

# SAVE THE FOX

ATOS MEMBERS MAKE A COMMITMENT

by John Clark McCall, Jr.

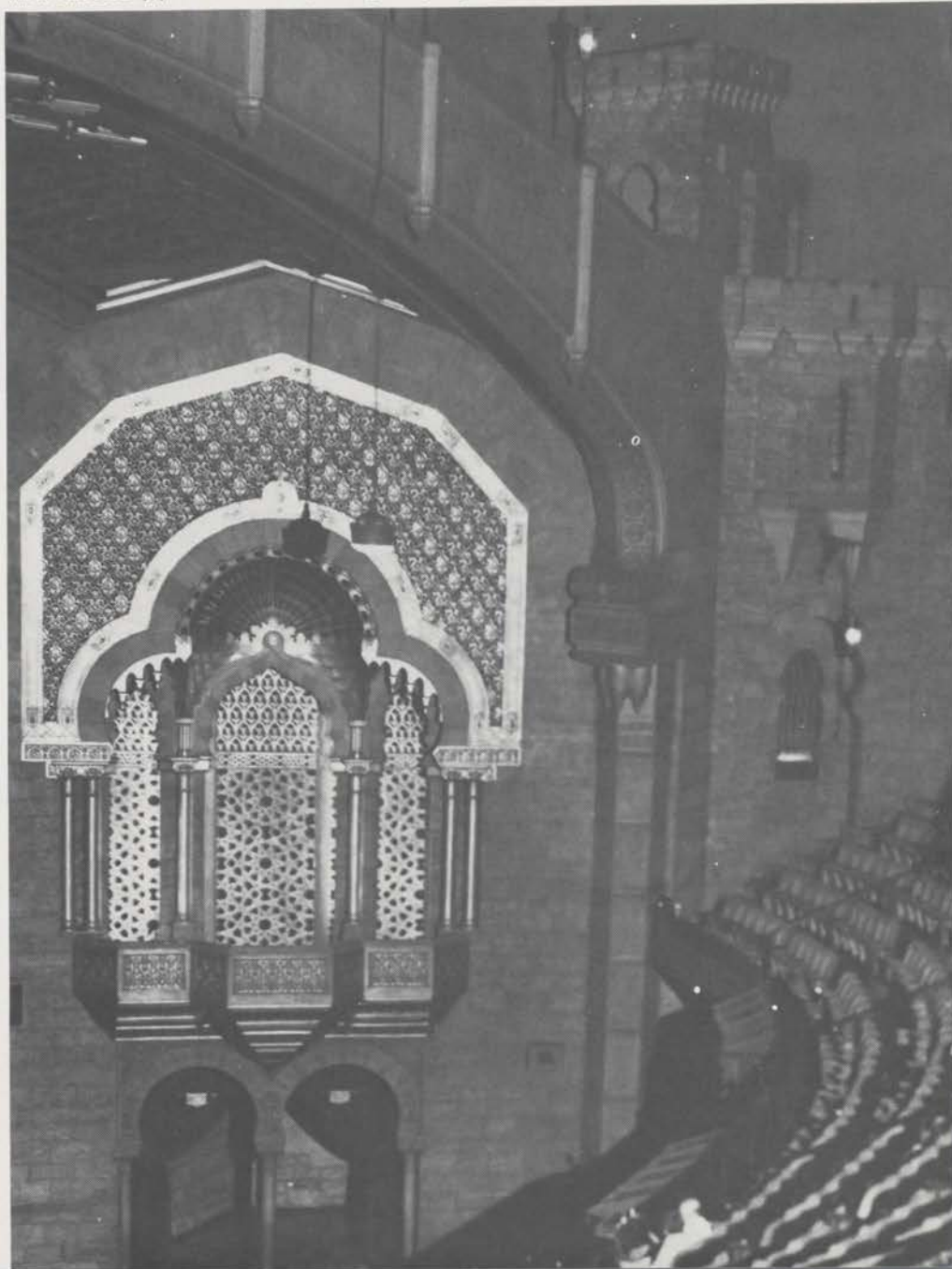
The Fox Theatre, home of the 4/42 Moller organ restored by ATOS members in 1963, has been offered for sale together with surrounding parcels of real estate by its owners, Mosque, Inc. (comprised of ABC Theatres, Storey Theatres, and Georgia Theatres). Public knowledge of negotiations by Mosque, Inc., with Southern Bell Telephone Co. involving the Fox parcel became known in late June, 1974. Implications of the deal revealed that Southern Bell would buy the real estate *cleared* of the 74,000 sq. ft. Fox structure, built in 1929 by the Yaraab Temple of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine and originally leased by movie magnate William Fox, to boast another super-Fox in his chain of palaces from San Francisco to Brooklyn.

Bell officials are eyeing the property for the site of a new administrative office building.

Immediately following the announcement of the Fox's impending demolition, concerned Atlanta citizens began groundwork for a "SAVE THE FOX" campaign which has culminated in the formation of Atlanta Landmarks, Inc., a non-profit organization designed to spearhead the protection

The Fox balcony, proscenium arch, and right organ grill.

(Tommy Ford Photo)



of all important Atlanta structures and sites, with the Fox Theatre high on the city's current priority list. Much of the organization can be attributed to two members of Atlanta Landmarks' Board of Directors, Joe Patten and Bob Van Camp, both ATOS members. In fact, many ATOS members are actively involved in the "SAVE THE FOX" movement... from the volunteer cleaning of the theatre's brass and floors and conducting Sunday morning tours of the house, to circulating petitions (numbering over 100,000 individual names and addresses at this writing).

A public hearing held at the theatre by Georgia Senator Floyd Hudgins, chairman of the Georgia Senate's Tourism Committee, drew over 2,500 interested citizens to the 3,934-seat house on July 29. The program, coordinated by Joe Patten, featured Bob Van Camp at the Moller organ, both in a concert spot, and as background accompanist (spotlighting the song, *That's Entertainment*) for Patten's on-stage demonstration of the Fox's vast staging capabilities.



Frank Beckum, professor of architecture, Ga. Tech., narrates an on-screen tour of the Fox. (Robert Foreman Photo)

Other events at the hearing included the airing of views by citizens, numerous endorsements — including an open letter to Atlanta by actress Helen Hayes (entertainer Mitzi Gaynor and Mrs. Martin Luther King, Jr. followed with statements days after the hearing), and an on-screen pictorial tour of the theatre narrated by Ga. Tech. University Professor

Frank Beckum.

The ATLANTA JOURNAL acclaimed the hearing as probably "the best-attended hearing ever held by that or any other legislative committee."

The first concrete financial backing for saving the Fox, or rather, for testing its feasibility to remain, has emerged from the State of Georgia, Department of Human Resources, in

Bob VanCamp and the Mighty Moller with the Phantom Piano.

(Tommy Ford Photo)





Millie Alexander

(Tommy Ford Photo)



Walter Winn

(Tommy Ford Photo)



Dottie Whitcomb

(Tommy Ford Photo)

the amount of \$11,000. The funds will be used to underwrite a professional economic feasibility and reuse survey which, hopefully, will convince businessmen — in white and black figures — the financial advantages, the community need and the versatility of the unique Atlanta Fox.

With the S.O.S. for the Fox, comes, ironically, the most exciting schedule in the theatre's recent entertainment history. Atlanta rock music king, Alex Cooley, an ardent Fox enthusiast and a businessman who through his more than 10 rock concerts has kept the theatre in the black in the past year, has scheduled more big-name rock attractions; the first of the new series was August 23. Cooley's youth-oriented extravaganzas have continually filled the theatre. Albert Coleman, conductor of the Atlanta Pops Orchestra, is also working with Cooley in a joint benefit performance at the Fox and for the Fox.

Organist Lee Erwin played for the Southeastern Chapter ATOS, Sunday, August 11. Erwin featured repertoire recently recorded on his two Angel Records releases of original scores for silent movies and marches and rags of Scott Joplin. The concert was probably the best attended chapter-sponsored concert in Southeastern ATOS history.

Television and newspaper coverage has not let one of the Fox's greatest and most popular features, the mighty Moller organ, go unnoticed. Sound film clips and newspaper photographs of the organ have appeared, and the instrument has been used as back-

ground music for television-aired editorial cartoons. The city of Atlanta could once boast of over eight organs in theatres. The Fox is the sole survivor of Atlanta's movie palace era of the 20's and 30's. It has survived because in its conception, the facilities were designed a step ahead of the limitations of an ordinary motion picture theatre.

Without the magic of the Fox's acoustical and architectural environment, the Fox Moller will probably never be quite the same. It is encouraging to know that through the past efforts of ATOS members, a great majority of Atlantans have now come to realize the importance of the Fox installation. Now their public support has come forth — physically and vocally — and "SAVE THE FOX" is at

the center of community concern.

The Southeastern Chapter, in the midst of the movement to save the Atlanta Fox Theatre, has experienced an eventful summer.

The Fox was the scene for over 300 ATOS members and guests at the chapter's "Mini National," Sunday morning, September 1. Chapters represented included New York, Motor City, Wolverine, Toledo, Delaware Valley, Eastern Massachusetts, Alabama, Chicago Area, Piedmont, and Potomac Valley with Southeastern members hosting the event.

Newly-elected to the ATOS National Board of Directors, Fox staff organist Bob Van Camp was featured in concert at the 4/42 Moller with a professionally arranged and executed

Mini-National audience assembled in Fox lobby during intermission.





Walt Strojny

(Tommy Ford Photo)



Grant Whitcomb

(Tommy Ford Photo)



Linda Kent

(Tommy Ford Photo)

program of extraordinary musical fare.

Following a brief intermission, six cameo performers, coordinated and introduced by Potomac Valley's Jean Lautzenheiser, had their chance at the instrument. The first spot was given to Millie Alexander (the only female ever to preside at the Radio City Music Hall Wurlitzer as a staff organist) who treated the audience to "console capers" with former teacher Bob Van Camp. Millie demonstrated how, as a student, her pianistic talents were transferred directly to the organ, later, the rudiments of a transition in style to pipes, and the polished, finished product in full-bodied arrangements.

Millie was followed by Linda Kent, a young organist who has already made news in pages of this magazine.

Southeastern member Walter Winn, displayed a sure, "at home" feel of the Moller and sampling of musical chestnuts were played by Grant and Dottie Whitcomb. A show stealer, Walt Strojny ended the cameo performances, encoring with several selections.

Newly elected to the National Register of Historic Places and the project of a mass public effort to insure its safe-keeping, the Fox was toured by visitors, led by historian/restorer Charles Walker of the Southeastern Chapter. Members also added their names to the growing number of over 100,000 signatures on "SAVE THE FOX" petitions.

Adding a national flavor to the meeting was newly-elected national ATOS president, Dr. Paul Abernathy of Burlington, N.C. Four National

Board members were present: Dr. Abernathy, Bob Van Camp, National ATOS Secretary Jean Lautzenheiser and Bill Rieger.

The event was, hopefully, only a beginning for future programs of a

joint nature, obviously resting on the fate of the theatre itself. All concerned ATOS members may express their interest by writing Atlanta's mayor, the Honorable Maynard Jackson, City Hall, Atlanta, Georgia. □

Linda Kent at the Fox organ.

