

## Connecticut Valley's

# Autumn Serenade

## A WEEKEND OF SPECTACULAR SURPRISES

*The following review was compiled from several sources, with special thanks to Wallace F. Powers, Jr., June L. Garen and William Chaloner.*

Photos by P. Miller

Not wanting to miss a single moment of Connecticut Valley's Autumn Serenade, ATOS Regional Convention, we arrived at the Sheraton-Hartford Hotel early Friday. The hotel is only a few months old, part of the new Hartford Civic Center complex, and proved to be a pleasant base for the convention. We quickly found the ATOS hospitality room where we were welcomed and given a map to Thomaston, about an hours drive to the west.

Arriving at the Thomaston Opera House, we were greeted by organ music and Registrars Bea Miller and Gen Roberg. We were immediately taken by the portfolios, large enough to carry music, with a gold imprint of the Thomaston 3/13 Marr & Colton which had been adopted as the convention logo.

Open console was in full swing with Jack Roberg as host, and it appeared that everyone who was so inclined had ample opportunity to try the instrument which is the pride of the Connecticut Valley Chapter. The Marr & Colton sounds thrilling in the auditorium, surely as a result of countless hours of devotion.

The ATOS gift store, with quite a collection of musical goodies, was next door to the Registration Room which was bustling with enthusiasts. We also noticed a table promoting the Lyn Larsen Fan Club. Shortly we were off to the buses where we were handed a box lunch as we boarded. In spite of the rain we could see that Mother Nature was certainly arrayed in all her glory. The autumn foliage was at its peak. The rain seemed to intensify the reds, oranges and golds of the maples and the sumac along the route, and those on the buses were provided with nourishment for the soul as well as for the body.

The rain outside was soon for-

gotten when Lowell Ayars took his place at the console of the Mighty Wurlitzer at the Waterbury Civic Theatre, formerly the State Theatre. Like other theatres, this one has been rejuvenated for live presentations with the interior relamped and repainted. But best of all, the 2/10 Wurlitzer, kept in playing condition for the past 31 years by Everett Bassett, has been completely revived and given a new lease on life with the additions of Solo 16' and 4' couplers.

Lowell began with selections from "The Desert Song" and took us on a nostalgic trip down memory lane with selections like "Louise" and "Lady, Be Good." Some of his sensitive arrangements showed off many of the lighter voices of the Wurlitzer. As Lowell led a community-sing, it began raining so hard that water started to come through the ceiling. He played "On The Sunny Side Of The Street" as some people moved to drier seats. Rain may have dampened just about everything else, but certainly not the spirits of the over 300 organ buffs who sang their hearts out.

The waiting buses quickly whisked us to the Thomaston Opera House for the second concert of the afternoon. Ashley Miller demonstrated both the versatility of the Marr & Colton and his own musical ability. Ashley Miller's registrations showed off many colorful and exquisite sounds, using the newly added Gamba Celeste for the first time publicly. Many of the up tempo selections made use of the new snarly Post Horn, and he even used it successfully as a solo stop at times.

A buffet dinner had been arranged at the high school across the street. Miraculously, all were fed and back in their seats in plenty of time for the evening concert by

Lyn Larsen.

Lyn's concerts are always "a happening" and this was no exception. Right from the first chorus of "Great Day," we knew that Lyn meant it. Lyn had appeared at the Opera House for six previous concerts, and it was obvious that he was at home at the Marr & Colton. His program was varied and sprinkled with humor. Lyn also showed his talents as composer and arranger with his own "Lovers Belong To Sorrento," written during a recent trip to Italy. Lyn announced that he would like to "indulge in a whim" and forsaking the console for a few moments, demonstrated his prowess at the 88-note keyboard of the grand piano. The selection was Rachmaninoff's arrangement of Kreisler's "Liebeslied," performed with a technique and feeling equal to any concert pianist... a facet of Lyn's talent we hadn't heard before.

The "surprise" finale of this evening came in three parts, combin-







Dr. Paul Abernethy, national president.



Allen Miller, convention co-chairman and MC.



ATOS gift shop at the Hotel Sheraton-Hartford.



Ashley Miller, Lowell Ayars, Lyn Larsen. The surprise at Thomaston.

Head table: (L to R) Stillman Rice, Eleanor Weaver, Don Mac Cormack, Betty Mason, Don Hyde, Allen Miller, Paul Abernethy, Kathy Mac Cormack, Paul Taylor, Claire Rice, Harold Weaver.



ing the playing, vocal, and musical writing talents of all three of our artists. First, with Ashley Miller at the Yamaha grand piano and Lyn at the console, we heard Lyn's transcription of Chopin's "Minute Waltz in Thirds." The piece is spectacular played in the normal manner, but with the organ mimicking the piano melody a third lower, and the first and second themes played against each other as a duet, the result was stunning. Then to add to the surprise, Lowell Ayars joined the duet in "Vox" with a delightful presentation of "There's A Place In My Heart For You" written by Lyn Larsen, with lyrics recently added by Dave Lindsay. The arrangement was an orchestration to back Lowell's baritone voice, but also gave Lyn and Ashley brief solos. The audience leaped to its feet cheering and begging for more.

The 'icing on the cake' was a second piano-organ duet, a thrilling transcription of Charles Williams' beautiful "A Dream Of Olwyn," with Ashley taking the piano part of the concerto, and Lyn at the "Mighty Machine" (as he called it) portraying full orchestra. This finale was, all by itself, sufficient justification for long distance travel and the cost of the package ticket! Thank you Lowell Ayars, Lyn Larsen and Ashley Miller for being of such good will to give us those memorable moments of beauty. Also, upon the convention program committee is bestowed our gratefulness for having the divine inspiration to conceive such a marvelous culmination of compatible musical artistry.

Most of us gathered back at the Sheraton-Hartford for "a glass of orange juice" (to quote Lyn). It was an informal chance to meet and talk to the artists, and we found them all as friendly as they are talented . . . the end of a perfect day.

Sunday morning found everyone still damp, but undaunted at the



home installations of the Stocks', the Twomeys' and the Millers' who made their guests feel welcome with Bloody Marys, coffee, donuts, and organ music, despite their dripping umbrellas and wet feet. At Stocks' 3/31 Wurlitzer, we heard Phil himself as well as Duane Boise, winner of the CVTOS student scholarship competition this year. It is certainly rewarding to hear these young people carrying on the theatre organ tradition. The Stocks' organ, largest in New England, is installed under the garage and speaks into the living room through a tone chute. The console is handsome and retains its original finish.

We then visited Allen Miller's 3/11 Miller Mini-Monster. It is a new "theatre organ" built and voiced to fit the home environment. This unusual installation is on the second floor over the garage, with the organ installed in a large closet. Using solid-state relays and some electronic pedal, the sound is certainly big and beautiful. Allen and Mark Gluhosky, another student scholarship winner, demonstrated the organ and attached Knabe-Ampico grand piano, then we heard Lyn Larsen again, but this time by way of punched paper rolls he recorded on the Austin Quadruplex Player.

Our last stop was at the Twomeys, who not only have a fine 2/7 style E Wurlitzer, but an extensive collection of music boxes and reproducing player pianos. The Steinway Duo-Art was playing away as we entered and were handed refreshments. Downstairs in a charming recreation room was the nicely installed Wurlitzer. We were impressed by the brand new look of the entire instrument, which was the second we saw with an attached Ampico piano.

This one, a rare late model Mason & Hamlin, played expressively from the console, as did Allen Miller's. In both instruments, the combination was excellent. Carmen Charte demonstrated the organ, which spoke directly into the room, but wasn't overpowering. We were told that Allen Miller did revoicing and regulation to fit the Wurlitzer sound to the room. As with the other homes, visitors had a chance to play, and we heard some fine music.

Rushing back to the hotel, we



Allan Taylor played Trinity College Chapel 3/78 Austin.



Waterbury Civic Theatre marquee.



Lowell Ayars the singing organist. Waterbury Civic Theatre 2/10 Wurlitzer.



Harold La Chapelle played dinner music at the piano during the banquet.



Larry Fenner at Twomey's 2/7 Wurlitzer.

Lyn Larsen in a rare appearance at the piano at the Opera House.







Ashley Miller and Lyn Larsen after their duet at Thomaston Opera House.



Sam and Elaine Blatt sign up new members for the Lyn Larsen Fan Club.



Mark Gluhosky at the 3/11 Miller mini-monster.

Everett Bassett makes a point to (L to R) Eleanor Bassett, Bea Miller, Ida Smith, Peggy Ray, Eleanor Weaver, Marilyn and Paul Plainer during "Afterglow" party.



An unfortunate turn of events occurred as the group was leaving the Thomaston Opera House to take in the buffet dinner across the street. Thelma Douglas of CATOE lost her footing as she stepped from the Opera House steps to the sidewalk, and suffered a fractured ankle. ATOSers quickly came to her aid with umbrellas and warm coats until the local police had determined she could be moved safely. Thelma was rushed to the hospital in Waterbury, where she was quickly X-rayed and fitted with a special shoe. Her friends brought her dinner from the Thomaston buffet, and she was back at the Opera House with crutches, and in a special easy chair in time for Lyn's concert. Said Lyn, "You just can't keep a dedicated organ nut down!" Larsen later autographed Thelma's shoe.

quickly changed and went to the Cocktail Hour, then came the Grand Banquet. The meal was superb, and while we ate, we were treated to piano music for dining by Harold La Chapelle.

Allen Miller, who was MC for the entire convention, introduced the head table, which included National President Dr. Paul Abernethy, THE-ATRE ORGAN Publisher Betty Mason and CVTOS officers. Roll call showed a large number of chapters represented with visitors from Canada to Florida. After the banquet, a movie, *The Austin Story*, was shown. This touches upon the history of the organ and shows the building of a modern pipe organ in excellent detail. We were told that the film is available to ATOS chapters for showing at meetings by contacting Austin Organs in Hartford.

At this point, shuttle buses took us to Trinity College, where Dan Kehoe, Master Carillonneur, gave us a recital on the 32 bell carillon. As we took seats in the chapel, we marvelled at the English Gothic construction which could not be duplicated today, and the 3/78 "French" Austin, which fills the rear portion of the chapel. To move from theatre style of playing to classical, it was only necessary to change location, as all three of our featured organists are as comfortably at ease playing both types of music. Lowell Ayars, Ashley Miller, and Lyn Larsen were joined by Trinity Senior, Allan Taylor. Allan has only studied organ for four years, most recently with the master of French organ, Clarence Watters. He has a controlled technique, hardly moving at the console, yet his playing was expressive and full of excitement. His playing of the Dupre "Prelude and Fugue in G Minor" was thrilling.

Each of the four artists provided us with a wide program variation. Outstanding selections were Lowell Ayars' playing of Sibelius' "Finlandia" which seemed to fit the Austin. The "French" reeds sounded like impending doom during the storm. Ashley Miller's playing of J. Clokey's "Ballade" brought up impressions of dark, dank castles and moats. Lyn Larsen conjured up "forest creatures" with Grieg's "Notorno" (Nocturne). Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance March" was not only exciting, but seemed to

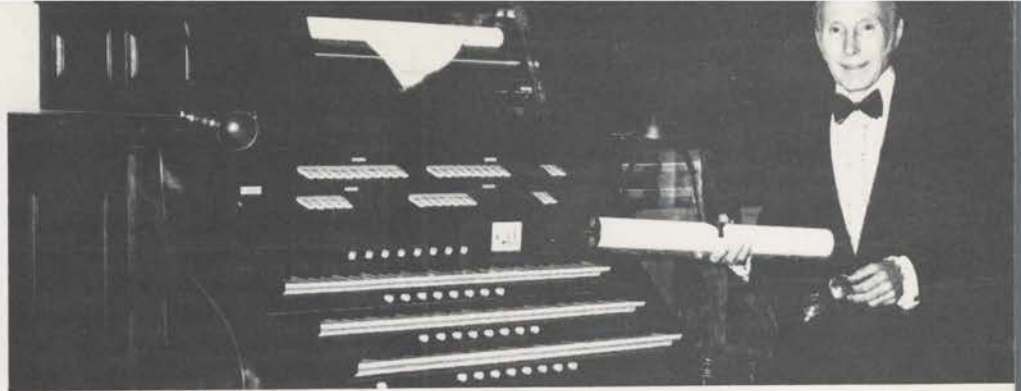


be fitting for both the instrument and the college chapel. The accomplished performances of all the artists maintained the standards set the day before.

On the way back to the hotel, some of us took in the organ crawl to the Aetna Life home office auditorium. Hartford is, of course, the insurance city, and the Aetna Life building is the largest colonial building in the world. In the auditorium is a 3/19 Austin residence organ built in 1931 with a Premier Quadruplex Player. This player was the greatest of all paper roll players, and this is the only one still attached to its original organ. Allen Miller demonstrated rolls by Lynnwood Farnham recorded in 1931, and excerpts from the *Nutcracker Suite*, typical of organ transcriptions played in the '20s and '30s. Some recently recorded rolls were played, including Lyn's roll of the "Minute Waltz in Thirds" heard the night before, played live at Thomaston.

Monday was reserved for unwinding and travel home with stops at various home installations throughout the state. Maps and descriptions of the installations had been provided, and we were free to set up our own itineraries. The sun had finally come out, and it was a great day for viewing foliage. Open homes included the Weavers' 3/9 Marr & Colton, Stillman Rice's 3 manual custom Allen, Bassetts' 2/4 Robert Morton pit organ, John Stokes' 2/5 Wurlitzer, Robergs' 3/10 Wurlitzer with church pipes, and John Starr's "Crystal Palace" 3/13 Wurlitzer and museum. Student scholarship winners were on hand to perform at each installation.

In fact, if there was any one impression which we took home, it was the friendliness and compatibility of the entire convention group. It is our belief that the outgoing warmth of the Connecticut Valley Chapter was contagious and spread through us all. Co-Chairmen Allen Miller and Don Hyde, and their committees, obviously worked hard to bring us such an enjoyable weekend. Our appetites were well fed with friendship, food and music. If this weekend is any sampling of what Connecticut Valley has in store for us during their 1978 National Convention, we look forward to our return visit. □



Ashley Miller holds roll for Austin player, Aetna Life Home Office Auditorium, 3/19 Austin.



Open house, Phil Stock's 3/31 Wurlitzer.

#### CHAPTERS REPRESENTED

Connecticut Valley  
 New York  
 Eastern Massachusetts  
 Garden State  
 Delaware Valley  
 Potomac Valley  
 Niagara Frontier  
 Wolverine  
 Motor City  
 Chicago Area  
 Land O'Lakes  
 Western Reserve  
 Toledo  
 Gulf Coast  
 Southeastern  
 Central Indiana



Thomaston registration.



(L to R) George Lewis and convention co-chairman Don Hyde discuss convention planning with Chuck and Mary Schrader, 1976 national convention chairman.

Buffet dinner at the high school in Thomaston.

