



CHAUNCEY HAINES

at the console

As told to Stu Green. Photos are from the Haines Collection.

PART I

His grandfather had played first trumpet in the Abraham Lincoln Union band back in 1863. His dad did long stints as an arranger and trombonist in both the Arthur Pryor and Sousa bands around the turn of the century. There had always been music, as far back as he could remember. Music is in his blood.

As a lad, still in his teens, he cued the *Birth of a Nation* on its initial run. In Los Angeles he played at the DeLuxe, the Kinema, Loew's and the Forum. There were side trips to the California theatres in Bakersfield and Santa Barbara, to the Strand in

San Diego and the Egyptian in Long Beach. And he made his mark with Balaban and Katz in Chicago with stints at most of their famous presentation houses. Charlie Chaplin was with him in the pit at the L.A. preem of *The Gold Rush*, feeding him cues. He played the premiere LA showings of *Hunchback of Notre*

Above photo: This is the earliest photo of a young man about to start a rewarding career as a theatre organist taken in 1917. About this time, Chauncey landed his first playing job. Haines recalls that Morton's young installer and maintenance man, Lee Haggart, was present when this photo was taken.

Dame in 1923 and the *Thief of Bagdad* in 1924. During the sound era he was usually a member of the studio orchestras which played soundtrack musical scores for such famous Hollywood composers as Erich Korngold, Max Steiner, Franz Waxman, John Green, Dimitri Tiomkin, David Rose and Alfred Newman. Chances are he'll be cueing a silent film revival tonight. He does 40 such shows a year, often on a 73-rank pipe organ.

But who is Chauncey Haines? You won't find his name in the ATOS Hall of Fame but he played opposite

We first met Chauncey Haines in these pages in a 1971 issue. Since then he has continued with his silent film series, usually in connection with film study courses sponsored by universities. Today, the veteran organist is still "good copy," so we decided on this followup. While Part 1 covers some of the ground we did six years ago, this study of the man reveals some of the more intimate details of his years as a theatre organist. With great frankness he discusses the organs, his many jobs, how he managed to lose them and his multiple marriages. Mr. Haines promises that the next installment will be even more revealing.

Helen Crawford, who ghosted portions of the scores for *Duel in the Sun* and *Saratoga Trunk*. He was an intimate of comedian Harold Lloyd, orchestra conductor for the Sonya Henie ice show and has been playing silent film revivals for the past 15 years, often for the college cinema classes.

Chauncey Haines is one of the most active and creative organists on the music scene continuously since 1917, when he played his first stint in a Los Angeles theatre, the DeLuxe (at Alvarado and Wilshire), one of two LA houses then equipped with Hope-Jones styled 8-rank Wurlitzers. Small organs were all that were available during the war years.

The first time this writer met Chauncey Haines was when he played a concert for the Theatre Organ Club of Los Angeles in the late '50s at the Lorin Whitney studio in Glendale, Calif. That was before auxiliary studios encroached on the speaking area of Whitney's 4/34 WurliMorton and there was room for an audience of 200. Haines arrived after an all night session of performing a Bernard Herrmann score for some subterranean sci-fic epic sound track at the 20th Century Fox studio. Yet he was able to come up with exemplary readings of the "Bagpiper" from *Schwanda* and Wagner's "Liebestod," in crisp organ arrangements. His orthodox approach and offbeat tunelist might have been over the heads of many fans in the late '50s audience. The hobby was new to many in those fledgling days but his audience sensed they were in the presence of greatness, and received him well. Chauncey included some material by Steiner, Herrmann and Tiomkin, and these more familiar soundtrack tunes hit the spot.

After that one concert, we somehow lost track of Chauncey Haines,

but occasionally saw his name mentioned in the trade journals in connection with various motion picture scores.

The next time we heard his name it was in connection with motion picture courses at UCLA; he was scoring the silent classics for the students. Then the university cut back on its motion picture classics and we heard no more of Chauncey Haines. Then, the seat of learning did an about face, and came on strong with its movie series. And Chauncey Haines was once again at the console of the 73-rank Aeolian-Skinner in UCLA's Royce Hall. That was 10 years ago, and Chauncey has since been cueing up to 40 movies a year, some in Royce Hall for UCLA, some for "Filmex," some for UC in Santa Barbara (Campbell Hall), some in Beckman Hall for Pasadena's California Institute of Technology, and some for the Motion

Chauncey Haines in 1920. By this time he was both in demand for the quality of his music and getting fired for being too often AWOL. He was also thinking about getting married for the first time. There would be four more.



Picture Academy in Hollywood.

Let's go back to the beginnings of the Haines career. Music was in the cards for him from the beginning. His grandfather, Jahn, played trumpet during the Civil War, in the Abraham Lincoln Union band. His father, Chauncey Sr., played brass in both the Sousa and Arthur Pryor bands. Then dad decided it was time to settle down with his family in one place and stop the constant travel of "one night stands."

Dad settled for the directorship of the Detroit opera, and by the time he was ten Chauncey had met many of the notables who appeared at the opera house, including William S. Hart, John and Lionel Barrymore. Among the opera orchestra members he found a ready supply of gratis teachers. In no time he became proficient on the piano. But the piano wasn't his only interest; he also played drums, sometimes on horseback in his dad's band for the Pendleton Roundup, a wild west show in the northwest (later called a "rodeo"). The Haines family lived in Walla Walla, Washington for a time.

Then he discovered a new phenomenon springing up everywhere — movies. They needed music and young Chauncey was ready to accompany the "flickers" on the piano. About this time the Haines family moved to southern California's dry climate for his mother's continued health. Movie houses in 1913 were being improvised from Los Angeles stores at an alarming rate. Chauncey heard his first organ in a theatre, a rather dull sounding church organ, but hearing it changed the rest of his life. When he was about 16, another event took place which would further tie him to the theatre organ; two Los Angeles houses installed small but prophetic Hope-Jones Wurlitzer organs, the Million Dollar and the DeLuxe. The DeLuxe organ was a "style 185" (8 ranks) to which a Tibia had been added. The vastly different sound of an organ tailored to film accompaniment needs had a strong appeal to the young man, whose practice was done on church organs.

Another significant event which inspired Haines was the arrival at the LA Million Dollar Theatre in 1917 of a young man named Jesse Crawford, fresh from triumphs in the northwest

(where he was born) and in Grauman theatres in northern California. Haines had never heard anything like the combination of Crawford and the style 185 Wurlitzer organ. He went to the Million Dollar every night he had the price of admission and sat as near to the console as possible, watching Crawford's every move as he produced that gorgeous music. Chauncey was firmly "hooked."

Crawford noticed it, too. One night the great man turned to his faithful fan and asked:

"Interested in organs, kid?" Haines was petrified at being noticed by his idol but managed to mumble an affirmative answer.

"Then come on over and sit on the bench with me," said Crawford, who didn't know then that the youth had already landed a job playing the only other Wurlitzer in town as "relief" (the 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. stint) to the exceptional British organist, Arthur Shaw, at the DeLuxe theatre. Crawford arranged for Haines to be admitted anytime at the Million Dollar's stage door, and shortly thereafter asked Chauncey to take over the console for a brief interval during the final evening show. But the interval was long enough to tell Jesse what he wanted to know; the largely self-taught Chauncey Haines had talent. Chauncey recalls Crawford's stern analysis of his efforts. The man pulled no punches. But he recom-

mended a teacher, and Arthur Shaw marvelled how rapidly Chauncey improved.

When Shaw left the DeLuxe, the obvious replacement was Haines. He was on his way.

Of Shaw, Chauncey says "He was one of the greatest musical technicians I've ever known. I had great respect for his faultless musical taste and his ability to cue silent films. He was second only to Oliver Wallace, the greatest of all time."

In a recent interview, we asked Chauncey about other Los Angeles theatre organists of the 'teens period.

"I don't think ATOSers will recall them," said Haines, "But here are a few — Albert Tufts, Herb Burland, Claude Riemer, Johnny Hill, Reginald Martin, Fred Burr Scholl, Clifford Demarest, and Ollie Wallace. They'd better know Ollie. He greatly influenced the well-established style of Jesse Crawford. But Ollie's forte was film cueing. There was no one like him — as proved in later years when he did orchestral scores for Walt Disney movies and organized Disney's music department under his brilliant leadership."

Let's examine some of Chauncey Haines' engagements during the late teens and early '20s.

"I got fired at the DeLuxe. One afternoon the slide came on the screen for my solo — 'Chauncey Haines at the Organ' — and nothing happened. I was across the street in



A promotional photo of Haines at the original Chicago Theatre 4/29 console. He was delighted to learn that it has been put in working shape by CATOE members.

When the golden era of the theatre organ passed into history, Chauncey Haines organized a concert orchestra which was heard during the early '30s on Los Angeles airwaves.



the park (now McArthur Park) paddling a canoe on the pond — and not alone. The manager came running to the edge of the lake to tell me I'd missed a solo. I answered, 'How am I doing?' He said, 'you're fired.' I lost more jobs because of the arrogance of youth. I was making \$150.00 a week in 1919. That was very high pay then — for anyone, especially a teenager. It went to my head.

"Next, I went to San Diego and got a job at the Strand at \$200.00 a week. I played a very sweet Robert Morton and I lasted about three months. It was the same story. The managers liked my music but not my lack of dependability. The dames, booze and cars aspect was very tempting to a 20-year-old. So, I got fired — and once again I was broke.

"Luckily, organists who could cue silent movies were in demand, so I had no trouble lining up a job at the California theatre in Bakersfield (north of LA). There I played an 8-rank Robert Morton for \$200.00 a week. Still, those exotic cars beckoned. I went through a Chandler and a Chalmers before I was fired. But I was improving; this time I lasted 8 months!

"My next engagement was back in the big time in Los Angeles. The downtown theatres were then making much of their organs, a style set in 1913 when Talley's theatre became a trend setter by installing a huge Murray-Harris straight organ. This marked the start of the 'movie palace' era in LA and the end of the converted store theatre. From this time on, luxury would be a factor. I recall seeing Chaplin's 'Shoulder Arms' at Talley's. That thunderous Murray-Harris was a thriller.

"My engagement was at the Los Angeles Kinema theatre, which later became the Criterion. It was equipped with a 5-manual Robert Morton organ which was a pleasure to play — except for that hard-to-reach top manual. Later, organist Eddie Horton quipped that the top manual was a good place to store one's brown bag lunch.

"My next job was at Loew's State which had a very slow Moller, but that engagement put me in contact with Claude Riemer, a very talented conductor/organist. I learned much from Claude. He was very effective conducting pit orchestras as well as

cueing movies on the Moller.

"Then I connected with the Egyptian theatre in Long Beach (near LA). There I played a circa 12-rank Smith organ known as 'the gutless wonder.' It left much to be desired.

"While I was playing for silent films and vaudeville at the Long Beach Egyptian, I heard the Forum theatre in LA was looking for an organist to spell Julius Johnson, an organist with a problem.

"I had heard about the fabulous Kimball in the Forum. It must have had 43 or 44 ranks of pipes, and it was absolutely the most gorgeous organ I ever played. It had everything a film cuer or recitalist would want. Later most of it was moved to the LA Wiltern theatre.

"My next move was to Chicago — still a haven for theatre organs. The Balaban and Katz chain ran the theatre business in Chicago in 1925, and I started at the famed McVickers theatre — opposite a gal named Helen Anderson, who would soon become Helen Crawford.

"Balaban and Katz kept me moving among many theatres between 1925 and 1929 — the Norshore, Paradise, Marbro, Granada, Avalon, Tivoli, Harding, Congress — and the Chicago. Most, if not all, of these houses had Wurlitzers or Kimballs.

"I don't think I qualify as a member of the 'Wurlitzer only' cult. One of the most perfectly voiced theatre organs I ever played was in the St. Louis Orpheum. It was a Kimball. But I was a Chicago organist in St. Louis. After six months I was escorted politely but firmly by two local AFM "business agents" to the RR station to catch the train back to Chicago. They have a very tough union in St. Louis.

"Back in Chicago I saw a film demonstration. It must have been early in 1927, a film with John Barrymore, named 'Don Juan.' It had a closely synchronized recorded score played through loudspeakers by a symphony orchestra. Vitaphone had arrived.

"I remember attending a club meeting of Chicago organists where I warned that Vitaphone would soon put musicians among the unemployed. I was greeted by laughter. At that time there were 150 organists employed in Chicago theatres. A year later, there were three working.

"I heard about a fabulous theatre



In the early '30s Haines looks to the future, unaware that a great career as a studio musician and film composer is just around the corner. We'll cover that period in a future installment.

being built in Los Angeles, so I returned to the west coast in the hope I might connect with that much heralded house, the Los Angeles theatre. The house was equipped with a 10-rank Wurlitzer and impresario Albert Short hired a 50-man orchestra. It looked like a first class operation with movies, music and stage presentations. I was overjoyed when Short hired me to play the Wurlitzer. Everything went well — for four weeks. Then, all the musicians were fired, and the Los Angeles theatre became a "grind" movie house. That was about my last venture as a theatre organist except for a nine-month stint at the United Artists theatre where I played the Wurlitzer later to become part of Buddy Cole's studio organ. Then I organized a concert orchestra for radio broadcasts."

How about the personal life during those adventurous years? Chauncey was married briefly to showgirl Ethel Stoddard in 1920, for about eight months. He's reluctant to say anything about a brief but disastrous second marriage but he talks with great warmth about his third marriage to coloratura soprano Caltana Christoph. This marriage endured for three years, but by the early '30s, Chauncey was again single and a fourth marriage to Willow Wray, sister of King Kong's "bride" Fay Wray, lasted for 17 years. But we are

ahead of our story. We have seen Chauncey Haines through the silent movie era as a very successful theatre organist. In our next installment, he will meet Hollywood composer/conductor Max Steiner and his life will change again. The best is yet to come. □

Closing Chord

John Victor Stango, 72, a Philadelphia organist, died on February 26.

He served at Philadelphia's Mastbaum and Upper Darby's 69th Street theatres. He later moved to New York and was a concert performer in that city and in Europe. He is survived by a brother and a sister.

Alfred M. "Al" Melgard, dean of Chicago theatre organists, died on July 8 in a Las Vegas nursing home following a prolonged illness. He had retired to that city in 1973 after a tenure of almost forty-five years as head organist at the Chicago Stadium.



Al Melgard, 1890-1977

Born in Denmark on Oct. 4, 1890, Melgard came to America at age seven. Soon after he started organ lessons in a south side Chicago church which led to positions in theatres, as a demonstrator and teacher for the Barton Organ Co., and as organist at the world's largest unit organ, the 6/62 Barton in the stadium. It was he who suggested "Happy Days Are Here again" when F.D. Roosevelt was nominated there in 1932. Mr.

Melgard also operated a teaching studio for many years, training a number of professionals.

A fitting tribute was paid to Mr. Melgard during the "Chicago '77" convention. Ron Bogda played "My Vision," composed by Al for Sonja Henie when she skated on stadium ice during the 1930's.

Mr. Melgard was a member of the ATOS Hall of Fame, an honorary life member of CATOE, a charter member of ASCAP, life member of Local 10, American Federation of Musicians, a Pilgrim in the Moose, a Mason, and a Shriner. He is survived by his wife of more than fifty-five years, Ruth, three children, six grandchildren, twelve great grandchildren and two brothers. Entombment was at Rosehill Mausoleum, Chicago on July 12.

Richard Sklenar

Dessa Byrd Rappaport, elected to our Hall of Fame in 1976, died in her home in Indianapolis May 18, 1977. She was 79. Services were held in the Meridian Street United Methodist Church, where she was a member.

Dessa, a native of Robinson, Illinois, was born March 7, 1898. She was a 1918 graduate of the Indianapolis Conservatory of Music and immediately embarked upon a fabulous musical career.

Dessa was pianist at the former Alhambra and Rialto Theatres before moving to the Circle Theatre in 1919, where she played a church type organ behind the screen for silent movies. A year later the Circle Theatre formed a 35-piece pit orchestra and Dessa played the overture with it.

In 1921 the Circle Theatre purchased a "Mighty Wurlitzer." It was necessary for Dessa to take a crash course to prepare for opening night. This opportunity brought her instant success and the coveted title of "Indianapolis' Theatre Pipe Organ Queen." She continued there until 1928 when she joined the Indiana Theatre for the next three years. Meanwhile, she also played in a dinner music ensemble at the Claypool Hotel.

She was appreciated by her audiences, not only for her ability to play, but for her elegant and colorful satin gowns, usually sleeveless, and her perfectly marcelled hair.



Dessa Byrd, 1898-1977.

In 1923 she married Ed Resener, concertmaster of the Circle Theatre. When the Circle Theatre orchestra was disbanded in 1928, he joined the Indiana Theatre musical staff. He directed the orchestra and she performed organ solos. One week, they stepped out of their regular roles and tap danced together to the delight of the audience.

Dessa married Leo M. Rappaport, a Circle theatre Company officer and Indianapolis attorney in 1942. After his death in 1959, she resumed her musical career. She continued to be known professionally as Dessa Byrd.

With the advent of "talking" or sound motion pictures, she turned to radio and television, working at WIRE and WFMS radio stations and WISH-TV. At one time Mutual Radio Network carried coast to coast her taped organ programs.

She gave her farewell performance in 1971 at the Rivoli Theatre, playing to a standing-room-only crowd.

In 1975 she was awarded the first lifetime membership in the Central Indiana Chapter of ATOS.

As a final tribute to a colorful and charming personality, "she will forever remain the Indianapolis theatre pipe organ queen, a legend to commemorate the dearest memories of the theatre era and an inspiration to all who are dedicated to rejuvenating and preserving the remains of the 'king of instruments' from the most glorious era of the 20th century."

Ruth D. Ward