

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.

During the renaissance of the theatre pipe organ, the refurbished instruments have wound up in sometimes strange places. They are in homes, pizza parlors, a bicycle shop, a motorcycle shop, recreation halls, restaurants, recording studios, a museum, high schools and fraternal order buildings. But in Healdsburg, California, there is a 2/7 Marr & Colton in Johnson's Winery on State Highway 28. When a new bottling is completed, the staff hosts an open house during which Bud Kurz plays the organ. This could be called "Music to Guzzle By."

Not much escapes sharp-eyed Billy Nalle. He sent in a clipping from the ARAMCO Oil Company's slick publication, an article dealing with the great variety of US goods now reaching the Saudi Arabian capital, Jiddah. Photos show piled-up packing cases of air-conditioning units, refrigerators, washers, tires and tur-

bines unloaded from ships and awaiting delivery. And there, broiling in the sun is one packing case clearly labeled "Wurlitzer Organ." On top of it is a smaller case marked "Wurlitzer Bench."

We hope the gals in the harem enjoy their electronic music maker — one doubtlessly equipped with automatic rhythm.

Billy Nalle informs us that most of the tunes for his two record releases played on the 4/36 Dowager Empress Wurlitzer in Wichita's Century II auditorium are "in the can," with only four more to tape. Billy is shooting for an early fall release date.

As readers know, we are always in search of a love story for this column. Here's one from Carol Palmer, mother of the bride.

"Members of the Western Reserve Chapter of ATOS were treated to a different kind of 'organ happening' as two members, Carolyn Palmer and Fred Carson were married, May 14, 1977, in Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Cleveland, Ohio.

"The difference became apparent when Hector Olivera appeared, not as organist but as best man for his friend, Fred 'Frenchy' Carson. Fred maintains the 3/11 Kimball at the Lamplighter Inn in Olmsted Falls.

"When Carolyn joined WRTOS four years ago, Fred was one of the first members she met. They saw each other at meetings and socials, discovered that they had mutual interests, began to date regularly and to repair old pump organs together. Fred slipped the diamond on Carolyn's finger during the Larry Ferrari concert at Gray's Armory in Cleveland last spring.

"Carolyn was a beautiful bride in the wedding gown of Chantilly lace over candlelight satin which her mother had worn as a bride 25 years ago. Fred and Hector in their ivory tuxedos, tried to outdo each other in nervousness. It was a very impressive ceremony.

"The wedding music was played on the Cathedral's Skinner organ by Kenneth Demko, former Lamplighter organist. Sad to relate, but the magnificent Skinner is being al-



Hector, Carolyn and Fred. Look what repairing old pump organs can do.

lowed to go to rack and ruin because a new Flentrop is being built for the Cathedral.

"Guests at the reception in the Cathedral Hall were entertained by Earl Reisdorf, who had trucked in his Hammond for the occasion. Hector, as his friends know, cannot be around an organ very long without trying it out so he played a few songs, to the delight of the guests.

"Fred and Carolyn had only a short honeymoon, since Fred teaches school. However their 'second honeymoon' began when they attended the back-to-back conventions of the Theatre Historical Society and ATOS in Chicago. The Carsons couldn't stay away too long because they are involved in the project to restore the Lorain (Ohio) Palace Theatre with its 3/10 Wurlitzer for use as a Civic Center, and also are involved in the WRTOS-sponsored Super 77 Regional Convention in Cleveland, November 25, 26 and 27, 1977."

Lots of newsy nuggets in these nuptials.

ATOSer Elbert Dawson reports that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Salt Lake City announced during the week of April 24, the appointment of a new (associate) organist at their famous tabernacle. Dr. John T. Longhurst, FAGO, 36, will command the 5/189 Aeolian-Skinner, mostly as accompanist for the 375 voice tabernacle choir. He will join chief organist, Dr. Alexander Schreiner and associate organists, Dr. Robert Cundick and

Roy M. Darley, MM. He will also do some solo work such as the daily noontime recitals; however, the church doesn't emphasize instrumental music and has always concentrated on choral music.

Dr. Longhurst will continue with his present positions which are Associate Professor of music and carillonist at church-operated Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. He specializes in organ instruction and music theory at the "baroque only" organ department of America's largest private university.

He is married to the former Nancy Meldrim of Syracuse, New York, and they have two children.



The Fresno (Calif.) "Bee" reports on an April silent movie and organ concert at the local Warnor's Theatre, sponsored by the University Presbyterian church in their continued effort to raise funds to restore an orthodox organ for a planned sanctuary. They tried it first last fall with a showing of *Phantom of the Opera* and this time they imported (from San Francisco's Avenue Theatre) Bob Vaughn to accompany Charlie Chaplin's *Gold Rush*. The restored 3/14 Robert Morton was in fine shape and if all the people shown waiting to get in made it, they had a very successful fund raiser. The Morton organ restoration resulted from the cooperation of enlightened theatre owner Frank Caglia and the church's choirmaster, Dick Cenci-baugh, long associated with theatre organ preservation in the Fresno area.



It's good to have George Wright back on the pipe concert circuit. Of course, by now the conventioners have heard him play at the Chicago Theatre, and reports are that he had a fine reception for his concert in Connecticut. Long-term Wright watchers have detected a different George of late; gone is the sometimes flamboyant dress of yesteryear, as well as the dramatic hair stylings. But the showmanship and humor remain. During his May 13 concert at the San Gabriel, Calif. 3/16 Wur-litzer, he bantered with friends in the audience and commented on topical



matters (for Anita Bryant he played "The Boy Next Door"). But his entry for Part II was something to remember. As the curtain was raised, George was discovered reclining on a high-flying canoe-size new moon which lowered him slowly to stage level where he "deplaned" and made for the already raised console. He explained that the moon effect had been used recently as an entry device for Ann Miller in a production of *New Moon*, but seeing George coming in on a descending moon had its own shock effect mixed with amusement.



George at San Gabriel. He entered on a phase of the Moon. (Stufoto)

George proved something else at that concert; showmanship and crowd pleasing skills aside, he still comes through with the quality of music which put him among the greats in the first place.



Charles Dailey, of Wilmington, Del., submits a clipping from the local "Evening Journal" (March 24, '77) with Al Cartwright's feature about Gordon Brinckle's hobby theatre, built in his 12' x 30' cellar.

Brinckle, a projectionist and theatre manager, says "They don't make movie houses like they used to." So he built his own "atmospheric" under his Middletown (Del.) home. Named "The Shalimar," it is completely equipped with 18 theatre seats, an army surplus 16 mm projector, carpeting, a miniature organ console (which is also a speaker enclosure) and no chewing gum under the seats. Brinckle started work 17 years ago and estimates he has about \$5,000 invested in the project.

"My kicks are in construction and sound, not showing movies," says Brinckle, which explains why the only films he has are old army training films.

He has fond boyhood memories of the Overbrook Theatre in his native Philly.

"It was so beautiful — a 1000-seater. Now it's a bakery. I miss it. When I was a kid, the manager let me hang around. I was an organ buff even then. The tuners let me push the keys. I grew up to be an usher there.

"In those days movie house people were showmen. (Now) the magic has disappeared."

But not in Brinckle's Shalimar. It has special effects lighting and a color wheel — even headphone jacks on the seats for the hard of hearing. He is especially interested in theatre sound and the Shalimar's system is one which envelops the listener, and organ music emanates directly from the little console.

"I was always more interested in the buildings and the organ music than the pictures. That's how I remember the silents."

Nearing retirement, Brinckle is the projectionist at the Middleton Everett Theatre. When he is free, he can devote full time to his mid-20's Shalimar.



The 16-acre Beverly Hills, Calif. estate of the late film comedian Harold Lloyd is up for grabs again, according to real estate magnate Stan Herman, whose specialty is the posh and costly in film land. Time was when the property was envisioned as a film museum with a theatre and pipe organ, even a permanent HQ for ATOS. But difficulty in raising money and the loud ob-



Water-spewing fountain gargoyle on the Harold Lloyd estate expresses astonishment as the late comedian's home and grounds go on the block once again. (Stufoto)

jections of neighbors killed the hope and it was sold to an individual. Now it's for sale again — for \$4.5 million.



After five consecutive monthly concert evenings with most abominable weather, RTOS concert goers were rewarded with beautiful spring-time temperatures on April 15 when 1625 showed up for the return of Ron Rhode at the Auditorium Theatre. The largest crowd since November 1974 heard a kaleidoscope of tunes ranging from popular pieces to "Pomp and Circumstance" with some nostalgic songs interspersed.



Jack Skelly informs us that old-time New York City theatre organist Will Gilroy is alive and well. Gilroy played Proctor's 86th Street and 58th Street theatres, the Beacon, the Capitol and Brooklyn's Loew's Pitkin. Jack also recalls organist Henrietta Kamern, whose father, Nat., played the violin in the pit orchestra at Loew's State in White Plains, N.Y.



In 1964, enthusiast Bob Oberland of Chevy Chase, Md., bought a 2/8 Wurlitzer for \$500 in Maine, and with an expenditure four times that, installed it in the Baronet Theatre in Bethesda, Md. Now a minicam engineer at WTOP-TV, Bob faces a crisis. The theatre is destined for the

steel ball shortly. On April 12, Rosa Rio presented probably the last concert on the instrument. She gave two shows, the first being aired on TV and radio. "The audience was terrific," she says. "Sorry the theatre has to come down for a Metro rapid transit system."



Massachusetts member Paul Chavanne, upon reading the Nuggets column in the February issue, had his memories rekindled at the mention of Evangeline "Eva" Langley, who served as assistant organist at Boston's Metropolitan Theatre. She did not play the 4/26 Wurlitzer in 1928, however, as the organ was installed in the spring of 1930 when it was opened by Jesse Crawford.

"I caught what may have been Eva's farewell organ performance at the Met in early August 1928," Paul says. "A small fire damaged the Met's 4-manual Skinner. As I arrived on the morning after the fire, the first showing of a weird film, *Forgotten Faces* with Clive Brook, Olga Baclanova and Mary Brian, was in progress. Eva's struggle with the organ made it all more weird. Arthur Martel skipped a scheduled organ solo called 'Write Your Own Lyrics' and accompanied the second showing of the film on the pit piano.

"The Skinner remained out of service until the last week in November 1928 when Martel returned for solos. The house had long been wired for sound as Richard Dix played in *Warming Up* the week before *Forgotten Faces*. When the house went on a steady diet of sound films, Eva Langley left the Met. When the 4/26 Wurlitzer was installed, Martel and Esther Newcomb played two-console presentations, while Chester Brigham played openings.

"Langley did a good job in silent movie accompaniment, while Martel's forte was showmanship to put over spotlight solos," says Paul.



Veteran film cuer Luella Wickham was honored by the Corinthian Foundation's Wagon Wheel Senior Center in Syracuse, N.Y. recently. Now 84, Luella says, "Music is the



Luella, a beloved reminder of the theatre organ's greatest days. (Stufoto)

best therapy for a long life. That's my secret."

In an interview with local press reporter Carolyn Straub, Luella recalled her first playing job in 1911 at the long gone Savoy Theatre on South Warren Street in Syracuse.

She later played at most Syracuse theatres, including the Eckel (a church Austin replaced by a 3/8 Wurlitzer), the Strand (Austin replaced by a 3/12 Wurlitzer) and the Rivoli (2/6 Marr & Colton). The published interview included a photo of Luella seated at the Wagon Wheel's plug-in.

Then on June 11, she played a concert for the local ESTMIM organ club on another old friend, the 3/11 Wurlitzer rescued from the steel-balled Syracuse Keith's Theatre by local fans and now safe in the New York State Fair Grounds building.

To fill in her "spare time," she maintains a full teaching schedule.



Lee Erwin reports many adventures before, after and during his 4500 mile (23 city) concert tour. Lee tells of a new addition to the theatres-with-organ list; the Colonial Theatre in Phoenixville, Penna. has a 3-deck Kimball which used to be in the Brookline Theatre near Philadelphia. A string of one nighters with the Rodgers Touring Organ accounted for a whole month. Rodgers' truck driver/setup man Craig Allen is a genius, insists Lee. That tour covered seven states, and included two tire blow-outs. In Pensacola, Florida, Lee noticed something peculiar about the print of *The General* unfolding on the screen. He had dif-



Lee Erwin. Always doing something.

ficulty reading the titles and subtitles. Small wonder, the distributor had delivered the Italian version of *The General* by mistake. "They loved it anyway," says Lee. Lee showed up early in June for the "1977 Science-Fiction Horror and Fantasy World Exposition" in Tucson, Arizona, where speakers such as famed director Frank Capra (*Lost Horizon*), Johnny "Tarzan" Weismuller, monster animator Ray Harryhausen, Buster "Flash Gordon" Crabbe, Mae "Betty Boop" Questral and Clarence "Donald Duck" Nash, competed with the lab set from *Frankenstein*, the Starship Enterprise bridge set from *Star Trek* and costumes and props from the *Planet of the Apes*, for attention. Sometime during the five day run, Lee provided accompaniments for such warhorse silents as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Metropolis*, *Thief of Bagdad* and *Sherlock Jr.*



When Danny Schultz was in the process of overseeing the initial restoration of Rochester's RKO Palace Theatre Wurlitzer in 1960, he was determined that the instrument would be enriched by the addition of a Post Horn rank. When the organ was re-installed in the Auditorium Theatre in 1967, he converted an Orchestral Oboe into a Post Horn, with some help from a professional voicer. That set of pipes has served its purpose these ten years, and to eliminate problems which have arisen

with it, the RTOS Board of Directors has commissioned the M.P. Moller Co. to build a new set of Post Horn pipes. Advice from Billy Nalle and George Wright was a major factor in the selection of the Moller Co. over four other firms.



One of Ashley Miller's recent ventures was as part of the band in Madison Square Garden for the *Greatest Show on Earth*. He played an electronic with the Ringling Bros. Circus band for nine weeks in the Spring. "It was rough work, doing two or three shows a day, surrounded by 25 musicians trying to make themselves heard in the cavernous Garden. But the pay was very good," he says.



The wonder of it all! Bob Van Camp explains the intricacies of Atlanta's "Mighty Mo" to visitor Debbie Lynn during the west coaster's March visit east. Debbie reports that Bob was most kind, taking lots of time to provide her with a proper briefing of the one-of-a-kind 4/42 Moller which a spirited group, Atlanta Landmarks, is determined shall remain in its original home, and that home shall remain intact. The ATOS Atlanta Chapter has recently issued a record with performances by Bob Van Camp and several other fine artists as a fund raiser.

Incidentally, Debbie finished high school in 3½ years and immediately enrolled in California's Loma Linda University. But she went back to Upland (Calif.) high school come June to graduate with her class.



Lee and Laurel Haggart, who have often been mentioned in these pages, are now residents of Twin Falls, Idaho. They were visiting fellow organ buff George Brown last September, fell in love with the area, and moved there in December. Lee's doctor strongly advised his leaving the Los Angeles area, so that was a second factor in the move. Lee has perhaps more information on organ builders, organists, and the theatre organ movement dating from the early years, than anyone alive. "He is a walking encyclopedia, and if one were to visit him for several hours with a tape recorder in motion, he'd glean some material never published heretofore," says the Old Prospector.



Author John Landon, whose devotion to the theatre organ cause is legendary, announces that a second record has been cut for early release on the 3/7 Page in Anderson, Indiana's Paramount Theatre. John



has played this instrument on week-ends for several years. Proceeds from the disc will be used to swell the organ's maintenance fund.



Cheryl Creel



Wayne Seppala

Our continuing search for romance has led us to the "Spaghetti and Pizza Pavilion" in San Diego where two young staffers who play the Reginald Foort Moller committed matrimony on July 9. Congrats to organists Wayne Seppala and the former Cheryl Creel.



In April, Edward "Doc" Bebo was presented with a gold membership card by AFM because of his 50 years as a member of New York City Local 802. At the age of 17, he became a member when he landed his first professional job at New York's Cosmo Theatre at 116th and Third Avenue. The organ was a 2/8 Kramer, assembled by a Thomas Vasientino. The regular organist, Robert

Soffer, had gone on vacation, Doc pinch-hit, and Soffer never returned. Doc was a theatre organist in the New York area for 15 years, and has remained an 802 member. Congratulations, "Doc!" Anyone know what became of Soffer?



One of the leading Buffalo radio stations is WGR and it observed its 55th anniversary on May 22, with a daylong schedule of old programs, reminiscences by veteran announcers and alumni, and excellent nostalgia. One program lead-in was from *Little Orphan Annie* which originated in Chicago. Ambrose "Larry" Larson played the theme on a studio Wurlitzer. Another program excerpt was from *The Shadow* with organ background by Rosa Rio. Veteran orchestra leader, Cliff Kaiser, remembered the days when he played Buffalo's Capitol Theatre at South Park and Triangle, as a drummer from 1912 to 1920, "before they installed an organ which ran us out."



Walter Beaupre submits a fascinating paragraph which appears in a new book titled *Phantoms of the Theater*, by British author Raymond Lamont Brown. It concerns a "ghost organist" in the Avon Theatre, Utica, N.Y.

"Some fifty years ago, it seems, a mystery woman ran down the center aisle of the Avon Theatre and shot the pipe organist dead. Gossip of the time had it that the organist was cheating on his wife, and she took the traditional way out of the situation. From that time to the theatre's demolition in 1947, the building was deemed haunted. Night porters at the Avon testified that the organ would rise from the pit at midnight and play music, without the assistance of human hands. The theatre auditorium would be filled with sinister music until someone entered. Then it stopped. During the last few years of its existence, the theatre had difficulty employing staff, so well known did the psychic happenings become."

Having lived in Central New York for many years and having at least a nodding acquaintance with the

Avon, we decided to look into the ghost story. We wrote to ATOSer Don Robinson, who conducts the weekly *Organ Loft* record broadcast in the area. He contacted Raymond Conrad, assistant organist at the Avon in 1926-1927. Conrad said he knew nothing of a ghost at the Avon. And George S. Davis, who used to broadcast the circa 8 rank Wurlitzer over WIBX radio in the '30s, just chuckled and said "It's all fiction" when Don asked him about the ghost.

If the console rose from the pit at midnight, it did so without the aid of an elevator; it was not so equipped. Don adds that even the demolition year of 1947 is in error in the British book. Don informs us that the Avon was demolished in the mid-'60s. The 3-deck Wurlitzer was long gone by that time.

Look to your sources, Mr. Brown.



Byron Olsen sadly reports that the Capitol Theatre in Davenport, Iowa, closed on May 6. It is located in a large, well-occupied building complex, so the theatre won't be torn down.

Meanwhile, the theatre's 3/10 Moller-Wicks organ languishes in silence, its future in doubt. This instrument was the focal point of CRATO's concert activities in recent years, attracting such stars as Dennis James, Hector Olivera, Rex Koury and Lee Erwin, all playing before capacity houses. □

SUPER
'77
WESTERN RESERVE
REGIONAL
CONVENTION

FRIDAY
SATURDAY
SUNDAY
NOVEMBER
25-26-27
1977

CLEVELAND
OHIO