



**The 22nd ATOS
National Convention
CHICAGO '77**

by Stu Green, Lloyd Klos, Don Lockwood and others.

Photos by Bill Lamb and Stu Green except where otherwise noted.





Doug Christensen was on hand to emcee this year's convention programs.



Ron Bogda at the Chicago Stadium 6/62 Barton.

The huge Chicago Stadium seemed empty even with our crowd of ATOSers.



The 1977 ATOS convention, headquartered at Chicago's resplendent and historic Palmer House, got underway, as always, with personal reunions in the hotel lobby after registration on Tuesday. The conventioners descended on Chicago from the usual "four corners of the world" — including Great Britain and Australia, not to mention the "50."

Wednesday, June 29

On Wednesday morning, 20 buses transported 1100 registrants to the Chicago Stadium. The weather was gorgeous — sunny, but neither too warm nor too chilly. It was "shirt-sleeves" weather.

This would be the first official event. The conventioners filed into the cavernous Chicago Stadium, some to the main floor where the area was covered with rows of folding chairs facing a stage set for a rock concert — facing away from the console! Of course, the conventioners turned their chairs around to get a better look at the console and organist. Old hands took seats high on the sides of the tiered sports arena where experience had taught them the reflected sound of the 6/62 Barton is most listenable.

Doug Christensen, the official MC, introduced organist Ron Bogda, who has taken over retired Al Melgard's duties at the stadium. Ron didn't talk much; he let the music do the communicating. For a starter he played a bit of "Mexican Hat Dance" and the audience responded with the customary hand clapping. The huge

vari-hued console perched on a balcony at one end of the hall, and the sound from the overhead chambers is indeed an experience.

One of the problems with the auditorium is the natural reverb. This makes the playing of ballads, and similar "slow music," rather than fast tunes, more effective to an audience which fills only part of the house. Therefore such tunes as "Spanish Eyes," and "Indian Love Call" came through with more definition than "76 Trombones" and "Java." Ron simplified some of the more intricate passages of such tunes as "Chicago" and the fast parts of "Granada," apparently to avert the mashing together of tone clusters in "harmonic hangover" dissonance. But other times he keyed every 16th note and let the huge echo chamber mix 'em up, and mix 'em it did.

Neither Doug nor Ron did much talking but one brief speech about former auditorium organist Al Melgard was most appropriate. Some background on Melgard's long service as official organist jibed with organ builder Dan Barton's high esteem for Al as a person and as a musician. The late Dan once told the writer that he considered Melgard the finest organist the theatre organ era produced, and that Al's demonstrations sold many a Barton instrument. The conventioners were urged to drop Al a card at his Las Vegas address.

Ron Bogda's program closed with "The Party's Over," applicable only to his portion because the party was just starting.

Next stop was at the Patio Theatre with its 3/17 Barton, for an early afternoon session with Hector Olivera. Those who have experienced an Olivera concert know they can expect good music plus Hector's floor show while MCing and playing. Hector is a firm believer in "visual accompaniment."

His opener was a much embellished "That's Entertainment," during which he threw in a pedal portamento. He literally "toed" a smooth chromatic roll.

So compelling is the "eye appeal" of an Olivera performance that one doesn't want to look away and possibly miss a trick.

He left his audience with some vivid memories: the Clarinet solo of the smooth middle part of "Canadian

Capers" which Hector right-footed on the pedals; the soft, sustained Vox choir which carried the ball during "Body and Soul" while percussions added the ornamentation; the somewhat garish "Buddy Coleisms" which marked "Secret Heart;" the utter beauty in every nuance of Hector's "Jeannine;" the clarity and precision of the Bach "Toccatina and Fugue in C Major." We list but a few highlights; they went on continually.

At one point, he thanked the hard-working crew which had made his performance possible, in accents of pre-Lucy Desi Arnez. Indeed, they had the organ in excellent shape and those electronic bells in the pit that were played from the console supplied an extra palette of musical color.

Hector's encore was his controversial "kitchen sink" attack on "Flight of the Bumblebee." If composer Rimsky-Korsakoff might do a few turns in his sarcophagus over the Olivera circus-band approach to his diminutive piano piece, it didn't matter. Here was showmanship and musical vaudeville. One could visualize the yellow striped varmint buzzing around Hector's lightning-fast tootsies, as the entertainer pedaled the melody line which has numbed the digits of many a piano student. Then it was over and the audience clapped and howled approval. Hector Olivera had won another round pitted against that monster with the many electrical circuits and a searing breath of high wind pressure. His audience loved him, and let him know it. They filed out with a hero on their shoulders figuratively speaking. They had experienced music they could see as well as hear.

The next bus stop was the Pickwick, a theatre whose auditorium decorative scheme is best described as "modernistic Mayan" — all sorts of angles decorated in bright colors and lights. Pure geometry! The asbestos curtain has the most fantastic and brightly colored design of all, representations of beautifully plumed birds in various states of repose and flight.

The organ is a 3/10 Wurlitzer to which a Post Horn has been added. Tom Cotner is a somewhat new name in the theatre organ world but Tom's interest goes back to boyhood.

One of his recent projects was developing a theatre-style instrument for a builder of electronics. His initial offering was a medley from *Gold Diggers of 1937*. Tom displayed some tasteful registration on an immaculately maintained organ. Lots of variety and there is no sound quite like the Wurlitzer sound, a point driven home by ATOS charter member Judd Walton, who is also the permanent president of the "Wurlitzers Are Wonderful" club. Judd beamed throughout the well-played program — until his idolized brand developed a cipher. His face fell with a resounding "thud." But that tiny squeal was evident only briefly in the final selection. Fred Kruse's pipe organ retained the good manners expected of it by its overseer.

Tom Cotner displayed an easy manner as MC and quickly developed rapport with his willing audience. His medley from *The King and I* proved Tom to be an accomplished orchestrator. His registration and phrasing of "Poor Butterfly" was especially rich in old-fashioned appeal and *Myrt and Marge* nostalgia.

Next came "Anything Goes" time with tunes dedicated to two West Coast friends: "Goofus" for Tiny James and continuing with an extension of the 50-year search for that swampland wraith, "Chlo-e," for Stu Green, who's still looking for her. Both tunes got good-humored burlesque treatments, but poor "Chlo-e" suffered most, with auto horn and train whistle "riffs" plus surf noises (surf — in a swamp?).

Silent movie time starred droopy-moustached Snub Pollard in *It's a*



Hector Olivera at the Patio Theatre 3/17 Barton.



The elaborate asbestos curtain at the Pickwick reflects the Art Deco theme found throughout the theatre.

Although the Pickwick console is now a dignified white, the organ grilles still show the original geometric designs.





Tom Cotner at the Pickwick Theatre 3/11 Wurlitzer.



John Innes (left) at the 88 and Bill Fasig at the 3/50 E.M. Skinner at the Civic Opera House.

Gift, a story about an inventor who, appropriately for these times, develops a substitute for gasoline. Tom cued this fast-moving bit of mid-'20s slapstick with appropriate action music to underscore the many laughs as Snub's dependence on gadgets to maintain his lazy life style are revealed. Tom Cotner modestly pointed out that Snub Pollard deserved the credit for the enjoyable moments of that two-reeler. But Tom's music offered solid support. And the theme, energy conservation, is currently appropriate.

The "community sing" was notable in several ways. The colorfully illustrated slides had to be left-overs from the "golden age" when

each illustrated slide contained no more than a couple of lines. Besides the oldies (e.g. "Bye Bye Blackbird") there was a "Welcome ATOS" song sung to "Hello Dolly." It was performed in the best tradition of the slide novelties of the mid-'20s, and the slides had the appearance of authenticity.

Tom's closer was his own musical patchwork of themes from Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." We can welcome Tom Cotner as a valued member of the younger coterie of entertainment organists who have made a special study of the styles and programs of the '20s.

On a warm Wednesday evening, conventioners walked several blocks from the hotel to the beautiful, moderne, Civic Opera House. This 3000-plus seat auditorium is the home of the Chicago Lyric Opera.

As the contour drape rose revealing the 3/10 Skinner console, we saw the console flanked by the grand piano and an elaborate stage set for *Idomeneo*, an early Mozart opera, to be premiered at the Opera House in the fall. The massive set, dominated by a giant head of Neptune, was erected just for our program, and later disassembled to await the fall production.

Organist Bill Fasig and pianist John Innes opened with "America the Beautiful" followed by a musical duet of Moskowski's "Bolero." They continued with a Gershwin medley that included selections from *Porgy and Bess*.

Bill Fasig then did a bravura spotlight solo with Bach's "Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor."

Returning to the 88, John joined Bill, playing Hadyn's hymn, "Austria."

At this point, the pianist went to the 3/50 and performed a powerful rendition of Widor's *Fifth Symphony* "Tocatta." We now learned that John originally studied organ while Bill's forte was the piano. With the duet formation years back, the two decided to swap instruments.

They eventually returned to their duet instruments to perform the finale, "Cornish Rhapsody." For the encore, the two returned with, "Heaven Came Down and Glory Filled My Soul."

The conventioners left the plush surroundings and the fine concert organ for a well-deserved nights rest.



Edna Sellers, retired Chicago organist, one of the four 1977 entrants into the Theatre Organists Hall of Fame.

The Neptunish stage setting was erected just for our enjoyment at the Opera House.



Thursday, June 30

Conventioners were awakened early Thursday morning by the sound of thunder rolling down the narrow air shafts between sections of the hotel. If they looked up the shafts they might see flashes of lightning, because Mother Nature had stepped out of that TV commercial to welcome ATOSers to Chicago in the way she knows best. It was no small and fleeting storm. The thunder and lightning rumbled and flashed for more than an hour and the rain came down in ever-drenching patterns well into the afternoon.

Meanwhile "wagonmaster" Alden Stockebrand was having problems with his fleet of chartered buses; the storm had dampened the promptness of their arrival, due mostly to traffic jams caused by heavy rain. The conventioners lined up four deep in a block long column, in the shopping arcade of the hotel. It was still raining heavily an hour later when the last in the line boarded the buses for Joliet and the Rialto Theatre. It was a long 45-mile trip slowed by intermittent bursts of heavy rain. It was still raining when the buses disgorged their cargoes in front of the Rialto Theatre around 10:15 a.m., 15 minutes after the scheduled start of the Don Baker concert.

Entering the lobby of the Rapp and Rapp house, the viewer is impressed by the magnificence of a big town theatre in a comparatively small town. The immense marbled lobby, complete with chandelier, turned all eyes upward to wonder at the marvels of theatre decor in the '20s. The massive Barton console is on a lift at the right end of the large orchestra pit. Overhead at the

(L to R) Virginia Ferrolli, Marie Pond and Ione Tedei work on the Chicago Theatre piano action in the Palmer House late at night.



"Where were you when the lights went out?" Despite the power failure, Don Baker came through like the pro he is at the Rialto Theatre 4/21 Barton.

apex of the proscenium arch are life-sized classic figures, a most impressive example of the "golden era" theatre builder's art.

Then unfolded a chain of events which would require the patience and professionalism of a Don Baker to make it come off. Don was introduced but the PA system didn't work, so Don started the elevator upward and commenced a brassy intro. Then the house lights failed, leaving only the spotlight for illumination. The sound of the troubled organ left something to be desired. There were pedal notes sounding which Don hadn't touched, later to be identified as wiring "runs" caused by the heavy rain.

Then the spotlight, malfunctioned leaving organist and audience in total darkness. Conventioners rushed flashlights to the front and shined them on the stoprail to help Don. But Don didn't miss a note during the perhaps two minutes of blackness. At this point the power failure was resolved, and the lighting returned to normal. Don was master of the situation all the time. If the temporary blackout flustered him,



The elaborate mirrored lobby of the Rialto in Joliet.

he never let on, nor did his music reveal it. Yet, the organ was out of tune in several ranks and the unplayed bass notes continued an independent life of their own.

It was explained that the rain had gotten to the relays, which would account for the wiring "runs." The writer has never before witnessed an artist performing under such travail. A lesser musician than Don Baker would have given up, but he stuck it out and his artistry came through despite the plagued instrument.

Among his selections were two tributes to a southern state, "Georgia" and "Georgia On My Mind;" a "rhythm" medley which included "I Got Rhythm," "Crazy Rhythm" and "Fascinatin' Rhythm." "She's a Grand Old Flag" preceded an Irish medley of "How are Things in Glock-

The line for the buses to Joliet stretched the entire length of the Palmer House. Buses were delayed due to the day-long rain.





Magician De Yip Loo studied with Harry Blackstone and is known for his major stage illusions.



Bob Neller and Reggie. Edgar Bergen called him "the greatest natural ventriloquist."

Over 1100 were served at two sittings at Pheasant Run, an elaborate restaurant complex during the trip from Joliet and St. Charles.



amorra" and "MacNamara's Band," as the green spot colored the console. Don's encore was a majestic "How Great Thou Art." His audience let him know in the usual manner that they appreciated his efforts under most adverse conditions. Then Don held court at the raised console with his many friends and admirers while flash photography filled the room with lightning.

Outside, the rain had diminished as the conventioners boarded the buses for St. Charles and the Arcada Theatre with its 3/16 Geneva organ with some Marr and Colton history. The organist was Lowell Ayars, performing for his eighth ATOS convention.

Doug Christensen introduced Lowell, whose opener was *Showboat* selections. Then came a vocal solo, "The Stars Will Remember," followed by another medley featuring "Rooms" in the titles.

Then it was vaudeville time with veteran ventriloquist Bob Neller and his wooden friend Reggie. Bob's technique is amazing; not only do his lips not move but Reggie has



During his program at the Arcada Theatre, Lowell Ayars accompanied vaudevillians Bob Neller, and De Yip Loo, at the 3/16 Geneva.

more facial expressions than Charlie McCarthy and Mortimer Snerd together. Bob and Reggie engaged in banter, sang duets and even performed a whistling duet — in harmony. The audience ate it up. In the pit, Lowell accompanied the songs and hyped the routines with appropriate music (e.g. "I Don't Want to Talk Without You").

Then Lowell presented "Chanson Bohemienne," better known as the radio theme of *Vic and Sade*. His second vocal was "On a Clear Day" despite the stormy weather outside.

Once more it was vaudeville time and the act was veteran Chinese stage magician De Yip Loo — and Company. His many feats of magic included disappearances galore and even a levitation sequence wherein a girl was suspended in space while the conjurer passed hoops around her apparently "floating" body. Then Yip Loo tried a bit as a stand-up comic, and his patter was just as amusing as his magic had been puzzling.

Lowell Ayars' closer was the completely forgotten "Yeast Foamers' March," a tribute to a company on the rise in 1929.

The Ayars performances have seemed to get better and better over the years, but never have his vocal solos and well-performed organ selections been more warmly applauded than in 1977.

Back to the buses and a short trip to Pheasant Run for a chopped steak lunch that hit the spot. Or it might have been the other way around, since half the conventioners had lunch first, then went to the Arcada Theatre for the Lowell Ayars performance. Alternating groups was all part of the CATOE plan to prevent crowding.

Either way, the buses deposited the now weary organ enthusiasts at the Palmer House late in the afternoon.

Seminars — Thursday Evening

In keeping with the ATOS educational mandate in the Articles of Incorporation and a strong desire to have something for everyone, Thursday evening was set aside for two well-chosen seminars.

Bill Hansen, organ builder, conducted the first by tracing pipe organ history from the legendary beginning

down through the history of our beloved unit (theatre) organ. He speaks with authority on the subject having learned a great deal from Harry Caruthers, whose father, Joseph, was an associate of Robert Hope-Jones. Mr. Hansen, with his historical commentary and personal anecdotes, produced an enjoyable as well as educational diversion.

The second seminar, entitled "Our Mansions for Pipe Organs," was conducted by Dr. John Landon, and Bro. Andrew Corsini. Dr. Landon, author of "Jesse Crawford Poet of the Organ," and Bro. Andy could hardly have chosen a more appropriate place to discuss movie palaces because the early movie merchants in the Windy City were the pioneers in developing the mansion for pictures concept and brought many of the innovations of movie presentation to the public with resounding success.

Dr. Landon is currently researching for another book which will deal with theatre organists. This treatise will cover a profession that began and ended within a 20 year space of time.

Bro. Andy Corsini is probably the nation's leading authority on theatres, especially movie palaces. He, together with the late Ben Hall, sparked the formation of the Theatre Historical Society. Bro. Andy, as editor of the THS journal *Marquee*, has, over the years, given detailed descriptions of many famous movie cathedrals, a great number that are now gone, leaving his accurate writings as the only history of these opulent buildings.

Chicago is fortunate in having some movie palace examples still intact making this seminar most meaningful.

Friday, July 1

The conventioners put on their walking shoes Friday morning and strode several blocks to the still impressive Oriental Theatre on Randolph Street to hear the young artist, Walter Strony.

A highlight of the interesting program was "Variations on a Theme by Oscar Mayer" in which the well-known TV commercial was given an orchestral arrangement in several tempos. Hot dog!

Another highlight was "Granada," a good rouser for this instrument

whose sound is very bright.

As an encore, Walt thrilled the assemblage with the Glenn Miller tune "In the Mood" in which the artist demonstrated an escalator effect with a rapidly ascending-descending motion on the four manuals.

It should be pointed out that Walt had to set his registrations by hand because the combination action has been inoperative for some time. This did not seem to deter the artist from the execution of his program.



Walt Strony at the Oriental Theatre 4/20 Wurlitzer.



"Theatre Organ from Roots to Full Blossom" was the subject of the seminar conducted by William Hansen.



Brother Andrew Corsini talks to the crowd during the second seminar on Thursday.



Dr. John Landon conducts his seminar "Our Mansions for Pipe Organ" in the Palmer House.

ATOSers crowd the Red Lacquer Room for the Thursday evening seminars.





Stan Bielsk and Gus Pratt drove this Honda from New York to Chicago '77.



Henry Gottfried, from the family of pipemakers, talks with Lorin Whitney.



Australia was represented by Rob Glidden and Bill Schumacher, both members of Puget Sound.

Three Chicago rink organists, (L to R) Paul Swiderski, Fred Arnish and Leon Berry.



Friday turned out to be a lovely summer day, with no remnants of the previous day's storm visible (although there were floodings and power interruptions elsewhere). This time the buses made a leisurely journey to the Elm Skating Rink, where one of the loudest organs we have experienced, so far, occupies two overhead swell chambers plus a console balcony loaded with percussers and bass offsets.

The makeup of the Elm organ almost defies classification. It boasts pipework and parts from a number of brands, including Moller, Gottfried, Barton, Wurlitzer, Geneva, Wicks and Kimball. It has four Tibias, three Post Horns, two Clarinets and two Train Whistles. In addition to the Post Horn chorus there are eight solo reed voices. The total is 24 ranks, controlled from a four-deck Geneva console.

Rink organist Paul Swiderski opened the program with a string of pops and standards played as pop stylings rather than skating tunes with their strict tempos. At one point he demonstrated the voices of the instrument, including the Polish Post Horn, which he fabricated, probably from funnels and Halloween horns. But we jest. It was nearly as raucous as the two other Post Horns which give the organ lots of blast power. And there is volume to spare. The conventioners perambulated around the skating floor, trying to locate a "node" where sound cancellation might reduce ear strain, but in vain. Not that the music was too loud all the time. It was just plain loud, but the registration changes offered some respite. We perched on a bench just beneath an imposing row of metal mitered 16' Tubas. It was like being in the middle of the Oompah section of a German band.

Paul Swiderski at the Elm Rink 4/24 Geneva hybrid.



At one point one of the bus drivers stuck his head in the door and listened briefly. Back in the fresh air outside, he was heard to remark, "I'll bet they've got a thousand watts of amplification going in there!"

Organist Jerry Glenn took over for a subsequent serenade, and demonstrated a style closer to the ideal established by Leon Berry, the "Chicago Thrump-Boom" style, so described by a West Coast journalist when the first Chicago rink records hit the market.

The trip to Hinsdale allowed sensitive ears to once more normalize to no more strain than the cacophony of traffic. It was a picturesque journey through a countryside which seemed abnormally green to denizens of the parched Far West. It was not until we discovered that the bus windows were tinted a greenish hue that the truth hit — we had been filtered into thinking green!

Hinsdale is a small town with a business district comprised of a couple of streets with wide-lawned residences fanning out from that center. Practically in the middle is the Hinsdale Theatre, a well kept movie house of somewhat ancient vintage, judging from the 1925 architecture. It's a long, rather narrow house with gently curving contours. The walls have been shrouded with sound absorbent hangings, probably to reduce liveness in connection with sound films. We soon learned the padding also helped contain the roars of a beast confined in chambers on each side of the proscenium.

There has to be one remarkable man of vision connected with this theatre. There are two large consoles in the pit, a four-deck Wurlitzer and a Kimball. Both are mounted on four-poster elevators. To date, the Kimball is in command of 24 ranks of mostly Kimball pipes.

The organist was the well-known Kay McAbee, whose legendary arrangements and recordings have established his good reputation for tasteful and absorbing organ music.

True, we weren't quite prepared for the volume of this particular Kimball. But first, there was an announcement on the PA system by Jim Glass, the man who, in recent years, has sparked the organ project, by establishing The Owl Cinema Organ Guild, a local society dedicated to keeping the theatre or-

gan alive and well in Hinsdale and environs. Mr. Glass provided some insight regarding his organ project, then introduced Kay McAbee. We never saw Mr. Glass in person.

Kay started the motor which operates the lift and at the same moment opened a broadside — "Luck Be My Lady Tonight." It was obvious from the applause that Kay's efforts were much appreciated, and the applause competed with the volume of the Kimball, which sounded smooth and loud in the acoustically excellent house.



Kay McAbee at the 3/21 Hinsdale Cinema Organ. Counting both consoles, there are 7 manuals and 32 ranks in the theatre.



Jim Benzmiller at the Downers Grove North High School 3/10 Wurlitzer.

Bob Ralston with his singer/secretary Mimi during his program at Downers Grove North High School.



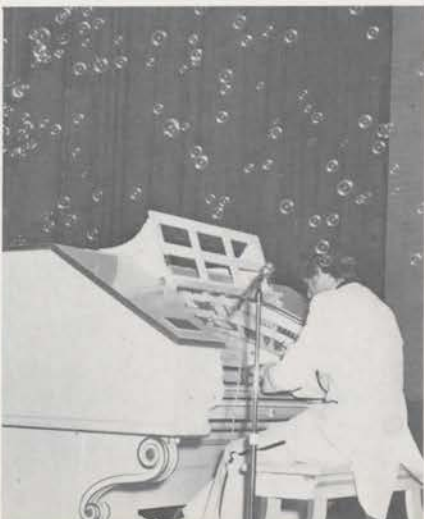
Kay's selections included "Summer of '42," "Temptation Rag," and "Stay As Sweet as You Are." The qualities of the Kimball pipe-work were demonstrated with good effect. Kay did a nice job at the microphone regarding the music, but no one explained why there was an extra console in the pit. His audience demanded an encore, and Kay played a thunderous "Everything's Coming Up Roses." Then back to the buses and on to Downers Grove.

The high school at Downers Grove, Illinois, houses a prime condition 3/10 Wurlitzer, thanks to CATOE members who removed it from a theatre in Lima, Ohio, trucked it to the high school and installed it. The small town of Downers Grove is justifiably proud of its organ, which was a gift from the Glen Alden Corporation.

On this particular Friday afternoon, the first player was Bob Ralston, known for his appearances with a popular TV orchestra. Unfortunately, the session got off to a late start; there was a 40-minute delay while Mr. Ralston's combinations were set.

The opening medley included such diverse items as "Somewhere My Love" and "Tijuana Taxi," the latter rattling with toy counter sound effects. The American Medley was interesting in that it presented tunes popular in the USA's distant past, but not the over-played ones. For "Deep Purple," Bob went to the piano on the stage for an arrangement of the tune which illustrated how he played it at 15 years of age. He continued with a comic version of "The Merry-Go-Round Broke Down." He turned the blower off for a moment to obtain the effect of music disintegrating during "Merry-go-round," (shades of Sidney Torch).

Bubbles "a la Welk."



Bob's "Ebb Tide" featured not only surf sounds but Orchestral Bells. His "How Great Thou Art" was properly "straight" in its registration.

Some pleasurable minutes were provided by Bob's secretary, Mimi Boyer, whose kaleidoscoped vocal selections proved to be audience pleasers. Mimi can belt them (e.g. "Sunny Side of the Street") or fill the house with her well practiced and cultivated voice (e.g. "Jalousie").

Bob scored with "I Get a Kick Out of You" then amused his audience with his playing on the manuals while lying on his back, thus doing some upside down and backwards digital work on "12th Street Rag." His encore was a ballad rendition of "Stardust."

Bob Ralston presented an often frenetically paced show, well laced with visual humor which obviously pleased many in the audience.

After the annual membership meeting, it was Jim Benzmiller's turn at the 3/10 Wurlitzer. It's a bright-sounding two-chamber installation with plenty of presence and fast response.

Jim presented a program which contrasted sharply with the Ralston performance, in style and content. He confesses to growing up as the "only Kraut" in a largely Polish area of Wisconsin. He is unable to explain his expertise at playing Dixieland jazz, rather than Polkas, yet that's what developed.

But before the jazz came a particularly attractive ballad treatment of "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows." Jim's version was completely independent of any allusions to Chopin's "Fantasie Impromptu." His "12th Street Rag" was lively, loud and with jazz "rides" plus interest-bearing key changes.

One might assume "Five Foot Two" to be a suitable vehicle for jazz variations, but not that ancient George Jessel tearjerker, "My Mother's Eyes." Jim played them both in Dixieland style with good effect.

His prowess in the light classics was illustrated by a rousing "Malaguena." Jim puts his all into such standards, as proven later by his encore, "Zampa Overture." We couldn't leave Jim without some kind words for his treacly, tearful and terrific "I'll Be Seeing You." All of which leads to the question, where has this talented organist been hiding for so

long? It is hoped Jim Benzmilller will not retreat to the wilds of Wisconsin to spend his life trying to convert the polka-loving Polonians to an appreciation of Dixieland organ jazz.

Saturday, July 2

On Saturday morning the buses took off on a comparatively short journey to the Montclare Theatre and its 3/10 Barton, an organ which



Ron Rhode at the Montclare 3/10 Barton.



Fred Arnish and his "Arnishlitzer," the 3/13 Wur-litzer at the Axle (Hub) Rink.

Conventioneers listen to the organ at the Axle (Hub) Rink.

is remembered fondly from previous ATOS conventions. It's a two-chamber installation with console on a four-poster lift at the right end of the small orchestra pit.

The organist was Ron Rhode, a young man who has distinguished himself in both the concert and pizza parlor fields (he's the chief organist at Organ Stop No. 2 at Mesa, Arizona).

Ron brought the spotlighted console up with "Whispering," a tune which set the pattern for stylings and titles bound to appeal to the aficionados. This included one Crawford styling, "Hiawatha's Melody of Love;" "a Wayne King novelty tune, "Corn silk" (which is reminiscent of "Josephine"); Victor Herbert's romantic "Thine Alone;" some burlesque bumps with "Beale Street Mama;" a fast-moving "Fiddle Faddle;" "Teasin'" and a fast flowing "Blue Danube."

Ron's easy speaking style and his smoothly contemplative arrangements (and that includes registration) added up to a solid hit with his audience. And the goodly number of young people who crowded around the console after Ron's encore, indicates he has aroused the interest of the young.

The buses then ferried the conventioneers to the Axle Skating Rink, where Fred Arnish "at the Mighty Arnishlitzer" entertained. This instrument has a long history. As a 3/10 it first came to prominence via the late Bill Huck's Replica record label, with house organist Leon Berry doing the honors. And Eddie Osborn cut his "Fabulous Eddie" album for the Replica label on it just 22 years ago. It was Berry, however, who established the so-called

"thrupp-boom" Chicago rink style. Fred Arnish couldn't be classed as an exponent of the pure "Chicago style" because his "thrumps" were not necessarily automatically followed by "booms." His is a freer style, with more attention to phrasing, although "ol' debbil" bombast is still the order of the day. The rink organist's instrument is quite different in stoplist and wind pressure. The Axle (formerly Hub) Rink's organ operates on 22 inches pressure. It is now a 3/13.

Fred entertained with such tunes as "Lida Rose," "Boo Hoo," "Green Eyes," "Valencia" a spectacular "Patricia" and a roaring "Quiet Village." His audience reconnoitered about the skating floor, some trying to again locate a lower volume area, but in vain. The rink organist's problem is to produce sufficient volume to overcome the noise of a floor full of undulating skaters, but still not pass the Excedrin zone. It's a fine line, and the "doppler effect" caused by hundreds of speeding, screaming, clattering bodies may still affect the musician even when they aren't there. There was plenty of toe-tapping, twisting and dancing by conventioneers. It's a happy moment when the desire to dance can bring together such generation gap extremes as sexogenarian Anna Olive and youthful organist Lew Williams for a few minutes of the light fantastic, and it happened. Repeat a few dozen times and it's catching. There's a lot of charm in those super-powered rink organs and the specialist musicians who have learned to make them a permanent part of life in Chicago. We won't say "more power to them" because they already have plenty.

The trip to the WGN Continental Broadcast Center was fraught with memories for many a veteran radio listener who sat fascinated in front of his Model 70 Philco (the dome job) and heard the announcer proclaim, "From the organ studio in Chicago's Drake Hotel, it's Leonard Salvo at the Mighty Wurlitzer," although it was then only a 2/7. Now in its third home, it is a 3/11. Three Kimball ranks have been added, plus an Aeolian Nachthorn. Kimball also built the present console.

Byron Melcher first came to hobby notice through the Replica release of a record recorded on the label's





President Ray Snitil presents the charter to William Tunstel for the new South Texas Chapter.



Stan Whittington accepts the charter for the new London and the South of England Chapter — our first in Great Britain.



(L to R) Ione Tedei, banquet chairman, Bill Rieger, convention chairman, and Charlotte Rieger, registration chairman. These three, like many other CATOE members, put in countless man hours to make Chicago '77 a success.

Crowd gathers for admittance to the Chicago Theatre on Wabash at Lake streets, scene of a recent elevated railway tragedy.



studio Wurlitzer and entitled *The Gorilla in the Garden*, an event which has haunted Byron since the record's release in the late '50s. Now the Director of Product Development for the Thomas Organ Co., he has done much toward giving theatrical qualities to that firm's recent output.

Byron was introduced by Al Field, one time WLW *Moon River* poetry reader, now a wheel at WGN. Al reminisced a little, "down the valley of a thousand yesterdays," then brought on Byron Melcher whose program included "Blue Skies," "Little Orphan Annie," "Lady Be Good," and a rather different reading of the *Amos 'n Andy* radio theme. His personable anecdotes and informality put the audience in the mood of "use to be" radio quickly, although the present installation is in a TV studio with the usual overhead clutter of lights and dead acoustics. The two chambers are side by side at the right side of the studio (facing the console), and volume is controlled by 40 swell shutters installed horizontally.

At one point Byron mentioned the



Byron Melcher at the 3/11 Kimball-Wurlitzer at the WGN broadcasting studios.

dead acoustics, but it's certain the studio can add the necessary reverb before the organ tones hit the megahertz.

The Melcher stylings brought out much variety in registration. The solo voices blend into an attractive ensemble sound, and the pitched percussions add sparkle. However, the organ has no toy counter. It is maintained by CATOE.

After the too brief WGN sojourn, CATOE Chairman Dick Sklenar led his "flock" to the departing buses, then greeted those stepping from the arriving people-carriers. Dick seemed to be everywhere at once. He walked calmly about without an apparent worry in the world, completely placid and unruffled. His peaceful demeanor was quite in contrast with the excited concern of some past chairmen. One witness commented, "Dick either has everything under control — or he just doesn't give a darn (expletive diminished)!"

Scheduled at the same time Saturday afternoon as the visit to WGN, was the home tour to see and hear the 3/16 Wicks from Oral Roberts University and now in the home of Faye and Bob Wheeler, the 2/5 Estey in the Bolingbrook home of Art and Carol Todesco and the 3/8 Wurlitzer/Kimball in the home of Jack Gustafson's parents in Elmhurst.

Back to the Palmer House to store up the energy required for the banquet in the evening.

The banquet was held in the Palmer House Grand-State ballroom, a spacious T-shaped combination of high-ceilinged rooms with huge chandeliers and plenty of gold paint. Nearly 1000 attended the banquet, of a total of 1152 conventioners registered.

After the dressing-rolled-in-chicken meal had been consumed, there were speeches and announcements by ATOS President Ray F. Snitil, Convention Chairman William Rieger, and Judd Walton awarded the Honorary Member signs to Mr. and Mrs. Les Rawle.

Lloyd E. Klos, chairman of the Hall of Fame Selection Committee, gave the results of his committee's 1977 choice.

Eloquent John Muri, organist of the year, spoke to the conventioners and his words were pointed; while he reveres the past, even if he had the



Frank Pellico's music provided a nightclub atmosphere following the banquet.



Lloyd Klos, committee chairman of the Theatre Organists Hall of Fame, announces the 1977 entrants.



Peter Miller, the very cooperative manager of the Chicago Theatre, helped make it possible for John Muri to fulfill his life long ambition.



"No, I'm not standing in a hole," says Judd Walton who followed a much taller speaker. He announced the 1977 Honorary Members came from "east of New York."



Harry Koenig played the grand in the Chicago Theatre lobby before and after John Muri's program.

Richard Sklener (L), CATOE chairman, with John Muri and Alden Stockebrand, transportation coordinator, at the Chicago console after John's program.



capability he would not return to it. John looks with confidence to the future.

George Wright was awarded a lifetime membership in CATOE, which means CATOE also must pay his national dues from now on. George said a few words from the podium, echoing John Muri's thoughts, then choked up and quit.

Then came the roll call of chapters, which revealed that 47 of 51 chapters were represented at the banquet.

Those who had served ATOS in a number of capacities over the past year were asked to stand so they could be seen and acclaimed.

Results of the popular election of ATOS national directors were announced.

It has been explained that computerization can be a money-saving route for many ATOS functions, making possible, up-to-date membership rosters at more frequent intervals, and mailing labels which will void the necessity of mailing packets of empty envelopes to the dispatch location.

After the usual banquet "business," Frank Pellico and his combo, with his X-66 on a turntable, provided music for dancing and listening in the night club atmosphere created in the ballroom.

Sunday, July 3

On Sunday morning at 10:15 a human line three and four abreast stretched from the Chicago Theatre doors, around the corner, and nearly to the stage door. An ATOS concert was open to the public and tickets were on sale at the box office. On entering the lushly appointed theatre lobby, one heard the sound of a grand piano. On a balcony, above the entrance, Harry Koenig was playing semi-classics and operetta tunes on the 88. The sound of the piano faded slowly as the conventioneer climbed many flights of carpeted stairs to that good listening spot, the huge balcony.

Inside the auditorium there was a silent film in progress, *The Big Parade*, King Vidor's 1925 war film. This presentation was really silent; no music of any kind. As René Adoree and John Gilbert went into their final clinch, the magnificent sound of the 4/29 (style 285) Wurli-tizer was heard. The spotlight fo-

cussed on the left end of the orchestra pit and in a moment the white console, with John Muri piloting, rose up into the beam of white light.

The idea was to present a Sunday morning organ program as Jesse Crawford would have done it in 1924. Titles included Schubert's "March Militaire," a medley of six Richard Whiting compositions; songs by tenor Cory Winter — "Only a Rose" and "Rose Marie;" and compositions by theatre organists — "Blue Prelude" (Crawford), "Where Are You Tonight?" (Mrs. Crawford), "Cinderella (Albert Hay Malotte), "Under Christmas Mistletoe" (R. Liebert), "Around the Sundial" (Lloyd del Castillo) and "Waltz in E" (Preston Sellers). There were excerpts from the score for the silent classic *Wings* and Delibes' "Entrance and Procession of Bacchus."

After John Muri took his bows to generous applause, he played Jesse Crawford's radio theme "Forgotten Melody" as the console sank into the pit. Those taking photos noticed Mr. Muri wiping something from his eyes as he played the historic trademark.

On Sunday afternoon, there was a choice. One could visit the Temple Sholom and hear Devon Hollingsworth play the 4/32 Wurlitzer church organ or go on a tour of organ-equipped homes.

The Temple is a huge Synagogue facing Lake Michigan. The Wurlitzer organ, which has some theatrical voices, was installed when the Temple was built in 1929. The sound is more church-like than theatrical. It can sound both big and intimate. Hollingsworth, playing from the choir loft, opened with "Washington Post March" and followed with Bach's "Little Fugue in G Minor." His presentation of Ives' "Variations on America" indicated he had cleaned up the original considerably; it was not nearly as dissonant as, say the Biggs recorded rendition. His pop selections included "What I Did For Love" and "Nevertheless." But the organ is best suited to items such as "Pomp and Circumstance No. 1" and "William Tell Overture." We noted that in the Temple no one shouted "Hi-Yo, Silver" at the "Finale" fanfare.

Devon Hollingsworth gave a good account of his varied talents and the organ is proof that Wurlitzer could

A Word of Thanks

The Board of Directors of CATOE wishes to thank all of its members and friends who worked so hard to make "Chicago '77" a success.

Thanks also to all the ATOS members who came to visit us and hear our organs. Without you, there would have been no convention.

build church instruments with the best of them.

The home tour included visits to Leon Berry's now 2/8 "Beast in the Basement" Wurlitzer in Park Ridge, Bob Schmitt's 2/7 Wurlitzer-Kimball in Barrington, and the 4/20 Barton in the Deerfield home of Stan and Vi Lechowicz. Visitors returned from the tour full of praise for instruments and the hospitality of the owners.

The final official concert involved a lengthy bus trip to Maine Township High School North, with its excellent 3/10 Wurlitzer. Everything about school and instrument give the impression that they are immaculate in all respects.

The auditorium is steeply inclined. Chambers are on both sides of the proscenium. The white console is on a dolly so it can be rolled off-stage when not in use.

Tom Hazleton is a well-known concert artist who does some playing in California pizzerias and regularly in church. He's one of few organists equally adept in both pop and classical fields.

He opened with "Abba Dabba Honeymoon" then to *Showboat* selections. "I Write the Songs" and a Crawford style "Just a Birdseye

Students at Maine North High School built this musical backdrop for the Tom Hazleton program.



Devon Hollingsworth at the Temple Sholom 4/32 Wurlitzer.

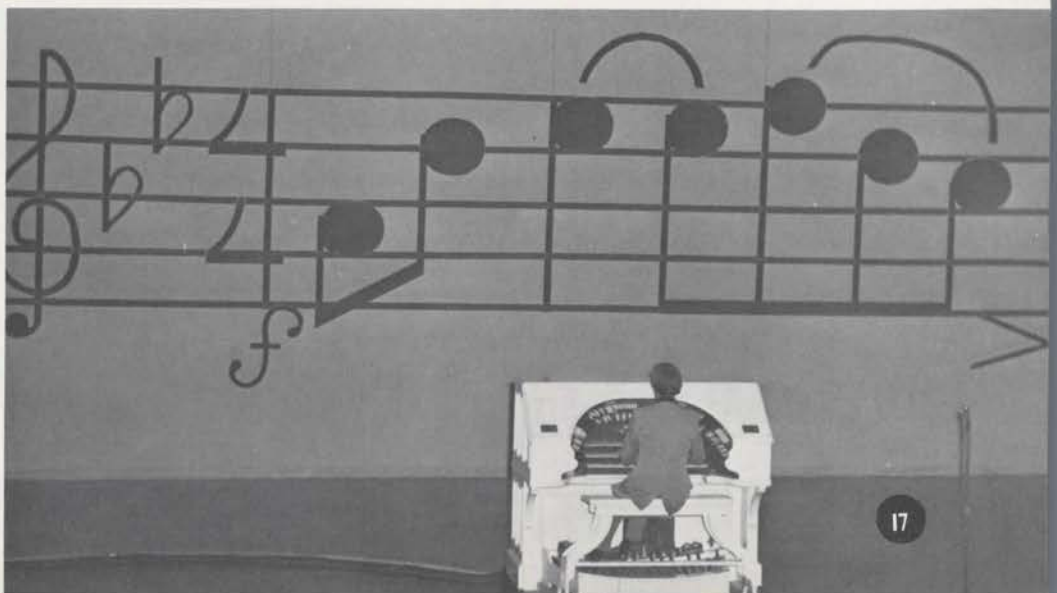


Dick Glover played the piano at the Chicago Theatre both before and after George Wright's performance. (Margerie Allen Photo)

View of My Old Kentucky Home" illustrate the wide contrasts in just the pop portions of a Hazleton program.

The organ sounds crisp and bright. It is just right for the 800-seat auditorium of this fortunate high school.

Tom continued with a Gershwin set and then announced "Nadia's Theme." While he played, a cloud projection appeared on the white backdrop; then the stage went slowly dark while the music continued. When the lights came up, the player





Tom Hazleton at the 3/10 Wurlitzer at Maine North High School.

looked very much like Jonas Nordwall from the rear. Then it happened again, and this time the man at the console could have been Dennis James. The last blackout brought Tom Hazleton back. Just as a gag, the three had pulled a triple switch — without missing a note.

For an imposing closer, Tom improvised a concert piece around the Alka Seltzer TV commercial. Yes, he “flip-flop-fizz-fizzed” his way into the hearts of all present.

Then there were goodbyes from CATOE reps to the conventioners until Atlanta next year. □

The Palmer House, Convention headquarters in 1977. (Photo courtesy of the Palmer House)



Jonas Nordwall (L) and Dennis James (R) helped Tom Hazleton pull a triple switch.

The Chapter Reps Meeting

Tuesday, June 28

The annual meeting of the board of directors and the chapter representatives convened at 8:15 p.m. in the Palmer House in Chicago, Illinois on June 28, 1977.

There were 40 of the 51 chapters represented. An interim five month financial report was given. A report from the THEATRE ORGAN staff was given and a few suggestions for future issues.

A report by Marvin Lautzenheiser, of the Anagram Corporation on com-

puterization of the membership records.

A record number of 1987 ballots were cast, with 6 invalid, making a total of 1981 valid ballots. Our computer service, the Anagram Corporation of Springfield, Virginia, was delegated to count the ballots and certify the election.

The ballots were to be postmarked no later than June 10, 1977, to be valid. To make certain that all qualified ballots were received, due to the

During the get-acquainted cocktail party on Tuesday, the chapter representatives met with the elected board.

