

# 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.*

George Wright comes to us with goodies this time. The good news is that he's going to have a studio organ again, and is busily collecting parts. From Dennis Hedberg's "pizzery leftovers," George has purchased Wurlitzer ranks for Concert Flute, Open Diapason, Viol d'Orchestre, Vioi Celeste, Salicional, Horn Diapason, Tuba, Clarinet, Vox, Orch. Oboe and Kinura. A friend in Denver released pipes for a Wurlitzer Trumpet and Tibia.

While George was in Binghamton, N.Y. last April, famed organbuilder Ed Link donated a blower, swell shutters, traps, percussions and his remaining personal stock of Wurlitzer and Gottfried pipework. He even crated and shipped the parts to Los Angeles. And Howard Vollum (Portland, Oregon) came through with a set of rare Wurlitzer Musette pipes.

This will be George's second organ. The first, on which he made many memorable records, was lost in a fire years ago. Asked why he would go through the rigors of set-

ting up another pipe organ, this time in his Hollywood home, George replied:

"I feel the need for a small studio organ for my practice and possible recording needs."

With 15 ranks of pipes available, it's doubtful that it will be "small." George has some space limitations and that's why he can't install the 3/16 Wurlitzer donated to him by an anonymous San Francisco couple about three years ago. It has large-scale pipework, much of it on 15" pressure. Tonally and physically too massive for a residence. George says he will return the Wurlitzer to the donors, who have already several locations in mind.

For all that Wurlitzer pipework, George's instrument will be played from a 3-deck Moller horseshoe console, similar to that in the Trenton War Memorial, an item he acquired from Jim Glass in Hinsdale. George says:

"I particularly like this console. It has many stopkeys and the highly desirable feature of hold-and-set pistons."

George is currently burning the midnight oil, formulating installation plans.



While speaking of George, reader John Cantrel takes us to task for referring to him as an "intermission organist" during his three years at the New York Paramount. John writes that he caught George's act many times and it was never music for the popcorn break but an integral part of the show during which audience members remained in their seats and absorbed the music. He describes George's appearances as in the solo organist class, much like Crawford before him. The spotlighted solo usually ran to three special pop arrangements, the last usually being an upbeat number, Cantrel says.

While we are correcting our sins against George, let it be known also that he contributed \$1000 to the Connecticut Valley Chapter, not the piddling \$100 we reported last issue, as several ConValChaps have reminded us.



Brother Andrew, leading light of the Theatre Historical Society, un-



Don Baker 'at the mighty Hammond' — for one day. (Churchill Photo)

earthed a late-thirties ad which proclaimed Don Baker playing a "mighty Hammond" at the New York Paramount. Asked if it were true, because the organist is known to have played the "Queen Mother" for close to 14 years, Don replied "we tried something different one day. It was the only show when I didn't do my usual Wurlitzer solo. We had two dozen Hammond speakers spotted around the theatre, from the orchestra floor to the top balcony. The Hammond console was on the orchestra lift in the center of the band setup. I played two numbers featuring the Hammond with the band, just as a change from the song-fest and organ solo."



The Movie Music show at the Ohio Theatre on September 24th may have been the final appearance of Dennis and Heidi James on the same stage; they have undergone a "dissolution of marriage" as they call divorce now. We noted earlier this year that Heidi was writing an original orchestral score for the show's chosen film, Harold Lloyd's *Safety Last*, work which involved composing many pages of music, then scoring her work for the Columbus Symphony orchestra. After all that work, Heidi was dealt a low blow when the film was switched to *Broken Blossoms*, for which the ancient Gottschalk score was played by Dennis at the Morton and the symphony orchestra.

Undaunted, Heidi prepared a 10-minute overture for piano, organ and orchestra from her *Safety Last* com-



Heidi. Going it alone. (Bob Hill Photo)

positions, which was also spotted in the same show.

She also played "Warsaw Concerto" with orchestral support, while Dennis and the orchestra contributed music from *Ben Hur*. The orchestra offered music from Max Steiner's *Gone With the Wind* score and Erich Korngold's *Robin Hood*. Quite an evening, saddened only by the separation of the well-established star duo.

Presumably, Dennis will continue as resident organist at the Ohio Theatre, and pursue his very successful concert career. Heidi has a job; she's now Director of Development for the American Music Scholarship Association in Cincinnati.



A clipping from the *Columbus Dispatch* submitted by Bob Cotner, reveals that the Palace Theatre in Marion, Ohio, celebrated its 50th anniversary on August 30th with a debut concert on its new Wurlitzer played by Dennis James. As always, there's a story connected with an organ going into a theatre, and there's usually a strong personality behind the project. In this case it's ATOSer Tom Yannitell, who until a few years ago could be seen snapping photos at ATOS events, particularly in Chicago where he conducted a re-

corded theatre organ radio show. When he moved to Marion, he started a search for an organ for the Palace.

Unless we are mistaken, the new Palace Wurlitzer came from the Detroit home of Betty and the late ATOS ex-pres. Al Mason. It was, and as of now, it is still a 3/10.



Californians J.B. Nethercutt and wife Dorothy have reason to remember the Artcraft organ in Santa Monica High School. When both were students there they participated in drives for newspapers for recycling. The money thus earned helped pay for the organ and its installation in the school auditorium. They recall the part it played in school activities fondly. Years passed and the organ fell into disuse and deteriorated. In the same time period J.B. and Dorothy married and built up Merle Norman Cosmetics into one of the big beauty aid manufacturers. Always interested in organs, they set up a music room with a now 4-manual, 30 ranks plus organ in their San Sylmar "Tower of Beauty."

When the condition of the high school organ was brought to his attention, Nethercutt volunteered his help in putting the organ of his youth back in playing condition. His offer was eagerly accepted. Over the summer, parts of the Artcraft (predecessor of Robert Morton) were moved to the workshop in the San Sylmar museum building where Gordon Belt, Nethercutt's organ tech. and museum curator, could supervise the work. At this writing, the pipe chest and console re-leathering has been completed. Looks like another one will soon be back in action in time for the 1979 ATOS convention, thanks to the Nethercutts.



Bert Buhrman, who keeps theatre organ a very live entity in the School of the Ozarks in Missouri, checks in to tell us that the annual July series, featuring him at the 3/15 Wurlitzer, was very successful for the umpteenth year. This year, the organ, in response to repeated requests, was featured more, and time devoted to vocalists was reduced. That is one part of the country where the mighty Wurlitzer is appreciated!

Incidentally, Bert says that the

Jones Auditorium, wherein the organ is installed, has a novel way to maintain even temperatures in the chambers. "We air condition with river water, pumped 350 feet to the campus. It is then run thru pipes, and fans are directed on the cold pipes, keeping the temperature a stable 55 degrees. It works like a charm and is very cheap, compared to other means of air conditioning. Ozark ingenuity!"



John Landon reports on his recent European trip: "I enjoyed England most of all, partly because there is no language barrier, and because there are many interesting organs to see and play. People there are always so friendly and warm-hearted. I had a chance to try both Les and Len Rawles' theatre organs. Les has increased the size of his instrument to 18 ranks, having enclosed his patio for more chamber space. Len has the former Empire Theatre organ which Jesse Crawford played on his tour of England in 1933. It is, I believe, the finest home installation I've ever heard."



During the '78 convention, organist Lee Erwin told us of an interesting possibility — an organ removed from a theatre going back into the same theatre.

Several years ago the 4/23 "Wonder Morton" in Loew's King's Theatre (New York) was removed for re-installation in New York's Town Hall. It languished in storage for



Lee Erwin. A "first" if it comes to pass. (Stufoto)

five years while the Big Apple went broke. End of dream? Not entirely. In the interim, King's Theatre was taken over as a cultural center with the assistance of New York University, and the U's president, wants the organ back. Chances are slim but it would most likely be a "first."



Mention of Roy L. Metcalfe, organist at the Raymond Theatre in Pasadena, Calif. in 1924 & 1925, in these pages awhile back brought fond memories to ATOS member, Dick Mead of North Hollywood. "Around 1930, Mr. Metcalfe played a Wurlitzer pipe organ in the Alexander (now Alex) Theatre in Glendale, Calif. before showtime, and I operated the equipment for remote broadcasts." According to records, Metcalfe played the Empress Theatre in Missoula, Mont. in 1913-1915, and moved to the Los Angeles area around 1923. He served as director of the Los Angeles Society of Theatre Organists for several years, while he played theatres in Long Beach. He also broadcast over KFOX Long Beach, from his home studio in 1929.



Congratulations are in order to Clealan Blakely and to Virginia Helsel who became Mrs. Blakely on June 24th. Clealan, a lifetime organ enthusiast, has often contributed articles to this publication and loaned us photos (remember his words and photos for the story "Requiem for the Roxy" and his tribute to Dan Papp a few years back?). He is especially well informed about the Crawford's New York period because he attended the Times Square Paramount regularly during the late '20s. He has a hybrid pipe organ in some state of playability in his Bancroft, Ontario home.

A widower for 7 years, he tired of the solo life. He writes, "Virginia likes the same kind of music I do, so now I'm converting her to a theatre organ fan." The newlyweds enjoyed a brief honeymoon in the Canadian Rockies where there are no theatre organs, but Clealan did locate a Knabe concert grand piano at Chateau Lake Louise:

"It had a beautiful tone," writes the groom.

The wedding and honeymoon were

what kept Clealan from attending the ATOS 1978 convention, "the first one I have missed in a long time." He has a very good excuse.



Walt Beupre, our written music reviewer, advises that the 1977 book, *Fats Waller, His Life and Times* (Contemporary Books) makes the point over and over that the theatre pipe organ was Waller's first love. As one music critic stated, "The organ is the instrument of Waller's heart; the piano that of his stomach."

In the book we meet young Thomas playing the family harmonium; his mother was organist at the Abyssinian Baptist Church. The boy dropped out of school and left home to play organ for \$25.00 a week in Harlem's Lincoln Theatre. Later he was lured to the Lafayette where there was a Hope Jones organ, although most of his later jazz pipe records were played on a church organ. In 1936, Fats stated, "I am the finest jazz organist alive." This was certainly true. Author Joel Vance believes that the final recordings made in 1943 (on a Hammond) are the most personal statements of Fats Waller, the performer. He recorded these in a Hollywood studio and they reached GI's overseas via V-Discs. Fats died on the train returning him to the east.

The current Waller renaissance includes the Broadway musical, *Aint Misbehavin'*. He wrote the title tune. And 1976 Safari-goers were treated to a preview of Waller records made from piano rolls played on an organ in Bolton, England. Wonder if the records were released?



Nick Snow! The name goes back a long way, when Nick was going to college and located a 2/8 Morton organ in the Manos Theatre, Indiana, Pennsylvania. Nick got the organ in playing shape and played both for theatre audiences and broadcasts over WISR radio. Nick sent us a tape of his playing and it was good. That was way back in 1962 and we reported Nick's accomplishments in the magazine we published at the time, *The Posthorn*. That's the last contact we had with Nick Snow until Fran Verri sent us a copy of the May-June issue of the excel-



Nick Snow playing the Manos Theatre organ in 1962.

lent newsletter he does for the Pittsburgh Area Theatre Organ Society, the *Pipes of PATOS*.

There on the front page was a photo of Nick Snow presenting a concert on the PATOS 2/6 Wurlitzer installed in the Keystone Oaks High School through the efforts of club members. Nick shared the concert with veteran organist Harold Rouse who cued some Chaplin comedies with skills acquired over a half century ago, *Pipes of PATOS* reported.

Perhaps Nick has been around all the time and we just never saw accounts of his feats, although Fran Verri refers to him as "the new Nick Snow." Anyway, welcome back to one of us, and, Nick, if you still want that Manos tape back, shoot us an address.



We have been hearing a lot about an electronics engineer who has a magic touch in improving the theatrical voices of electronic organs in Southern California. First, he built a new Vox Humana "rank" of generators for Bob Power's "style 260" Rodgers. And what a Vox sound! Then he gave Ray Hoeppe's Allen truer theatrical voices. He has also worked some improvements into the 3-deck Rodgers 340 in J.B. Nethercutt's Antique Auto Museum at San Sylmar. He modified the Tibia and Vox along the lines of the changes made in the Power organ.

When we caught up with him it turned out to be Lee Sundstrom. We



Lee Sundstrom. He has the magic touch. (Zimphoto)

first sampled Lee's magic while he was working for Thomas, before they moved to Chicago. Lee had a prototype of a Tibia that came very close to the pipe sound, and demonstrating it was Eddie Dunstedter, who gave his approval. Lee's circuitry wasn't incorporated in stock models.

Talking with Lee now, he is still deeply interested in improving the state of the art.

He says "I became rather fed up with a sine wave flute sound fed through a Leslie speaker coupled with very dead reed voices plus innumerable automatic devices."

So Lee developed what he calls "timbre modulation," an entirely different system of tone generation now being patented so we can't give details yet.

But we can reveal that Lee puts much emphasis on the attack of a given voice. He has added "attack transients" (a subdued chuff) to the Tibia and Post Horn on the Power organ. Bob likes the result. Lee is also critical of tremming methods.

He says "It will be much better to stop shaking the oscillators and develop vibrato after the oscillators."

With paino sales increasing because of the complexity of learning to use all the gimmicks on current electronics, Lee may be just what the electronic organ field needs. He puts pipelike tone generation at the top of the list.



Is your chapter in the doldrums? Are you losing members? Is your concert attendance declining? If the answer to any or all of those

questions is "yes" perhaps a copy of the pamphlet "How to Improve Your Chapter Programming and Publicity" by Lee Bristol, Jr. may provide some helpful hints. The American Guild of Organists member has prepared some suggestions to improve matters. Copies are obtainable for 50 cents each from Order Dept. AGO National Headquarters, 630 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2010; New York, NY 10020.



During an interview over KFAC radio, concert violinist Isaac Stern made the following statement:

"We can't impose on modern ears the sounds, smells and feel of the 18th century." The "baroquists" will not agree.



Remember Marty Dohm? Last time we encountered him, he had just gotten the 3/10 Kimball in the Madison, Wisconsin Orpheum in playing shape. In fact, the main feature story in the Dec. 1962 issue of *The Posthorn* was about Marty's restoration of the Kimball. Then 16 years passed without a word about Marty, until we received a letter from Matt Smith of Sullivan, Wisconsin. Matt found Marty playing an 1899 Farrand & Votey tubular-pneumatic action church organ in Baraboo, Wis. Later the pair went to the Al Ringling Theatre and Marty played on the 3/8 Barton, which is played often, according to the theatre's manager. Marty told Matt that he now spends the sum-

mer months playing an X77 Hammond at the Ishnala Restaurant in Lake Delton.

In the years since the *Posthorn* story, Marty rescued the Kimball from the Orpheum when it was in danger and now has it stashed, awaiting a proper place to install it. Bravo, Marty!



On September 1st, KCET, the non-commercial educational TV station for Los Angeles scheduled the 1927 German utopian film, *Metropolis*. This was brought to the writer's attention when the phone started ringing a few minutes after the film started and excited voices advised us to tune in to "get a load of the 'score'!" We recall seeing the silent classic, directed by the great Fritz Lang, on its first run at the New York Criterion Theatre, accompanied by a large symphonic orchestra playing a special score. So, we assumed KCET would at least come up with an organ score.

But no; there was no music at all, just sound effects and a synthesizer issuing squeals, grunts, bleeps, bleeps, sworls, thuds, and generally regurgitational noises which did much to impede the story flow and draw attention to its audible grossness. As this film dealt with a serious theme, the klops, plinks and yowls couldn't have been intended as a joke. They even gave screen credit to the guy who honked the synthesizer after the final fadeout, as though he had contributed something of value. But we tend to agree



Marty Dohm at the Al Ringling Barton.

(Matt Photo)

with one of the telephoners who described it as "an insult to Fritz Lang, the cast and the art of the silent film."

This is "educational" television?



In mid-July Baton Rouge celebrated a 3-day Arts and Humanities Festival — and theatre organ was a part of it. The 2/6 Robert Morton in the Paramount Theatre was played by Dolton McAlpin (he recorded it for the Concert label 10 years ago), in concert and to cue a film comedy.

Dolton reports that the Festival marked the first public performance played on the Morton for several years, and the response was overwhelming — six full house performances over the Festival weekend. Dolton's presentation included cueing Laurel & Hardy's *Big Business* (Dolton's first whack at cueing silents) and the audience ate it up. The organist writes, "I have never seen such enthusiasm for the theatre organ by the general public as I witnessed this weekend." The theatre owners were likewise stunned and are making plans for more silent films with organ accompaniment. Naturally, Dolton is encouraging them.



Bill Hagey, who plays the Wurlitzer in Salt Lake City's *Pipes and Pizza*, has a fan in reader Buncha Chimchinda, who writes:

"I like his style and I told him he played a 'mean organ.' Bill replied that the organ isn't mean at all since he and his boss, Cal Christensen, had lavished so much hard work and TLC on it in recent months. Bill is tops in my book and I recommend him to anyone passing through Salt Lake City — as well as the inhabitants."



Organist Don Lorusso isn't allowing those two heart attacks to cramp his style. Now fully recovered, he's on what he calls a "limited schedule" — only four nights of playing each week. He's doing a couple of nights a week at Milwaukee's Pipe Organ Pizza, Fridays at Dot's Supper Club in West Bend and Saturdays at Chuck's Supper Club in Silver Lake,



Don Lorusso.

the latter with a quartet.

The former Englishman finds playing for pizza munchers quite different from his BBC broadcast days, especially that Command Performance for King George and the Royal Family in 1947.



Andy Kasparian. Back at home base — briefly.

It was "old home night" at the Lansdowne Theatre in Lansdowne, Pa. when Andy Kasparian returned to his home town to fill in while the regular organist (probably Shirley Hannum, Ed.) was absent for a night, reports Andy's flack, Margaret Sabo. The Lansdowne is still operated as a family theatre and the Kimball organ has always been a feature of the entertainment. Some members of the audience recognized Andy from the days he played there as a youngster. He was heard in concert on this same instrument during the 1976 ATOS convention.



Rev. William E. Biebel, of Erie, Pa., has been playing concerts throughout the East for a number of years. He has had extensive training in piano, organ and theory, so that background enables him to perform most adequately on either a drawknob or horseshoe console. In June, he performed on Dick Kline's installation in Maryland, followed by a recital in Miami. On November 30, he makes his initial Rochester, N.Y. appearance.



The Garden State chapter follows a concert ticket sales policy which might be followed profitably by others. In a letter signed by Bill McKissock, listing the cost of a five-concert series, the prices ranged from \$15.00 to \$25.00. However, senior citizens and students can hear such artists as Hector Olivera, Lyn Larsen, Keith Chapman and Dennis James playing the Trenton War Memorial Moller for \$2.00 a concert, or \$10.00 for the series. There are no fans with greater interest than the oldsters who experienced the "golden era" in person. And we are dependent on youth to carry on. Yet ever-increasing admission fees are barring both groups from performances. And there are all those empty seats at theatre concerts. One way to get them filled is to make concessions to youth and the elderly.



In Los Angeles, John Ledwon picked up an unexpected organ gig when the manager of the Wiltern Theatre asked him to play a brief



1979 ATOS Convention Chairman John Ledwon at the Wiltern Kimball console.

(Bob Hill Photo)

concert before a special midnight showing of *Tommy* on September 1, 2 and 3. John reports that the organ music was well received and that the 4/37 Kimball was on good behavior except the combo pistons were temperamental.

There was an impressive memorial service for Fred Feibel held in Vero Beach, Fla. on May 20th. The late organist's long-time friend, Bob Pereda, played the music, and the

church was filled to capacity. Bob used music composed by Fred for the service. There were two hymns sung by the mourners and as the procession left the church Bob used Fred's sign-off theme from his CBS network *Organ Reveille* show, "Thanks to the Dawn." A most fitting tribute.

When CATOE hosted the ATOS Convention in 1969, a late-evening concert by Eddie Weaver was held in Whiting, Indiana's Hoosier Theatre, a 3/11 Wurlitzer sounding forth. Changes have occurred in the house since then. Owner Bob Montgomery is transforming the Hoosier into a sort of four-channel studio. He is revamping and augmenting the Wurlitzer, installing a 4-manual console in the process. His automatic roll player came from the organ which was once in Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak's home. Bob is being assisted by five Viet Nam veterans.

He says that eventually the balcony will house considerable pipework.

No need to mention it because you'll be reading about it in Chapter News, but Ashley Miller was in fine form during his summer concert excursion to southern Calif. He played for the LA Chapter, then at the Nethercutt Museum at San Sylmar, then on to San Diego to play the Wurlitzer in the Mesa Organ Power pizzeria and later the newly installed 2/7 chapter-owned Wurlitzer in the California Theatre.

Did you notice anything wrong with the photo at the top of page 35 in the June/July THEATRE ORGAN? Quite a few readers did; the photo was reversed in the publishing process. Therefore the names listed should be associated with the people shown from a right to left perspective. □

## A Note From The Past...

The following item appeared in Jacobs Magazine, June 1927, and was submitted by Lloyd E. Klos:

R. Wilson Ross, feature organist at the Victoria Theatre, Rochester, NY, was organist at the Liberty Theatre, Carnegie, Pa. (a suburb of Pittsburg) before locating in Rochester, and was previously organist of the Trinity Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia. Before the war, he was a pupil of Pietro Yon, organist at the Vatican, Rome. The Eastern connections of Mr. Ross are musically strong, including a two-year course at Coombs University, Philadelphia, and organ study under Henry Fry, John Crist, and Daniel Phillipi. In 1921, he joined the National Association of Organists and later became a colleague of the American Guild of Organists.

Mr. Ross has been organist at several large churches, was with the Stanley Theatre Co. for three years, served as concert organist at the Rivoli Theatre in Philadelphia, and followed his Rivoli engagement by specializing for the Marr & Colton Organ Co. in important recital engagements and feature programs

opening new Marr & Colton organs in various theatres. He has given a great many guest recitals in eastern churches.

Mr. Ross was introduced to the Pittsburg district by an engagement at Maute's Theatre in Irwin, Pa., where he dedicated a large Marr & Colton organ, and stayed for two years as organist before accepting the engagement at Carnegie. While at Irwin, he gave free Sunday afternoon organ recitals to thoroughly introduce the new theatre organ to the people of that community. His success in both Eastern and Western Pennsylvania attracted the attention of the Rochester theatre management, and his engagement at the Victoria Theatre followed as a matter of course. At the Victoria, where he assumed charge of the music February 15, he featured organ recitals on the new Marr & Colton \$30,000 organ. These recitals met with the enthusiastic favor of Victoria patrons, and completely justified the wisdom of installing the new organ and securing Mr. Ross to play upon it, even without considering the important contribution they make to the photoplay presentation. □

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