

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 10c postcard to get it to VOX POPS Editor, Box 3564, Granada Hills, California 91344. If the contributor can afford a 15c stamp, why not include a black and white photo which need not be returned.

Veteran organist Jane McKee Johnson, whose *Just Playin' Jane* record is doing very well, had another encounter with pipes in Tacoma, Washington for three days in March during which she played a 20-minute prelude and a 20-minute intermission for the "Junior League Follies," on the 2/9 Kimball in the Temple Theatre, the last remaining original pipe installation in Tacoma. It was the most the venerable Kimball had been used in years and Jane reports many encouraging comments.

When Rosa Rio learned of the saving of New Orleans' Saenger Theatre and its 4/26 Robert Morton, she was overjoyed. "John Hammond opened the place in 1927, and was succeeded by Ray MacNamara. Herbie Koch also had a stint there, and his wife, who was a very beautiful girl, often appeared on stage at the second console, holding down a chord while Herbie played. Ray MacNamara and I did duets, and one of them was done with a small

house built around the console. We played 'Together' as we looked out a window. I played the final program on this instrument when the organ's use was discontinued." Rosa is hopeful that when the organ is again fully restored, she will be signed to do a re-dedication concert.

From Dallas, Texas, organist Lew Williams informs us that Gordon Wright has removed his 2/9 Wurli from his home (wasn't it originally a 2/6?) and will soon replace it with the 3/15 from the Dallas Capri Theatre (and didn't that used to be a 3/11? Things sure grow big in Texas!).

At a recent Rosa Rio concert, Norman L. Ray, chairman of Conn. Valley Chapter ATOS stated that the pipe organ, formerly in the Allen Theatre in Hartford, is being renovated, prior to its installation in Shelton High School, and will hopefully be ready for concert activities early next year.

On a visit to his mother's home in Cape Coral, Florida, organist Jimmy Boyce kept hearing rumors of a terrific pipe organ in nearby Fort Myers. Doing some sleuthing he found the instrument in an arching studio, a magnificent 3/15 carefully assembled by Walter Draughon of Fort Myers. So, for the past two years Jimmy has been giving concerts on it for the local AGO chapter. The organ is a real mix, says Jimmy: the

Tibia, Flute, Salicional, Sal. Celeste, Diapason, Clarinet, Vox and Style D Trumpet are Wurlitzer; two Strings are Robert Morton and the Gamba is Gottfried; the Kinura is Marr & Colton; a second Vox is Morton; there's also an Estey Flute d'Amore and a VDO. He adds that the studio has a cathedral roof and the acoustic qualities are excellent.

Dick Sklenar reports another incident involving Chicago's Oriental Theatre. Last time it was a suicide-bent rodent in the organ's blower. This time it was a fire in the balcony during a June matinee. It started in a metal butt container, one which had been stuffed with paper cups and napkins. 2,000 people who had come to see *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Deathport* lost no time piling out of the house and demanding their money back. The ornately decorated walls, a corridor ceiling, and a carpet were damaged to the tune of \$25,000. Water from fire hoses helped. The organ was not damaged.

The Oriental was built in 1926 on the site of another theatre, the Iriquois, where 600 persons perished in a 1903 fire.

The Oriental reopened a day after the fire with a closed balcony.

Dick Loderhose tells us that the installation of his 4/42 augmented Wurlitzer in his 430-seat Bay Theatre in Seal Beach, Calif., will be well underway by September. Dick has spent much of the summer in the



Jimmy Boyce at Walter Draughon's 3/15 console.



Dick Loderhose. His project is moving. (Stufoto)

east, packing the remainder of his huge instrument for the westward trek. He is also picking his installation crew in southern California with much care. With a little luck and elbow grease Dick will have it ready for the '79 convention in Los Angeles.

In the pages of the *Sunday Rochester Journal-American* of May 11th, 1930, appeared an answer to a question Jesse Crawford was once asked: "Do you like the organ?"

"Do I!", was the immediate response. "Once when I was getting along on a \$25-a-week salary as a piano player in a Spokane movie house, I quit to work for \$10 in a smaller theatre. And the reason I did this was because the latter place had an honest-to-goodness pipe organ."

The 445-seat Wheeler Opera House in Aspen, Colorado, is in the market for a theatre organ donation. It's a "safe" theatre, owned by the city and manager Jon Busch has the go-ahead but no money from the city fathers. Jon is hoping some generous person has an organ up to 3/15 to spare. He has lots of chamber space.

Remember the 3/27 Wurlitzer which was a feature of the Orpheum Restaurant in Clearwater, Fla., in 1976? After a traumatic start when a tornado swept into the area on opening night, the place closed six months. later. Thru litigation, the place is now in the hands of the original owners, but the organ is in stor-

age in Cincinnati, the property of one of the principals of the Orpheum Corp. Don Baker, who played it in the restaurant, is now at the 3/25 Kimball in Burns Pizza & Pipes in Tampa. His schedule allows him to concertize on theatre organs about the country.

Terry Charles continues to be the number one organist at the Kirk of Dunedin, though other artists are interspersed in the concert series from time to time. On January 12, Charles played his 70th formal concert. The organ has been restored since the disastrous fire in 1977. On May 11, he gave his 75th concert in the 10 years of the Kirk series. Some of the best-known organists on the circuit have appeared in Dunedin: Helen Dell, Ann Leaf, Billy Nalle, and Rosa Rio, to name a few.

Billy Nalle, whose latest platter is reviewed in this issue, has another reason for rejoicing: he's drawing better than rock concerts. Despite a holiday concert when large numbers took to the road, Billy's recent concert netted over 2000 admissions to the Century II auditorium in Wichita to hear Billy play the 4/37 ex-N.Y. Paramount Wurli. Contrast that record with the scheduled presentation of the rock group chosen to represent the USA in a tour of Russia. On the eve of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's scheduled holiday concert in Century II, the group's manager cancelled

the show, because only 300 tickets had been sold (1500 had been sold at the same point in time for the Nalle concert). Score one for theatre organ!

Word reaches us from Jim Foley in Syracuse, N.Y. that the Landmark (ex-Loew's State) Theatre is busily serving as the community's performing arts center. "It has been going just great, with lots of bookings and other activity." The 2900-seat theatre was saved by community effort last year. Diligent fund-raising by citizens, plus a state grant, assured purchase of the property. Volunteer effort has been responsible for cleaning, polishing, and refurbishing. Priorities in 1978 include roof repair, new stage flooring, and acquiring a pipe organ. The original 4/20 Wurlitzer, Opus 1825, was spirited away by a west coast organ broker in the sixties. Efforts to re-purchase it from the present owner, who has had it in storage 12 years, were unsuccessful. Those who played it at Loew's included Paul H. Forster, Maurice Cook, Betty Lee Taylor and Lew Baker. Sure would be nice to see the instrument back where it belongs!

The Grande Dame of the theatre organ, Luella Wickham, who always looks forward to attending each ATOS convention, has experienced a spell of adversity since January 3rd. She had a couple bad falls, one which broke her hip, and which



Billy Nalle's audience at Century II. His organ concert bested a rock concert.



Luella. She's the greatest.

(Stufoto)

necessitated hospitalization. At last report, she is recuperating at her home, 833-715 E. Brighton, Syracuse, N.Y. 13205. She was a noted silent film organist in the Salt City during the big era, and Stu Green, who described himself as "a pimply-faced adolescent," would sit at the orchestra rail and converse with Luella. They couldn't believe that the talkies would supplant the silents. How about a get well card?



The June 2nd issue of the *Washington Star* ran a full page article about how many towns are rescuing the remaining movie theatres from the wrecking ball — but not the nation's capitol. One reason for the lack of urgency is the presence there of the Kennedy Center and the American Film Institute where performing and cinema arts are secure. Writer Vincent Canby muses about the Radio City Music Hall living on borrowed time and praises Atlanta Landmarks and other groups which have joined in the battle to save theatres.



Another performing arts center with pipe organ has been added to the growing list of such installations. In May, a two-day dedicatory program inaugurated the 4/24 Robert Morton, newly installed in the Forum in Binghamton, N.Y. The organ was formerly in the America Theatre in Denver, reinstalled in the Alma Temple, from which it was removed

in 1970. It was acquired from broker Roy Davis by the Binghamton Savings Bank in 1975 as a gift to the Forum.

Dennis and Heidi James, the famed organ-piano duo, played before near-capacity houses in the 1521-seat theatre, and their program of classical, semi-classical and popular music received an excellent reception from the audiences. The Binghamton Kiwanis Club plans to sponsor an organ concert in the fall, and another next spring.



While in Britain, George Wright sent us a clipping from the London Times, supposedly giving a deadpan account of the British Chapter of Midnight Organ Supply, at least on first examination.

"Three mortuary technicians charged with having taken organs from a Stoke and Trent hospital, for sale to Sweden, will appeal."

Then the zinger. The organs for sale to Sweden were pituitary glands removed from "customers."

Judd Walton and Bob Jacobus who attended Wright's April concert in Britain report the sold out event was top drawer.



Our now and then correspondent Margaret Sabo safaried to her old northwest stamping ground around Easter and discovered much new pipe activity since her move to Pennsylvania a few years ago.

One of her discoveries was Bob

White a promising young organist who plays for the Breuer chain of pizzerias. She found Bob being cajoled by a parrot at the Seattle Pizza Shop, but resisted the urge to state toward which feathered friends the art was going.



Our correspondent-at-large, Doc Bebko, had a stroke of luck, rather wife Stella did. The couple are looking forward to October when they will have an 8-day, all-expense paid trip to London, courtesy of Buffalo's Studio Arena Theatre. Mrs. Bebko won the prize in a drawing. So, Doc will probably be scouting a few Comptons, Christies and Jardines across the pond. May they have a jolly good show in Britain!



From Beaumont, Texas, Al Sacker reveals that the "mystery organ" he used for his recent *Music of the '20s and '30s* album was actually the 31-rank hybrid in the Pipe Organ & Pizza in Houston. Built around the 3/13 Wurli from the St. George Theatre, Staten Island, N.Y., it has been enlarged with Morton, Kilgen and Moller components.



The George Eastman House in Rochester is a noted museum of photography. It also has a rich archive of silent films. On May 29, an explosive fire destroyed four buildings



Bob White and friend. No, he didn't get the bird.

on the property. Lost in one were 329 motion picture negatives, including such films as *Boys' Town* and *Strike the Band*. Loss was placed at \$1 million. A new building had been planned, but lack of money prevented construction. Only 60 of the 329 films had been copied. Spontaneous combustion, coupled with the 90-degree outside temperature caused the ignition of the nitrate-based film. The storage building, which had no humidity control or sprinkler system, originally served as an incinerator, and it sure lived up to its name!



The *Project UFO* TV show has revived interest in the Air Force's "Project Bluebook" which is the basis for the Jack Webb-produced series. One especially interested individual is retired AAF Colonel Harry Jenkins who worked on the investigations for "Project Bluebook." Jenkins, who was a theatre organist way back when and more recently a circus organist for 10 years, has been receiving invitations to speak on the UFO phenomenon before various groups, one being the San Diego UFO Association. He appreciated the high level of questions asked, and reassured his audience that the AAF did not quit the investigations in order to keep secrets from the public. They admitted that 12 percent of the sightings have not been explained but added that no UFO activities have been antagonistic, only curious. They do not see UFOs as any threat.



Organist Shirley Hannum has done it — committed matrimony, that is. The lucky man is red-headed Alan Keiter, a chemical process engineer who served on the maintenance crew for the Kimball organ in the Lansdowne Theatre, Lansdowne, Penna., Shirley's stomping ground for approximately the past 15 years. She played intermissions and her music turned Alan on. It all came to a head on May 13th at the Drexel Hill Baptist Church where Rev. Kurt Frank tied the knot. Then a reception at the Alpine Inn, Springfield, Penna. An interesting detail of the ceremony was a rendering of "O Perfect Love" on handbells, instruments close to the bride's heart.



They merged. Alan Keiter and Shirley Hannum. Shirley was so excited she forgot the organ star's first commandment — to ditch the cheaters when being photographed. (Clair Pruett Photo)

The honeymoon trip was to Hawaii. Our good wishes are with you — kids!



Organist Gunnar Anderson, who plays in the Bellingham, Washington area, discovered on a recent visit to Panama what had become of the one-time 3/27 Wurlitzer which was once installed in the Panama Hilton. Originally from the Atlantic City Warner's Theatre it was moved to Panama through the efforts of Leroy

Lewis, who played it in the hotel's El Bombarde room after its installation. Now in storage, it has been discovered by a die-hard pipe enthusiast, Pablo Herrero, who has talked the manager of another Panama City hotel into buying it (for an alleged 45 grand). By the time this hits print, installation should be well underway.



In his biography of Gaylord Carter in the October 1967 *THEATRE ORGAN*, Lloyd Klos mentioned Ethel Percy Andrus as being Gaylord's principal at Lincoln High School in Los Angeles over 50 years ago. It was she who advised the future ATOS Hall of Fame organist: "I hope that whatever you do which takes the most time, will be the thing you enjoy most." Considering the fact that Gaylord Carter is over 70 years young, his principal's advice hasn't slowed him one bit. "I did De Mille's *King of Kings*' 20 times during the 1978 Easter season, including once on a 5/125 Rufatti. I'll be in Wichita Century II in December and the Ohio Theatre in Columbus in April. I manage to keep busy with concerts, recordings, workshops, seminars, film festivals and electronic promotions. I like what I'm doing." He has never lost that boyish enthusiasm and drive for entertaining audiences.



Enthusiast Ken Veneron took a week off in May for an organ-hopping trip with wife Jane. He first vis-



Pablo Herrero. He is rescuing a fine instrument. Pablo is shown here at his Hammond X66, soon to be replaced by pipes.



Hector Olivera

ited Hector Olivera at his Pittsburgh home to see his installation, and then headed for Chicago where Hector, in spite of a recent accident to a hand, played up a storm in the Oriental and Chicago Theatres. Ken had a nice visit with Bismarck Hotel Lounge organist, Barbara Sellers and her Hall of Fame mother, Edna. Then to Rockford and the Coronado where Bob Coe played the Barton. DeKalb, Ill. was along the way where the mightiest Wurlitzer of them all is being assembled. In Spring Green, Wis., the couple visited the House on the Rock, replete with band organs and other mechanical instruments. At Platteville, Wis., the Venerons saw the Timbers Restaurant organ; mostly Conn electronic, but with some pipework augmenting. That is the type of vacation enthusiasts dream about.

"When I saw Al Jolson in *The Jazz Singer*, I knew theatre organs were on the way out," says ex-theatre organist Robert Stratton of Alexandria, Virginia. So, he turned to electronics and ended up with a long stretch with the Federal Communication Commission (FCC). He retired recently and went immediately to his first love, music. He assembled parts from four church organs into a 976 pipe organ for his home. Stratton also custom-builds Harpsichords (45 to date) and repairs ancient organs. One in Antigua, Guatemala, hadn't played since 1773 when an

earthquake silenced it. Stratton was one of a team of two commissioned to get it going, and they did.

In his spare time, Bob Stratton, now 73, is Chairman of the Potomac Valley Chapter of ATOS, a 200 member group which is currently moving the organ from the Washington Warner Theatre to the Adult Education Center at the University of Maryland, where it will be much safer.

Stratton was the subject of a spread in a recent issue of the *Alexandria Gazette*.

Commenting on our review of one of his recent records played on the London Odeon Compton organ, Don Knights explained why he ended "Gaitie Parisienne" with a horrendous palm smear. His reply is probably the most reasonable excuse we've heard.

"I wanted to musically picture a can-can girl ending her dance with a split. The smear seemed to fit the picture." So be it.

We are sometimes accused of ignoring the electronics, even condemned for calling them plug-ins. To get us off the hook, here's a photo of three happy people, too joyous to ignore. It was taken at a concert played by Dwight Beacham at Nags Head, North Carolina. The occasion was the dedication of a new Allen Organ in the home of Joe and Mary Pool, for which they built a music

room onto their home which will seat 40 people. Dwight showed off the versatility of the new instrument to an overflow audience.

There, we seen our dooty and we done it.

The 4/22 Marr & Colton in Elmira, N.Y.'s Samuel Clemens Center is now undergoing modernization in the very latest sense. For some time interested persons have been trying to raise money to update the instrument, and one donor gave \$10,000 to the cause. In May, two boxes of printed circuit cards arrived from England. Total cost of these units was \$10,000. An automatic relay unit arrived on the same day, the \$5,000 cost being borne by the Center. A third acquisition which will be ready for the fall concert season, is the "Jolly Green Giant", a blower from a dismantled organ in Philadelphia. The original blower just couldn't provide sufficient air for all the ranks. Volunteer labor has cut the cost of restoring the Elmira organ from \$80,000 to \$30,000. While the organ is idle during the summer, the new appurtenances will be installed by crew chief Lauren Peckham and his associates. Peckham feels the restored M&C "will be one of the finest."

Bill Blunk advises that the Sherwood Oriental Theatre, in Sherwood, Oregon (near Portland) is open on Fridays and Saturdays during the



Dwight Beacham (left), Mary and Joe Pool. Happy with their electronic.



Bill Blunk

(Alice Blue Photo)

summer. The show starts at 7 p.m. The Oriental is the home of the 5/24 Marr and Colton originally in the Rochester Theatre in that N.Y. state town. Bill recently installed Peterson solid state relays. "They worked perfectly the first time" says Bill.

Don Thompson was visited by Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau at the Toronto Organ Grinder pizzeria recently. Trudeau brought his two small sons and all seemed to appreciate Don's performance. A few days later a "thank you" note on official stationery arrived.

Jimmy, you've been one-upped!

Enthusiast Eric Reeve is trying to determine the whereabouts of the following organists, or any news of them: Bob West, Henrietta Kamern, Elsie Thompson, Doc Whipple and Stanleigh Malotte. Drop Eric a line at 1630 Elmwood Drive, Minot, North Dakota 58701.

One doesn't hear from the Minneapolis area too often, especially in regards to the Civic Auditorium's Kimball made famous by Eddie Dunstedter. According to ATOS member, Luther Winquist, the instrument's 124 ranks are playable from the 5-manual draw-knob console, and 21 of these ranks are also playable from the 4-manual horse-shoe keydesk. The theatre console is used for some ATOS events and for background music for other affairs.

The classic console is used mostly in church functions, such as the Episcopal Convention which was held in September 1976.

Several readers sent us a clipping from a May Wall Street Journal, a story about 28-year-old Gavin Mc Donough, owner, manager and sole employee of the B.A.B. Organ Co. headquartered in East Burke, Vermont. (population: 150). Interested since boyhood in amusement park carousel organs, McDonough was apprenticed for two years to one-time Wurlitzer organ repairman Ralph Tussing. The older the carousel organ, the greater the value

from the antique viewpoint, and Mc Donough says he has more business than he can take care of.

"Why do I do it? I guess I want to preserve what could become extinct. When I get those things playing, that's my reward."

WHERE IT IS!

The cover photo on the June/July, 1978 issue of THE-ATRE ORGAN is the five-manual Wurlitzer at World Headquarters for the Wurlitzer Co. at Dekalb, Illinois. This information was inadvertently omitted.



Closing Chord



Norville Hall, veteran organist and pipe organ builder, age 68, passed away May 5th while attending a convention, in Detroit, Michigan, where he was giving a concert at an electronic organ. His death occurred instantly, on stage, as he was playing the concert.

Although he was born in Livingston, Alabama, he spent his childhood in Birmingham, living with his parents and four brothers and sisters. His family always had a piano in the home and he became interested in the piano at an early age. At about age 10 he was given permission to practice on the church organ at the Episcopal church where they were members.

After graduating from Phillips High School in 1927, Mr. Hall began working as an apprentice organ builder with Orla Allen, well-known organist and choir master for the Church of the Advent and a representative for the Aeolian-Skinner pipe organ company.

The Alabama Theatre was under construction and young Norville Hall, who was also an usher at the Strand Theatre, became a frequent visitor to the construction site. One night, after he had closed the Strand, he went to the Alabama and was invited into the building to see the Wurlitzer console which had arrived that day. The night the organ was completed, Mr. Hall was the



Norville Hall

first to play it and, in his words, "This was the greatest musical moment of my life."

In 1931, he attended the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago, where he majored in piano and studied organ. Mr. Hall, in the depths of the great depression of the 1930s, began playing organ at a skating rink. He also played organ at a number of churches, theatres, night clubs and radio stations in the Chicago area.

In 1944 he returned to Birmingham and became staff organist for radio station WSGN. Also, during this year, he fell heir to Orla Allen organ business and in 1945 started