

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

Organist Billy Nalle is always good for some upbeat items. For example, the Wichita Wizard learned just before Yule that PBS station WEDU, Tampa, Florida, would run his *The Pipes of Christmas* TV tape on Christmas day, the first time a Florida broadcaster has so honored the local lad (he grew up in Ft. Myers,



Billy Nalle. Terminal Optimist.

which saw the show via cable) since he went north to what he calls "Nineveh on the Hudson" (New York, that is) and crashed Juilliard. The 30-minute color show, taped with Billy playing the Wichita "Dowager Empress" Wurli, can only gain friends for our favorite instrument.

Then, on the day before Christmas Billy turned on his own TV and happened upon a 1945 movie entitled *The Enchanted Forest*. The only thing remarkable about it was that the score was composed and conducted by Albert Hay Malotte, best known for his musical setting for "The Lord's Prayer." Billy didn't know theatre organist Malotte was active in film scoring after the '30s.

Lastly, Billy's Bach-like treatment of "All the Things You Are" ("Alles Was Du Bist") will henceforth be published by Gentry Publications, Tarzana, Calif. It wasn't sacred enough for the previous publishers to retain in their catalogue. Horrors!

See, all upbeat items.



The theatre organ once again took it on the chin from a church oriented musician recently. In a "Dear Abby" column, a St. Augustine, Fla. reader said he quit going to church because the organist played too loudly. A San Francisco organist, Louise M. Childs, responded thusly: "I've been a church organist since 1934, and the problem is probably not the organist, but the organ. Over the years, churches replace worn-out organs with re-built theatre organs or parts of several organs, and the resulting sounds are disastrous!" A following reader advised attending the Church of Christ where "it is heavenly to attend church and not have to hear all the loud instrumental music." So, take your choice! As in the churches, the theatre organ idiom also has its share of slam-bangers. But don't blame the instrument.



Several readers have asked "What's Ashley Miller up to these days?" We haven't heard much from the former RCMH organist since he resigned as organist for the New York Society of Ethical Culture after 17 years ("... now I can sleep late Sunday mornings.") True, he showed up at the Trenton War



Ashley Miller and 'butterfly.'

Memorial to mainline Rex Koury's fall concert there, and it's reported he got on famously with the "Gun-smoke" organist ("It's a shame we meet the genuine people so late. Rex is 'real people' in my book, as an artist and man.")

Then there was that Manhattan cocktail party. The hostess was a former Rockette who had married a fiddler in the RCMH orchestra. She introduced Ashley as "a celebrity who plays both for the New York Rangers and the Knicks," thus mixing the musical aspects of basketball and hockey. This caused quite a stir among the guests.

Friends say Ashley now divides his time writing music, arranging and practicing, but this could not be substantiated. He's still single, gals, but don't bank on anything. Old embers are still smoldering.

Outside of those shaky items, we don't know a thing about recent Miller activities — except that he has acquired one whopping bow tie (see photo).



The North Texas ATOS Chapter seems to have established a tradition with the third stanza of its Organ Marathon, a show devised to raise funds for the housing and installation of the Chapter's as yet stored

4/22 Robert Morton organ. This year 29 organists participated and all but one concert was held at the Organ World Concert Hall in Garland (near Dallas) between Nov. 26 and Dec. 1. Talent was local with one exception; Ed Galley was imported for two opening concerts. The idea was continuous music and there was no set admission charge, although donations were requested. Playing was done on electronics, but for the benefit of pipes.



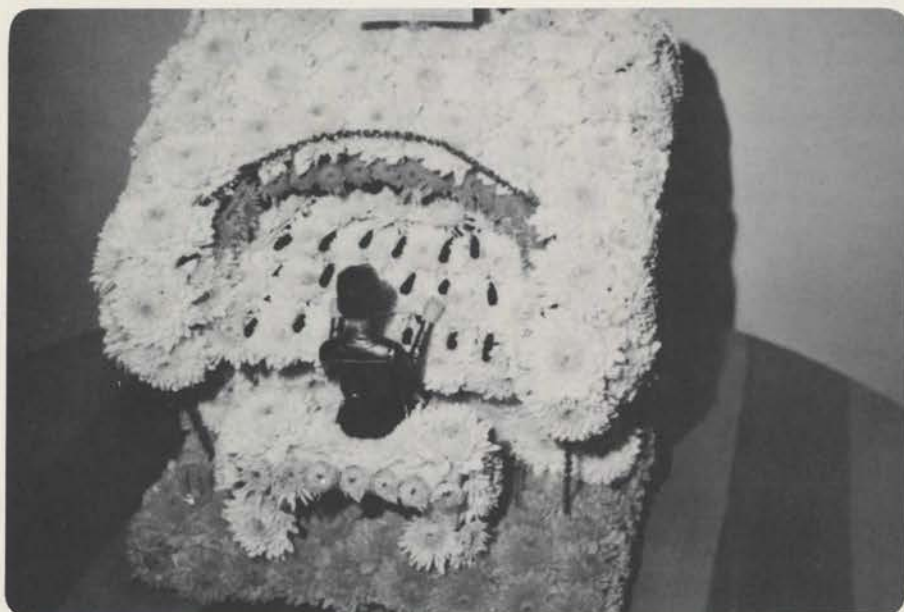
Congratulations go to ATOS member Robert Pereda, organist and director of music at the Community Church of Vero Beach, Fla. Bob received an Honorary Doctor of Music from Piedmont College in Demorest, Georgia. Piedmont president, James E. Walter, made the presentation.



Offside to Eddie Madden, Chauncey Haines remains the only organist to be elected to membership in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, so he is entitled to pose with an "Oscar."



Here's a new angle. From time to time we report on the model makers who live up our hobby with miniatures of various makes of console. But this is the first time we've seen it done in flowers. A Toronto florist



Don at the 'Flowerlitzer.' He's a doll.

who enjoyed Don Thompson's performances at the local Organ Grinder returned a few days later with a 2' x 2' model of the 3/12 console, complete with a doll miniature of Don at the manuals — executed entirely in flowers. This artist could qualify for the annual Pasadena Rose Parade.



The sale of records played by John Landon (see Review in FOR THE RECORDS) is doing much to make restoration and improvement of the 2/7 Page organ in the Anderson, Ind., Paramount possible. The Paramount Organ Society reports that a rectifier has replaced the worn low-voltage generator and a missing rank of pipes is being replaced. A piano will be added, but pipework will be preserved exactly as Page installed it in 1929. The group is always on the lookout for genuine Page replacement parts. There has been no tonal tampering and the wind pressure has not been increased. A genuine article!



Luella (Edwards) Wickham, Syracuse's Grand Lady of the Theatre Organ, hasn't been active over the past couple of years. A veteran of many ATOS conventions, Luella is now a patient at the Loretta Geriatrics Center, 700 E. Brighton Ave., Syracuse 13205. She was able to attend an ESTMIM concert earlier in the year at the State Fairgrounds,



Luella.

(Dick Harold Photo)

with the aid of a wheelchair ambulance, Luella would enjoy hearing from her ATOS friends.



In the October 1979 issue of THEATRE ORGAN, appeared the feature story of the Eastman Theatre's Austin organ in Rochester. According to Russ Shaner, the console, after being in several storage areas since its removal in 1972, is now in a Philadelphia church. It was overhauled and adapted to play fewer organ voices. During renovation of the Eastman, the console was removed and was to have gone into a church in the Rochester area, but was rejected. Several ATOS members had a hand in its being installed in the City of Brotherly Love.



Mention of E. Power Biggs unenthusiastic opinion of the huge Austin organ in Rochester's Eastman Theatre, brought fond memories to organist, Bert Buhrman: "During my days in New York, I had to 'stand by' during his Sunday morning program. I went on at 8:00 a.m., live, full network, playing the horrible old Lew White Kimball, then went back to the CBS studios at 485 Madison Avenue for a morning of standbys and fills. Biggs was then broadcasting on that rather ugly baroque organ from the Germanic Museum at Harvard, starting at 9:30 a.m. One morning, the lines failed and I had to do a fill on a Hammond yet!

I was careful of the selection of material, but was pleased when a couple of persons called in to the production office, saying they liked the fill better than the regular Biggs' broadcast. Those calls really made my day!"



The October 11 final concert played on the famed Wiltern Kimball was well covered by the Los Angeles press. Both the *Times* and the *Valley News* provided photos and text on the event, which featured Ann Leaf in concert and Gaylord Carter cueing Buster Keaton's *The Navigator*. The nearly full house applauded the performances with what might be called "terminal verve." The event was sponsored by Pacific Theatres, whose lease was expiring. The 4/37 giant would have to be moved from the building at the corner of Western Avenue and Wilshire Blvd., where it has resided since being moved from the LA Forum Theatre in the early '30s.

There was talk about having the theatre declared a landmark, and that effort had warded off the wrecking ball temporarily. Even so, the organ, claimed by Pacific Theatres, would have to be moved out. First, it looked like storage, then word got around that Pacific Theatres wanted the Kimball installed in their showcase house, the Pantages on Hollywood Blvd. Fine, the LA Chapter would supply skills and labor for the move in exchange for a written

guarantee that the relocated instrument would be available for a few chapter events.

Such assurances were not forthcoming. When the Kimball maintenance crew visited the Kimball for a touch up session in December '79, they found that the locks to the chambers and workrooms had been changed. After circa 17 years of maintenance at no labor costs to the management, the LA Chapter was thus dismissed from further access to the Kimball, which would be moved by unnamed parties.



It would seem that our optimistic view in this column concerning the future of the 3249-seat Shea's Buffalo Theatre was somewhat premature, says Lloyd Klos. According to more recent reports there is big trouble. To backtrack a little, in 1975 the owner of the historic house was bankrupt, Loew's pulled out of operation, and the city seized the building for back taxes.

To the rescue came The Friends of the Buffalo, who eventually secured a three-year lease from the city to operate the movie palace. Unbelievable problems have cropped up since then. The blizzard of 1977 caused a loss of over \$40,000 in revenue and severe damage to the roof and plumbing. The city changed the house's name to "Shea's O'Connell Center" to honor a former official.

Pickets walked to protest the volunteer ushers. The heat was shut off for non-payment of a bill. Lately, charges and counter-charges have been flying.

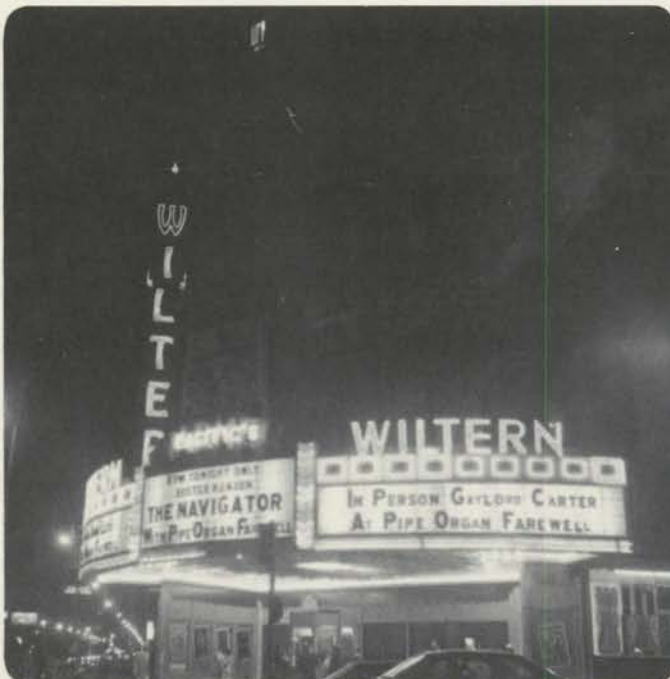
On October 31, the Friends closed the building, with 14 full-time and 50 part-time employees laid off. Performances were cancelled and people demanded ticket refunds.

"We are unable to meet expenses and to deal with the ever-increasing deficit, now over \$200,000," said Robert M. Greene, secretary of the board of directors. Buffalo's Mayor Griffin said he "wanted the Friends out in the next few weeks." The attendant media publicity has not been conducive to further operation.

Rehabilitation of the 4/28 Wurplitzer, its console now in the hands of Dave Junchen, was not mentioned during the latest crisis. Plans had called for the organ's rededication in the spring of 1980.



Remember Heidi James, the "88" half of the James family organ-piano duo which agreed to call it quits a few years ago? We hear lots about Dennis as he is very much in evidence on the organ concert circuit, but Heidi sorta vanished from these pages as pianists are won't to do. We asked Heidi to keep us informed if anything unusual happened. We were hoping for perhaps a new romance. Instead we got violence.





Distinguished company. Ann Leaf (right) chats with concertgoers Mr. and Mrs. John Strader and Heidi James, still sporting bandaged hands. (Lodder Photo)

On Sept. 17, Heidi was driving along a Cincinnati street on her new moped (having just sold her motorcycle in the name of energy conservation). Enter a speeding truck, aimed at Heidi. She managed to dodge the truck but lost control. Heidi did a belly-whopper, palms down, in rough gravel. For awhile there was a question as to whether she would ever play again. Not only were her hands badly lacerated but blood poisoning set in. Progress was slow and Heidi needed a friend. Friends materialized in the persons of Mr. and Mrs. John Strader. Mrs. Strader took Heidi home with her and for a month changed dressings and soaked the injured hands twice a day. Heidi wondered whether she could play again. Her doctor told her to go ahead and try it — if she could stand the pain. She could, and did.

Heidi had been out of the hospital only two weeks when the photo was made. She's sporting her "new lightweight" bandages. The event was Ann Leaf's fall concert at Cincinnati's Emory Theatre. Shown with her are Mr. and Mrs. Strader, the "friends indeed."

"I don't know what I would have done without them," says Heidi.



From St. Louis, Bill Anthony reports that local fans were heartened by a 15-minute organ program seen and heard on KSD-TV. The show in-

troduced the former WENR (Chicago) 3/13 studio Wurlitzer now installed in the home of Bob and Susan Chandler, Webster Grove, Mo. The instrument was played by Gerry Marian who opened with "The Perfect Song" as played by Dean Fossler when he played the *Amos 'n Andy* radiocast theme on the same instrument in the '30s.

The Chandlers were interviewed



Rosa Rio and husband Bill Yeoman making like a scene from the 'soaps' she used to cue.

and the TV camera explored one of the chambers. It will be recalled that Gerry Marian played the 4/36 Wurltzer in the now dark St. Louis Fox Theatre during the final years of its operation.



Bill Anthony is back with another report about theatre organ broadcasts in the St. Louis area. This one was a full hour early November program from KFUE-FM in nearby Clayton, Missouri, conducted by Bob Ault on his "Ragtime and Jazz" series. Heard were recordings by Don Baker, Jesse Crawford, Ray Bohr, Milton Charles, Fats Waller and Lee Erwin. Between tunes was commentary about organs and organists.

With radio's burgeoning rediscovery of big bands, can the theatre organ be far behind?



Rosa Rio recently added another laurel to many she has acquired through the years. On October 20, during the annual Convention of the Friends of Old-Time Radio, held in Bridgeport, Conn., she was awarded a trophy in special recognition of her musical contributions during Radio's Golden Age. Following her theatre

organ days, Rosa became a network radio organist, providing themes and background music for more than a score of radio shows.



A report from the east coast reveals Jimmy Boyce has sold his 4/34 Alexandria, Va., roller rink organ, originally in New York's Center theatre, to Bill Brown of Phoenix, Arizona, who is both a pipe organ fancier and pizza parlor magnate.

In the Alexandria rink the pipe-work was installed across a balcony, with no means of expression other than the Crescendo pedal. It was heard by ATOSers during the 1972 convention held in Washington, played by Boyce and Ray Bohr. Those who heard it recall vividly the ample reverb in the hangar-size structure and the long fabric streamers attached above the lips of bass wooden pipes which fluttered skyward each time the note was sounded.

Bill Brown hasn't informed us to date as to his plans for the ex-Radio City complex Wurlitzer — but we have a fairly good idea.



Word from Don Robinson tells us that his weekly *Organ Loft* program over the Utica, N.Y. airwaves is now in its 17th year, which must be some sort of record for organ-oriented broadcasts. The folks in the Mohawk Valley and other Central New York locations can consider themselves fortunate that Don provides a mixture of classical and theatre organ stylings. An organist himself, Don hosted the annual



Don Robinson. Seventeen years of organcasts and still going strong.



Old friends part. Jimmy Boyce at the console of his 4/34 Center Theatre Wurlitzer. Boyce has embarked on a concert career.

Christmas Day special which is always a treat. He says, "1979 was a highly productive year for the Organ Loft, both in terms of new albums played which featured some new and promising talent, and recordings of the all-time great artists."



"Hey, do you know there's a big organ installation just a few blocks from where you live?" That kind of phone call is the type that galvanizes the true aficionado to immediate action. In this case the call was from organist Bill Wright to Pasadena Calif. true aficionado Bill Reeves. In the next scene we find the two entering a Pasadena shop full of toy trains and several plug-in organs, including a Rodgers Trio and a model 340.

The owner is piano technician William C. Harris, whose hobby is miniature electric trains and organs — and not only electronics. Harris showed his visitors a vast litter of pipes he said were from the Los Angeles La Brea theatre, a Wurlitzer style 240. He has most of the organ, but no console. But that will not phase Harris in the least. After he moves to a new location in June, he plans to add the Wurlitzer ranks

to his Rodgers model 340.

Obviously, this man will bear watching.



The folks up Connecticut Valley way are not adverse to publicizing the theatre pipe organ. Largely through the energies of Thomaston Opera House commissioner, Bob Howe, channel 49, which feeds five other television stations in the Nutmeg State, presented a half-hour documentary on November 22 from the opera house. The program, entitled *The Arts*, was hosted by Nancy Savin and featured Rosa Rio at the 3/15 Marr & Colton. This first TV pickup from the building brought an interview with the organist; a Laurel & Hardy short, which was shown on a split screen; a selection of numbers; and a "trip through the organ," showing off its effects. The opera house was packed for the occasion. National syndication of this program is being considered.



Not much has been heard from the style 216 Wurlitzer in the Monrovia, Calif. High School auditorium recently, and for valid reasons. With the retirement of its champion, the late Jut Williams, evil days befell the

instrument. With no one to replace the beloved teacher, it was used rarely and not maintained. In 1972 vandals broke into the chambers and damaged priceless parts. It looked like a goner.

Would anyone with the knowhow step forward to rescue the still valuable instrument?

"I will!" This came from Peter Crotty, manager of Pasadena's Crown Theatre, whose hobby is restoring pipe organs. But due to budget cutbacks, the school had no funds to pay Crotty for labor or supplies. No matter, Crotty pitched in. In a few weeks he had the Wurli singing again and it was ready for the school's annual Christmas concert on Dec. 20.

School authorities value Peter Crotty's labor and parts donations at \$10,000.

How do Monrovia's feel about their organ? One indication might be the front page story about the restoration in a recent issue of the *Monrovia News-Post*.



From Rahway, N.J., manager Bob Balfour passes on the word that the Landmarks campaign to preserve the Rahway Theatre and its 2/7 "biggest little Wurli" is picking up steam. The Christmas kiddie show, featuring a plethora of cartoons and Ed Baykowski at the organ was the successful starter.

Then in January the first in a festival series of seldom seen classic films, silent and sound, was scheduled, with AAF Captain Jack Moehlmann set to cue the silents. All this to promote a bond issue which will enable the Landmarks group to purchase the theatre when enough bread has dribbled in.



Willem Brouwer of Middleburg, Holland, read our item (April/May 1979) about a BBC personality claiming the 4/14 Christie organ from the Paris Gaumont theatre was again for sale, and decided to check the tale. Through a number of phone calls he was able to contact a member of the city council at Nugent/Marne near Paris. The official quickly shot down the "for sale" sign with:

"The organ is safely installed in the Pavilion Balthar exhibition hall,



Jim Maples playing a state fair mini-concert at the Golden Bear Playhouse 2/7.

(Konas Photo)

Nugent/Marne. It sounds marvelous and we are busy organizing concerts for the public. We will never sell such a beauty."

As we have always said, we need more French officials in our city councils.



From Sacramento, Gary Konas reports that in 1979 Sierra Chapter's Seaver Memorial organ was used more and heard by more people than ever before since its installation in Sacramento's Golden Bear Playhouse in 1974. The history of this 2/7 Wurli has been given previously (THEATRE ORGAN Dec. 1974 and April 1975). This past year thousands of people outside of ATOS heard theatre organ music, perhaps for the first time, played on the only theatre pipe organ located

at a California state fairground.

During the California State Fair in Sacramento (running from mid-August through Labor Day) two "cameo concerts" were played daily in the Playhouse by the club members and local pros. Thanks to advertising, attendance was excellent, with full houses on several occasions. Total attendance was over 6,000, and as a result several people decided to join ATOS.

This past December a local group staged the musical, *Scrooge*, at the Playhouse. A small group of Sierra Chapter volunteers, organized by Randy Warwick, took turns playing Christmas music on the organ before each of the 18 performances and at intermission. Thanks to these efforts another 4,000 people were able to hear a pipe organ in a theatre atmosphere. □

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