

One odd item of useless information always seems to pop up when we welcome American visitors to London. It's just the reminder that Britain's golden age of theatre organs was the 30s, and most pipe jobs were installed after the coming of talkies.

Which explains why so many of them were heavily unified six to ten rankers with elaborate consoles (often the psychedelic "fruit jelly" eye-catchers) which were fine for sing-alongs and short interludes but not much good for anything more ambitious.

It also explains why so many star names of those times are still with us and playing for our delight. What happened to them when the big cuts came about 20 years ago and the circuits decided the organ was "no longer an attraction"? The simple answer is that most of them stayed in the cinema business and became managers.

Oddly enough, it's the current revival in interest which is bringing belated stardom to some talented Tibia rollers whose first playing careers were cut short.

*Noel Briggs* is one of these folk. He's built up quite a following in recent years with a bouncy style of rhythm playing which is a bit reminiscent of *Reg. Dixon* in his Blackpool heyday.

Like most of us, *Noel* started with church organ. But by the age of 17 he had graduated to the Compton 2/5 at the Queen's Hall, Grimsby (one of our best-known fishing ports). Three years later, he was launched on a career with the ABC circuit, now part of the vast EMI conglomerate. He held residencies at Wellingborough, Nuneaton and Scunthorpe before settling for a desk job.

Not exactly a swinging start on the road to stardom. But during the dead times when few Wurlitzers were singing, *Noel* kept right on playing, just as a hobby.

He helped to open a preserved Compton (from the Gaumont, Birmingham) at Abington and then he taped a few tracks on the Wurlitzer 3/8 at the Ritz, Ipswich for broadcasting. When these were aired on the



NOEL BRIGGS, manager and organ star, seen here at the Granada, Kingston Wurlitzer 3/10.

popular BBC show *The Organist Entertains*, his no-holds-barred version of "Tiger Rag" was one great big hit.

So big was the listener reaction, the number was hastily included in an LP from the show.

Since then, manager Briggs has been much in demand as organist Briggs. The Northern Theatre Organ Trust asked him to make a special EP disc on their hybrid Compton at Ossett in Yorkshire. The Lancastrian Theatre Organ Trust booked him for one of their Manchester LPs, as well as concert work. And one group of buffs voted him top in a popularity poll.

His signature tune has a catchy touch — it's called "Let's Make it a Party."



Sadly, 1973 did see some of our old friends playing their final chords. The last "Snippets" column recorded the 70th birthday of *Jack Helyer*. Before the words achieved publication, Jack had died suddenly... *Jimmy Swift*, who made two sorts of record when he released his first LP at the age of 78, is also gone. His long career was highlighted by radio shows from the Paramount, Leeds, before the war... Tragic was the passing of *Laurence*

*James*, who collapsed while giving a recital at the Odeon, Hammersmith, and died of a coronary occlusion at age 53... Midlands star *Leslie Taff* did not survive a long illness... *Eric "Tim" Smith* played the first half of a concert at Southampton Guildhall, then went outside to sit in his car where friends found him dead.



STACCATO SNIPPETS — Slated for re-opening mid-1974 is Europe's biggest Wurlitzer. It's the Trocadero, Elephant and Castle, 4/21 made famous by *Quentin Maclean*. After 14 years storage and silence, the Cinema Organ Society are putting it into a nearby college hall... Technical maintenance of the famed Standaard 3/10 in the Passage Theatre, Schiedam, Holland, is now being undertaken by members of the Dutch Organ Federation... The Hollanders' group's own Standaard 2/6 (from the Rembrandt, Utrecht) is going into an Amsterdam chapel... Granada, Tooting, home of a noted Wurlitzer 4/14, was suddenly shuttered November, 1973... The hat is being passed round to keep Britain's first Wurlitzer playing. A six-ranker first installed in the Palace, Walsall, it is now in a church in the Devon village of Beer. Charming name for a charming place... Just for the record, the state of the nation at end 1973 was that Britain still had some 40 organs still in theatres (all but a handful still playable), Addition of instruments in other public buildings, some being transplants, brings a total of about 70 packets of pipes available to us. And that doesn't include the residence jobs and transplants to churches, a lot of which can still offer throbbing Tibias and all traps and effects. □

It'll be...

**PIPES GALORE  
IN '74**

**NATIONAL CONVENTION  
DETROIT**