

# 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.*

Veteran California organ enthusiast Chard Walker sent in a clipping from the Union, New Jersey, Star-Ledger, which recently devoted an entire page to the announced closing of the Radio City Music Hall and the resulting impact on New Jerseyites associated with the showplace. Of course, there were photos of yummy Rockettes and ballerinas, but also shown were organ maintenance man Ron Bishop, inspecting a rank of pipes, and Ray Bohr at the console of the 4/58. The text expressed both past pleasures and future uncertainty about the 6200-seat house, on the part of employees. Ray Bohr spoke for many: "I don't know what I'll do. Nobody hires a 58-year-old musician." The Wurlitzer has been his companion for 30 years. The showgirls were apprehensive, for all their glamor. They discussed various ways of keeping the house open, such as getting the government to declare it a historical landmark, so it wouldn't be taxed. The ballet corp dance captain has organized many of the theatre's 440 employees into

"The Showpeoples committee to Save RCMH." We wish them well.

Most everyone knows that the Radio City Music Hall has come on hard times over the past ten years or so. The big events for the 6200-seat house were the Christmas and Easter shows which drew thousands. The remainder of the season was light, attendance-wise. However, there was one factor which kept the theatre going in recent years — charter excursions. Following conductor Raymond Paige's death, his widow, Mary, traveled up and down the east coast, publicizing the "Showplace of the Nation." This activity paid off as tours from Connecticut to Philadelphia swamped the streets surrounding the Hall, and \$300,000 weeks were common, from Thanksgiving through New Year's. Of course, the big drawing cards were the famed Nativity Pageant on stage, the Rockettes (reduced from 36 to 30), and the pit orchestra under Will Irwin, the only theatre to have one in daily use. Though the "Grand Organ" was no longer heard in half-hour concerts before the opening each day, and for playing out the last show at night, in recent months, it still was used in solo numbers and with the orchestra by Ray Bohr, John DeTroy and Cecil Benz.

James ("Jimmy") Boyce, after years of playing the ex-Radio City Center theatre's unenclosed 4-deck Wurlitzer for roller skaters in the Alexandria Rink, is entering the concert ratrace. One of his initial engagements entails quite a journey from Virginia. He's set to play for the San Diego ATOS chapter.

In the year end issue we ran a Vox Pop about Hector Olivera discovering a "Discus" organ in a church in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, during "shore leave" from a Caribbean cruise. No one had ever heard of a Discus organ so we dug deeper and discovered that a tape had been made. It bore not only some of Hector's music played on the ancient organ, but also a commentary by the South American organist. In Desi Arnaz accents he described the instrument: "There's a plate on the console which says 'Watkins and Watson, London' — and



Hector. He found the 'Made in Britain' trademark in Jamaica. (Bill Lamb Photo)

also 'Discus.' Guess that's the blower." Mystery solved. We must admit to ignorance of that brand of unified organ although the Discus blower is not uncommon. Hector listed the stops as Open Diapason (8' and 4'), Lieblich Gedeckt (16', 8', 4' & 2'), Dulciana (8', 12th & 15th) plus a 3-rank Mixture. No reeds. The pipework is in a swellbox and there's a Crescendo Pedal and a light tremulant. Olivera added that despite one dead pedal stop, it was in good shape. There's a story there. How did a conservative English organ find its way to the Jamaican Ocho Rios Baptist church?

Those who have been long-term devotees of the *Tonight Show* on television, recall when Lyle "Skitch" Henderson served as pianist and conductor. He was originally a studio organist in the days when radio stations had pipe organs. On a recent Mike Douglas talk show, Skitch mentioned his experience when he subbed for organist Paul Carson on *One Man's Family* for a week. During dialogue on one live show, he inadvertently brought his elbow down on a manual with a "wrrump!" So,



he turned off the organ blower. But when the director gave the split second cue to Skitch for mood music, he came down on the manuals to no music! As he stated, "I was way down the list of studio musicians even before the week started." Skitch, of course, went on to greater fame as a top pianist and conductor.



ATOS member Lawrence Birdsong describes himself as "surprised and pleased" to hear the names of Frederick Kinsley (1973) and Bernie Cowham (1977) announced as entrants to the Theatre Organists Hall of Fame. "Fred frequently substituted for Bernie, and I had a chance to try the Riverside Church's Hook & Hastings (before the Skinner was installed), where Fred was organist. In 1939, I asked Bernie where I could get a Howard Seat. He didn't know, but promised to will me his. Which he did, and upon his death in 1949, I received a letter from an attorney, stating the seat was mine."



Since the RTOS was founded in 1964, the club has been fortunate in having to cancel only two concerts. The first was in April 1975 when a freak April blizzard prevented Lowell Ayars' leaving Philadelphia. The second occurred a few months ago when Walter Strony was scheduled on January 26. This time, the artist was in town, but the forecast of "the worst storm of the century" (which never materialized in Kodakville) caused the closing of the Auditorium Theatre hours in advance. Fortunately, the following Saturday was open and 859 concertgoers were saturated with some pyrotechnics which proved that the 22-year-old Strony is on his way to becoming a star in the concert spectrum. His program was heavily featured with modern works plus a sprinkling of some oldies. High points were Walter's famous rendering of "Variations on a Theme by Oscar Mayer," the hot dog wheel, which brought the inevitable chuckles from the assemblage, and a flashy up-and-down-the-manuals interpretation of "In the Mood" which evoked memories of dancers in the aisles of the N.Y. Paramount when the Glenn Miller band played there in the thirties.



Walter Strony

Walter made use of the newly arrived Moller Post Horn (two months ahead of schedule). The stop richly complements the other voices but is not overbearing. Keep your eye on this developing personality! He has since replaced Lyn Larsen at Organ Stop No. 1 in Phoenix, Arizona.



Hall of Famer, Dr. C.A.J. Parmentier, who was incapacitated



'Cass' Parmentier. Back on the organ bench again. (Bill Lamb Photo)

awhile back, has returned to playing before audiences. On January 20, he was scheduled to play for the New York State Bar Association's annual dinner in the Grand Ballroom of the New York Hilton. The NYBA had written Local 802 for permission for him to perform, and the request was approved unanimously.



Oliver Wallace was famous as a west coast theatre organist from whom several other top organists, including Chauncey Haines and Jesse Crawford, got ideas for improving their playing. Wallace's prowess as a composer came to public notice after his theatre days when he composed music for Walt Disney cartoons and live feature productions in Hollywood. But his most famous composition remained the early '20s "Hindustan." Ollie had a humorous side, too. In 1942, he composed "In Nutsy Land" for a Donald Duck cartoon. Walt Disney changed the title to "Der Fuehrer's Face," and it was recorded by the late Spike Jones and His City Slickers. In a very short while, it sold 1½ million 78s at a time when the country needed a morale boost after several military setbacks. It also made "Spike Jones" household words, as his zany musical interpretations swept the country for ten years afterward. Now his records are being reissued by RCA, and once more one can hear the immortal "Chloe" being sought by her rough-neck lover with "Where are you — you old bat!"



We have a rather sketchy report that the Tennessee Theatre in Knoxville, was scheduled to reopen as a classic film house on March 15 with the 1936 film, "Grand Hotel," starring Lewis Stone, Wallace Beery, Jean Harlow and a supporting cast of MGM contract stars. Our source says the Tennessee's organ will play a major part in the '30s style programs.



Alert ATOS member, Matt Smith of Sullivan, Wis., believes he has found another pipe organ in a theatre. He was in the Ironwood (Mich.) Theatre last summer and spied a console, draped in the pit. He believes it to be a Barton as it has a 4-



poster lift. The 1051-seat house did have a 2/7 Barton originally. Matt made several trips to Ironwood but was unable to talk to the manager. "According to a few of the locals," Smith says, "it had been played up to a few years ago. Perhaps a change in the managership had something to do with it. This might be a good opportunity for the Wolverine Chapter to add another playable organ to the ranks of the Pipe Piper list."



Then there's the case of the unwilling organist, the fall guy, who because he's tops in another line of musical endeavor, gets pressed into service when the featured organist doesn't show up. It happened to orchestra conductor Werner Janssen when he was assistant conductor at the New York Roxy during its salad days. Janssen, who was given "Show Business" magazines 1977 Award "for superior artistry is the world of entertainment," was assistant to such baton wielding luminaries as Erno Rapee, Charles Previn and Joseph Littau. Rapee knew that Janssen had studied classical organ in Paris and Leipzig so one evening when the featured organist didn't show up for his solo and the assistants couldn't be located, Rapee pointed to Janssen, said "You're IT!" and handed him a piano copy of "I'll See You in My Dreams" because that was what was on the program.

"I climbed onto that five manual console, and up it went as I read the music from the piano copy. It was a full house — all 6000 seats taken . . . I don't think the audience was 'consoled' by my impromptu rendition — meaning 'to tear asunder.'"

Once wasn't enough. "It happened again at the Strand when manager Joseph Plunkett demanded that I solo a novelty tune called "Itching Fingers" on the organ because the regular man didn't show." Janssen would not disclose the names of the organists for whom he subbed.

As a lad, Janssen accompanied silents on the small organ in his home town theatre in Great Neck, Long Island — "Until I got fired," Reflecting on these unnerving experiences, Janssen says he decided to stick to composing and conducting. These areas of music won him acclaim



Werner Janssen. No more subbing.

throughout the musical world and his descriptive composition, "New Years Eve in New York" won him the Prize of Rome.

"But no more organ subbing, please," begs Janssen.



George Wright, whose "Wright On" record release is reviewed in this issue, informs us that the Great



George. Like being in the theatre

(Stufoto)

American Gramophone Co's first release of his cuts made at the Chicago theatre's beautifully restored 4/29 Wurlitzer will be available about the time this issue arrives in your mailbox. George says he is thoroughly satisfied that the direct-to-disc recording system (eliminating tape) is the way to go. "It's like being in the Chicago theatre while the organ is playing," says George. The company disced enough tunes for three releases. Meanwhile, George is getting more deeply into the concert scene. One engagement is an April 30 concert in England, playing the Gaumont State (Kilburn) 3/16 Wurlitzer.



For those who have been wondering about the whereabouts of the mysterious Korla Pandit, the *After Nightfall* column in the San Francisco Examiner had him playing for two Sunday concerts throughout February at the Pipes and Pizza in Serramonte, Calif. The column, conducted by "The Owl," reveals that Korla is a grand nephew of Nehru's sister, Madame Pandit. For those who missed the February stint, catch Korla at the Baldwin on Saturday evenings at Captain Anchovy's Pizza in San Leandro. The turban gets around.



How many readers living in the Denver area remember theatre organist Zoella Kees? She played for Fox Theatre's KOA radio from 1935 to 1945, five times a week on a 15-minute program, *Midnight Melodies*. It's been 32 years since she was making \$150 a week, and also playing the organ for vaudeville shows at the Denver Theatre. Now living in a Dallas apartment, she plays for friends on an electronic. When in Laguna Beach, Cal., she taught organ at Leisure World, and has a plaque from pupils addressed to "The World's Greatest Organ Teacher." As for teaching again, she says, "Honey, I'm 81. I played "Over There" on Armistice Day in 1918."



Not much has been heard from Stan Kann along the pipe circuit since he moved from St. Louis to Los Angeles. A two page spread in the Jan. 14 *TV Guide* made no mention of his musical prowess but concen-





Stan Kann. His future is on the tube. (Stufoto)

trated on his gadget gathering and TV talk show gigs. An interview in the Feb. 1978 *Keyboard World* by Bob Rubenstein is more revealing. It seems that Stan has switched professionally from music to comedy built around his collection of ancient vacuum cleaners, apple corers, mousetraps, wringers or what have you. His target is TV talk shows, and perhaps a show of his own. Another reason for his absence from the pipe spotlight is also revealed.

Said Stan: "I find I've suddenly grown rather tired of the theatre organ, because I've played it so long . . . When you play it for 20 years or so, and you have to play it, it's just not the same . . . It seems to me now that all theatre organs sound alike. I can no longer hear anything exciting coming out of a theatre organ." He added that his big thrill now is playing the electronic organ with orchestral accompaniment.



Bert Buhrman reports from the School of the Ozarks that the Christ-



Bert Buhrman at the console, and the School of the Ozarks' chorus await a cue during filming of the Christmas TV special.

mas TV special in which he, the S.O. Choir, and the 3/15 Wurlitzer were featured, was highly successful. The PBS station in Springfield, Mo. used its new mobile equipment, the first time such apparatus was used in that area. With originality, the technicians used shots taken above the console, close-ups of Bert's hands on the manuals, fadeouts and fadeins etc. The show began in Bert's study at home, showing his wife Denice's miniature nativity scene; a 1½-minute segment which took over three hours to film. Reception to the show was good, and most were of the opinion it was better than many commercial Yule shows on TV. If your local PBS station is desirous of running a first-class Christmas program next yuletide, get in touch with the School of the Ozarks at Pt. Lookout, Mo., and the wheels can be put in motion for a tape of the show.



Our correspondent-at-large, Doc Bebko, is at it again. Around New Years, he and Mrs. Bebko flew to Salt Lake City and while there, Doc sampled the sounds of three installations. First, he attended the farewell recital of Dr. Alexander Schreiner at the Mormon Tabernacle. "I first heard him in 1927 on CBS when our family got our first RCA 'dynamic speaker,' and have listened to him over the airways ever since. The governor of Utah declared December 30 as 'Alexander Schreiner Day.' I also heard concerts by the other Tabernacle organists: Robert Cundick, Roy M. Darley and John Longhurst. It was a dream week."

Another day saw Doc at the Pizza & Pipes where Bill Hagey presides

over the 3/31 Wurlitzer. "Bill did a great job accompanying a silent movie, and I was permitted to play a few numbers for my very young grandson, Todd. The piece-de-resistance was our dinner at Larry Bray's 'Organ Loft.' Joann Harmon came on at nine for dancing, and what an organist she is! Accompanied by a fine drummer, we had three hours of real dancing pleasure and good fellowship. The instrument is perfectly balanced, absolutely in tune, and in the hands of this great gal, it sings forth like a junior N.Y. Paramount dowager. Salt Lake City may not have quantity, but it sure has quality."



May 27, the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, will provide a big night for organ fans in Wichita, Kansas. At 8:00 p.m. Billy Nalle will play a genuine theatre organ concert on the 4/37 "Dowager Empress" Wurlitzer in Century II Center. The exuberant Billy has rated high with past audiences there. No doubt he'll do it again.



When Hollis R. Upson of Batavia, N.Y. attends a theatre organ concert, which is often, he does so with a very discerning ear, both as to the instrument and the artist. Back in the twenties, he worked for an organ maintenance firm which was responsible for keeping the Schine Theatre organs in the Rochester area in tune. He remembers that the bulk of the instruments were either 5-rank Marr & Coltons or Style D Wurlitzers. "The Riviera, however, had a 3/11 M&C, and we tuned that one for Tom Grierson about 1925." Hollis further states that he joined national ATOS independently as Batavia has no chapter. "THEATRE ORGAN Magazine is well worth the money and is very necessary. Competing organ magazines print a variety of material, but are no substitutes for THEATRE ORGAN."



Friends of retired theatre organist, and for the past 10 years circus organist, Harry J. Jenkins will be glad to know the silent movie veteran is nearly recovered from surgery wherein a faulty hip was replaced by an artificial metal one. "I can play





Circus organist Harry Jenkins. The man with the iron hip. (Stufoto)

the organ again" says Harry. Just wait until he tries to go through an airport security metal detector with that iron hip!

Personable Edward C. May, "Mr. Music of Miami Beach," has made progress toward recovery of his health following a lengthy sojourn in intensive cardiac care. The organist was scheduled to return home the first week of 1978. His daughter, Carol, says it will be a long road back, but knowing Eddie's spirit and perseverance, he will succeed. All his friends, in Florida and elsewhere, are pulling for him.

Historical Loew's Grand Theatre in Atlanta suffered a serious fire on January 30. The 2500-seat house had become world famous on December 15, 1939 when it was the site of the premiere of what may be called the greatest movie of them all, *Gone With the Wind*. The 85-year-old Peachtree Street theatre which closed last June, was one of the city's most elegant, and once housed a style D Wurlitzer. Atlantans remember the festivities attendant to the GWTW event, amid the glitter of searchlights. Over 300,000 Southerners lined the streets that day, many in period costume. Six thousand attended the costume ball.

Among the stars who attended were Clark Gable and his bride, Carole Lombard; Vivien Leigh; and the author, Margaret Mitchell. It would be the greatest event in Atlanta until the ATOS convention in July 1978.

This probably belongs with the record reviews, but we can't resist telling readers that *Readers Digest* has reissued the set of four stereo organ records originally released about 10 years ago when reviewers gave it general approval. The organists are Virgil Fox, Ray Bohr, Reginald Foort and Reginald Dixon. The organs used are the Tower Ballroom Wurlitzer (Dixon, Blackpool), The Radio City Music Hall Wurlitzer (Bohr), the Kearns — Carson Hollywood studio Wurlitzer (Foort) and the Royal Albert Hall and N.Y. Riverside church classical organs (Fox). The "Organ Memories" set now sells for about \$14.50 postpaid from the mag's Pleasantville, N.Y. headquarters. Also available on two 8 track tapes for about \$3.00 more. Either way, it's a good purchase.

Our sharp-eyed correspondent in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Helen Kiley, caught a reference to a long ago radio organist in a recent issue of the *Ft. Lauderdale News* and clipped the item for us. The organist's name was then Belle Brooks. She is an organist and pianist and once had her own program on WHN, New York. Now the widow of vaudeville and recording vocalist Irving Kaufman (over 600 of his 78s went into release), Belle was trying to locate one of the singers who had performed on her broadcasts, an Evelyn Bennett. Belle had recently moved from Palm Springs, Calif. to Ft. Lauderdale and thought she had found a clue to Evelyn's whereabouts. Perhaps a reader can help.

It transpired in a relatively small southern California beach town on January 29, a concert, plus silent film shorts, played on an electronic organ installed temporarily in the 430 seat Bay theatre in Seal Beach. The organist was durable Gaylord Carter.

More than 300 people, mostly local residents, gathered in the at-

tractive auditorium on a Sunday afternoon to witness Carter's accompaniment of a frenetic W.C. Fields auto chase; Harold Lloyd's disastrous trial run of his new 1923 car; "Koko," Max Fleischer's cartoon clown, conducting the sing-along to the beat of his famous bouncing ball; newlywed Buster Keaton building a very non-linear house from tampered-with plans, and Charlie Chaplin in the most memorable scenes from *The Gold Rush*.

Between film clips, Gaylord soloed at the souped-up Conn 651 with selections from *Star Wars* and *Chorus Line* plus a lilting medley of Irving Berlin selections, ending with the audience singing "God Bless America."

So why does this somewhat remote concert, played on a plug-in, rate coverage in these pages? Mainly because it was a test program staged by the Bay Theatre's owner, Dick Loderhose, an experiment to determine how both ATOS members and locals would respond to the idea of organ concerts at the Bay. It was the local Seal Beach and Long Beach fans who responded.

The point is that this show was a harbinger of a far different setup — pipes. As many fans know, Dick



A late arrival points to the good news on the marquee. (Pegpic)





Theatre owner Dick Loderhose stands by his lobby display while the latecomer rubbernecks. (Pegpic)

Loderhose is the owner of a 4/42 Wurlitzer pipe organ, an instrument built around, and including the New York Paramount broadcast studio organ, Jesse Crawford's "dream organ." Until recently the instrument was housed in a studio on the Loderhose property in New York, where it often figured in ATOS activities. A few years ago, Dick and his wife, Jane, decided to move west. The huge organ is slowly being moved west. Dick has removed several rows of theatre seats to make room for backstage chambers, reducing the seating to 430.

Loderhose was encouraged by the local turnout for his initial concert venture and expects more widespread support after his pipes start perking (he is reticent about announcing a completion date). It's one of the few houses in the USA with a pipe organ going in instead of coming out, and the house is making ends meet on the income from judiciously selected art films ("No, not porno films!" roars Dick).

Last year, we mentioned in this column that the Jaques Cattell Press, a division of Bowker Co., publisher of reference books, was compiling a work on the Halls of Fame in the United States and Canada. Naturally, the ATOS Theatre Organists Hall of Fame is to be included among the musicians. While compiling the data, it was found that there are more than 750 Halls, honoring people in all walks of life. Therefore, the material will be compiled in three volumes. The first, with 1072 pages on 173 sports Halls of Fame, was published last year. The second,

on non-sports, including ours, will hopefully be finished this year. Ours, by the way, is the only hall devoted to honoring performers on a specific musical instrument. More on this when the volume is released is promised by our Hall's chairman, Lloyd Klos.



Rex Koury, "the Boy With Miles of Smiles," still has a warm spot in his heart for a theatre organist he met while in high school, Bill Meeder. Recently, a friend of Rex sent him a 1945 picture with clipping of Meeder, and it turned out to be the



Rex Koury remembers a friend. (Stufoto)

only one of his exteacher Rex has. Koury says that when he moved to the coast and his father sold their Cranford, N.J. home, all Rex's school things, memorabilia etc. were tossed out.

"It's a shame that ATOS people never had the opportunity to meet and know Bill," Rex says. "An outstanding musician in every way, yet quiet, gentle, unassuming and soft-spoken — a real gentleman in every respect. I owe him so very much. He was my earliest musical inspiration and ideal and I'm reasonably sure I would not have followed the course in life which I did if it hadn't been for him."



Those who attended the pre-glow event of the 1976 ATOS Convention, remember the playing of Robert Carwithen at the Hope-Jones organ in the Ocean Grove (N.J.) Auditorium. Both artist and instrument are still doing well. Last August 17, the Monmouth Chapter, AGO, sponsored a recital there. Mr. Carwithen, thru a unique organ stop which involves re-

lays of flashing light bulbs, simulated waving of the huge wooden American flag in the front of the auditorium while the audience sang the National Anthem. First half of the program was devoted to works of Bach, Bingham and other classicists. Second half featured light classics and popular works including those of Richard Rodgers and Scott Joplin. The "Allegro" from Widor's "Sixth Symphony" closed the program.

The organ was built by Robert Hope-Jones in 1907 and was among the first electro pneumatic instruments in the country. Originally 14 ranks, it was enlarged to 30 by ATOS member Ronald C. Bishop.



Just because he was named Organist of the Year, doesn't mean that John Muri has been resting on his oars. For example, his nine-year-old column in THEATRE ORGAN is continuing to attract readers with its lucid viewpoints. "I am amazed," says he, "to find after these years that I am not running out of material. There is enough for years to come." And apparently his talents as organist haven't abated, either, with numerous engagements scheduled



John Muri. (Garden Photo)

this year, including a concert in California (See Los Angeles chapter News).

Thirdly, John has been retained as a consultant to the Wurlitzer Co. for the installation of its 5/65 organ in the mammoth new complex in DeKalb, Illinois. He helped draw the specifications, assigned the ranks to specific chambers, and prepared music for the Mighty Wurlitzer Day last October. He says it will be quite a story, this "super installation", and we hope it will be shared with THEATRE ORGAN readers. □