

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.

Sorry we must open on a minor chord, but as we go to press the major wire services are reporting that the Radio City Music Hall in New York will close following the Easter show, after 45 years of operation. Declining attendance was given as one reason. Once "the showplace of the nation," the huge theatre, which always featured a stage presentation with its first run G-rated movies, has suffered from the lack of appropriate films and security in Gotham. If you attended a Music Hall evening performance you were also running a chance of being mugged on the streets. At this writing no information was available as to the fate of the 4/58 Wurlitzer but we have high hopes that a wealthy ATOSer or organization will rescue it.

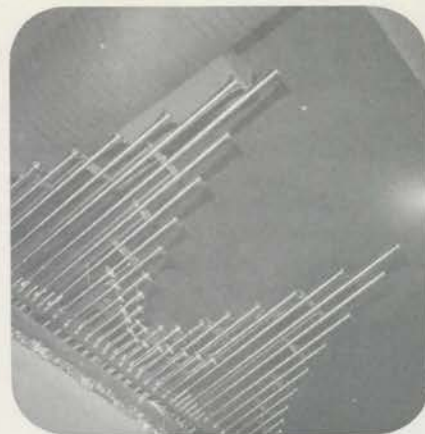


The trio of San Diego, Calif. spaghetti and pizza chain of organ-enhanced eateries no longer exists. The Mesa installation (3/14 Wurli) survives but the Pacific Beach (5/28 Reggie Foort Moller) and the Solana

Beach (4/20 Robert Morton) pizzerias are closed and the instruments disposed of. Owner Preston "Sandy" Fleet explains that the two restaurants operated continually at a loss, and, as a businessman, he couldn't afford to sustain them. The Mesa installation, on the other hand, has always shown a profit and will continue to operate.

Sandy Fleet has disposed of his organs thusly: the Solana Beach Morton has been donated to an organization (details later). The 5/28 Moller has been sold to J.B. Nethercutt (sponsor of the San Sylmar, Calif. Tower of Beauty Museum) and its disposition has not been determined. Rumors that it would be installed in the Hollywood Pantages Theatre are untrue, according to Gordon Belt, who speaks for Nethercutt. The Trompette-en-Chamade which had been added to the Moller goes to a Bakersfield Church, where it will be added to the heretofore homeless Harvard Chapel organ, so long a cause celebre of organist Virgil Fox. The style D Wurlitzer which was also installed with the Moller, goes into storage.

Conditions attached to both the Morton and the Moller is that both remain intact. Conversely, the 4/28 assembled Wurlitzer which Fleet bought from George Allen has been broken up for parts, with roughly three-fourths of it (about 20 ranks) donated to the Oakland, Calif. Para-



Sandy's Trompette-en-Chamade. To church, with a Harvard accent. (Stufoto)

mount organ project. The remainder was donated to the San Diego ATOS chapter.

We can't help but wonder how these vast changes will affect the ATOS Convention planned for San Diego.



Gunnar Anderson, intermission organist at the Mount Baker Theatre in Bellingham, Wash., recently took a vacation trip to Panama. He had a goal; to find out what had become of the 3/27 Wurlitzer which had been such a solid draw at the Panama Hilton hotel in Panama City until a Canadian firm with no interest in organs bought the hotel and removed the organ, later selling it for a reported 10 grand. Gunnar managed to locate one of the Hilton's last or-



Gordon Belt presents Sandy Fleet with the check from Merle Norman Cosmetics paying for the transfer of the 5/27 Reginald Foort Moller to the J.B. Nethercutt Company.

ganists, Pablo Herrero. The experience had made Pablo a pipe addict, and he became the unofficial champion of the stored organ. He was determined that the organ, which had originally been installed in the Atlantic City Warner's Theatre, would be heard again in Panama. He started doing the rounds of possibly interested parties and hit pay dirt at the Continental Hotel. There was a glimmer of interest when he told about what a draw the organ had been while installed in the Hilton's "El Bombarde" cocktail lounge. It took a lot of convincing, but finally the owner of the Continental hotel decided to buy the Wurlitzer, whose price had meanwhile risen to a reported \$45,000.

Chambers are being built in the Continental. It is expected that it will be playing by July 1978. The organist? Pablo Herrero, naturally.

It will be recalled that the Wurlitzer was moved from Atlantic City to Panama City in the early '60's by Leroy Lewis and technician Ted Campbell. They installed it in the Hilton and Lewis was the first staff organist. He was followed by Bill Coffman, Lyn Larsen and Pepi Bustamente, among others. Another one saved.



Ken Veneron sends a clipping from the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle which indicates that some reporters assigned to cover organ events could profitably do some woodshedding, else develop an ear for music. Reporter Larry King innocently discovers that such a thing as a theatre organ exists, describes what it was designed to do, provides some history of the RTOS 4/22 Wurlitzer involved, how the "talkies" silenced it, discovers that the instrument functions only when there is an organist, compares the organ's obsolescence with horse drawn carriages and the Model T (Ford) and adds: "Something better replaced it."

But not a word about the concert played in Rochester's Auditorium Theatre by no less than Del Castillo.



Games played by the Tampa Bay Rowdies soccer team are "cued" much like a silent movie, reports John Tyner. The organist is Leora Birk, playing the three truncated manuals of a Conn model 580, plus



From tiny press row room, Leora Birk keeps the Tampa Rowdies musically inspired. Note microphone position just below the lower keyboard.

an organ-top Electric Band synthesizer. As the players are introduced at the Florida playing field, each one comes on to a brassy fanfare. When the game starts, Leora tailors the music to the action. When the Rowdies are advancing, it's ascending chromatic chords. As they near the opponents' goal, the music speeds up to a gallop, followed by the "charge" trumpet call. When the Rowdies score, its pure pandemonium, and the Electric Band provides a rising siren while Leora

makes with "The Rowdie Song."

Should the team miss a goal Leora has a sour "lamentation chord." But officials who clap a penalty on the Rowdies are assaulted with a facetious "Three Blind Mice" roaring out of the Tamps Soccer Stadium's PA system. Should the ball approach the Rowdie's goal, it's slow music and if the opponents score a goal, it's the "Funeral March."

Sometimes Leora cues the ball as it bounces on the ground with Wood Block "plocks," quite a trick considering the organ is located in a glassed-in box atop the grand stand far above the field. To be in sync, she must hit the Block button while the ball is still in the air.

This is Leora Birk's third year as official organist for the Rowdies, and she has yet to develop a whit of sympathy for the opposing teams. No wonder she has become such a plus morale factor to rooters for the Tampa team.



Add Syracuse N.Y. to the list of cities wherein a group of dedicated citizens are trying desperately to save a movie palace, 3000-seat Loew's State. Spokesman Jim Foley says that Syracuse Area Landmark Theatre (SALT) needs \$100,000 to buy and repair the Thomas Lamb — designed house. Its 4/20 Wurlitzer is long gone, having been spirited away to storage in California 10 years ago by an organ broker who paid \$5,000 for it. SALT wants it back but the cur-

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DON BAKER
on the 4/58 Wurlitzer
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After 45 years, Radio City Music Hall will close its doors following this Easter Show.

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rent owner refuses to sell. If SALT can raise the theatre's purchase price, matching federal funds will help toward establishing the ornate house as a performing arts center.



Lee Erwin. Doubling on tape. (This photo was made by movie star Gloria Swanson when Lee visited her.)

Lee Erwin reports that the late Ben Hall's "Little Mother" Wurlitzer has been giving good service since it was installed in the New York Carnegie Hall Cinema last March. Lee has also been playing silents on a plug-in in the downtown Bleeker Street Cinema. He's totalled 148 performances between them since March, scrambling between the two houses. Sometimes there's a scheduling foul-up and Lee finds himself listed to play both houses at the same time. After an unsuccessful search for a substitute to alleviate one such problem, Lee settled the matter by taping his score for the Bleeker Street Cinema's show. Which brings up a question? Is it still a silent movie show in the full sense of the phrase if a soundtrack has been added? Without a visible musician I want my nickel back.



ATOS member Dave Broskowski recently visited Mrs. Dan Barton for the purpose of gathering information for an article in process to be entitled, *The Barton Story, the Man, the Company, the Product*, being written by Dave.

While in Oshkosh, Dave examined an original 3/21 Barton church installation still in use (actually one of many in the area). "It has a smooth

romantic-era ensemble, which really blends... a true straight design with straight chests, straight-rail Barton style church console, lower pressures, and differing scales from their theatre work. Especially notable was the 8' Doppelflote and an excellent 16' Violone in the Pedal. Barton manufactured all of their wood pipes in their Oshkosh factory," writes Dave.

From another source we learned that Dave also took time out to play weekend interludes before the show at Milwaukee's atmospheric Avalon Theatre on a late 3/9 Wurlitzer during July and August. The organ is maintained by the Dairyland chapter and features a "gorgeous Tibia and Vox Combination".



We lost a couple in the Bay Area of San Francisco. The 2/9 Wurlitzer, for many years the only distinguishing quality at the "Lost Weekend" watering hole in San Francisco, was silenced and removed, reportedly because of the complaints of other tenants in the building. It was "replaced" by a — Yamaha! Also closed down are the pipes in Rudy's Supper Club in Vallejo, replaced with a plug-in." For years Dave Quinlan played a 2/6 Wurlitzer there, often expanding to a jazz combo on weekends. No info has been received regarding the disposition of the instruments.



A clipping from a Clearwater, Florida newspaper indicates that the organ in the Kirk of Dunedin is perking once more, a rebirth which has given it voice after a year of si-

lence caused by a disastrous fire. Its mentor, Terry Charles, writes, "It's really something, the way this new concert series is taking off. The organ is much better than ever before. We are getting a terrific response." Good news!



Bob Ralston. Only slightly incorrigible.

Organist Bob Ralston is prominent in *Lawrence Welk's Musical Family Album*, a photo-autobiography with a running commentary by the maestro (\$12.95, Prentice-Hall). Some of Welk's comments are revealing: "Musically, Bob and I don't always agree. But after a little hot and heavy discussion (during which I pointed out that I was the boss!), Bob agreed to do it my way, with no baubles, bangles or birdcalls."



From Columbus, Ohio, we learn that Heidi James has been commissioned to write an original silent movie accompaniment for Harold Lloyd's *Safety Last* to be scored for piano, organ and the Columbus Symphony orchestra during the Ohio Theatre's 50th Anniversary celebration on March 12. Says Heidi, "I'm up to here in manuscript paper." Wonder if she has any special organist in mind for that show? (Your Vox Popper is available, Heidi!).



The electric sign which usually announces shows and exhibits had a different message on Dec. 29, 1977. There would be a wedding in Wichita's Century II Exhibition Hall, present home of the former N.Y. Paramount "Dowager Empress" 4/36



Wurlitzer (now 4/37). Organ enthusiasts Mike Coup and Karen White were married by Judge Robert Stephan before 200 invited guests. ATOS Director and Past President Dick Simonton was best man.

After the ceremony, the reception was held in the same hall. The desire to include the famous organ in the festivities was easily explained. The groom has been a major driving force in getting the Wurlitzer a permanent home in Century II and is the current president of the sponsoring organization, Wichita Theatre Organ Inc. From all reports the bride has become as enthusiastic as the groom in the TO cause.

The reception was sparked by organ music played by local artists Tom Taylor, Alan Malaby, Jim Sanford and Carl Packer. Rick Shindell came all the way from Toledo, Ohio, to participate. The final performer

was WTO resident organist Billy Nalle.

It was a warm and inviting setting as the guests danced on the attractively decorated stage, never far from Mother Wurlitzer's console.



Charlie Balogh. 'Hitched.'

(Stufoto)

Another wedding of interest to TO fans took place at the Fountain Street church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on Nov. 3, 1977. Married were Charlie Balogh and Carrie Adams. The bride and groom met where they are both employed, the pipe organ-equipped Roaring '20s pizzeria, reports Barbara Gedris. Charlie, who is a staffer at the '20s, will be remembered as the young man who presented a most attractive concert on the Trenton (N.J.) War Memorial Moller during the 1976 ATOS convention.



A TOAST TO THE NEWLYWEDS — The best man, Richard Simonton, left, and the Matron of Honor, Connie Ficklin, right, offer well wishes to Karen and Michael.

Elsewhere in this issue is the account of Reginald Foort's farewell concert at the Vancouver Orpheum. Nothing was mentioned about the reception held Nov. 11 for the retiring organist nor the remarkable PR man who brought it to fruition. The man responsible for both the concert (including the organ restoration) and the party was Herbert McDonald, long prominent in western Canadian promotional work. Herb held the party at his home on a mountain side west of Vancouver. For Reggie Foort it was like an episode of *This is Your Life*. He had brought wife Betty, the first time she had gone along on a concert engagement. At Herb's long bar, the Foorts met a score or more of people who had figured in Foort's past, for example, Irv Pearson, a member of Foort's traveling organ crew in Britain in the late '30s, Peter West who had sung to Foort's accompaniment at the Regal Theatre, Kingston on Thames — when Peter was ten! There were Frank and Teddy Killinger. Frank had released the recording of Foort's reunion with his beloved 5/27 "traveling Moller" in San Diego and who had come to Vancouver to record the organist's farewell concert for immediate release. There was Ken Hodgson who headed a group of ATOS volunteers in the seven-month organ restoration project, and Hodgson's teacher, Stan Haddon, who had maintained the 3/11 all through the vaudeville salad days. And alderman Bill Gibson was there. Bill had supported the loan which made the restoration possible. Reggie met some of his relatives who live in western Canada for the first time — cousins Ted and George Foort, both born in India.

Foort was visibly shaken when alderman Gibson read the inscription on a plaque to be attached to the Orpheum console which credited the veteran player as the "rededication organist." "It was just my way of celebrating my wife, Helen's birthday," said Herb McDonald. And the cake was there to prove it.



Several correspondents, notably Tom De Lay and Elbert Dawson, provide details about the retirement of Alexander Schreiner as organist at the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City after 53 years of service. Schreiner bid farewell to the enormous



Alexander Schreiner. A distinguished career included a smattering of theatre work.

choir during its Christmas party. Even then, he managed a "first," — he sang "A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody" to the gals in the 375-voice vocal group. Born in Nuremberg, Germany, his family moved to Utah in 1912 and it wasn't long before the gifted Schreiner made his musical presence known.

Theatre organ buffs will appreciate his two stints in that capacity, first at the American Theatre in Salt Lake City, playing a 4-manual Kimball, very straight. Then he obtained a leave to try his hand at the Los Angeles Metropolitan Theatre's style 285 Wurlitzer. His engagement lasted six months (in the late '20s), after which he returned to church duties in Utah, never again to play a theatre instrument. He is best remembered as the organist (along with Dr. Frank Asper) who played the Tabernacle organ for a memorable series of Sunday morning CBS radiocasts which spanned the decades. He is also a composer and teacher. Welcome to leisure days, Dr. Schreiner.



SHORTIES: LA Dodgers organist Helen Dell's musical greeting to an opposing team during the 77' World Series — "Send in the Clowns." . . . The only known "X-rated" organ console in a theatre is in the Riviera,

North Tonawanda, N.Y. It's an original 1926 Wurlitzer installation, decorated with female nudes . . . The long-going restoration of the 2/11 Kimball in Elkhart, Indiana's 2100-seat Lyceum Theatre now has the instrument playable, reports prime mover Peter DeYoung. The 16' pedal Bourdon has a 10-2/3' mutation to obtain a 32' effect . . . RTOS (Rochester, N.Y.) knows how to attract an audience. More than 1500 attended the Dennis James Halloween concert at the Auditorium Theatre . . . Multiple trumpeter Vic Hyde once owned 15 Rolls Royces, but now settles for a German Tempo truck. The Tempo carries his band wagon calliope with fewer alterations . . . A comer: 16-year-old David Peckham, who created a sensation playing the newly refurbished 4/22 Marr & Colton in Elmira, N.Y.'s Samuel Clemens Performing Arts Center at a Nov. 19 concert there . . .

Visiting British organist Ron Curtis, here on a concert tour, delighted RTOS members by turning a goodly portion of his fee back into the organ fund, the first to do so of the 72 organists who have played for the Rochester club . . . Bill Blunk invites



Ron Curtis. Generous.

organ fans passing through Portland, Ore., to drive the 11 miles to Sherwood to enjoy his 5/24 Marr & Colton in the refurbished Oriental Theatre . . . Model railroaders who attended the November show in St. Paul's (Minn.) Har Mar ballroom were afforded the additional bonus of ATOSer Claude Newman playing interludes on an unspecified theatre pipe organ according to *Model Railroader* magazine . . . In 1971, downtown Chicago had 16 theatres with a total of 24,024 seats. Since then, the Bismarck, Michael Todd, Monroe, Clark and Marina City theatres have

shuttered permanently. Lucky the Oriental has been saved, else the loss of seats would have totalled 8,697, or 36 percent . . . The Land O'Lakes ATOS chapter has 224 members, with eleven pipe organs in homes, or in progress, reports news-hen Bea Englund . . . Carolyn Beck reports that Dr. Rainsford A. Brown, Bettendorf, Iowa, has donated his home installation, a 3/20 Wicks, to Rust College, where it has been installed in Morehouse Auditorium . . . George Faxon, organist at Boston's Trinity Church, Copley Square, is seeking information about theatre organist Deszo D'Antalfy's descriptive compositions. D'Antalfy was one of the original staffers at the New York Roxy . . . Scratch the 3200 seat RKO Keith's Theatre in White Plains, N.Y. It opened on Nov. 7, 1927 with a youth named Jack Skelly at the 3/10 Wurlitzer . . .



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December 3, 1977, was a great day for the theatre organ in Beaumont, Texas. ATOS prexy Ray Snitil and treasurer Erwin Young were there relative to the establishment of the Southeast Texas Chapter, which is centered at Beaumont with its fine 8-rank Robert Morton organ in the Jefferson Theatre. The visitors ran into an unexpected helping of Texas hospitality. First, Mayor Ken Ritter issued a proclamation, loaded with "whereases" extolling the wonders of the theatre organ and proclaiming Dec. 3 as "Southeast Texas Chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society Day." Then Mayor Ritter, who is a nephew of famed Tex Ritter of the movies, gave Ray and Erwin the keys to the city of Beaumont and made them Honorary Citizens of Beaumont. Declared "Cap" Young, "Talk about civic cooperation! The whole town of Beaumont is theatre organ-conscious. Ray and I were treated like kings!"

All of which must be most satisfying to Al Sacker, the organist who worked so long and hard to convince the city that it had treasure in the Jefferson Theatre. You've done it, Al.



Bob Legon writes from Malden, Mass. of the arrival of "Andre" at the New England Aquarium at Boston where he immediately dove into his favorite tank of water. Andre is a tame seal who spends winters at the aquarium, but is freed to summer in Maine. He swims both ways. His arrival back in Boston is an annual event and this year WBZ-TV covered Andre's return to his winter quarters on Nov. 2. What set the presentation apart was background music dubbed in from George Wright recordings, Bob says the organ music set the scene of Andre coming ashore to be greeted by a delegation of humans very effectively. He adds that it reminded him a bit of scenes in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (which also featured a seal) with George Wright doing an unintentional and invisible Captain Nemo.



We can't begin to thank all the wonderful people who were so thoughtful as to send Season's Greetings cards to THEATRE ORGAN staffers. We can't possibly acknowl-

A TRIBUTE TO BUDDY COLE

A certain glow has left this earth
And reached the great above;
Another star now lights the sky
In brightness of its love.

It leaves us with such sorrow
This dark and saddened day;
But the world is so much richer
For his having passed this way.

The happiness he gave us
Through his music and his song;
The memory of his cheerful smile
Will linger on and on.

For this man was a giant
In a world sometimes so small;
It makes me wish with all my heart
I could be half as tall.

So sleep in peace, dear Buddy Cole
We weep for you in prayer;
We ask that God watch over you
In special loving care.

For there is a special place for you
In the hearts of young and old;
But there will never be for us
Another Buddy Cole.

by Max E. Schloss

edge them by mail, but they are very much appreciated. Thanks, friends!



(Pegpic)

If your VOX POPS column seems a little truncated this issue, the photo will explain. During the recent holidays your Vox Popper took a dive and the result was a bifurcated wrist. The heavy dose of plaster-of-paris proved something of a handicap and it slowed us down considerably.

It also proved that one-armed Vox Popping can be somewhat limiting. Try getting the stopper out of a bottle with one arm useless. Try tying

your shoe strings one handed. Try getting into your wet suit for a plunge into Mare Nostrum. Hope the knitting is complete by next issue. □

moving?

Send your change of address to . . .

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