

developed between the work crew and Ben and Max, the friendly custodians at F.I.M.

In the spring of 1977, Mr. Peryer asked Bob and Velma Burnham to look for an artist-in-residence for the 1977-78 season. For eleven years, Velma has served as staff organist at the Capital Theatre playing Saturday and Sunday intermission programs. Throughout the years of escorting Velma to and from the theatre, Bob had developed a special affection for the Barton. Though many artists were considered, their thoughts always came back to Dennis James as the one who would be able to "bring it all together."

Dennis agreed, knowing it was his responsibility to show the people of Flint what theatre pipe organ was all about. And this he did, during the one-week visit each month for seven months from November through May. It proved to be a grand awakening for theatre organ lovers of Flint.

Velma Burnham is presently house organist at F.I.M. Bob now serves as coordinator between F.I.M. and the Flint Theatre Organ Club and was the one who accepted the responsibility for moving the organ to its present home. Both are now members of the Activities Board at F.I.M.

The Flint Theatre Organ Club can now say they are the first to offer instructional opportunities to the community within a college complex, through a series of private lessons, workshops, concerts, sing-alongs and silent movies with organ accompaniment. This has been made possible by a grant awarded by the Mott Foundation for an artist-in-residence at the Flint Institute of Music.

Although not affiliated with ATOS, about half of the Flint Theatre Organ Club members are individually active in the Motor City Chapter.

Not unlike a fairy tale, with everybody living happily ever after, this story, too, has a happy ending. Although forever is a long time, F.T.O.C. members are thankful that their Barton is in a position to teach the coming generation a very important part of this country's history — the theatre organ, its music, and the enjoyment of playing, listening and preserving its sound. □

TRASH

by John Muri

You can't tell about word-meanings. Much of the time you have to guess. We are now assaulted by locutions like "real bad, real cool" and hyperbolic adjectives like *fantastic* and *fabulous*. If everyone who uses them is correct, we must be enjoying the greatest musical age the world has ever seen. The current devotion to a mangled construction of the adverb *hopefully* shows that many, many people are carried away more by the sounds of words than by sense. When reading some of our concert reviews, we have to guess at what happened; so much is left unsaid, merely suggested, or expressed ironically.

There need be no equivocation about musical trash, offal, detritus, refuse, or junk, whatever you call it. For a long time, so-called purists have been calling theatre organs, their players, and their music trash. We have shrugged off the words of Dr. Audsley and E. Power Biggs (who is reported to have called the theatre organ "a vulgar instrument.") If the latter did so, he was blaming an inanimate object, while what he should have been blaming were irresponsible, over-enthusiastic, and tasteless players. He would have done us a service by defining his adjective, had he cared to do so. The word *tasteless* is continually bandied about in "legitimate" musical literature.

What is good taste? Briefly, we might say it consists in expecting or asking no more of an instrument than it is capable of producing adequately and pleasingly, if not completely. But what do we mean by those last three adverbs? The endless excoriation of Vox Humanas and tremulants by purists who never fail to include those devices in their organ specifications is indicative of a singular inconsistency, to put things mildly. One doesn't blame a trombone for being a trombone, even though it can't sing the highest,

sweetest melodies. Nobody expects it to.

Some theatre organs can be said to have been thrown into their chambers, but this can be said of church as well as theatre work. I know many in which large blocks of electrical connections were left unsoldered. You couldn't always blame the organ manufacturers, though, when they were pressured into getting the instruments working without enough time to finish the installations. Many organs were "thrown" in because of the demands of theatre owners who wanted organ sound for opening performances. Many organs today are in bad condition, with their owners complaining about the lack of economic return or of time needed to do a good piece of work. I have heard a hundred excuses why organs are in junk condition: poor health, no money, no time, etc. The "legit" theatre organ in first-class condition is a rarity. There are at least three organ owners who persist in offering organ shows (I can't call them concerts) on instruments that hang together by "baling wire and a prayer."

The main weakness of theatre organs has been their lack of enough stops to create more than a few interesting tonalities. A related weakness is a frequent lack of good foundation tone, despite the insistence of organists on playing heavy works, like Bach fugues, on organs too small or too ill-voiced to produce more than a travesty of performance. When appropriate music was used, some fine playing could be done on small instruments, that most theatre organs were inadequately serviced added to the critics' dislike and the organists' discomfort. The careless, hasty way in which many organs were installed, jammed into inaccessible chamber-space, made them trash from the beginning. One could only sympathize with the people who had to play and service them. As for the organs being over-balanced

with Tibia sound, you would always turn off the Tibias if you didn't like the sound provided you had enough other stops from which to choose. The purists hated theatre organs particularly for the excessive doses of Crawford portamento or Hawaiian roll. There they had something to complain about, but then they should have blamed the organists and not the instruments.

Purists have rarely been willing to give theatre organ manufacturers credit for pioneer experimental work in creative pipe-making, winding, electrical work, and reliability of mechanism under hard use. William H. Barnes is the only fair-minded critic I have read on the subject. The purists have never been remiss or tardy in appropriating good new ideas from theatre organ people. A detailed account of their borrowings is long overdue.

A little dip into history shows, surprisingly enough, that organs in general were long in disrepute, even with churchgoers. Between 1642 and 1644, at the beginning of the English commonwealth period, the instrument was so hated that troops of soldiers were given orders to invade churches and destroy the organs. Organs were torn apart wholesale under a January, 1664 ordinance of the House of Parliament. John ("Father") Howe, the most famous organ builder of the time, lived to see most of his work destroyed.

The thing really to criticize is trashy playing. It was hard to score fine music for trashy films, but one could do such a thing with a little extra effort. Although we could make some excuses for the overworked player of the twenties, we can't excuse today's console-jockey who in an hour and a half persists in using the following five most horrible organ clichés:

(1) the opener using a trill followed by a run up several octaves (*a la Rhapsody in Blue*) to a few wild chords succeeded by a dynamic drop to the first simple bars of a mediocre pop tune.

(2) the use of the Crawford portamento every four bars, sometimes on

loud combinations of stops,

(3) wild, meaningless runs up and down the keyboard during ballads,

(4) buildups from soft to loud and *vice versa* every few cadences, and

(5) endings consisting of protracted loud chords followed by two staccato fillips.

Our jockey becomes specially trashy when he uses inane, insulting, or profane remarks while addressing his audience. It is good to report that he is a rarity. We must call attention to one player on the circuit who calls himself the trashiest of theatre organists, meaning only that he specializes in simple, ragtime, first quarter-of-the-century pop tunes. Those of us who know him are aware that he isn't using the term literally or pejoratively, and that he is reminding us again that we need always to judge language in the light of the spirit and the intelligence with which it is used. □



Lowell Ayars.

the most theatrical Kimballs we've heard, either in person or on records. And Lowell takes every opportunity to exploit those qualities. Big hall miking helps with the "I'm sitting in the best seat in the house" illusion.

Lowell Ayars started his career near the close of the silent film era, so he knows all the methods of getting the most from a theatrical instrument. He prefers mostly the mellow, full combination sound to the brassy, punctuated ones but he also uses some intriguing solo combinations. His playing is satisfying rather than startling. While his arrangements are pure theatre organ he has included such recent titles as "Summer of '42," "Time in a Bottle" and "I Wish You Love," tunes which adapt well to theatrical stylings. But it's his 10-minute medley of four tunes from *Showboat* which benefit most from Lowell's stylings.

Lowell is known as a "singing organist" and has included two pleasant vocals, "I Wish You Love" and "They Didn't Believe Me." He pays tribute to much-neglected tunesmith Neil Moret with a medley of "Song of the Wanderer," "I Got a Woman Crazy for Me" and durable "Chloe," still being pursued through the Everglades by a determined suitor.

He knows how to wring a torch song dry, too, as during "I Got a Woman" and "Can't Help Lovin' That Man." The oldies are obviously Lowell's strongest area and he does well by a brass-studded "You're



LOWELL AYARS AT LAST, playing the Dickinson Kimball. DTOS-2001 stereo. \$8.00 postpaid from Dickinson Theatre Organ Society, 1801 Milltown Road, Wilmington, Delaware 19808.

As the jacket notes inform us, Lowell Ayars has performed at more ATOS conventions than any other organist (over the past 15 years), but this is his first grooving. Hence, the album title, the one Lowell's many fans have been waiting for.

The organ, a 3/19 Kimball when in the Philadelphia Boyd Theatre, has been enlarged by 11 well selected, matching ranks. It is one of

Mr. Muri's opinions expressed herein are his own and do not necessarily reflect the policies of ATOS or THE-ATRE ORGAN Magazine.