

Emery Theatre Organ Dedicated

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Photos by Peggy Palange

Gaylord Carter acknowledges applause of audience.



Downtown Cincinnati, Ohio is, what they call, undergoing progress. One entire side of Fountain Square, as well as other large areas in the immediate vicinity, have been brought to ground level by the wrecking ball. New buildings — higher, brighter and more contemporary — will rise from the earth for new generations to work in, eat in and be entertained in.

One of the buildings that bit the dust was the well-known Albee Theatre, located on the south side of the Square. For a number of years, the Albee was the home of a fine Wurlitzer theatre organ but its pipes had long since grown silent with “progress.” The talkies were in, and no longer were the likes of Hy C. Geis, Grace Baucom, Johanna Grosse, Lee Erwin and Gaylord Carter needed at the keyboard.

That’s what everyone was thinking — and resigned to — until the Ohio Valley Chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society got into the act. The Albee organ would live, the Society said. Quicker said than done.

Let’s start with 1968. It was then that RKO-Stanley Warner Theatres, owners of the Albee, decided to give the organs remaining in their theatres to charitable and educational institutions. The Ohio Valley Chapter of ATOS was contacted to see if a suitable home could be found for the fine instrument.

After a long search, the Ohio College of Applied Science-Ohio Mechanics Institute, then an independent institution, announced its willingness to house the organ. The beauty of that offer was that the college owned the Emery Theatre at its Central Parkway and Walnut Street location in downtown Cincinnati. The college is now part of the University of Cincinnati.

The Emery was the former home of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, a facility possessed of fine acoustics, a seating intimacy that gives the audience in the 1,680-seat house a feeling of being a part of the performance and a convenient location.

The Emery was built through a \$500,000 gift from Philanthropist Mary Emery, and for almost 25 years the Cincinnati Symphony played most of its concerts there. Conductor Leopold Stokowski called the acoustics “superb — the power of the orchestra in the smaller hall seems

greater, but the blending of the instruments is above reproach."

The years between the two world wars were the great days for productions at the Emery. Walter Hampden and Maurice Evans were there in Hamlet. Mme. Schumann-Heinck, Fritz Kreisler and Rachmaninoff were there in concert, and Anna Pavlova, Russia's prima ballerina, danced on the Emery stage during her farewell American tour.

In recent years, several other theatres in downtown Cincinnati followed the Albee into disuse, but the Emery stood — waiting.

The word went out to ATOS members that volunteer help, and money, were needed to dismantle the Albee organ and install it in its new home on the Emery stage.

Mr. and Mrs. John J. Strader, prominent Cincinnati theatre organ lovers and philanthropists, responded with substantial contributions. The couple then expanded their generosity by securing the largest theatre screen in the state of Ohio and by having the excellent professional theatre projectors and sound equipment modernized and overhauled.

For the next eight and one-half years — years, not months — members of ATOS worked to restore the Albee organ in its new home. One retired radio-television engineer spent

The Emery Wurlitzer with view of swell shades in the background.



The Emery Theatre foyer.

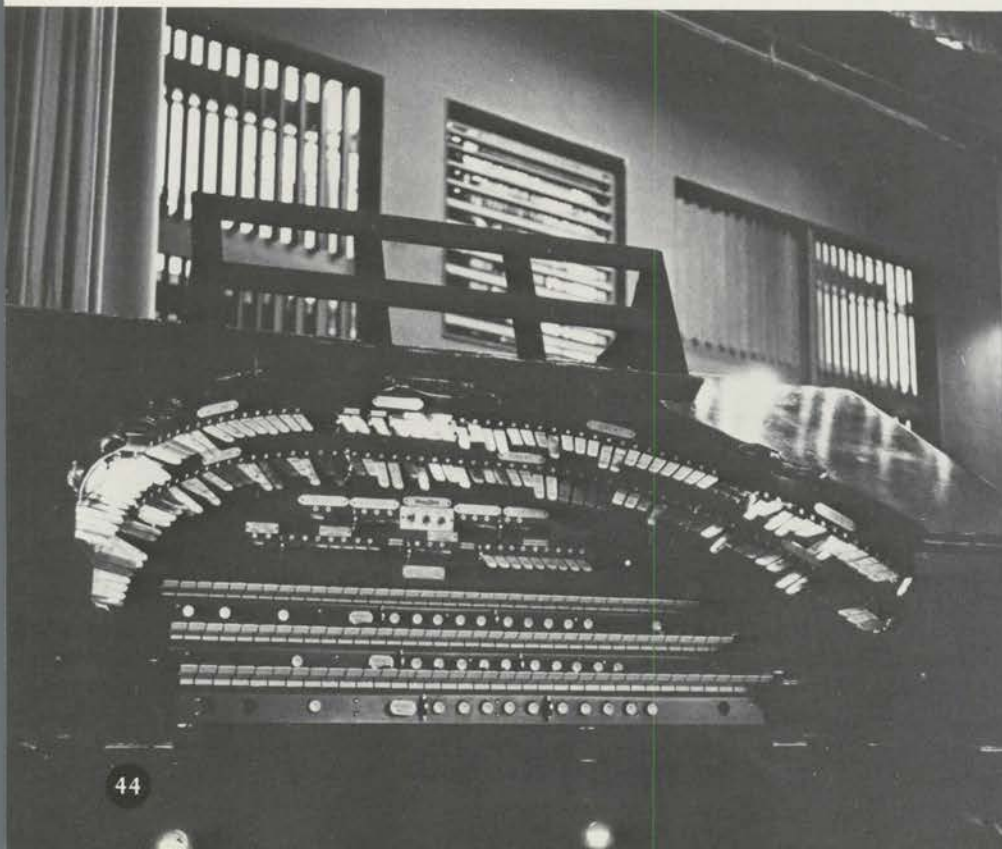


A full house for the dedication of the Emery Wurlitzer.

almost the entire time in the sub-basement of the Emery, installing the electrical panel and connecting wires that would produce the right sound when a key was depressed on the organ out front.

Finally the task was finished, and on the weekend of October 21-22-23, 1977 the rebuilt organ was dedicated before full houses of cheering music lovers and theatre buffs. Gaylord Carter was there, tickling the ivories while old silent films were projected on the huge screen.

The organ is truly magnificent, better than it ever was in the Albee. When removed from that theatre, it had three manuals and 19 ranks. When it was newly installed in the Emery, it had an additional rank, a pedal violone stop from the Austin



organ once installed in the Liberty Theatre in Covington, Ky., across the Ohio River. The rank was donated to the chapter by member Herbert E. Merritt.

A special Chinese gong was added to the organ's percussion section, a gift from members Philip and Blanche Underwood. Mr. Underwood had recently retired from Station WLW after 42 years as an engineer. The station had given the old gong to him as a keepsake from the days when WLW originated a number of live radio programs that were heard all over the country.

By the evening that Gaylord Carter touched the dedication keys, more than 20,000 volunteer hours had been spent on the organ's restoration. But, audiences have proclaimed the labor an effort well worth all the energy.

Now starts the next phase, the eventual restoration of the Emery Theatre. It has been only sparsely used in recent years and major repairs and renovation must be made before the house is truly suitable for the renewal of concerts. Yet, those dedication audiences, filling the place wall to wall, clearly indicated that the Emery could again be a popular theatre.

Beyond its use for entertainment, it is an ideal place for rehearsals and performances of the University's famed College-Conservatory of Music, now in need of more space for its many activities. The science college next door, which is entered through the theatre foyer, could make good use of the space for large lectures.

Leaders of the Organ Society and the University have held several preliminary conferences on what might be done with the Emery Theatre. The University wants to cooperate to the extent possible, but no fixed schedule for Emery renovations is possible at present because of outstanding capital commitments to various academic units.

Those who earnestly desire completion of the Emery project feel that a way will be discovered through the unique relationship between the University and the Organ Society. A master plan is being developed. How it will evolve, and when, is not known; but neither was the timetable known in advance when the old Albee organ was dismantled. And listen to its great pipes now. □

New Pizza Showplace in Florida



Resident organist Don Baker at the 3/27 Wurlitzer at the J. Burns Pizza Shoppe in Tampa, Fla.

(Gladys Henderson Photo)

Now, Florida has another spectacular showplace. J. Burns Pizza Shoppe in Tampa with Don Baker as resident Organist.

J. Burns and Bud Hatcher have gone "all out." A brand new 600 seating capacity building with a 3/27 Wurlitzer. All pipes can readily be seen behind glass windows. Each note on all the percussion instruments lights up a tiny bulb as Don strikes the keys. The pizzeria is complete with color wheels, strob lights, crystal revolving ceiling balls, bubble machines, silent movies, life size animal characters, pizzas and a gift shop. Some 3800 lights throughout the building are operated from the console by Don.

Charles Stanford and Tom Hoehn are Don's associates at the organ.

Don Baker has had visitors from throughout the entire United States ranging in age from six months to 90 years. This is a fun place for one and all. Another must for visitors to Florida. □

WE'RE NUMBER 1!

And we're busier than ever! Work now in progress at Junchen-Collins includes:

WURLITZER — rebuild and enlargement of Boston Paramount (pictured at right) for midwest pizza parlor

WURLITZER — enlargement of 3-manual console from 135 to 200 stops for Pied Piper Pizza Peddler, Detroit, Michigan

MOLLER — rebuild and historical preservation of 1915 instrument at United Methodist Church, Poolesville, Maryland



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