

Closing Chord

Joseph Henry Koons, a veritable patron saint of the theatre pipe organ, passed away in Long Beach, California on Saturday morning, January 28, 1978, following a long and disabling illness.

This is the same Joe Koons who provided the Mighty Wurlitzer and camp chairs in his motorcycle shop at 1350 East Anaheim Street in Long Beach and shared the music and camaraderie with his fellow man every Saturday night for the past ten years, no strings attached. All organists were welcome, from amateurs to old pros. Each had his few minutes in the spotlight, and the loudest applause came from Joe, from his easy chair in the row nearest the console.

From the beginning, Joe was infused with a great gusto for life. Born in Hardin County, Ohio, May 30, 1909, he was brought by his family to a ranch near Santa Ana, California at the age of six months. His love affair with motorcycles must have started shortly thereafter, for he started his first shop in the family barn in 1931, moving to Long Beach in 1944, and to the present location on Anaheim Street in 1949.

During this time another love surfaced, and he was married to Ida Mae or "Spud," as she prefers, on May 1, 1942. Spud will tell you their honeymoon trip was made, quite predictably on a motorcycle. During his ocean fishing days in the late '40s, he received as many prizes and awards as he did for motorcycle racing in his younger days.

To celebrate his 25th wedding anniversary on May 1, 1967, Joe Koons purchased his first theatre pipe organ and things have never been the same on Anaheim Street in Long Beach, California. Since it was too big to put in the living room with the Hammond and since he figured any self-respecting motorcycle shop should be blessed with a theatre pipe organ, that's where he put it. Right in the service department, in three chambers.

With the installation completed in 1968, the Saturday Night Open House custom was started. It has been going on, without interruption,



"Spud" and Joe Koons. Spud will carry on the tradition started by Joe.

(Bob Hill Photo)

since that time. The great and the near-great have played it. It's guest book is a Who's Who of the organ world. It has been recorded by such artists as John Scot, Gene Roberson, Ramona Gerhard Sutton and Lloyd del Castillo. Everyone, it seems, has played it except Joe, who, if he could do so would never admit it. But all would agree that Joe has been a one-man ATOS chapter, doing more on his own to foster appreciation of pipes than many a group.

Over the years, the instrument has grown from very modest proportions to a total of 34 ranks controlled by a 3-manual Wurlitzer console, which was added just in time for the 1972 ATOS Regional Convention in Los Angeles. And it is still playing every Saturday night, through the generosity of "Spud" Koons, who is also just a professional listener and wonderful hostess.

We can't imagine a more fitting memorial to Joe Koons.

Bob Hill

Alexander D. Richardson, former Radio City Music Hall organist, died in New York's Columbus Hospital on January 6. He was 81.

He learned to play the pipe organ from books, and in his youth, served as organist in his father's temple for seven years. With the aid of a scholarship, he was graduated from the Juilliard School in 1918. After military service, he was organist at New York's Rialto Theatre from 1920 to

1925. Other theatres he served were the Rivoli; Brooklyn Fox; Academy of Music; Roxy; and Radio City Music Hall, all in New York.

As a concert organist, he was with the New York Philharmonic under several conductors. He concertized extensively, recorded and broadcast. Prior to his retirement in 1973, he was organist in New York's Central Synagogue for 40 years.

Mr. Richardson is survived by his wife, Adele; a son, Robert; a brother, Louis and two grandchildren.

Word has been received of the death of **Viva ("Vee") Dunstedter**, widow of Eddie, in a San Fernando (Cal.) rest home early this year. The Dunstedter's daughter, Dodie, told us that her mother, Eddie's wife for over half a century, went into a decline soon after Eddie's death and her loss of memory made it necessary to place her in a rest home.

Besides Dodie, Eddie and Viva Dunstedter are survived by a son, Eddie Jr., who bears a marked resemblance to his famous dad.

Robert H. Coulter, Sr., retired manager of the Byrd Theatre in Richmond, Va., died in January. He was certainly one of the best friends ATOS ever had and in particular, the Potomac Valley Chapter. The chapter was always welcome at the Byrd and he was always ready to help.

During the war years when the or-

gan was not used, he would turn it on daily and run over every stop and key to keep it in working order. It was mainly due to his efforts the organ is still in use.

During the 1972 convention, he, as manager, was in the theatre at 7 a.m. to make sure the air conditioning was on before a 7:30 practice session took place.

As George Stitzer, the present manager, said at the funeral, "I don't know where Bob is going to be, but you may be certain that where-ever it is, he will be managing it."

As far as Bob was concerned, nothing was too good for the Wurlitzer or the men who worked on it or played it.

Johnny Mack (McCartney), over 50 years a professional organist, died of a massive heart attack in February.

Born in Metropolis, Ill., the family moved to Seattle in 1920, and it was in the state of Washington where Johnny's playing in the 1920's centered: Tacoma, Centralia and Port Angeles. He played the Blue Mouse Theatres in Seattle and Tacoma, and the Pantages, RKO, Paramount-Publix and Fox Midwest circuits.

When theatre-playing became passe, he toured the club and hotel circuit with an electronic, being based in Illinois. For eight years, he and his wife operated the Central Hotel in Metropolis, where, fictionally, Superman met his guests and entertained there.

His biography appeared in the August THEATRE ORGAN.

Harold Jolles, over 40 years a theatre organist, died in the Tri-County Community Hospital in Gowanda, N.Y., February 23. He was 81.

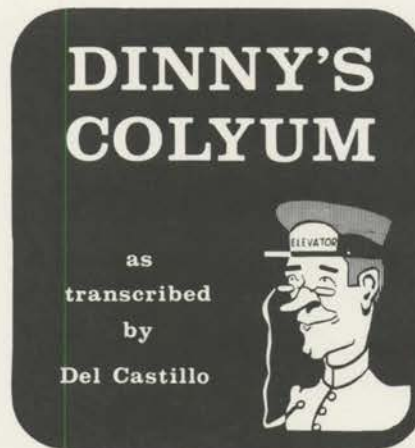
Beginning piano lessons at ten, he



Harold Jolles, shown at the console of the Marr & Colton in the Roosevelt Theatre, Buffalo, N.Y.

then became interested in the theatre organ. After some lessons with Henry B. Murtagh, he enrolled in the Eastman School of Music under John Hammond.

Following graduation, Harold played theatres in Jamestown, N.Y., New York City, and had a lengthy tenure at the Lerner Theatre in Elkhart, Ind. He turned to farming in 1935, but when the Marr & Colton in Buffalo's Roosevelt Theatre was restored in 1957, he played weekends there until the theatre's closing in the early sixties. Since that time, performed for Rochester, N. Tonawanda and Gowanda enthusiasts on several occasions. □



Maybe now Spring has come we canforget all about last winter, but wasnt it a dilly. I come out to LA so as I could get away from all that there snow and cold weather, but along about in Febuary they was times when it was a toss up as to witch was the worser, all them blizards in the east or the floods we was gettin in the west. Old man Noah would of felt rite to home the way those rains was pourin down. I had my old tin Lizzie out on the Freeway in one of them storms, and the rain was a-comin down so fast you couldnt see twenty feet in the front of you. And the wust part of it was that these crazy LA drivers was all tryin to prove that a little bit of rain wasnt goin to bother them so they jest slammed into it at 60 miles per hour and jest about knocked me off the road whizzin by and spashin me like I was in Niagary Falls in a barrel.

Rain storms and organ playin dont get along too well together neither. Jest ask Mr. Don Baker how he feels about it. I was to the Chicago

Convention the day they had the rain storm and that was the mornin he was givin a concert and all the the-ayter lites went out and the rain got into the cellar where the organ insides was and put em out of kilter and Mr. Baker he had to play in the dark with only about half the organ workin. If it had been me I would of told the people what was the matter but Mr. Baker he jest went rite ahead and did the best he could and I guess everybody appreshiated it. Later on that day after the rain had let up Mr. Lowell Ayers he give a concert and the first peace he had picked was On A Clear Day You Can See Forever witch was good for a laff.

Away back when I was still in Boston they was a theayter witch had put in a big fan in the roof like to blow cool air in on hot days, and they had been a big rain the day before and so they was a big puddle in front of the fan. They was a lady organ player and she was playin for the movies when they started the fan, and all that water swooshed down on top of her and drenched her so all her close was soaked. She had to stop playin while the stage hand rushed out with some cloths and soaked the water off the keys before it could get into the organ.

I remember they was a organ player there who was always comin in at the last minnit and one time durin the winter I was sittin there waitin for the show to start in the afternoon and the slide come on tellin what he was goin to play only he wasnt there to play it and all of a sudden he dashes in in his overcoat and galoshes and jumps over the footlites and lands on the organ bench and plays the whole peace with his galoshes on. Sounded pretty good, too.

I could never figger out how a organ player in cold weather like that could get his fingers limbered up enough to play anyway. You could drive a autymobile with mittens on and your fingers would still get so num they wouldnt be any fellin in them. And some of them organ players sounded like maybe that was jest what was the matter. Or maybe they was playin with mittens on, at that. □

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