

# The Golden Bear Playhouse

by Carroll F. Harris

She talks again, and she is in a theatre too — it is not the original theatre and it is not a large theatre, but it is a theatre. Let's go back to late 1924 when Wurlitzer Opus 939, a 2/7 Style E, was shipped to the San Francisco Wurlitzer store. From there it was taken across San Francisco Bay to the city of San Leandro and a theatre that was known at different times as The Leandro and The Palace. This author knows nothing about the organists who played her in the theatre, and he doesn't have the date she was removed and installed in a Richmond, California church, but from November, 1968, we can tell you all about it.

Larry Weid purchased the organ in November, 1968, for installation in his Sacramento, California home. His wife Annette went along with the affair and had no illusions about regaining use of the family garage (for the reasons garages are usually built) when the Sierra Chapter purchased the organ early in 1974. The instrument was to be reinstalled in The Little Theatre of California's State Fair and Exposition. It was to be the fulfillment of a dream, the group's own organ, and above all it was to be a memorial to their late first vice chairman/treasurer, George A. Seaver.

Removal from the Weid residence and re-installation were under the direction of Harvey M. Whitney. Plans were to have the little jewel playing for the 1974 edition of California's State Fair. The daily schedule of the Fair showed: "Organ Concert, 5:30

Workmen erect framing and walls around the single 12' x 16' x 20' pipe chamber in the Golden Bear Playhouse. Wall studs are metal; walls are ½ inch sheetrock filled with spun glass insulation. So far there have been no "sympathetic vibrations" to disturb the fine sounds of Sierra Chapter's Style E Wurlitzer.

(Bob Moore Photo)





P.M. — Golden Bear Theatre — Free”, and from opening day, on August 23, through September 4, a sign had to be posted on the entrance doors: “No Program Today — Organ Still Under Construction.” Finally, on September 5, after 27 working days (and long days they were), Sierra members took to the plaza in front of the theatre carrying signs: “Free Organ Concert Today.” Long time Sacramento organist and Sierra member Emil Martin played the opening concert as well as the next day’s concert. All this time Harvey and his crew continued working. Saturday, September 7, Bob Hartzell filled the bench for the evening concert; the closing concert was played by Mary Ann Mendenhall. Fairgoers enjoyed every minute of the concert although the chapter’s organ experts were not satisfied that they had a perfect installation.

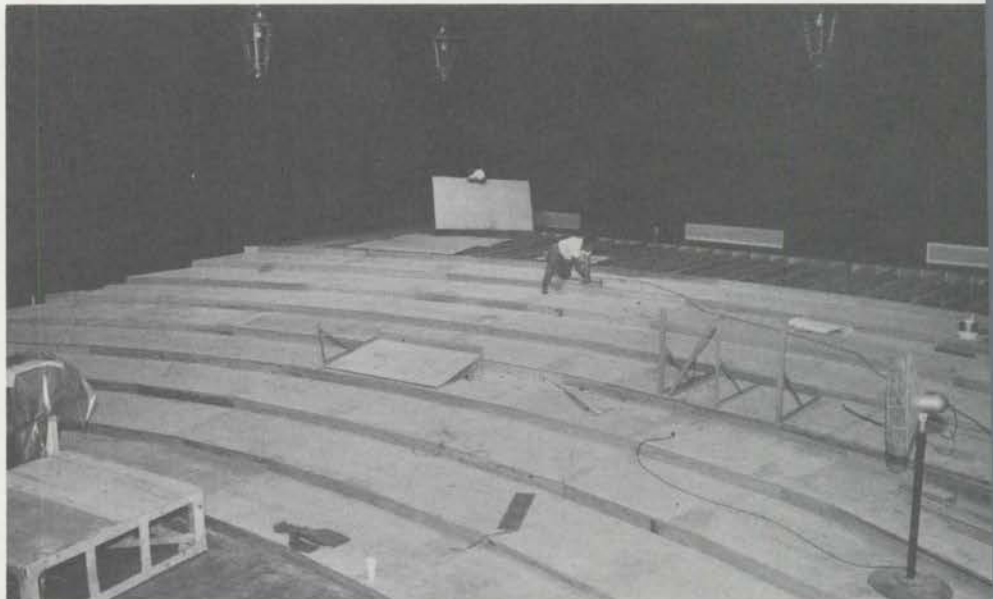
There were many casual workers, and they were not limited to the male members of the organization. There were many donors of funds who helped to make the dream possible, not to mention the State Fair officials who gave Opus 939 a perfect home.

California had moved its State Fair to a new site on the American River a number of years ago with the idea that it would become the “Disneyland of the North.” A change in political situations found it lacking funds and lacking the support of those who make State Fairs, State Fairs — the agricultural community. Finally common sense won out and the California State Fair and Exposition was given new life when it was placed under William Penn Mott’s Department of Parks and Recreation. A new manager was appointed, a man with imagination who surrounded himself with more men and women of imagination.

Larry Jenkins sparked the renovation of the nondescript so-called Little Theatre into the Golden Bear Playhouse. Dr. Paul R. Waldo of Sacramento State University did the design work. Flat seating was replaced with “raked” seating; the bandstand sized stage gave way to one designed for almost any type of production. It was “baptized” with a show ideal for the house: Vaudeville Tonight, an abbreviated version of a successful variety show done in the style of days gone by. Dr. Gerald Larson, professor of Theatrical Arts at Sacramento State University directed some 50 of his students in the performances. There

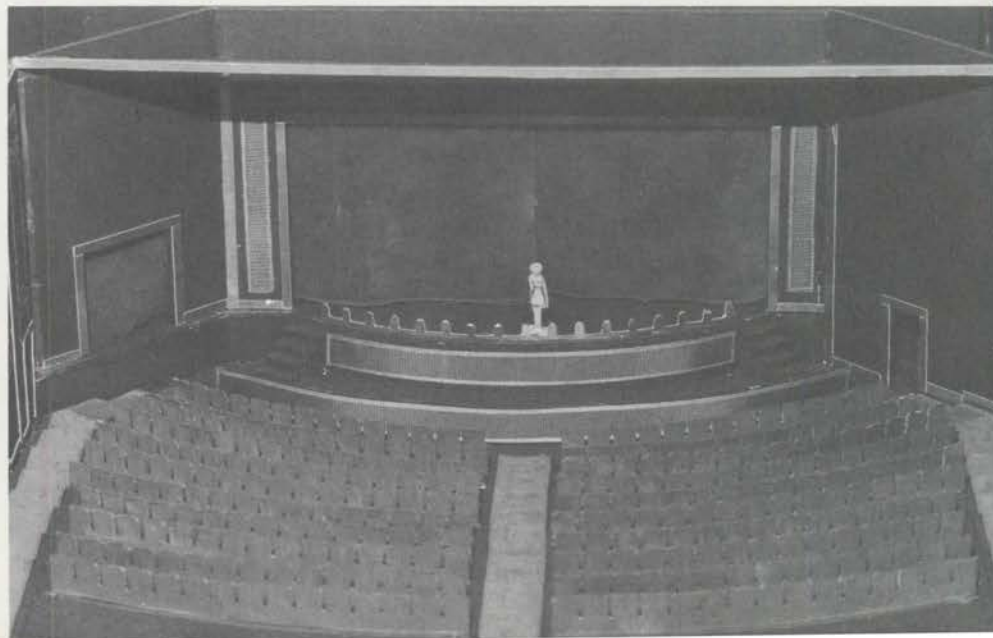


Sierra Chapter’s Emil Martin played the first public concert at the group’s 2/7 Wurlitzer, installed in the Golden Bear Playhouse, at the California State Fair on September 5, 1974. The console was refinished in antique white and gold by the previous owner, Larry Weid. (George Cline Photo)



The Golden Bear Playhouse in Sacramento as viewed from the position of the single chamber during construction. Wrapped console is at far left. An idea of the height of the theatre can be seen by comparing the light fixtures with the two workmen. (Bob Moore Photo — Sacramento Union)

Scale model of California State Fair’s Golden Bear Playhouse, designed by Dr. Paul R. Waldo of Sacramento State University, the new home of Wurlitzer Opus 939, owned by Sierra Chapter. The instrument is known as the George A. Seaver Memorial Organ to honor the chapter’s first vice chairman/treasurer who passed away early in 1973. The theatre is predominately brown, with red wall panels framed in gold and bright red seats and carpeting. (Bob Moore Photo — Sacramento Union)





was an excellent orchestra in the pit, but too many broken wires in the main cable prevented use of the theatre pipes.

The Fair is long over but Harvey Whitney and his crew continue their tuning and refinement of Opus 939 to put it in as near perfect condition as humanly possible for its formal debut. On April 20, 1975, barring unforeseen difficulties, the chapter intends to formally dedicate their instrument to the memory of George A. Seaver. He had played the instrument in Larry Weid's home, in fact a TV film presentation featured both several years ago. Plans call for a 2 P.M. presentation using the same artists who had gathered in the dining room of Sacramento's Sheraton Inn at 2 P.M. on April 16, 1972, to again play the type of music George liked. (George had passed away the previous month and had previously requested no funeral, no formal services, but indicated if his friends wished to do something it should be around a theatre pipe organ with some of his favorite artists.) Clyde Derby, Sheraton Inn house organist, W. "Tiny" James and Emil Martin were the concert artists in 1972, and Jim Hodges, Sacramento radio personality, did the introductions. All ATOS members, and theatre pipe organ music lovers in general, are invited to attend in April. A word of advice is in order — be early. Capacity of the Golden Bear Playhouse is 325 persons, for fire and safety reasons. □



Joe Brite

Colorado for the past 37 years. He passed away several days after a brutal beating during an attempted holdup of the Rialto Theatre which he managed.

He was 71 years of age. He had studied theatre organ at the Chicago Musical College. He had played in several Chicago Theatres, and at some performances had played with Milton Charles. Following his move to Alamosa in 1937, he played daily radio broadcasts on the Wurlitzer in the Rialto Theatre for 28 years. He played the organ during intermissions between movies. This was one of the few theatre organs in the nation used daily. His record for continuous per-

formance was exceeded in duration perhaps only by those in Radio City Music Hall.

He was a member of the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society of Denver. One of the finest home-installation concerts ever enjoyed by Chapter members was that played by Joe on Beck and Edith Maddy's Wurlitzer (formerly of the Mayan Theatre of Denver).

An article on his career, *It's Brite in the San Luis Valley*, appeared on page 13 of the April 1970 issue of THE-ATRE ORGAN.

Kenneth Tillotson

**Robert Dilworth, Mr. and Mrs.** Robert E. Dilworth's 16 year old son died suddenly on November 1, 1974. The boy had apparently been experimenting with plastic bags and accidentally suffocated.

A Memorial service was held on November 5th at the Second Baptist Church. In lieu of flowers the family suggested contributions in his name to the Rev. Malcolm MacQueen Memorial Fund of Second Baptist Church, 2800 Silverside Road, Wilmington, Del. 19810. (A perpetual scholarship fund for theological students).

Robert had spent many hours with his father working on the Dickinson Theatre Pipe Organ. The Kimball was originally installed in the Boyd Theatre, Philadelphia.

Betty J. Kouba

## Closing Chord

Ralph Trout III, staff organist for Capn's Galley Pizza Chain passed away several weeks ago following a second heart transplant. His first transplant took place in the spring of 1969. Living on borrowed time, Ralph lived an active and vigorous life. His wish was that any expression of sympathy be in the form of contributions to the Stanford University Heart Cardiovascular Foundation, Palo Alto, Calif. 94305.

Joseph L. Brite passed away September 17, 1974. A former theatre organist in Chicago during the silent film era. Joe has lived in Alamosa,

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