, he was proved correct as the stock zoomed upward in price and he realized a huge return for the second time.

At the age of 20, he organized the Toronto Electric Light Co., which brought the first electric power to Toronto. He sat on the boards of over a dozen utility, steel, mining, and insurance firms, so important had he become. He was the benefactor of many humanitarian enterprises such as universities, hospitals, museums and social organizations. He was knighted in 1902 for bringing electric power to Toronto from Niagara Falls.

Sir Henry had strong ties with the military. He was commanding officer of the "Queen's Own Battalion", which was expanded to a regiment. In 1910, he took the 750 men to England at his own expense to attend army maneuvers.

An incurable romanticist, when a young boy he assiduously devoured the stories of the medieval ages, the knights, the battles, the castles and all the aurora associated with this glamorous era. On trips to England and the continent, his interest was further heightened when touring the old castles; he would some day build one for his very own.

Thus, Sir Henry Pellatt will be most remembered for his Casa Loma (House on the Hill) which he built during the years 1911-1914.

THE CASTLE — Casa Loma. One of Toronto's most famous landmarks, Casa Loma took 300 men three years to build at a cost of \$3½ million, with another \$1½ million for furnishings. It was Pellatt's idea to make the edifice the most magnificent of its kind in the world, to live in it during his lifetime, and to leave it to the City of Toronto as a museum, following his death.

The 98-room castle was erected on the brow of Toronto Hill on Sir Henry's 25-acre estate. Marble, glass and paneling came from Europe, teak

from Asia, oak and walnut from prime areas in North America. Stonemasons were brought from Scotland. The castle became more than merely a 19th Century structure. It became a composite of Norman, Gothic and Romanesque architecture. The 20th Century was represented by the electrically-operated elevator, indoor swimming pool and private telephone system.

If you haven't been impressed by Casa Loma thus far, here are a few more startlers:

Taxes on the land were \$600 when the castle was in the blueprint stage. In 1924, they were \$12,000.

The fuel bill was \$15,000 a year during the twenties. Eight hundred tons of coal were used per year.

The servants' bill was \$22,000 a year for a staff of 40.

Under each floor is an 18-inch concrete base, and foundations are 45 feet deep.

The library has space for 100,000 volumes.

The castle boasted a \$75,000 Legge pipe organ, 15 baths and 5,000 electric lights.

There was a 165-foot shooting gallery, and the cost of stables, finished in mahogany and Spanish tile, was \$250,000. Each horse had his name set in 18-carat gold at the head of his stall. An 800-foot underground tunnel leads from the basement to the stables.

As one can imagine, the expense of maintaining the place was astronomical. In 1923, Sir Henry was forced to move from Casa Loma because of a series of financial losses which reduced his fortune considerably.

In 1924, Toronto's greatest auction was held at Casa Loma, and the fixtures and furnishings which Sir Henry had acquired were sold at a fraction of their cost, including the pipe organ which was bought by the CBC. For days, the sale went on, and it must have been with heavy heart that the castle's master viewed the proceedings. The auction realized a mere \$250,000.

The history of Casa Loma since 1924 was a series of efforts to put the property to good use. It was once proposed as a home for war veterans, and there were rumors that the Canadian Government would buy it. Mary Pickford considered it as a locale for several films. Other proposals were for



Horace Lapp, official Kiwanis Club organist, at the Casa Loma console — (Toronto Theatre Organ Society)

its conversion to a high school, an apartment house, a convent and an Orange Lodge. An attempt was made in 1928-29 to run it as an apartment hotel, but it was far too luxurious to pay its own way, even in the Roaring Twenties. For twelve years, the property posed a dilemma for its owners, the City of Toronto, which had acquired it because of non-payment of taxes.

In 1937, the Kiwanis Club of West Toronto came to the rescue. It leased the property and by special agreement with the city, operates it as a tourist attraction. For a time during World War II, and unknown to the public, Casa Loma's stables and carriage

houses were used to assemble sonar devices used in U-boat detection. Twenty-foot clearances were needed and the property was ideally suited for this project.

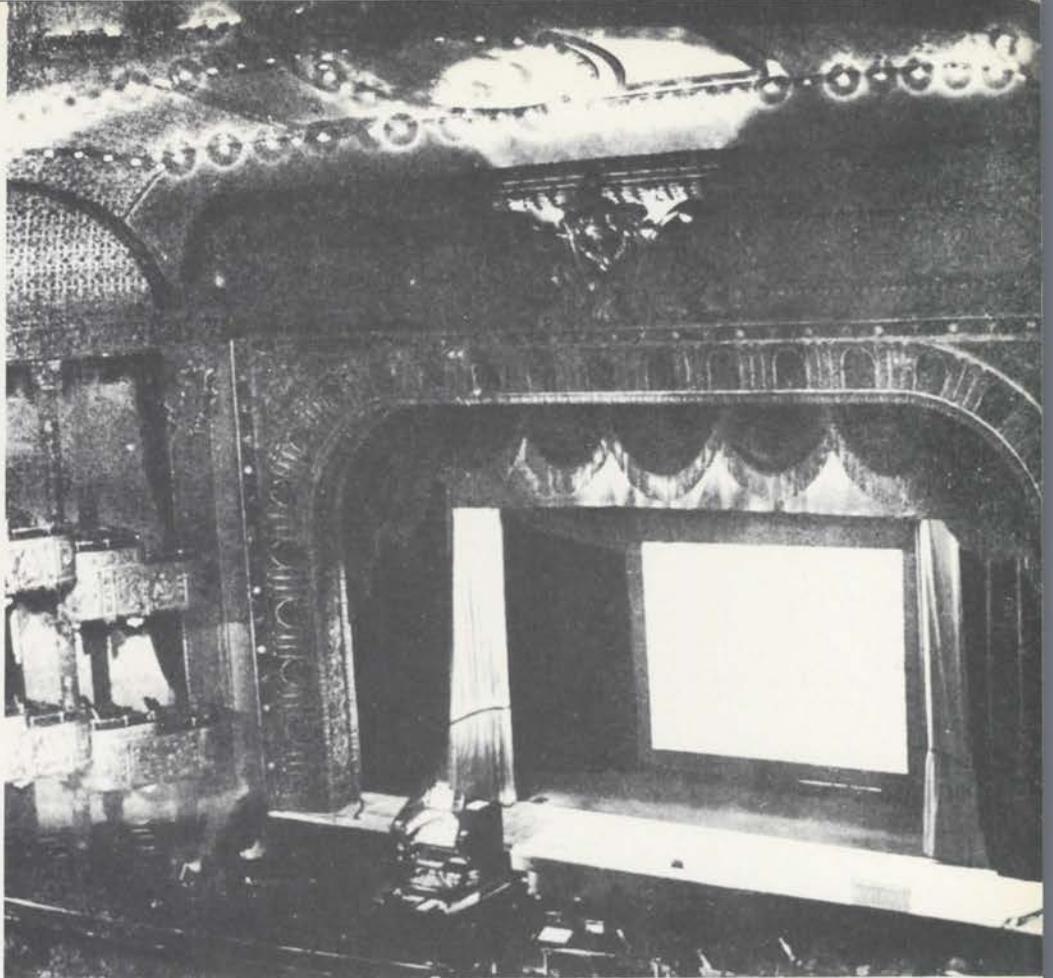
To people all over, Toronto is known as the "City With the Castle." Since 1937, the Kiwanis Club of West Toronto has donated over \$1½ million to vital community affairs, including youth programs, Kiwanis Music Festivals, volunteer service work with the mentally ill, educational funds and scholarships, child aid and others. Tours of Casa Loma are held daily. The restoration of the castle and its furnishings is a continuing project, and included is the installation of a Wurlitzer pipe organ which was featured in two previous locations.

THE ORGAN. The Wurlitzer organ, Opus 558, was a 3/15 model, shipped from North Tonawanda, N.Y. in July 1922 and installed in Shea's Hippodrome Theatre on Toronto's Bay Street, a place it was to occupy for 34 years. The original cost of the organ was \$55,000, and it was considered at the time to be one of Wurlitzer's larger installations.

The site of Shea's Hippodrome was originally the home of a flea circus, a freak show and a traveling aborigine. In 1914, the Hipp opened. For the first few years, the theatre was run mainly as a presentation house, featuring cultural productions by Jack Arthur and Leon Leonidoff (the latter now a producer of Radio City Music Hall shows); offerings of symphonic, ballet or operatic nature. Eventually, the great names of vaudeville were to trod the boards of the Hippodrome: Bennie Fields, Blossom Seeley, Jimmy Durante, Ben Blue, Red Skelton, Helen Kane, Jack Benny, Maurice Chevalier, Bob Hope, Blackstone, Fanny Brice, Burns & Allen, Will Rogers, Louis Armstrong, George Jessel, Guy Lombardo, Cab Calloway, to name a mere handful.

The Wurlitzer in the Hipp was a magnificent instrument. It became the best known theatre instrument in Canada, principally because of the organists who played it. Ernest Hunt opened it. Those who followed from 1924 to the mid-thirties were Horace Lapp (still active and a member of the Toronto Theatre Organ Society), Ernest Dainty, Harry O'Grady and Roland Todd.

Following a nine-year engagement as organist at Loew's Downtown The-



The original home of the Casa Loma Wurlitzer, Shea's Hippodrome Theatre. The organ cost \$55,000 and at the time it was installed in 1922 was one of Wurlitzer's larger installations. To hear Quentin Maclean play the organ was always a treat for many visiting the Queen City.

Shea's Hippodrome as it appeared in 1947, nine years before its razing. — (B. Venus collection)



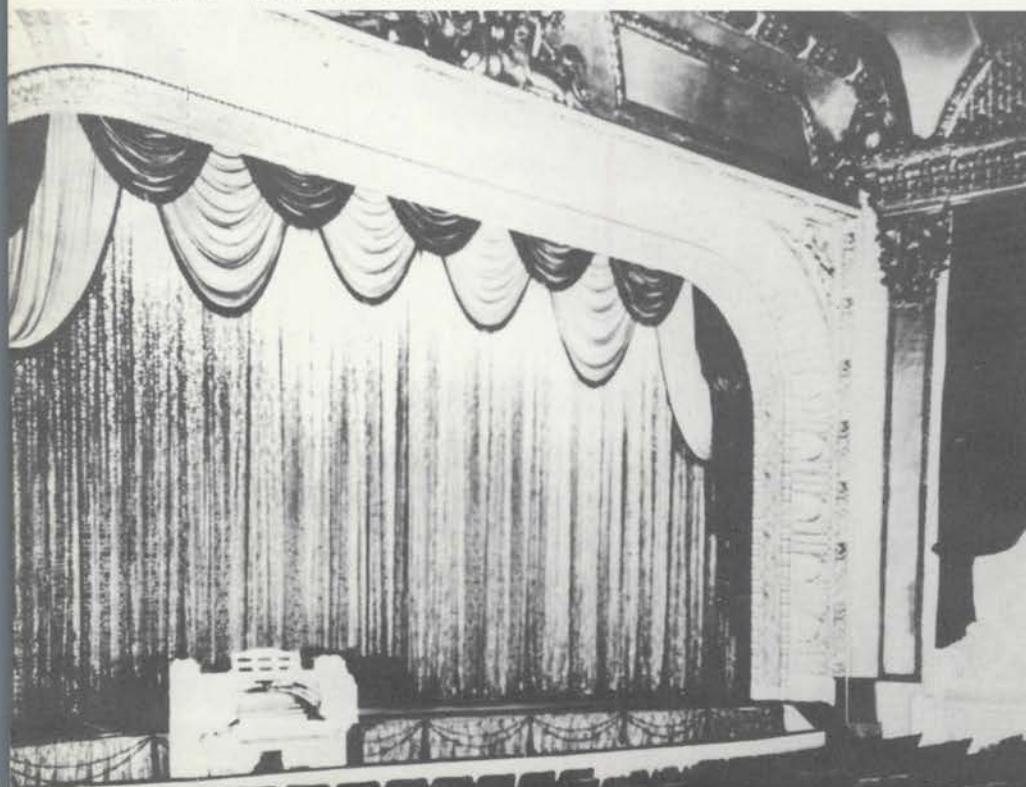


The site of Shea's Theatre, Toronto is now part of the Civic Center. — (B. Venus collection)

atre in Toronto, Kathleen Stokes was featured at Shea's from 1935 to 1939. Dynamic Kate is remembered for her stint on the daily radio show, *The Happy Gang* in the late forties.

Next was Colin Corbett (formerly a student of Kay Stokes and until late 1973, house organist at the Odeon Carlton Theatre) who played Shea's until he joined the RCAF in 1940. One of England's best known organists, Quentin Maclean, was employed for a "six-week engagement." He became Toronto's favorite organist, and his tenure was extended until 1948. During this time, Mac was featured on

In later years, the organ console and proscenium were painted and two levels of boxes were removed. — (B. Venus collection)



ATOS Hall of Famer, Quentin Maclean at Shea's Hippodrome Wurlitzer. — (B. Venus collection)

radio over CBL, Toronto, and his announcer was a Canadian favorite, Don Sims. Mac's playing at Shea's became tradition for tourists. A visit to that theatre to see a movie and to hear Maclean's rousing, chandelier-shaking medleys was as much a part of a trip to the Queen City as a visit to Casa Loma.

Al Bollington was the last house organist at Shea's, playing only a short engagement. The organ then became dormant as a theatre attraction for three years. However, Len Bishop, former Hippodrome manager, recalls many impromptu concerts during

these years after theatre hours. "Organ lovers would ask permission to play it. Often, we didn't know them, but we'd stay open long after the regular theatre programs to grant their requests."

In 1956, the fatal news was announced that Shea's Hippodrome would be shuttered and the property demolished to make way for the new civic center. Almost too late, the organ was purchased by the Maple Leaf Gardens from the wrecking company for \$2,000. The roof of the theatre had already been removed! A month was allowed for removal of the instrument.

Credit for the purchase of the organ by the Maple Leaf Gardens management goes to two persons. Dr. Bruce Tovee, ATOS member, and personal physician to Gardens president, Major Conn Smythe, talked the major into buying it. The major, with a feeling of tradition and history, was convinced that the organ would serve a useful purpose in providing background music at hockey games, church rallies etc. The console, pipes, new bandstand and an executive clubhouse all fitted into a neat structure at the sound end of the Gardens under a huge new portrait of Queen Elizabeth.

During re-installation, the organ was considerably enlarged. A new 5-manual console was built, and two of the manuals were obtained from the right pit console of the New York Paramount. The action was completely re-leathered, and new relays installed. Three additional ranks were purchased from the Strand Theatre in Brooklyn, and California theatre organ

enthusiast, Dick Simonton, contributed an English Post Horn. A new blower was installed, and a high-pressure fanfare Trumpet was planned for but never installed. The piano was not included in the new specifications, either, but most of the toy counter and percussions were. Retained also were the Brass Trumpet, Brass Saxophone and a solo Tibia Clausa on 25-inch wind pressure. The action was changed from pneumatic to partial electric operation.

About a year was required to properly install the organ. Doug Morris designed the new addition to the building. Sound engineer was Bob Wood. Much of the organ installation was handled by Ed Gress from Boston and Stewart Duncan, a local expert. Total cost of the the project was approximately \$100,000.

The first program on the newly installed instrument was on December 20, 1958, when Don "Knuckles" Gordon played seasonal music for Young Canada Night, between periods of a hockey game which was broadcast coast-to-coast on the CBC. Horace Lapp became organist shortly after.

The organ's tenure in Maple Leaf Gardens was a short one, indeed. In 1963, the Gardens were remodeled to add 1,800 seats, the Wurlitzer becoming superfluous. What followed was a memorable battle among elements of organ lovers to keep the organ intact and in the area until a place could be found for its third installation.

When the smoke of battle had cleared, the Toronto Theatre Organ

Society, with help from affluent members, purchased the organ for \$3850. The instrument was removed from the Gardens in 1964, and stored in the Imperial Theatre. The Imperial's manager, Bert Brown, was an ATOS member, so this helped the situation immeasurably. The organ languished for six years until the society found a home for it.

Early in 1970, the Kiwanis Club of West Toronto offered the Wurlitzer a home in Casa Loma, thereby replacing the organ which had been sold in the 1924 auction. In June 1970, the organ's components were moved from the Imperial to the Casa Loma and housed in what was the indoor swimming pool. Installation was begun immediately by members of the Toronto Theatre Organ Society.

Because of the unique location of the chambers, the restorers have literally walked miles "up mountains" to bring the organ's parts to their locations. One chamber is situated on the second floor, and the other is on the third. Rehabilitation work was done in a basement work room. In Jim Lahay's words, "It has been a tedious job to move heavy pipes and chests up three floors, around narrow, winding staircases, not to mention the wiring and wind ducts which had to be installed."

A 4-manual console shell was obtained from the 4/28 Warren organ in the Capitol Theatre in Montreal, but the manuals and electrical parts from the original 3/15 Wurlitzer console were retained. The 30 HP blower used in the Maple Leaf Gardens was too large for the new location so a smaller



When the organ was transferred to Maple Leaf Gardens, this custom-built console was installed. — (B. Venus collection)

one was purchased as was a 15 HP motor.

The costly main air duct, similar to the duct work on hot air furnaces, is 15 inches in diameter then branches into smaller 3 and 4-inch ducts. Nine cables, donated by Bell Canada Telephone, each containing 400 wires, have been used in the rewiring of the organ.

By the spring of 1972, work on the second floor chamber, containing percussions and several light ranks, was completed. The temperature in that chamber during the summer months of

Bell Canada employees (l to r) Craig Nicholson, Ernest Grundy and Bert Keffer at work in the Casa Loma pipe chamber. The phone firm also contributed many cables which were needed in the organ's restoration. — (Ballard & Jarrett Photo)



Maple Leaf Gardens, second home of the Casa Loma Wurlitzer. — (B. Venus collection)





Quentin Maclean at the 5-manual console at the Maple Leaf Gardens in 1961.

1971 registered 90 degrees and more! (Shades of the Virginia Theatre in Alexandria during the 1972 ATOS convention!)

The Kiwanis Club of West Toronto has been extremely generous with its support and co-operation during the entire restoration. It made available \$5,000 for materials as well as professional people on a full-time basis to work. Each Toronto Theatre Organ Society member working on the project had donated \$5 a month for the privilege.

The City of Toronto, owners of Casa Loma, has also co-operated. Its workmen have removed the plaster from the chamber openings so that the shutters could be installed. Two coats of paint were applied to the chamber walls. As there is practically no ventilation in the chambers, the crew took the summer of 1972 off, resuming activity in September.

As is the case with any organ relocation, there are always problems. The crew had set December 31, 1972 as the deadline for completion of the work. It was not to be. There were problems with duct work, and the console needed rebuilding. The stop tabs were not considered adequate, and a complete new set was ordered. A new date of October 23, 1973 was set for the formal dedicatory concert.

Then in the spring of 1973, more problems manifested themselves. The Brass Trumpet rank had to be rebuilt because of missing parts, and the French Horns were water-damaged while in storage. To compound these problems, the West Toronto Kiwanis Club's annual summer tour season in Casa Loma from early May to September 30, prevented any work on the



The remodeled Warren console in Casa Loma. Notice the unique bench; the height can be easily adjusted to accommodate the organist. — (Toronto Theatre Organ Soc.)

Horace Lapp (l), veteran Toronto Theatre Organist, and Edgar Goodaire, pianist for the Kiwanis Club of West Toronto, pose at the Casa Loma console. The 4-manual keydesk is from the Capitol Theatre's 4/28 Warren organ in Montreal. — (R. Essex Photo)





Console of original Legge organ which was in Casa Loma. The organ went to CBC studios after the 1924 auction. — (B. Venus collection)

organ involving noise, from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily.

As a result, the initial concert date was set back again, this time to February 12, 1974, with talented young organist, Dennis James, scheduled to do the honors. The long-range plans now call for monthly concerts from September thru May. Since there is no air conditioning in the Casa Loma, there will be no concerts during the summer months.

At the risk of inadvertently leaving out someone's name, we list those who co-operated in bringing this project to fruition:

Kiwanis Club of West Toronto — Dick Crawley, President; Ron Sclater, Secretary; L. Buell Manning, Past President; John Bird, Ivan Christie, Ray Sadowski, Charm Shaver, Bill Spearman, and Ed Walters.

Toronto Theatre Organ Society — George Lang, President; James W. Lahay, Secretary; Ernie Grundy, Treasurer; Roly Webb, Technical Director. Installation Crew — Ed Borron, Bill Childs, Bob Cloughley, Ernie Fogel, Cliff Forester, Dave Granger, Dennis Hobbs, John Holywell, Floyd Horricks, Burt Keffer, Dave Mills, Doug Martin, Craig Nicholson, Claude Tulk, and Bernie Venus.

City of Toronto — Harry Rogers, Property Commissioner

This has been the story of a remarkable series of events relative to a theatre pipe organ. We are sure that if Sir Henry Pellatt were alive, he would most enthusiastically endorse the addition of a Mighty Wurlitzer to his castle. Remember, he was a pipe organ lover when residing there. Not only does Casa Loma come "full circle" in this regard, but the writer firmly believes that the installation will be a solid link in the theatre organ concert circuit for many years to come. □

DINNY'S COLYUM

as
transcribed
by
Del Castillo



Well here it is already February so the New Year is on its way and all I can say is that so far it looks like it is even worse than the Old Year and that is really sayin' somethin'. The politicians really been gettin' it in the neck as the sayin' goes but the organ players seem to be goin' along as usual. I disremember back to the New Year of 1930 which was a pretty bad one for organ players in the theatres because it was when the talkin' pictures was gettin' popular and puttin' the organ players out of business. But so far this year the organ players seem to be doin' all right except that some of the saloons they have had to cut down on acct. the ecology or the economy or whatever.

So I thought that since the organ concerts in the theatre organ societies seem to be goin' OK, that maybe even tho' it is too late for New Year Resolutions I would make up like a set of rules for the concert organ players to go by. Not bein' much of an organ player myself, I had to kind of look back and see what some of the concert organ players like Virgil Fox or George Wright or people like that was doin', and no offence intended because these here rules I made up don't really apply to any one organ player but they is just a sort of a general guide. So here goes.

1. I will not play Nola or Dizzy Fingers or Alley Cat or Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head. I guess I don't have to tell you why. I ain't sure I even know why except that they has been played too much in the past.

2. I will buy a coat with spangles on it so as when I come up in the spotlight it will bedazzle the customers. (Of course when I say "I" I don't mean me, I mean the organ Player who is givin' the concert).

3. I will get another coat with silver or gold to change to after the intermission. If I can't get that I will get one with red or orange lining.

4. I will put in a big pedal solo somewheres and play it with my hands up so as the customers can see I am doin' it with my feet.

5. I will use my hands like I was a ballet dancer or a conductor, and make big hammy gestures when I change the stops or come down on a big cord.

6. I will try to think up funny stories to tell before I play a number, or I will maybe tell about things that happened to me when I was playin' some other concert. I will then make some funny remark after I have turned away from the mike back to play, so that only the people in the front rows can hear it.

7. Somewheres along the line I will tell the people that this the greatest organ I ever played on, and somewheres else I will tell them they are the greatest audience I ever played to.

8. I will use the full organ at least once in every number.

9. If I get a syfer I will make sure the audience knows it is the organ's fault and not mine.

10. I will get in some good long Harp Arpedgios or some long fast runs to show how good tekNIK I got.

11. I will connect up a lot of notes with Glizandos to make sure that everybody can see that I can play as good as Jesse Crawford.

12. I will get in some cracks about my rekords on sale in the lobby, and I will make sure I got a good black pen so's to rite on the covers "To my good friend _____."

They may be some other things I have forgot, but all in all I guess those are most of the rules about how to be a successful organ player. Oh yes, and make sure you get in one or two big numbers or medleys. Those are the ones that the audiences clap the most for. □

It'll be . . .

**PIPES GALORE
IN '74**

**NATIONAL CONVENTION
DETROIT**