

Lee Erwin Finds An Important New Pathway Reaching Beyond Limitations of Nostalgia.

Under normal circumstances, it would have been a sad occasion.

A beautifully-preserved 4/23 "Wonder" Robert Morton, admired by concert artists and organ music lovers alike, was playing its final program in what the late Ben Hall characterized as his favorite among all of New York's mighty picture palaces — Loew's regal Kings Theatre on Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn.

Tape recorders and cameras were in evidence throughout the house. Even the August *New York Times* saw fit to cover the event with both a feature writer and a photographer. And the Times' radio station, WQXR, which normally is dedicated solely to serious music, proclaimed this "last concert" worthy of their listeners attention.

The artist, Lee Erwin, held the key to why the occasion was not funereal. His music, as always, was superb. He brought out everything the Morton had to offer and presented a deeply satisfying blend of traditional and contemporary music, light and heavy, frivolous and serious, familiar and unfamiliar.

But it was not what Lee played that warm morning in January of this year in Brooklyn that made the dramatic difference.

It was what he said.

He left everyone with a sense of pride in the theatre organ movement and, more importantly, a sense of anticipation that this usually sad occasion was but a prelude to a giant step forward that will benefit the

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movement everywhere — for years to come.

The organ he played is to be removed from the Kings and carried to Manhattan where, after complete rebuilding that may include a totally new electronic combination action, it will find a new home in prestigious Town Hall. The organ's new home has a long history as one of America's foremost concert halls. Now owned by New York University, Town Hall is being restored to its former position of glory in the music world.

As Lee pointed out, the Robert Morton was easily capable of shaking the boots of an audience throughout the 3,195-seat Kings house. So in the 1,400-seat Town Hall, it should speak with amazing gusto.

Which is fine for theatre organ fans, but not, in itself, a step ahead for the theatre organ movement.

Lee stressed, however, that the Town Hall people had specifically sought a theatre organ. Their building's now-empty chambers once housed a concert instrument. But Town Hall didn't want another classical or concert instrument. *They wanted a theatre organ — and a good one!*

That in itself is a highly significant turning point for our cause. But what Lee revealed next was even more significant.

Town Hall plans to make the theatre organ a focal point for many musical activities. It will be an instrument available for advanced organ students for practice and for regular public concert performances. But most significant of all:

Town Hall wants to encourage composers to write music specifically for this type of instrument.

Aside from works which Lee himself has written (including his much-admired overture and score for the Rudolph Valentino film classic *The Eagle*), there has been virtually no serious music written — ever — for the theatre organ.

What better way could any of us possibly conceive to assure a sound future for the theatre organ on the American (and international) musical scene?

For the first time, we can step beyond the nostalgia phenomenon to promote theatre organ with the general public. For the long term, this Morton's move to Town Hall may well be the move that assures a solid future for "our" instrument with resources beyond those offered by ATOS. It will focus important "outside" attention on this magnificent and now rare breed of music maker which ATOS chapters and members collectively have painstakingly rescued from certain oblivion during the past two decades.

Lee was characteristically modest about his role in this important new development. But New York chapter officers know that he has spearheaded this exciting new venture and that it is a logical outgrowth of his own background as a concert and recording artist, a show business veteran, a composer, a teacher and — in a highly professional way — an evangelist for the theatre organ.

His concert at Kings was memorable. But it was his quiet words between numbers — his unfolding of the real significance of the Town Hall project — that left his audience feeling so joyful after what, by tradition, should have been a very sad occasion.

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FINALE BUT A PRELUDE. — Lee Erwin explains new role for Loew's Kings "Wonder" Morton to New York chapter audience seated in virtual darkness. A scarcity of fuses had forced the choice: House lights or Organ music. The house lights lost.

