

AT TORONTO'S CASA LOMA

Wurlitzer Dedicated

by Lloyd E. Klos — photos by Karl Leutner

All the aurora, glitter and excitement of a theatre opening in the 1920's were in evidence the evening of February 12, 1974 when 325 notables were invited by the Toronto Theatre Organ Society and the West Toronto Kiwanis Club to attend the dedicatory concert of the ex-Shea's Hippodrome Wurlitzer in Casa Loma, with Dennis James at the console.

The amber floodlights never shone more brilliantly in illuminating the exterior of the magnificent edifice atop the hill which commands a total view of the Queen City. The beaming hosts, serving as ushers and guides, were constantly but courteously answering endless questions concerning the castle, and the organ whose installation took 3½ years of solid, hard work. The term "Wurlitzer Widow" applies in the ultimate degree here, as we are told the endless months spent at this project were responsible for four divorces! Et Tu Wurlitzer!

However, the fair sex were much in evidence opening night, and the audience was sprinkled with a sizeable number in floor-length gowns. Flowers decorated the console. Kiwanis and TTOS officers scurried about to make sure all details were handled properly.

At 8 P.M., the lights in the Great Hall were dimmed, and to the microphone, situated near the console, stepped the imposing figure of Ron Sclater, Public Relations Co-ordinator of the Kiwanis Club of West Toronto. Ron wisely kept his opening remarks brief and to the point, and with the audience's appetite for good music at fever pitch, he introduced Dennis James. The young American launched into a very inspiring and spirited rendition of Canada's National Anthem "Oh Canada", and from the crowd's rising for the auspicious beginning until it rose twice in standing ovations at the end of the concert, Dennis was in supreme command.

Following intermission, Ron Sclater provided an added touch to the evening's festivities by introducing some of the luminaries present. Getting some of the heartiest applause was the

fellows responsible for bringing the diverse elements together to make the project possible, Horace Lapp. Mr. Lapp played the organ in its two previous locations — Shea's Hippodrome and Maple Leaf Gardens, and is now playing it as official Kiwanis organist. The grand lady of Toronto theatre organ history, Kathleen (Kay) Stokes was introduced to spirited applause, and to this writer, one of the evening's dividends was to have the opportunity of conversation with her. She sat near the console, her eyes glued to every action of the organist.

Others introduced included the fellow who cracked the whip over the installation crew and kept the project moving, Roly Webb; organist Ron Padgett; Ray Gould and Wally Thurston who played the Wurlitzer when it was in Shea's; Tom Clifford, representing the Mayor's office; Harold Wooding, representing the City of Toronto; Randy Piazza, president of the Niagara Frontier Chapter, ATOS; Elwood Glover, who hosts a popular TV talk show in Toronto; and the writer, representing THEATRE ORGAN Magazine.

Others in the glittering opening



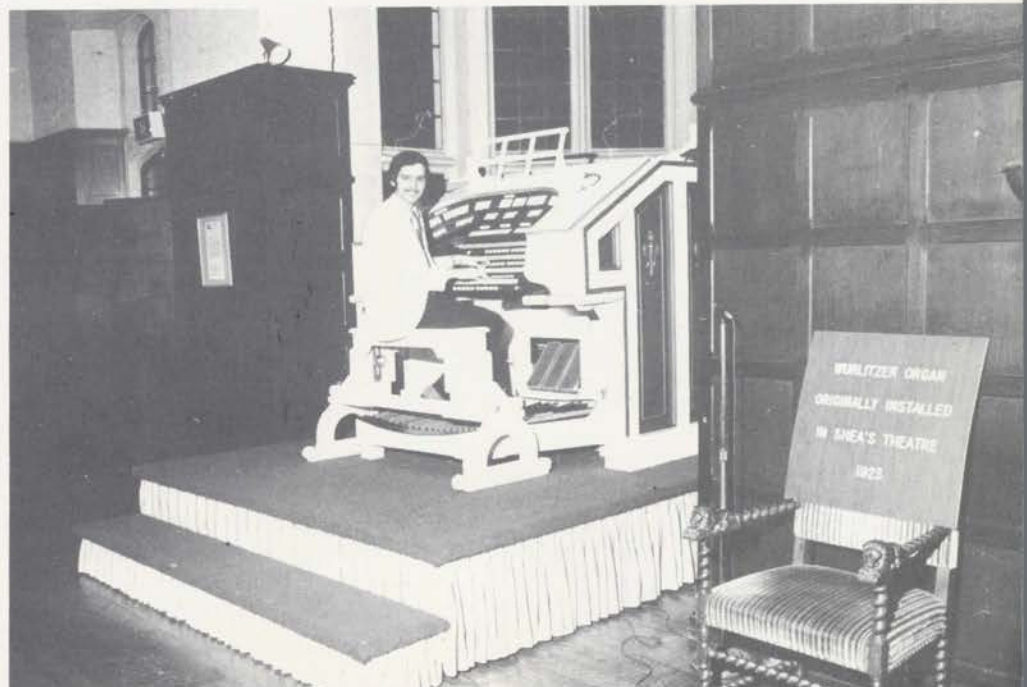
The opening night crowd starts filling seats in the Great Hall.

night crowd included noted historian of the theatre organ, H. Clealan Blakely, daughter Mary Lou and her husband "Slim"; Tom Lockwood, representing the Rochester Theatre Organ Society; Kenneth Trelford and Bill Caldwell, representing Heintzman & Co., leading music store of Toronto; and numerous radio, press and TV representatives.

A reception with light refreshments followed.

The organ really speaks out! The

Dennis James gets in a few hours of practice before his concert.





Engaged in news-gathering is Theatre Organ Associate Editor, Lloyd Klos (ctr), conversing with radioman John Carey (2nd from rt.), who runs a theatre organ program in Kingston, Ontario. — (Karl Leutner Photo)

Grand Hall is 60 feet high, the chambers are situated, one above the other at one end, and the entire organ is on 18 inches of wind. The crew admits that there will be a period of regulating; the piano has to be hooked up and the English horn can be made more strident. But these problems are minimal compared to the challenge of installation.

What impressed this writer was the complete spirit of harmony and co-operation exhibited by the men of the organ crew. Working right up to concert time, there was no evidence of salty language, bickering or in-fighting which can cause friction. A huge wreath of laurel to each and every person connected with this remarkable project!

And thanks are due to all concerned for the courtesies extended the writer during our stay in the Queen City.

What sort of day was February 12, 1974? A day like all days, filled with events which altered and illuminated the renaissance of the theatre organ. And we . . . were there! □

Horace Lapp and Kathleen Stokes, who played the organ in its previous locations, pose at the console following the concert. — (Karl Leutner Photo)



VOX POPS



Conducted by Stu Green

Readers are encouraged to submit interesting sidelights on the organ hobby (exclusive of chapter news items) material they believe will be of general interest about local organ activities and installations and the people who work at the hobby. We know "there's VOX POPS in them there chapters" and it only requires an 8 cent postcard to get it to VOX POPS Editor, Box 3564, Granada Hills, California 91344. If the contributor can afford a 10 cent stamp, why not include a black and white photo which need not be returned.



CHANDELIERS and SHALLOTS. The chamber was a dining room before the pipe invasion.

ATOSer Judd Walton, who keeps track of Wurlitzers, will be interested to learn that Publix No. 1, Opus 1148, originally in the State Theatre, Detroit, is destined for an eventual home in Dallas, Texas. Mark Muntzel, Jr. reveals that the senior Muntzel has purchased the instrument from Roy Davis of McMinnville, Tennessee, and will move it shortly — but not into the Muntzel residence in Dallas because a 3/9 Hillgreen-Lane is already ensconced there. Mark Jr. sends along a

photo of the H-G chamber which shows a chandelier above the rows of pipes. Mark explains that the chamber used to be the family dining room.



There may be a widespread public reaction arising about the destruction of '20s theatres which are no longer profitable as film houses. The Pittsburgh symphony orchestra is now heard in an ex-movie palace and a film theatre in St. Louis has been converted into an elegant concert hall. The Ohio Theatre in Columbus is now a performing arts center. Next may be the 2400-seat Majestic in Dallas, Texas. The theatre was closed recently for lack of movie attendance. Now the entire building, valued at \$2,000,000, has been offered free to the City of Dallas by the Hoblitzelle Foundation, trustees of the 1921 theatre's builder, Karl Hoblitzelle, for use as a performing arts center. The city council is dragging its heels because it would require 1½ million to restore the Majestic to its original opulence — a condition of the transfer. Chances are good because a study revealed that a proposed performing arts center would cost 20 or 30 million, according to the Dallas Times-Herald.



And plans are afoot to convert Omaha's 2975-seat Orpheum Theatre into a performing arts center. Mayor Zorinsky has sought a \$250,000 grant from the Kresge Foundation which has made previous grants to the arts. The Orpheum has been closed for 2½ years, although a couple of organ concerts were held during this period, using the 3/12 Wurlitzer.



Don't believe all those media reports about the closing of the Harold Lloyd estate in Beverly Hills, Calif., a project in which ATOS has a stake. Estate trustee and ATOSer Dick Simonton assures us that the closing is temporary and that the estate definitely will open again to the public. Several factors were involved in the decision for a temporary closing at this time: (1) the energy crisis which cut into tourist business, (2) Sanitation Department demands for immediate updating of the plumbing and (3) the popularity of the estate as a setting for TV and movie filming.

"The estate can take in up to