

VOX POPS



Conducted by Stu Green

Readers are encouraged to submit interesting sidelights on the organ hobby (exclusive of chapter news items) material they believe will be of general interest about local organ activities and installations and the people who work at the hobby. We know "there's VOX POPS in them there chapters" and it only requires a 9c postcard to get it to VOX POPS Editor, Box 3564, Granada Hills, California 91344. If the contributor can afford a 13c stamp, why not include a black and white photo which need not be returned.

In an interview published in the "News and Observer" (Raleigh, North Carolina), Lee Erwin waxed warmly for ATOS.

"Erwin credits the American Theatre Organ Society more than any other group for the current trend toward preservation.

'By saving the organs, they have often saved the theatres,' he said. But they saved more than buildings, they helped preserve an art."

The erstwhile "Moon River" radio organist was in North Carolina to play a concert at the Carolina Theatre in Greensboro.

Lee Erwin has had some farflung musical adventures in addition to the above. He went south again in December to play a concert on former ATOS prexy Paul Abernethy's home-based Robert Morton, then to the Trenton (N.J.) War Memorial for a concert on the big Moller. Back in November he sat in for an ailing

Lyn Larsen on short notice at the Embassy Theatre's Page organ in Fort Wayne, Indiana, after an early morning flight from New York. He had only four hours break in on the Page but must have done a good job if the remark of one lady in the audience is indicative:

"You may not be as 'pretty' as Lyn — but you sure play pretty."



When George Wright was working in New York City from 1944 to 1951, playing daily on Prudential's Jack Berch Show ("The shortest 15 minutes in radio.") with accordionist Charles Magnante, guitarist Tony Mottola, and announcer Eddie Dunn, he also played the New York Paramount's 4/36 Wurlitzer several times a day. According to Eddie Dunn, Wright had a great admirer in Magnante, who often bought a ticket to hear the organist play the Paramount "Queen Mother." His favorite seat was in the balcony where the "great waves of sound from those shallow chambers flowed over." Eddie is eagerly anticipating a reunion with George Wright during the appearance of his old colleague at the RTOS (Rochester, N.Y.) console on February 26.



From the Land of Lincoln chapter, LOLTOS Pres. Bob Schmoock writes about chapter involvement in making a theatre interior look better. Before a recent Rex Koury concert at the Coronado theatre in Rockford,



The forty-foot elevation provided Coronado Manager Dennis Morlan a closeup of a lovely he had often admired from afar.

Illinois, chapter members cooperated with theatre management in cleaning 1600 square feet of grimy mirrors in the Coronado's lobby. Scaffolding got access to the high spots ladders wouldn't reach. Involved were gallons of glass cleaner, a case of paper towels, many sore muscles and the enthusiasm of theatre manager Dennis Morlan who pitched in with the volunteers for sometimes dizzying acrobatics on the scaffolding. The results were most satisfying, even sparkling, according to concert attendees.



That organ safari has had some interesting sidelights — like romance. It has been revealed that Angeleno Patty Barnes, who assisted



Coronado Theatre lobby during mirror washing day.

in coordinating the safari stateside, and one of the British Northern tour guides Rod Skelding, developed an attachment for one another during the bus trips around northern England. After a few days bussing(!) they knew they had something special. Then the Safari ended and they separated. Organist Skelding, whose first recording is due for release shortly, and lovely Patty later spent a fortune on trans-Atlantic phone calls during the five months following the safari's return to the USA just to keep it alive. They just had to see one another again, so Patty planed over for Christmas in England with Rod. She's back in LA with stars in her eyes and a sparkler on her finger. Rod will come to the USA about May 1 and the wedding will follow, "... hopefully to the accompaniment of a large Wurlitzer" glows Patty. So, there, you critics who complain that "this colyum aint got no romance." To those in search of a soul mate, there's a new safari being organized for later this year.



Report on the Dick Loderhose 4/42 installation in the Bay theatre, Seal Beach, Calif.: chambers completed, regulators and chests re-leathered. The theatre continues to operate with quality films during the installation.



From Chicago comes the good news that the Montclare theatre Barton continues to "purr" on an average of three nights a week. One recent highlight was a childrens' Christmas party which drew a capacity house (1200). It was sponsored by Chicago's 36th Ward alderman, and the organist was Bill Benedict, for once wearing a different hat from that of CATOE's able publicist.



New York's Beacon Theatre, once called "Bagdad on Broadway" because of its middle east decor, has been closed. The 2657-seat house which was the site of a number of theatre organ activities when theatre historian Ben Hall was alive, had been used as a rock and blues theatre for the past 2½ years. Inability to obtain name acts and financial

difficulties forced the owners' hands. Meanwhile, fate of the Beacon's 4/19 Wurlitzer, which was a focal point during the 1970 ATOS Convention, is unknown. The organ had been maintained by Ron Smith, Roy Sharp, Joe Vanore and others.



Out in California, ATOS pioneer Dick Simonton was exultant; after years of "trying," he and the Mrs. became grandparents, reports Patty Barnes. On Dec. 13, a son was born to Richard Jr. and Christina Simonton. He'll be named Richard III, with no apologies to Bill Shakespeare. The baby made his entry at 9 pounds, one ounce, and is 20 inches tall.

The senior Simontons have four grown children, the majority having experienced marriage but this is the first grandchild, circa 4 years after the marriage of Dick Jr. and Christina. Dick Sr., wearing a proud grin, hoped this would be the first of many grandchildren.



In Pompano Beach, Florida, organist Karl Cole looked back on his first year of operating his "Medley" restaurant-with-plug-in organ music. Karl, recently back home after a concert tour ("28 concerts in 40 days!"), was grateful to the many



Celebrating his first year as a restaurateur, Karl Cole is visited by the Don Bakers.

ATOSers who came to make his undertaking a success, among them such *prominenti* as Dick Kline, Lowell Ayars, Gaylord Carter, Reginald Foort and Don Baker. Karl says, "ATOSers make good customers."



Two of the most enthusiastic ATOS members to return from the European safari were Hall of Famer Fred Feibel and his wife, Lenore. Fred lavishes hearty praise on the organizers of the venture. "It is remarkable how one meets so many new faces when on a tour," he said, "who all share a common interest, the wonderful pipe organ. It would take dozens of pages to describe in detail all the interesting organ installations we visited and the enthu-



Hall of Famer Fred Feibel inspects the organ console in Blenheim Palace, the birthplace and early residence of Sir Winston Churchill.

siasm of the British who played for us.

"Of course, Notre Dame Cathedral and the special reception and recital given by Pierre Cochereau in Paris were glorious events. We wound up in New York City afterwards, my old stamping ground. I never played at Radio City Music Hall, but I had been offered an organist post there once. I declined since it involved night work; after 13½ years of working in theatres seven nights a week, I felt I had done my share."



When the late Leonard MacClain played a concert at the Lorin Whitney studio (Glendale, Calif.) in 1960, no less than five Robert Zieglers came to hear Leonard at the 4/30 Robert Morton. All were related to Leonard's wife, Dottie, and all lived in southern California where the provocative Dottie was also raised. In late 1975 one of the five Robert Zieglers, Dottie's cousin, moved east and settled near the Pennsylvania home of Dottie and her husband, Grant Whitcomb — "Melody Hill." Robert is a frequent visitor and enjoys playing duets with Dottie and Grant on their custom Schober and two Hammonds. But a major project looms — the reassembly of Roberts 4-deck theatre organ.

"Now if I could just lure the other four Robert Zieglers to the Melody Hill area," says Dottie, "What delightful confusion that could bring to Delaware Valley!"



Organist Tiny James, absent from the concert scene since the 1972 ATOS convention (he played at the Byrd in Richmond) is back at the console, illustrating the "intermission music" which has made him well known in the Bay Area of California wherever the pipes were playable. A few years ago Tiny experienced a seige of "ticker trouble" which grounded him except for a rare impromptu concert and the chairmanship of the annual Home Organ Festival.

But on November 21, he was "back in the saddle," playing a concert for the San Diego, Calif., ATOS chapter on the 5/27 Moller located in Organ Power No. 2 in the suburb



Tiny James found the big Moller to his liking.
(Stufoto)

of Pacific Beach. Twice the membership of the chapter filed into the pizzeria for the Sunday afternoon concert. The program ranged from Tiny's "trademarks" such as "The Object of My Affection" and "Hindustan" to the current "Watch What Happens." He did a Crawford-like "Birth of Passion" (1910) and a lively "Ivory Rag," with the Moller's brand new *Trompette en Chamade* doing a New Orleans cornet "ride." During the program, Tiny honored two departed notables, Bay Area bandleader Anson Weeks and British organist Vic Hammett, as well as non-notable Stu Green, who proclaimed from the audience that he was still living.

At the close of the concert, it was obvious that his forced exile from the console had not cost Tiny any of the moxie which his audiences so admire. San Diegans clustered around the maw of the huge Moller console to shake Tiny's hand and shoot photos. One fan, obviously a victim of too loud pizzeria staffers, was heard to say:

"Tiny brought out subtle sounds on that organ, ones I didn't know it had."



Want to buy a fully equipped 2700-seat theatre, which includes a "Giant Wurlitzer organ, excellent condition"? It can be yours for \$125,000, a truly bargain price. The film trade magazines have been running a for sale advertisement for the Malco theatre (originally RKO

Orpheum) in Memphis, Tennessee which states that the house is operating at a profit. For \$300,000 you can buy the entire building, which includes rental office space which brings in \$30,000 a year. Of course, our object in bringing the Malco to readers' attention is the hope that there's an "angel" someplace who might rescue it. It's happened many times before, but usually the rescuers are locals who organize and pass the hat for funding. The prospect of another homeless theatre organ (if there is no buyer) doesn't set well.



It's too late to save Pittsburgh's Rowland theatre; the wrecking ball already has been busy. One of the trade magazines ran a brief obituary for the house described as "by far the finest in the tri-state area." The suburban theatre, dark for a dozen years featured vaudeville, stage attractions, personal appearances of movie stars, an 11-piece all-girl pit orchestra, newsreels, comedy shorts and feature films. The most memorable organist was Harry E. Reiff who popularized songs via illustrated slides. No mention was made of the brand of organ used by the theatre, so perhaps a Pittsburgh ATOSer with a long memory can fill us in.

It's not much comfort to know that the wreckers were having a difficult time. Not an easy pushover, the Rowland could have stood for hundreds of years with its all-steel, concrete, granite and marble construction, concludes the obit.



Miami Valley chapter member Tim Rowe apparently believes in dressing for the occasion. From Springfield, Ohio, Dave Marshall describes a screening of "Mysterious Monsters" at the local State Cinema. When the film ended, eerie organ music filled the house and as the lights came up all eyes focussed on the 3/7 Wurlitzer console. Playing was the Frankenstein monster, or a very reasonable facsimile created by organist Rowe. Dave shot a photo but sadly the print wasn't contrasty enough for reproduction. But we could make out the ghastly features of the black-clad creature at the console — the facial stitching scars, the

deep-set, cruel eyes, and the high-domed forehead containing the pilfered brain of a criminal . . .

"You should see Tim when he wears makeup!" chortles Dave.



When organist Doc Bebko paid one of his periodic visits to the Radio City Music Hall in October, he questioned the assistant manager about the former chief organist, the late Dick Leibert.

"The official told me," says Doc, "That when he was 19, he was an usher at the Hall at the time of its opening in December 1932, and witnessed the audition for chief organist. The PA system kept bellowing 'Dick Leibert, Dick Leibert, come to the console!' When he completed his audition (a medley of the tunes the other 12 aspirants had played) before 'Roxy,' the famous showman said: 'You are no longer Dick Leibert. From now on, you are Mr. Richard Leibert, Chief Organist of the Music Hall.'"

Dock revealed that Ray Bohr and Johnny Detroy are the current RCMH staffers, with Cecil Benz subbing. Jimmy Paulin has left.



People who have been wondering why the 6/62 Barton in the Chicago Stadium hasn't been booming forth this winter as much as in the past, were provided the reason in a recent issue of "The Sporting News," baseball's bible. Comiskey Park organist since 1970, Nancy Faust, was appointed organist at the Stadium for Chicago Bills' Games. Instead of playing the Barton, high in the first balcony, she plays an electronic at a corner of the court downstairs, a model "more adaptable to her bouncy style." She plays everything by ear, including chromatic scales which follow foul balls down the screen in the summer.



Dr. John Landon, University of Kentucky's gift to the literary and theatre organ worlds, continues as busy as ever. With his first book on the life of Jesse Crawford selling nicely, the manuscript of the second book, dealing with the history of the theatre organ, is in the hands of the publisher. A third work on the history of social welfare is in prepara-

tion. Rev. John appears regularly at his Sunday pulpit, necessitating preparation of his weekly sermons. Weekends are spent playing the 3/7 Page in the Anderson, Ind. Paramount Theatre. Spare time? John is installing a 3/10 Wurlitzer in his home.



The somewhat hush-hush reopening of the Solano Beach (Calif.) theatre as a "soup and salad" restaurant with organ music has some interesting sidelights. The organ is a 4/21 Robert Morton, originally in the Midland theatre, Kansas City, where Bill Wright used to play it. Bill is now the manager of the Eastland theatre in West Covina, Calif. where he plays intermissions on a Conn electronic, model 645. The Solano Beach theatre (actually Sandy Fleet's "Organ Power No. 3") opened without fanfare in late October '76 with Gaylord Carter at the keyboards. Then a young (23) man from St. Louis took over, Jack Jenkins, a southern Illinois University grad. Jack has been playing during the supper hour, then cueing a silent film, almost nightly, since the opening. The soup and salad menu is an experimental one, offered on the assumption that perhaps everyone may not prefer pizza. Solano Beach is a few miles north of San Diego.



Jack Jensen at the Solano Theatre 4/21 Robert Morton. (Stufoto)



The Solano Theatre offers a menu of salad, soup and silent movies, all with organ accompaniment. Sometimes even 'talkies. (Stufoto)



Bill Wright in 1928 at the Robert Morton pipe organ in Loew's Theatre, Kansas City.



Bill, forty years later at the Conn Deluxe theatre organ in W. Covina.



From Detroit, Greg Bellamy writes that most of his recent spare time (between 2:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m.) has been invested in working on

restoration of the 4/36 Wurlitzer and the 3/12 lobby Moller in the 5042-seat Fox Theatre in preparation for the Dec. 5 concert for Father Jim Miller. Greg, a member of a group called "Friends of the Fox," says:

"This will be the first time since John Muri's 1971 concert that the instrument will be heard complete. We have re-leathered and refinished the console and recovered several of the important 25" wind pressure ranks. More work to get the organ in reliable shape is planned — to bring this, the mightiest (4/36) Wurlitzer left in its original location, back to the public eye." And ear, we might add.

Canada's Clealan Blakely upon seeing Lloyd Klos at a concert, said, "I have a bone to pick with you. The date of the opening of the Brooklyn Paramount is 1928 not 1938, as stated on Rosa Rio's record jacket. I visited that house in 1929 when attending school." Klos, who wrote the jacket notes, checked with the man in charge, Bill Yeoman, who verified that the error was made by the typesetter. "Don't believe I've ever written notes for one of those things without an error creeping in," says Klos. "Printers and writers aren't very compatible anyway."

The former 400-seat Indianapolis Civic Theatre is safe due to a couple of the type of "angels" the theatre and organ world needs so badly. In 1974, Central Indiana Chapter members Phil and Betty Hedback purchased the Civic and started renovating — new heating, air conditioning, carpeting, plumbing, wiring — the works, including installation of a 2/10 Page theatre organ. The house was renamed the Hedbeck Community theatre, and leased to a 21-year-old civic theatrical organization, Footlite Musicals. Since the organ has been perking, CIC has sponsored concerts by John Muri, the James family and Walt Strony.

On Dec. 10 last, the Hedbacks gave the citizens of Indianapolis a Christmas present — the now mint condition Hedback Theatre. Actually, the theatre was given to Footlite Musicals, who will be responsible for the house's future.

Asked why they donated the theatre, which is the fulcrum of a much larger civic center plan, the Hedbacks replied that they wanted to give Indianapolis something permanent in appreciation of the years of business success they have enjoyed in the community.

Watch the Hedbacks; they have just started. What an honor for ATOS that they are members!

Manager Margaret Sabo writes from Philly that Andy Kasparian has been selected to hold down the staff position at the Canadian "Organ Grinder's" new pizzeria in St. Louis. The new "Organ Grinder's" opener will be St. Louis' long time favorite, Stan Kann, then Andy will take over as resident organist. The organ, according to Don Thompson, is a "Dave Junchen Special," meaning it has been assembled from compatible parts of several organs, same as the firm's Toronto operation.



Andy Kasparian. A new pizzeria post looms.

Andy hasn't been idle since his exposure at the 1976 ATOS convention, having played concerts at the No. Tonawanda Riviera Theatre, the Auditorium in Rochester in addition to holding down his plug-in job four nights a week at a New Jersey watering place.

The St. Louis "Organ Grinder" was set to open late in January '77.

In "The Marx Bros Scrapbook" (Darien House), Groucho reveals that his brothers Chico and Harpo were silent film accompanists —

briefly. During an interview with Marxabilia compiler Richard Anobile, Groucho said:

"(Chico) was working in a small nickelodeon... he stayed there about a month playing piano as background for silent movies. When he quit he got Harpo the job, but Harpo could play only one song. He only lasted a month. After all, if there are cowboys and Indians shooting at each other you can't play 'Love Me and the World is Mine.' So Harpo was fired. (But) remember, the people paid only a nickel to get in. What could they expect?"

Utica, N.Y.'s conductor of the "Organ Loft" radio program, Don Robinson, reports that he's well into the 15th consecutive year of broadcasting. The show is eagerly awaited each week by organ buffs in the Rome-Utica-Little Falls environs. Don pleases all followers of the pipe organ by devoting roughly half the program to the classical organ and the remainder to the theatre organ. There are occasional changes of format when Don uses taped interviews with some of the leading artists. Besides serving General Electric as an engineer, Don is also an organist at a Utica church, and in his spare time, helps maintain the 3/13 Wurlitzer in Proctor's High School in that city. His brother, Melvin, is kept busy traveling about the country, servicing organ installations.

In a few months, the Jacques Cattell Press and R.R. Bowker Co. will publish a new reference book: "Complete Guide to the Halls of Fame in the United States and Canada." To date, there are over 600 of these institutions, and they range in size from the "Count Dracula Society Horror Hall of Fame" which has four members to those with a hundred or more. The "ATOS Theatre Organists Hall of Fame" will be included in the publication, as committee chairman Lloyd Klos has dispatched information on the founding of our Hall, its selection procedure, committee members, and list of entrants with year of selection and a thumbnail sketch of each. According to the Cattell Press, the ATOS Hall is larger than average, and is the only one whose mem-

bers are restricted to the greats who played a specific musical instrument.



From New York we learn that the grand opening of the late Ben Hall's "Little Mother" 2/6 Wurlitzer in the Carnegie Hall Cinema has been advanced to March 17 (Saint Patrick's day) due to numerous installation delays. There are plans to add three more ranks, but there is no news regarding the piano apparently lost while the organ was stored out west.



For a number of years, the status of the First Universalist Church in Rochester, N.Y. was in doubt. This is the edifice wherein is housed the Hope-Jones Opus 2, installed in 1908, and fears were expressed awhile back as to its fate. Now, the dark clouds have been dispelled. The church has been declared a historic landmark, and an ambitious program has been inaugurated to completely restore and renovate the historic pipe organ. A committee has been formed to raise funds, and an "angel" has come forth to pledge two dollars for every dollar raised, up to \$10,000. This is indeed a worthwhile effort as there are very few organs left which were built in the Hope-Jones' factory in Elmira, N.Y.



Billy Nalle reports from Wichita that Carl Packer, a member of Wichita Theatre Organ Inc., has purchased a 2/9 Wurlitzer that former Dallas resident Jim Sanford had stashed near his Texas home. The



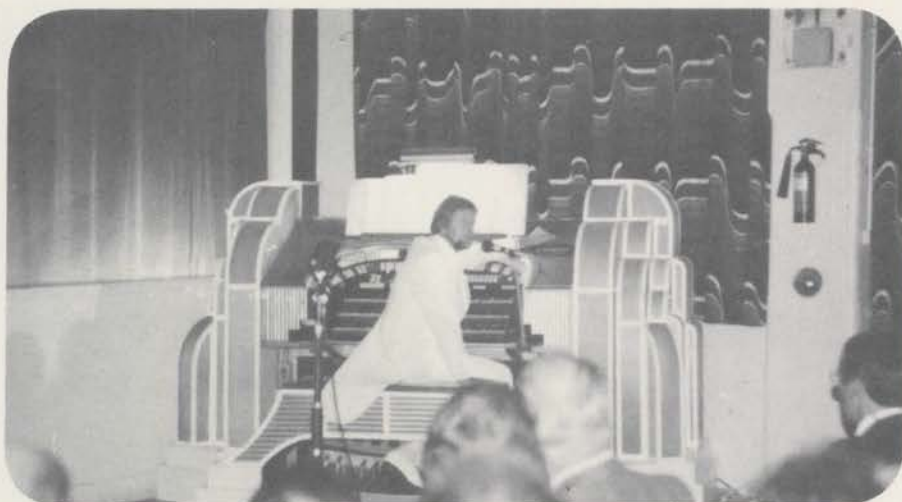
Billy Nalle (Bill Pearce Photo)

instrument will have been transported to Wichita by now. Billy says that the organ will be installed in a new home Packer will build.

Incidentally, Billy waxes most enthusiastic about the tapings he made on the RTOS 4/22 Wurlitzer in Rochester N.Y. The music will be released as a disc by Advent Records shortly. Billy feels it's his best work to date.



Don Thompson, back from an extensive English concert tour, reports from Toronto that he sat in for Hector Olivera in Syracuse when the latter was grounded by a foot injury. The Empire State Theatre and Musical Instrument Museum gave Don only 24 hours notice for the Dec. 14 concert, so Don's large



Don Thompson on tour. Shown at the console of the Marston Green Compton in Britain

memorized repertoire came in handy. Don was glad to see veteran Syracuse organist Luella Wickham in the audience in the N.Y. State Fairgrounds auditorium. The organ is the 3/11 Wurlitzer from the levelled Keith's theatre.

Don adds that he is set for a February classical concert at St. Paul's church in Toronto, playing an immense Casavant. While his program will feature works by Bach and Gigout, he'll include a couple of lighter items such as William Walton's "Crown Imperial" march and Billy Nalle's contrapuntal treatment of "All the Things You Are" dubbed "Alles Was Du Bist."



Harvey Heck. He's playing a 'Furioso.' (Stulfo)

In Agoura, Calif., veteran organ enthusiast Harvey Heck read the newspaper from Santa Ana and did an Edgar Kennedy "slow burn." The article purported to be an account of the restoration and installation of the Wurlitzer organ in the Pipe Organ Pizza pasta parlor in Santa Ana. Apparently some local nepotism/patriotism overcame the Santa Ana sheet's reporter because locals were credited with all the work Harvey had done on the former Paul Pease residence organ to get it in shape for pizzeria service.

To set the record straight, Harvey Heck wants it known that he overhauled, nursed, polished, cleaned, releathered and supervised installation of now tip-top Wurli in the Pipe Organ Pizza.

Incidentally, the chief organist is Tom Shean, and he is doing fine. □