

Opening of the 1974 California State Fair was a time of frustration and disappointment for the Sierra Chapter crew installing the George Seaver Memorial Organ. Construction of the Golden Bear Theatre had been delayed so it was only a week before opening day that the organ could be moved into its new chambers, and it was the last week of the fair before it was finally playing.

Opening of the 1975 California State Fair was a different story. There sat our little beauty, ready, able and willing. True, we were unhappy that the console had to be removed from its platform and placed orchestra-center because it interfered with the sight-lines of the nightly stage show. Nevertheless, at noon of the opening day, August 22, Jeff Barker, the fair's official organist, strode to the spot-lighted console and began the first of thirty-two one-hour concerts he was to play during the nineteen day run of the fair.

The organ was a "must see" at the fair and though an actual count wasn't made, hundreds of fair visitors saw and heard the Wurlitzer every day. The constant crowds around the door and small window looking into the chamber, convinced us that larger viewing facilities were a must for next year.

In addition to Jeff's many concerts, Sierra members entertained each evening from 7:00 to 7:30 while the audience for the evenings stage show were seated. A total of twenty-five concerts were played by Jim Brown, Tony Borgia, Don Croom, Diane Foster, Bob Hartzell, Sue Lang, Mary Ann Mendenhall, Martha Quinney, Chuck Shumate, Art Phelen and Milton Thorley. All did a great job, and for many it was their first try at entertaining the public.

It was decided that someone from Sierra Chapter should be present to answer questions and give out membership information, so I spent several afternoons doing just that and the questions and comments were plentiful; but for every question about the organ, there were three asking, "Can you tell me where the rest room is?"

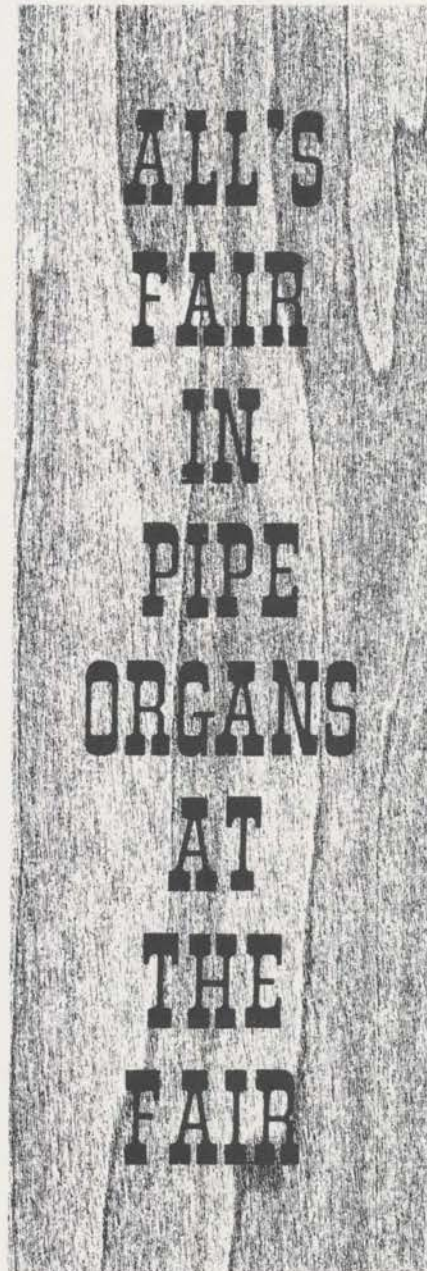
Questions and comments about the organ ranged from the ridiculous to the sublime, and listening to visitors explain the organ's operation to

each other was a revelation in organ operation. "Well its played by steam. There's a boiler back in one of the rooms and - - -." "Those little doors (the shutters) open and close, building up air pressure to make the pipes play." "It (the organ) probably came off a merry-go-round." (I can see Jeff at the console, riding round and round amongst the prancing horses.) "All those drums and stuff up there are the Rhythm Master." "It's an electronic organ but it doesn't use speakers." "Oh, there are speakers, but they're down where you can't see them." "There used to be lots of them, but they're so old there probably ain't more than four

or five in the whole country." And the questions: "How long did it take you to make this machine?" "Do you put this thing in for every fair?" "How can he play all those pipes when he's so far away?" (The console is about fifty feet from the chamber.) While watching a regulator: "Why does it breath so jumpy?" And shades of modern day theatre organ; "Did it come out of a pizza restaurant?" "How come some of the (mitered) horns got all bent up?" Of course there were lots of intelligent questions as well.

Senior Citizens Day (they're allowed into the fair free) was beautiful. Unlike other days when people drifted in and out of the concerts, many of the older people stayed through entire concerts and some came back for more. They were lavish with their compliments. "It reminds me so much of when I was young." "It's just like being a kid in New York again and attending the Paramount and Roxy." "What a wonderful way for a talented young man (Jeff) to make a living." Three elderly ladies stated: "I used to play the organ for silent pictures." One of them stated that she played the organ in the Del Paso Theatre (North Sacramento). "I haven't heard such beautiful music in forty years." "Why don't we have pipe organ programs on the radio anymore like we used to?" And finally, several people of varying ages asked: "Why don't you present more organ concerts here and why isn't there a little theatre drama group to present plays and make use of this fine theatre?" We agreed we also would like to see more use of the theatre and asked them to write letters to the fair board and Governor Brown.

The great interest shown in our Seaver Memorial Organ has already inspired us and we are making plans for improving and adding to the organ during the coming year. The fair board is also enthusiastic and will install permanent theatre seats to replace the present folding chairs, as well as other improvements to the theatre itself. Like all other owners of theatre organs, we are hoping that with proper care and upbringing our little 2/8 will someday grow up into a big 4/20, or even a king-size 4/36 and will be used all year around to entertain and educate the public. □



by Bob Longfield