

TIBIA, VOX AND PEPPERONI

THE PIZZA ORGAN IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Among the curious accidents of fate has to be the onset of the theatre organ revival just as the magnificent movie palaces began their long fall from fiscal grace. This could have led easily to the virtual disappearance of the theatre organ from the public ear but for the fortuitous wedding of the organ and the pizza in a San Francisco suburb a dozen years ago. The non-theatrical theatre organ is certainly not unique to this area, nor era, for we have the local precedents of the legendary Club Shanghai and the still-operating Lost Weekend; but the mating of pipes and pasta, clearly one of the landmark events in theatre organ history, is the contribution of Carsten Henningsen, proprietor of Ye Olde Pizza Joynt at San Lorenzo.

Having started here, the organ-pizzeria has flourished here as nowhere else. Befitting the cradle and capitol of the pizza organ, many pasta-colossi are on this year's convention ticket — organs ranging in size from 6 to 27 ranks, and in age from the golden era right up to last year. To describe them all, or even just those to be featured, would require this entire issue, so will have to cover the field by touching some of the extremes.

First things first, there is the original, the imitated but never excelled Pizza Joynt, where it all began with the 2/9 Wurlitzer from Fresno's State Theatre. Now 12 ranks and played from the San Francisco Warfield's 3 manual console, the organ incorporates a plethora of percussive devices, the most interesting of which is a most effective accordion. Many parts of the organ are scattered about the Joynt itself, and in the hands of long-time staffer Bill Langford, the machine makes the smallish restaurant jump with Wurlitzer music. Sensing a

good thing, Henningsen has never altered the place nor the policy, and it is not out of keeping to note here that he makes the finest pizza we shall ever hope to taste.

The largest pizza organ in this clime is easily the best known as well; Buddy Cole's justly renowned Wurlitzer-Morton recording organ, is now playing in the Cap'n's Galley, Campbell. Assembled by Cole from the U.A. Los Angeles 3/18 Wurlitzer and parts of an earlier Morton recording organ, the 27 rank leviathan is so installed that the entire solo chamber is visible from outside the restaurant. The Campbell Galley is one of three like-named establishments in the pasta empire of Bill Breuer.

Breuer's Redwood City Galley is the largest operation, and while the organ numbers but 18 ranks, many regard it as the most exciting in the area — it is certainly the loudest! One of three 4/18 Wurlitzers shipped to the West Coast, this one came directly from Seattle's 5th Avenue Theatre, and the panelled console still carries the pseudo-Chinese designs applied there. Space has been provided in the chambers and on the console for 9 additional ranks, but to date the only major additions have been a metal diaphone and a new Moller English Horn.

Our newest pizza organ is also the smallest; a 2/6 Wicks built new for the Pizza Machine, Pleasant Hill, only last year. Clearly patterned along Wurlitzer lines, the Wicks has a solid sound, but resembles the original most in its console styling. This is Wicks' second recent attempt at recreating the unit orchestra, and while smaller than the first organ, in Monterey, it is by far a more musical achievement.

The pizza organ is a relative new-

comer to capitol city Sacramento, but the Carl Greer (Sheraton) Inn has for a decade featured the 4/16 Morton from Seattle's Music Hall Theatre in the main bar. A powerhouse in the theatre, the Morton is tamed but not muffled by speaking through a tone chute from its chamber beneath the lounge room itself. This organ was a favorite of Eddie Dunsteadter, whose frequent programs there are a fond memory of recent years. The city does, though, have two fairly new pizza organs. In the Arden Pizza and Pipes is a 4/18 (nee 11) from Racine, Wisconsin; and at the Big Top is the famous WLW Cincinatti *Moon River* instrument. Both are Wurlitzers.

Some purists take exception to this application of the theatre organ, forgetting that these surrogate orchestras became identified with the movie theatre by virtue of having come on the market just as the demand for a picture-accompanying device was being felt; another accident of fate, if you like. That this traditional association should preclude other usage is unrealistic, for except in those rare instances where an in-theatre organ is still a regularly employed instrument of policy, the unit orchestra is realizing its entertainment potential best in the setting of a restaurant; and through this exposure is acquainting an ever-expanding audience with the musical marvel of a half-century ago.

We are proud here of having been the birthplace of this phenomenon, and we are even prouder to be able to show you both the quantity and quality of our numerous installations come July. We hope you will be with us in

**San Francisco
July 15-20!** □