

# Frederick Kinsley

## HALL OF FAMER

by Lloyd E. Klos

When Frederick Kinsley was elected to the Theatre Organists Hall of Fame in 1973, one of his daughters, Mrs. Jean Saling, was informed by ATOS member Bill Hill. She contacted the writer, evincing extreme pleasure over the honor bestowed upon her late father. When we suggested that she provide material for a feature story for THEATRE ORGAN, she was most agreeable.

Frederick Kinsley was born in New Haven, Conn., May 4, 1886 into a very musical family. His mother, a fine musician, gave him early piano training, beginning at the age of six. On his mother's side, he was related to Franz Abt. From his father's family, he also inherited a natural inclination for music.

For six years, he studied with his mother, and at the age of twelve, was appearing in concerts throughout New England as a boy prodigy. At eighteen, he was at a crossroads: whether to continue as a pianist or become an organist.

He decided on organ study, and from the start was determined to be a concert organist. He was accepted at Yale University, and in order to defray expenses, worked his way through college by playing in orchestras. He also played piano in a vaudeville pit and learned the ways of this facet of show business. His teacher at Yale was the noted Jepson.

A graduate of Yale's School of Music in the class of 1907 with a B.A., Mr. Kinsley also studied abroad. He was a Licentiate of Trinity College in London, which is the equivalent to a B.A. degree. Then came study at King's College in London where he won a competitive fellowship. There was also a course of organ study in France with the noted organist-composer Charles M. Widor.

Following this training, Mr. Kinsley's first professional work upon returning to the United States was in the dual position of organist and choir master of St. Paul's Church in New Haven, Conn. He had married vocalist Hazel Munson in 1907 in Hamden, Conn. They had two daughters, Jean and Ruth.

Then World War I came, and as a member of the 102nd Infantry, a part of the 26th Division, he saw service in France for 18 months. Upon his return, he found that his position at St. Paul's was occupied by another organist. Feeling quite upset over this (there was no G.I. Bill of Rights then), he went to New York City where the theatres beckoned. He was employed first by a Fox house, rapidly worked his way up through theatres such as the Albe-marle, Cameo, Rialto and Strand, and in 1921, became chief organist at the Hippodrome, then the world's largest theatre. This was the era when big shows there were delighting the patrons. Fred played the organ with the orchestra for the silent movies, and gave short recitals during intermissions.

The instrument was an antique Midmer-Losh and was completely buried under the stage. When Keiths took over the theatre and introduced vaudeville in 1923, Mr. Kinsley was retained because of the excellent impression his work had created. It is believed that he was the first theatre organist to introduce feature solos on a vaudeville program.

During his Hippodrome engagement, he made over 60 Edison records which were released before the theatre organ was featured by any other phonograph company.

For a brief period in 1927, he was employed at Warner's Piccadilly where he followed John Hammond

at the 4/28 Marr & Colton. That excellent organ was not used very long as Vitaphone accompaniment to the feature became the policy of the house.

Toward the end of 1927, Mr. Kinsley was back at the Hippodrome, this time playing a 4/29 Wurlitzer which had been installed in 1926. (This organ was removed in 1931 and installed in the Palace Theatre in Albany where Rex Koury was featured.) Mr. Kinsley's assistant at the Hippodrome was John C. Pfeiffer, and it was at this time that Kinsley appeared on radio, using the Welte Mignon studio instrument.

While at the Hippodrome, he also was engaged in teaching. Eddie Baker (Doc Bebko) has fond memories of Fred Kinsley. "I became aware of him when I first heard him playing the Midmer-Losh in the

Frederick Kinsley acknowledges applause at New York's Hippodrome. The console of the 4/29 Wurlitzer is shown, which would date the picture about 1927.

(Saling Coll.)



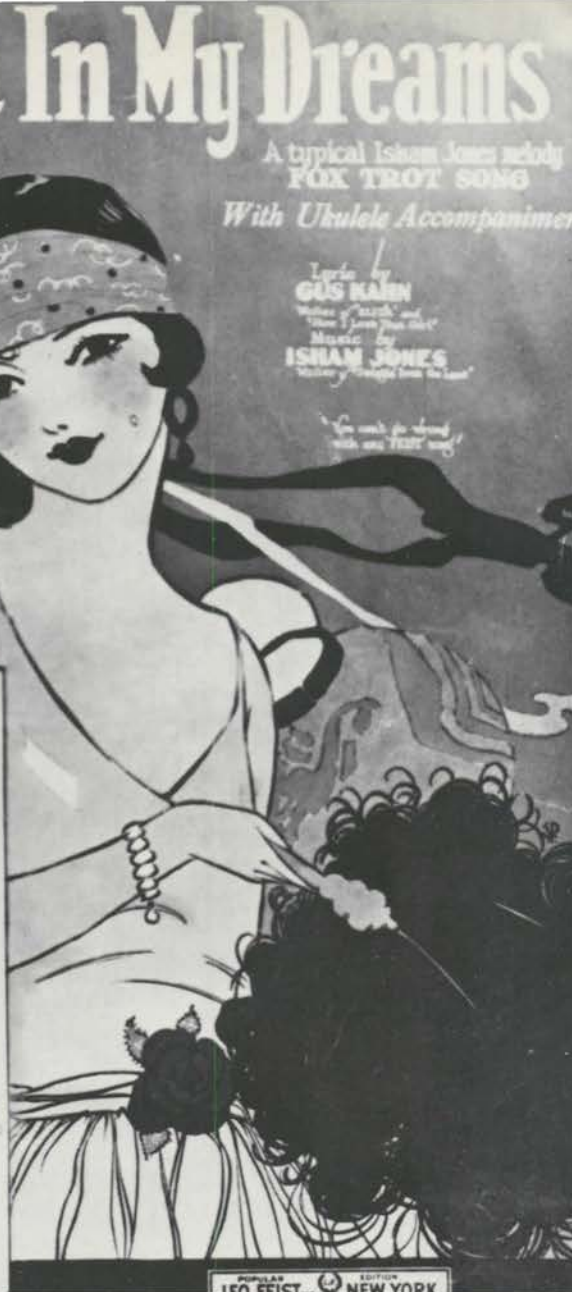
# I'll See You In My Dreams

A typical Isham Jones melody  
FOX TROT SONG

With Ukulele Accompaniment

Lyrics by  
**GUS KAHN**  
"Master of 'Rhythm' and  
'Sweet Love Songs'"  
Music by  
**ISHAM JONES**  
"Master of 'Straight from the Lute'"

"You won't be dancing  
with me 'Till' then!"



me most was Kinsley's magnificent way of playing with the orchestra. Yale gave us Kinsley, and Harvard spawned Del Castillo. So you see, the Ivy League grads gave some blue blood to what was considered an 'outlaw' instrument by the purists of the day."

Mrs. Bebko remembers Fred Kinsley when she was a student at Flushing High. He was an assistant to a Mrs. McCabe, and he was very soft-spoken.

In June 1928, Fred was rewarded for his talent and devotion to his work by being named chief organist for the entire RKO circuit. In his office at 1560 Broadway, he was in charge of 50 organists throughout the country, keeping three secretaries and an assistant busy with a myriad of details.

Larry Spier, writing in the March 16, 1929 issue of *Exhibitors' Herald-World*, had this to say about our subject: "Those of you who have never met Fred Kinsley would find him to be a prince of a chap and a regular fellow at all times. He is justly deserving of his success, and I doubt whether he has a single enemy amidst his profession. More power to him!"

Mr. Kinsley at the console of the Wesley Methodist Church organ in Worcester, Mass. He played this instrument from 1946 until retiring in 1960.

(Saling Coll.)

Many theatre organists introduced and plugged new songs, and Frederick Kinsley was no exception. In 1924, he introduced "I'll See You In My Dreams" at the N.Y. Hippodrome as the cover of this sheet music indicates. (Saling Coll.)

Hippodrome. After the big Wurlitzer was installed, I came across his teaching ad which was in either the *American Organist* or *Diapason*.

"I contacted him, and as we both had playing jobs, he arranged to teach me after we were off work, I at 11 p.m. uptown, and he at midnight. That's when my lesson began, and I always remember his leaving in a hurry around 12:45 with instructions to the night superintendent to let me practice. Fred had to dash to Penn Station to catch the last train to his home at Whitestone, Long Island. I really put the organ through its paces, usually staying until 2 a.m.

"The conductor at the Hipp was Jules Lenzberg, and what impressed



With the advent of Vitaphone and the talking picture, the handwriting was on the wall as far as theatre organists were concerned. Mr. Kinsley returned to church work, becoming organist and choir director of Christ Church in Pelham Manor, N.Y., and appearing as organist in several other New York churches. He became a public school music teacher and established a band at Bayside High School. While there, he wrote the school song and established their "Night of Music." He also was on the staff at Flushing High.

Beginning in May 1939, he was featured organist on the mauve-lit tropical balcony of the Florida Building at the New York World's Fair for two years. The organ was particularly effective in the air-conditioned pavilion whose ceiling simulated a sky, complete with sun which rose at dawn and set at dusk with brilliant color. Mr. Kinsley broadcast from the building, using a carillon, which was also playable mechanically.

From 1940 to 1946, he was organist and choir director at New York's Riverside Church. In October 1946, he assumed the same position at the Wesley Methodist Church in Worcester, Mass., a tenure he was to hold until retiring in 1960.

Throughout his musical career, he taught many students in voice, piano and organ. An active member of the American Guild of Organists and the New York Society of Theatre Organists, he introduced a number of popular songs such as "I'll See You In My Dreams," and "Doodle-De-Do." He played several musical instruments, including the brasses, but the organ remained his first choice with piano a possible second. His hobby was swimming.

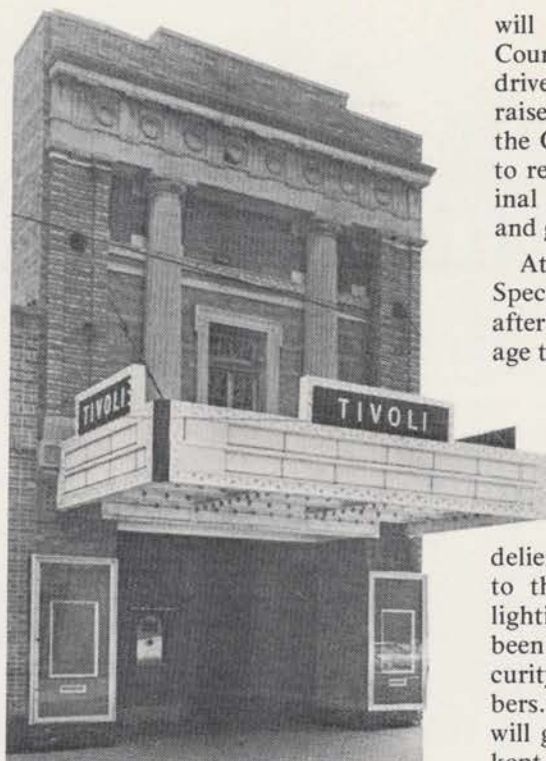
Frederick Kinsley died in 1960. His wife had passed on in 1956. □

## MUSIC HALL SPECTACULAR

The New York Chapter is sponsoring a Radio City Music Hall Spectacular on Sunday, November 13 at 8:30 a.m.

This special program will be Walt Disney's "Pete's Dragon" and the guest organist, Larry Ferrari. □

OCTOBER - NOVEMBER, 1977



The Tivoli Theatre is now the Weinberg Center for the Arts. (C.K. Holter Photo)

# The Weinberg Center for the Arts

## ● A New Name for A New Purpose

by Ray Brubacher

The Tivoli Theatre in Frederick, Maryland, scene of the 1972 ATOS National Convention, has a new name. In ceremonies conducted in May, 1977 at Frederick City Hall, theatre owner Dan Weinberg and his family presented the Tivoli Theatre to the City of Frederick to be used as a performing arts center. Mayor Ronald Young, long an enthusiastic promoter of this project, promptly announced the renaming of the Tivoli to be known as the Weinberg Center for the Arts.

The Weinberg Center for the Arts

will be administered by the Arts Council of Frederick. A fund raising drive is already well under way to raise more than \$175,000 to repair the October 1976 flood damage and to redecorate the theatre in its original 1926 state color scheme of black and gold.

At this writing, the 2/8 Model 190 Special Wurlitzer is again playing after suffering extensive flood damage to the console. The small orchestra pit is being extended some five feet, a new stage lighting control board is being designed and rewiring of all electrical fixtures is now in progress. All chandeliers in the theatre will be restored to their original appearance. New lighting and power circuits have been installed as well as a new security system for the organ chambers. The console of the Wurlitzer will go on a movable platform to be kept on stage. A portable stage extension is to be installed so that large ensembles, such as the Baltimore and National Symphony orchestras, may be accommodated.

Ray Brubacher has been appointed organist and maintenance man for the organ. He will be assisted by Douglas Miller and Paul White, both of whom put in many hours to restore the organ to its "before the flood" condition.

No date has been set for the reopening of the theatre. When the Weinberg Center for the Arts has its gala reopening, it will be an event to surpass the original 1926 presentation of the theatre to Fredericktonians. □

The Weinberg Center (Tivoli) with its classic decor of marble, brass, and crystal represents 13,000 square feet of history. (C.K. Holter Photo)



THEATRE ORGAN