

RTOS Anniversary Weekend

by Lloyd E. Klos

Following months of planning, "blood, toil, tears and sweat," the Rochester Theatre Organ Society culminated the observance of its Tenth Birthday with a 3-day, 5-concert weekend at the Auditorium Theatre, November 1-3. There were other activities sprinkled in for good measure, and the event resembled a mini ATOS Convention in many respects.

Attending the concerts was a total of 5,442, and they came from as far as Seattle (Margaret Sabo) and from as near as a few blocks away (Walt Schwind). There were some who attended every program, and the RTOS package ticket deal was a help in this area, costwise.

Festivities began on Friday evening with a 3-organist "Something New, Something Old" program. The show

started with a half-hour musical interlude by 13-year-old David Peckham of Breesport, N.Y. This youngster, a participant in RTOS' Talent Night in 1973, handled himself very well at the 4/22 Wurlitzer. The unmistakable signs of a budding concert artist are present, and given continued study, diligent practice and encouragement, David will continue to be heard. Talent like his must be nurtured because these youngsters are the hope of keeping the theatre organ alive in the years ahead.

Next to perform was veteran Syracuse theatre organist, Carleton James, making his first RTOS appearance. He launched into an accompaniment of what might be called a *Styles of an Earlier Era* movie short. Originally scheduled was a 1920 news short, taken from Rochester history. For

some unexplained reason, this hodgepodge was substituted and amounted to the low point of the program. Things picked up when Carleton accompanied a Buster Keaton comedy *One Week* (1920). This is a hilarious picture, full of action and side-splitting sequences. Carleton closed his portion of the program with music which included *Sound of Music* selections.

Finally, Luella Wickham, 82 years young, wound up the program with a musical stint. She played some ballads and sprinkled in were some fast numbers such as *Tico Tico*. Program director Ken Veneron presented a rose bouquet to Luella, the second she had received in a week, having performed in Syracuse earlier.

On Saturday, Dennis James and the Singing Hoosiers from Indiana Uni-

The Singing Hoosiers pose at the RTOS console. Dennis James is in the center, with director Robert Stoll at his left.

(Leichtner Photo)



versity provided the entertainment for matinee and evening performances. Making his fifth RTOS appearance, Dennis was his usual brilliant self in accompanying the Hoosiers and in solo sequences. The combination of a professional college group as represented by the Hoosiers and a trained technician of Dennis' calibre, means a class A-1 performance. The Hoosiers, directed by ex-Rochesterian Bob Stoll, are augmented by a small combo, and the whole aggregation is enhanced by colorful costuming, excellent choral arrangements, well-planned choreography and superb lighting effects.

Sunday was the banner day as Bob Ralston of the Lawrence Welk Show

and the darling of the Geritol set, presented matinee and evening performances. He played before 3,114, including over 600 senior citizens. Bob has a way with his audiences, a nice free and easy style. His music is an extension of his personality and no one seems to walk out on his performance. A crowd-pleaser was his playing of *Dizzy Fingers* while lying on the bench, his feet to the audience. Some of his numbers were decidedly old-hat to RTOS audiences (*Raindrops Keep Fallin'* and *The Entertainer* have been done to death). But the crowd was there to see Lawrence Welk's "boy" and they thoroughly enjoyed his efforts. A Channel 13 TV camera crew recorded part of the matinee for viewing on its two evening news shows.

There were other activities to highlight the weekend. On Saturday, there were cameo presentations at First Universalist Church (3/13 Hope-Jones, Opus 2) and at Blessed Sacrament Church (3/13 Wurlitzer, Opus 2032). In the new Eisenhart Auditorium where RTOS will install a 3/8 Wurlitzer (Opus 1492), there were working organ models, a pipe exhibit, complete toy counter, continuous slide presentations, pictures of RTOS artists, cue sheets, silent movie texts, and pictures depicting theatre organ nostalgia in Rochester. There was a relaxed atmosphere here with coffee and light refreshment to punctuate the social amenities.

Throughout Sunday, several owners of home installations held open house, and maps were provided for the convenience of visitors. Homes on the tour included those of Norm Bolton (2/6 Kohl); Dick Noah (2/6 hybrid); Russ Shaner (2/5 Marr & Colton); Henry Sibley (3/10 Kohl); and Jim Webster (3/15 Wurlitzer).

Arriving a few hours before the start of festivities was the shipment of 3500 *RTOS Story* booklets which resulted in a sale of about 450 during the three days. New memberships signed raised the total toward the 1300 mark.

The weather cooperated beautifully for the first four concerts, but rain fell during the final evening, which was not bad when one considers Rochester's changeable fall climate.

From RTOS executives down to those on the lower rungs of the organization ladder, all agreed that the effort was worth it. "What do we do in 1989?" □



Carleton James at his first RTOS appearance. He accompanied the hilarious Keaton film "One Week."
(Dick Harold Photo)



Luella Wickham is presented a rose bouquet, her second such honor in a week.
(Dick Harold Photo)

Dennis James. His fifth appearance at the Wurlitzer.
(Dick Harold Photo)



Bob Ralston, the darling of the senior citizens. His two concerts drew 3,114 to the Auditorium Theatre.
(Dick Harold Photo)

David Peckham at the RTOS console. He shows much promise as a young musician.
(Dick Harold Photo)

