

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