



Letters to the Editor concerning all aspects of the theatre organ hobby are encouraged. Send them to the editor concerned. Unless it's stated clearly on the letter "not for publication," the editors feel free to reproduce it, in whole or part.

Address: P.O. Box 1314
Salinas, Calif. 93901

Dear George:

Mr. Stein has exercised his right to criticize my book on Crawford. He purports to have found a "multitude of factual errors." He lists only five. Unfortunately Mr. Stein shows more zeal than factual knowledge and I must turn his own words back to him and say, "In your criticisms I find a 'multitude of factual errors'."

Mr. Stein first takes me to task for using personal interviews as a major source of information for the book. He suggests that I rely more heavily upon newspapers, etc. Mr. Stein has much more faith in the accuracy of the printed page than I. It was precisely to explode many of the myths and legends which surrounded Crawford and which were circulated in print, that this book was written. Because an article appears in print does not make it "truth". The first rule of any historian worth his salt is to seek out those persons whose personal experiences relate to the subject matter. Interview the man who was there — don't rely merely on a second, third, or fourth-hand account of the person or event. Yes, the human memory is fallible, but so are the writers of articles and news stories.

In actual fact the Crawford story was carefully balanced in regard to the use of printed and oral sources. I spent literally thousands of hours over a two year period reading all of the CHICAGO TRIBUNES for Crawfords' years in Chicago, and all of the NEW YORK TIMES for Crawfords' New York years. Nor were these the only

written sources used. My file cabinets bulge with the original source materials, the most important of which are listed in the Bibliography.

Mr. Stein is right in regard to Crawford's appearance at Shea's Buffalo Theatre. News clippings in Lucy Crawford's possession which I read and on which I took extensive notes furnished the basis for this particular paragraph of text in question. Farney Wurlitzer recalled for me that Shea had told him, "this fellow Crawford doesn't want to do anything but play the organ. Doesn't he realize there are other acts to follow?"

Mr. Stein needs to read a good book on the Great Depression. He criticizes my statement that the Great Depression was not yet at its height in 1932. Any serious historian of those times will tell you that the Depression reached its most serious point in the Spring of 1933 when fully 1/3 of the labor force (15 million out of a total 45 million workers) were out of work. (See Leuchtenberg — *FDR And The New Deal*, for example). Yes, in 1932 organists were losing their jobs, if they had not already lost them, but the truly deluxe houses such as the New York Paramount continued to feature the organ.

Jesse Crawford left a tape recorded-autobiography of his early years. This was used extensively as source material for the early chapters of the book. Repeatedly, he refers to C. Sharpe Minor as "Charlie Minor" — not inappropriate since this gentleman affected a hyphenated name. Never does he refer to him as Charlie Sharpe. Some people know me as "John" — others as "Jack". Neither is mutually exclusive.

I am accused of inflating the number of instruments manufactured by Wurlitzer. I used an approximate figure of 3,000. The *Wurlitzer List* supposedly shows 2,300. I was not attempting to list the exact number which is, in and of itself, the subject of much controversy. I was giving an approximation and I make that very clear in my book.

Mr. Stein accuses me of showing a definite bias in favor of the Wurlitzer organ. He takes issue with my mentioning that Crawford preferred the Wurlitzer. The fact is that he did prefer it. I cannot go back and change history to accommodate Mr. Stein's prejudices. As to my own personal preference, I might mention that the

theatre pipe organ presently being installed in my Lexington residence is largely, Marr and Colton, somewhat modified. Wait until my next book, *THE HISTORY OF THE THEATRE PIPE ORGAN*, is released before passing judgment on my presumed biases.

Finally, Stein takes me to task for not "showing the proper perspective" in regard to the theatre organ. Hope-Jones did not originally set out to build an instrument for accompanying silent pictures. Originally he sought an entirely new concept of pipe organ tonal design. It was later that this tonal design was adopted for use in silent picture accompaniment. My only point of agreement with Mr. Stein in his mention of the "Sigmund Krungolds" whose forte was silent picture accompaniment. I offer words of praise in my book for Krungold's masterful accompaniment of silent pictures. I have no words of praise, however, for his solo work of which I have examples in my extensive record collection. Crawford did both solo work and picture accompaniment well. His accompaniments tended to be entirely improvisation but clever, artistic, and delicate. However, he was not appreciated in his day by the "purists" who insisted upon fitting snippets of classical selections to the action on the screen. This was a splendid method and it was highly developed by the late 1920's but it was not necessarily the only "correct" method. The purists were angry with him mainly because his method transcended their level of understanding. The world usually hates its geniuses.

There is obviously more than one point of view regarding any human being and his contributions. If that was not so, why would each decade bring a fresh crop of books about Washington and Lincoln. Perhaps Mr. Stein or someone else should undertake such an interpretation of Crawford. Crawford was controversial in his time and he remains controversial today. I, for one, would welcome further research into Crawford's life.

Sincerely,
Dr. John W. Landon
Associate Professor

Dear Sir:

I enjoyed very much the cover story about the Ohio Theatre in the February issue. Living in south eastern Ohio as I do, near no Interstate, I had not been inclined to travel to Colum-

bus much...until I saw the Ohio Theatre's ad for its organ concert series; I promptly signed up for the series and so far have enjoyed Lee Erwin/Gloria Swanson and Hector Olivera. During February the Ohio has also been running a Mystery Movie series for which Dennis James plays prior to the first film and between it and the second.

Everything I have seen (or heard) at the Ohio has been top-notch. I think the most enjoyable part about going there is watching the expressions of awe on first-timers, especially children, when they wander about just looking — and again when the organ begins to play, slowly rising from the pit.

But the folks at the Columbus Association for the Performing Arts must be blushing from all the cover stories. As editor of our local arts newsletter (our center is a 1300-seat Paramount, about to itself undergo renovation), I've mentioned the Ohio — The Theatre Beautiful — in two consecutive issues with a cover photo in the last. Unfortunately with little response, I've tried to put the bug in the appropriate ears about the magic a theatre acquires with a theatre organ, one of the reasons for the appearance of the Ohio Theatre articles. Aside from its utility as a musical instrument, the theatre organ has a charisma of its own which — thanks to ATOS — more and more people are regaining recognition of. I'm only 27, too young to remember the golden age of the movie palace, but am glad to have discovered the Ohio.

Chris Gundlach

Dear Sir:

I am happy indeed to see the current issue of TO and the excellent article on Fats Waller. Dennis James really did his homework and legwork — running down that story about Fats at Notre Dame — I think I believed it too, until I read this. Also, he lays to rest the theory that Fats was untrained and couldn't even read music — Fats

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was a musician and a fine one.

As for all the people who took umbrage at my assessment of Jesse Crawford — it is what I said before, at the beginning of my letter. People take personally, remarks that were not directed at them in the first place. One says my remarks are reminiscent of those of many jealous organists of the day; an oblique way, perhaps of accusing me of jealousy. I have my faults, indeed, but jealousy of one outside my professional field is not one of them. I never played theatre organ for a living, and would have no reason to be jealous of Crawford (or for that matter, of George Wright, or anyone else.)

It is important to distinguish between musical taste and performing ability; they do not necessarily go hand in hand, and some of our greatest music critics can scarcely play a note. The moth-eaten non-sequitur "let's see you do better!" is a riposte beloved of the ignorant.

The fact is, my opinion of Jesse Crawford's playing is based on having heard him, and all the others, in their heyday. But this is not something that depends entirely on memory and nostalgia — the performances are there, on records. I recently got a new one — *The Best of Jesse Crawford* Decca DXSB-7171. I played it for people who are too young to have heard Crawford, live, and who have not been steeped in the tradition. They listened, politely, and finally, pressed for an opinion — they said "Second-rate." "Poor rhythm." "Sticky" ...

He was a great showman, but his playing was second-rate — sentimental, and with a cheap portamento trick. Lew White was better. George Wright can play rings around either of them. As the little boy said, "Look ma, the Emperor is naked." Trust your ears and listen to the records.

Sincerely,
John S. Carroll

Dear Sir:

As I read the letter by Charles Stein in the current issue of THEATRE ORGAN in regard to his reaction to the John Landon book about Jesse Crawford, some thoughts came to my mind.

Because I was one of the many contributors to Dr. Landon's book and was given credit for having submitted material, I should like to write a reply to Mr. Stein's appraisal of the book.

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Speaking for myself, nothing was given to Dr. Landon without my first consulting a source, either a Spokane city directory or a newspaper between 1912 and 1916, the period when Crawford was either a pianist or organist in Spokane theatres. The information I submitted to Dr. Landon was in the form of zexoxed copies of pages containing Jesse Crawford's name and the theatres where he was employed. This was done to help Dr. Landon clarify a point about which he was not certain, and one that resulted in our exchanging several letters.

As a result of these letters, I came to the conclusion that Dr. Landon, as the author, wanted the statements he used in his book to be correct. I am sure that other contributors will agree with me in this respect.

While it is true that Jesse Crawford was a solo organist, he was, long before he arrived at the coveted spot, an accomplished motion picture organist. Friends of mine in Spokane, who were some twenty years older than I, have told me that the patrons of the Clemmer Theatre, where Crawford played for almost a year in 1915-1916, did not attend the theatre to see the motion picture; they went to hear Crawford. This information, passed on to me by word of mouth, is verified in a review of a motion picture at the Clemmer, which includes some statements about the quality of his accompanying a feature picture. Under the date of January 18, 1916, the reviewer wrote: "... and a sensational accompaniment on the big organ by Jesse Crawford." In another part of the same review, the article reads: "To the rousing strains of *Dixie* and all the national airs as played by Crawford, the audience applauded tumultously. Crawford's masterly manipulation of the big organ and the musical accompaniment contribute no small part to the impressiveness of the pro-

duction." It seems that the review speaks well for the then young organist who, in 1916, had not had too much experience as a theatre pipe organist. Certainly, Mr. Crawford's consummate ability as an accompanist for silent motion pictures was evident early in his career.

Yours very truly,
George L. Lufkin

Dear Friends:

I am sorry to report that conditions concerning the movie theatres continue to deteriorate in Montreal. The beautiful Capitol Theatre was demolished last winter, this theatre housed the large 4/28 Warren organ, a real beauty, during the golden years. We have now lost the Imperial Theatre. It is converted to a "twin theatre" and renamed Cine-Centre 1 & 2. The Imperial I believe had the first Wurlitzer installation (1914) in Montreal. It was unique, it had a Hope-Jones 2½ manual console, and it is featured in the Hope-Jones catalogue reprinted by the Vestal Press.

With kind regards and good wishes for the New Year.

Yours Sincerely,
Charles Wright

Dear Sir:

I am writing this letter to express a few of my opinions on a matter that I feel should be discussed. I would like to criticize the critics of the record review section of the magazine. In the February issue on page 46 there is a write-up on the recent release by O'Lyn Callahan. What bothers me the most about this article is its inconsistency. It would seem to me if a critic is going to review the records the least courtesy they can give the artist is to be consistent with their criticism. On careful reading of this review in the first half the writer says "Tie A Yellow Ribbon and others quote" are all done well despite some 30's vintage Ham-

mond "Flash" here and there." Now, from reading this I get the impression the person does not like to have these songs arranged in what he feels (is) the same old way. Then if you read further on, the article in the last paragraph, Miss Callahan takes an old song and gives it a new arrangement and the writer wants to know "What have you done to our song." Now if this type of reviewing is fair I fail to see it. So what I am saying is if you are a critic, than for heavens sake be consistent. How do you want it, old or new, but give the artist a chance!

Next, I would like to add that I feel the people writing too often make reference to "Old style, palm glissing, old time Hammond, flashy body English" etc. as if there were something wrong with it. To me (and I do hope others share my feelings) this type of playing is acceptable. The impression I get from the write-ups is that the organists are supposed to sit stiff as a ramrod and plink each note out with one finger, or risk being called "OLD HAT." Some of us newer members like this old style. I enjoy watching an organist who shows the feel of his music with his body, otherwise we could all sit at home and listen to records. Half the fun is watching them feel their music as they play. Does anyone else agree with me? One of the greatest thrills of my organ life was watching Hector Olivera doing his "body English" at the '74 convention and I didn't hear a complaint in the house as the 1200 members were on their feet cheering. So lets allow them to be themselves as they play.

Sincerely yours,
Anna May Wyeth

Dear George:

At the risk of dignifying a ridiculous remark in the February issue of THEATRE ORGAN magazine, page 29, which states: "John Muri thought Randy Sauls' biography of composer J.S. Zamecnik was "pretty good" but points out that Randy left out an important item, especially in view of Zamecnik's publishers' failure to remember the man whose 1500 tunes they published. Muri further points out the financial rewards reaped by the publisher for Zamecnik's hit tune, *Neapolitan Nights* as well as for the standard piano novelty *Polly* even the theme for 'Wings.' These made money for the publisher who doesn't re-collect." I feel compelled to set the record straight.



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Since I am not acquainted with Mr. Muri I have no idea where he might have secured this erroneous information that J.S. Zamecnik composed music which reaped reward for the publisher while he, the composer, was not even remembered, obviously implying that he was not paid for his compositions. When Walter, son of the noted J.S. Zamecnik, who is now retired from a career in music distribution, heard this read to him over the telephone last night his only comment was: "There are people who elect to call attention to themselves by biting remarks about others. My father was well paid for *Neapolitan Nights* as well as for *Polly*, the theme from 'Wings' and countless other compositions he did over a long period.

"My father's only publisher during his entire career was Sam Fox Publishing Company. This association began in Cleveland early in this century with Vaudeville. He was later brought to California by Sam Fox, a member of the family which established Twentieth Century Fox Movie Studio. It was for them that he scored for SOUND the first movies ever released with recorded sound and musical accompaniment."

The studios had a tremendous backlog of silent films. When the "talkie" craze hit the industry they evidently felt compelled to brainwash Joe Public into accepting the mediocre quality of music which was all that the "talkies" sound systems could produce in speech and most noteworthy in MUSIC!

Walter recalls vividly his father's intense dislike for doing these early movie scores for recording since it dispensed with live music in theatres. Naturally, though, he had no choice. Walter further states that he and his family are still on friendly terms with Sam Fox Publishing Company and firmly refutes the implications made in the criticism of my article in THE-ATRE ORGAN magazine.

Very truly yours,
Randy Sauls

Dear Editor:

Having just finished reading the Jesse Crawford book by Dr. John Landon for the second time, I was quite intrigued by the comments made by Mr. Charles W. Stein in Letters to the Editor, for the February THE-ATRE ORGAN.

Mr Stein starts out by praising Mr. Landon's efforts in his first paragraph

and then proceeds to discredit him in the remaining seven paragraphs.

Even though a small portion of the book was based on tape recordings and personal interviews, Mr. Landon makes no secret of this fact and has included copious footnotes explaining the nature of these interviews. Is this a reason to discredit Mr. Landon's work?

He mentioned also that he disagreed with Mr. Landon, that the effect of sound films in 1932 had scarcely been felt in the deluxe houses across the country. We have proof that most deluxe houses DID retain their organists, some of them throughout the thirties. A few examples would be the RCMH in New York and the Minnesota Theatre in Minneapolis. Even though the so-called "Deluxe houses" numbered a few hundred, they represented a very small percentage of total theatres in operation at that time which is the point Mr. Landon was making. For many in the Upper Midwest, the depression hit its peak in the middle thirties due to the added onslaught of crop failures and droughts. Unemployment statistics are not the only hardship to be considered in this particular era.

Regarding the C. Sharpe Minor comment, the book clearly states "Whom he had known previously as Charlie Minor." While it was obvious that the last name of Minor was a stage name, it is entirely possible that Jesse Crawford knew him by this name only. Many professional musicians don't want their real name known to protect their privacy.

While it is possible that an error was made with regard to the so-called twin console program at Mike Shea's Buffalo Theatre, I am sure that Mr. Landon would have discovered this himself and would be the first one to correct it in the next printing. An error of this nature is certainly easily overlooked as the quality of this magnificent book overshadows it.

Mr. Stein also refutes the statement that Wurlitzer built only 2300 organs, not over 3,000 as Mr. Landon wrote. Could it be that Mr. Landon was referring to ALL organs built by Wurlitzer including automatic ones? If this were the case, the 3,000 figure would be very close to being correct.

Having analyzed this book carefully, I cannot find where Mr. Landon states that the Wurlitzer organ was in fact a superior instrument. While I am

sure Robert Morton built an excellent instrument, there is no builder even to this day that has built a faster action than Wurlitzer did, by having primaries to the top note of the chest. This coupled with an extremely efficient chest magnet with an exhaust hole of a small fraction of the size used by others, made the Wurlitzer chest a marvel of engineering. While each organist has his preference for make of organ, Mr. Crawford had his and there was no mistake about it.

I certainly don't agree that the heroes of the organ were only those who were silent movie accompanists. The solo organist has a much greater demand put upon him by the public, since he is the attraction, not the picture. If the music is poorly selected or poorly played, he will soon be out of business. Those organists who have been successful in recording since Crawford's first 78 rpm records, have left us a legacy that cannot be measured. If all the recordings that were left to us and all those being made today were all silent movie scores, the theatre organ movement as we know it

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today would have never had the impact and wide-spread enthusiasm that it now has. When we consider the total number of silent movie scores on records, you could probably count them on your fingers. It is also very rare to find well done movie scores on record such as Lee Erwin's *Sound of The Silents*. Jesse Crawford and George Wright did not popularize the theatre organ with movie scores.

I commend Mr. John Landon for his scholarly work in the life of Jesse Crawford. For Mr. Landon, it is something like the organ maintenance enthusiast who labors deep into the night after everyone else is home in bed, working on theatre organs without pay. Their reward, like Mr. Landon's, is purely the labor of love, certainly not financial.

Sincerely,
Lance E. Johnson, pres. A.I.O.
Johnson Organ Co., Inc.

Dear Mr. Klos:

As an active ATOSer in the Michiana area, I read with very much interest your story about Harold Jolles in the last issue of the ATOS magazine. (Dec. 74) In May of 74, I had heard from a reliable source that there was a pipe organ reposing quietly in the recesses of the Elco Theatre in Elkhart, Indiana. Armed with this information, I made a few more calls and finally got in touch with Mr. Wm. (Bill) Miller of Miller Theatres, Inc. Mr. Miller owns a chain of theatres around the Michiana area, one of which is the Elco. Mr. Miller was

somewhat hesitant to divulge any more information than was necessary, tho I did ascertain that the organ was still there and that no one was providing the tender, loving care for the instrument and that he really wasn't interested in pursuing the conversation in that direction. Undaunted, I pursued the issue further, via numerous phone calls and messages to Mr. Miller and finally he relented and said he would allow me to come to the theatre and look over the installation.

When the day arrived to go to Elkhart, which is about 20 miles away from my home, I gathered my snooping equipment consisting of flashlights, camera and flashbulbs, a ½ inch nylon rope in case ladders and/or crawl boards were gone and my trusty coveralls. Upon arrival, the caretaker let me in and showed me to the corner where the console was sitting, covered and almost unnoticeable in the dark. He showed me where the blower switch was located behind the console and left me alone to do all the poking and prodding I cared to do. I pulled the power switch and a distant rumbling was heard as the blower gained momentum. Even as noisy as it was, the sound of wind lines being charged in the bowels of the darkened theatre sure made me feel good about the whole situation. Uncovering the 2/11 Kimball console, I checked each stop individually, trying to hear above the incessant screech of some chest relays stuck open in the right chamber and I found that most of the console was still wired and operable to some extent, with the exception of some traps

which didn't work because of ruptured leathers and excessive wind loss.

The left chamber contains the Bourdons, the Tibias and Flutes plus a marimba and a full size piano, while the right chamber has most of the traps and sound effects in addition to the rest of the voices. The general condition of the chambers is fair to poor, due to falling plaster and the accumulation of dirt and dust by untold years of neglect. There was no sign of dampness or ever being wet in either chamber. Due to the limited access to the chambers (climbing a ladder in a narrow crawlway between two walls and if a fall should occur, it would be a non-stop trip to the basement), the chambers have been somewhat guarded against would-be investigators and vandals. All in all, after spending the better part of an afternoon in both chambers, checking wind lines, the condition of the blower and ferreting out the location of the tremos and regulators, I feel that the Elco 2/11 Kimball could be brought back from the doldrums of neglect and near silence to become a singing monument to the organ builders art and to be seen and heard by the multitudes of young people who missed this part of our musical heritage.

I would like to thank Mr. W. Miller for his kind consideration in allowing me to disrupt his busy schedule during the inspection process and also to report at this writing that Mr. Miller has agreed to allow a crew of interested ATOSers to get started on renovating the Elco 2/11 Kimball. The final arrangements are incomplete at this time, but it is a step in the right direction.

If at all possible, please forward the enclosed copy to Mr. Jolles.

Sincerely,
Peter A. De Young

Dear Sir:

Reference to the Solid State Traps Relay diagram on page 34 of the December 74 THEATRE ORGAN, if any readers build one of these according to the diagram, they shouldn't be surprised if it doesn't work . . . the person who drew the diagram has forgotten to finish connecting up the two diodes that connect to the cymbal magnet!

Deke Warner
115 Greenfield Avenue
Los Angeles, Calif. 90049

2/11 Kimball console in the Elco Theatre, Elkhart, Indiana.

