

January 26th marked a twin premiere. It was the initial pipe organ concert played by 16-year-old Chris Elliott, a young man with a bright future, unless we miss our guess. Chris first came to our attention when he competed in the Los Angeles Professional Organists' Club's 1979 scholarship competition. The writer was one of the judges in that contest. From the first we were impressed by the professionalism of the young man. He arrived early to acclimate himself to the conditions he would face. He tried out the plug-in organ all contestants would use, a make and model not familiar to him. Against formidable competition by other talented youngsters, Chris won second place.

But on January 26th he would play his first concert on a pipe organ before a small invited audience, and we were there.

The event was also a "coming out" party for an organ which had been "in the process" for several years. It's an assembled organ which was originally a mostly-straight Moller installed in 1926 in a California beach town club. Bob Trousdale, of Santa Ana, Calif., purchased it in 1972 and moved it to his home, where he built a 1200-square-foot studio building in his back yard to house it. The addition is 20 feet in width with a 13½-foot ceiling in the chamber area which is recessed into the ground to provide breathing room for the tall bass pipes.

The organ has changed considerably in its tonal aspects over the years. Nine basic ranks of the Moller remain but additions reflect Trousdale's desire for a more theatrical instrument. A look at the stoplist will indicate the origins of the added pipework, so far as can be determined. Note also the variety of wind pressures used. The overall sound is theatrical, but not akin to any one brand of organ in our experience. It's a one-chamber installation.

But tonality is only half the story; how the pipework is operated is a tale in itself. Bob's experience in the electronics field inspired him to discard the mechanical switches which are the heart of the unit organ. His profession acquainted him with solid-state circuitry, computer design and multiplexing practices. Why not replace the traditional mechanical switches, and all their

# DOUBLE DEBUT IN SANTA ANA

by Stu Green

Chris Elliott's brief concert illustrated both his musical accomplishments and the facilities of the Trousdale organ. At 16, Chris is going strong. (Stufoto)





reliability problems, with the best the space age could offer? The end result was a switching system employing integrated circuits and no moving parts, all installed in the console. And multiplexing (circuit time sharing) reduced the usual several hundred conductor umbilical connecting the console to the pipework to a mere eleven wire cable!

Bob Trousdale's first experience with a theatre organ was as a boy, when his parents took him to the 1939 World's Fair at Flushing Meadow, near New York City. While in New York the family attended Radio City Music Hall, and young Bob was deeply impressed by the RCMH organ. Soon afterward he determined he would one day own his own pipe organ.

Back home in Ithaca, New York, Bob rejected formal music studies; he would much rather play by ear. He still plays only in the key of C, but

has found an electrical way to achieve key changes in his current project.

His college major was in electricity and electronics engineering. After graduation he was employed in research work for the Stromberg-Carlson Company in Rochester where he developed electronic switching systems for telephone circuits.

Moving to California with his family in 1956, he was soon busy in the computer field. (He now holds upwards of seventy patents resulting from his work in electronics.) But always, the organ was on his mind. He bought an Allen electronic long before that company went "computer." In no time he had devised an attachment which permitted him to play his grand piano from the 2-deck Allen console. The next step was to pipes.

Bob has built some extra goodies into the pipe organ, which is now

controlled by the Style 260 Wurlitzer console, once part of the late Jim Gaines' "Echoing Antique Shop" organ. Originally, it had been in the Circle Theatre in Indianapolis, Indiana, where Dessa Byrd played it. To overcome his addiction to the key of C, Bob rigged a chromatic key changer operated by thumb pistons. He also devised a cassette-operated combination setter which permits instantaneous setting of combination pistons simply by playing a prepared cassette on a small recorder/playback into the circuit. And he perfected a device which permits tuning the organ and changing the pitches while the tuner is in the chamber, thus eliminating a second person at the console to hold down keys. So much for a most remarkable residence organ installation. Now back to Chris Elliott and the shakedown concert.

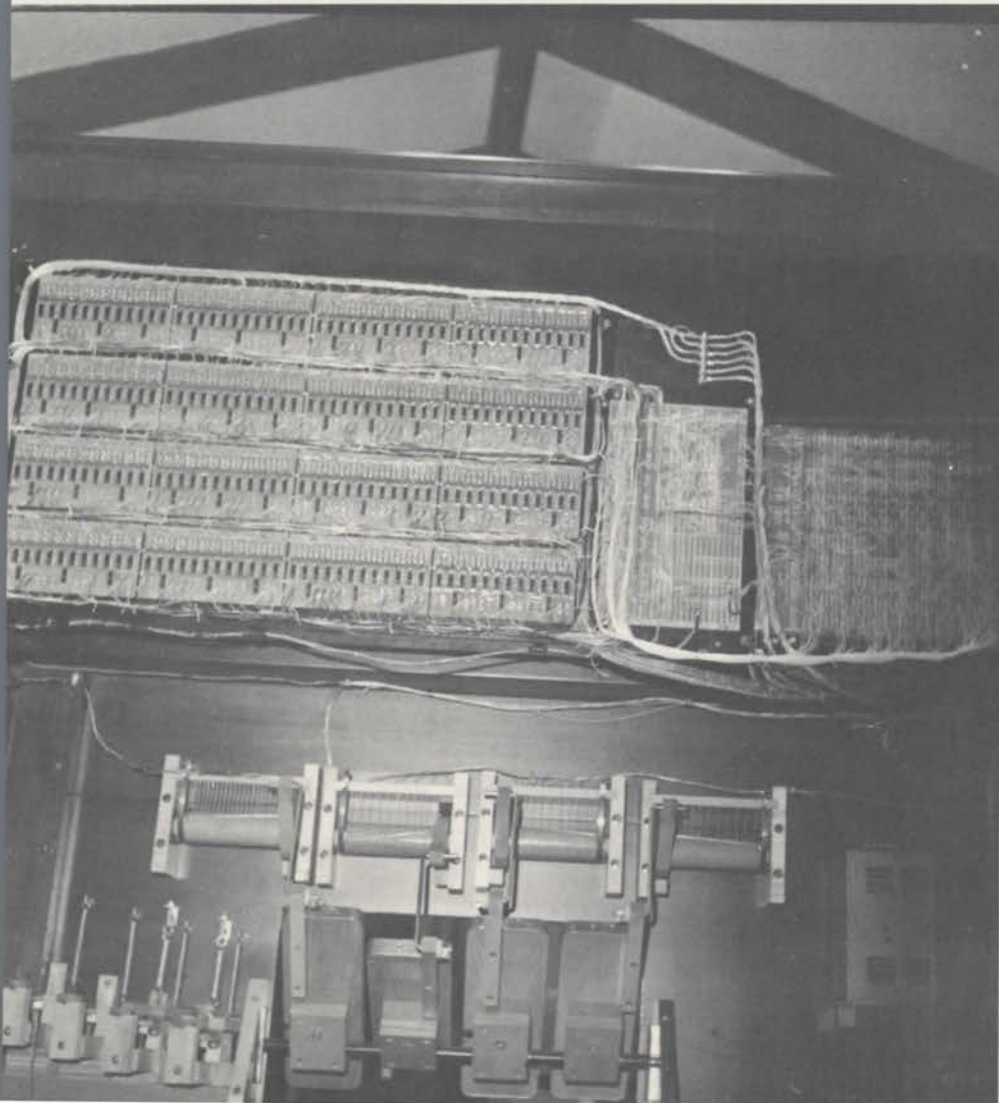
Chris had a headstart — both parents are musicians. After classical piano studies, until he was 12, the lad sought someone who could guide him to an introduction to the theatre organ. Records by Billy Nalle, Lyn Larsen and George Wright had established a beachhead on Chris' musical spectrum. His appetite was whetted when organist Dean McNichols invited him to have a go on the LA Haven of Rest Studio organ. Later, a session at the 4/73 Moller in LA's Shrine Auditorium cinched the matter. The sound of pipes had captured him. Chris was then 13.

He found two very competent teachers; Del Castillo for the fundamentals and Gaylord Carter for the cueing of silent films, a craft very close to Chris' heart. That brings us up to the evening of January 26th.

After a brief introduction by Bob Trousdale, Chris sat down at the immaculate console, which has been stripped of its gold paint job and fancy gegaws, and refinished in natural mahogany.

Chris opened with a dead giveaway — the Gaylord Carter version of "The Perfect Song," a styling we have sometimes referred to as Gaylord's "all quarter note arrangement" which the maestro uses as an opener for his famous "Flickerfingers" shows. Next came the "March" from *Robin Hood* (1922), also a Carter favorite. It could have been Gaylord playing. Chris had learned his lessons well.

What looks like a combination action setter board is actually the entire electronic switching system. This view, with the back panel of the console removed, shows the compact circuit board which replaces all mechanical switches and relays. Below can be seen the Crescendo pedal (left) and swell pedals which control three sets of swell shutters, all affecting the volume of one chamber. Bob is working on a similar switching system for the new George Wright studio organ. (Stufoto)







The Trousdale studio is separated from his home (left). It was built specifically to house the organ.

The silent movie was Buster Keaton's *One Week* wherein the deadpan comic builds a hilariously faulty house from plans doctored by the villain. Chris followed Gaylord's practice of marking each spot where a thump or thud might fit with a keyboard whap. Yet, he kept the fast-paced music going full tilt.

Next was another Carter favorite, "Westward Ho!" the march from *The Covered Wagon*. Then he went into tunes which projected his own interpretations to a greater degree; "Feelings," and the theme from *Love Story*.

To spell Chris, Bob Trousdale took over for a demonstration of his creation's wonders. His labor-saving devices were of special interest to the hobbyists in the group. For example, his one person tuning system has got

Bob Trousdale midst his 19 ranks of speaking pipes, which are all playing from a single chamber. He devised the intricate electronic switching system by which the organ operates. As a "one man organ company" he accepts assignments only in southern California. (Stufoto)



to be a timesaver. The electronic transposer would aid less able players who are tied to one or two keys.

Chris Elliott returned for an encore playing of "The Way We Were." As before, his registration and expression show skills beyond his 16 years.

Los Angeles ATOS members will undoubtedly have an opportunity to hear him in the near future. Los Angeles Chapter Chairman Ralph Beaudry was present and he obviously liked what he heard.

Thus, we witnessed the launching of a newly-assembled 3/19 theatre organ, and the career of an organist whose abilities include playing theatre music in a style reflecting the great days of the instrument. If Chris patterns his playing close to the style of Gaylord Carter, for the moment, it is only a step toward finding his own ultimate style. Other now bright playing careers have started with imitation of an established organist. How many of us are still making like Jesse Crawford and George Wright?



Organist John Scot was last to play at the console on the day the organ was auctioned at the Jim Gaines' Antique Shop. Note the gold leaf finish, a holdover from its original home, the Circle Theatre, Indianapolis. The finish now is plain but highly polished mahogany. (Stufoto)

While on the subject of learning, it was the skills taught Chris by Del Castillo which added lustre during his scholarship contest performance. Chris chooses able teachers. We wish him well. □

## TROUSDALE ORGAN STOP ANALYSIS

RANK	MAKE	COMPASS (ft.)	WIND PRESSURE (inches)
English Horn.....	Wurlitzer .....	8 .....	9
Trombone .....	Unknown .....	8 .....	9
Tuba Horn .....	Wurlitzer .....	8-4 .....	12
Diaphone .....	Wurlitzer .....	16 .....	13
Diapason.....	Moller.....	8-4 .....	5
Open Diapason .....	Wicks.....	8-4 .....	8
Tibia Clausa .....	Wurlitzer .....	16-2 .....	10
Tibia Minor.....	Morton .....	16-2 .....	5
*Orch. Oboe .....	Unknown .....	4 .....	6
*Kinura .....	Unknown .....	8 .....	6
Clarinet.....	Moller.....	8-4 .....	5
String .....	Moller.....	8-4 .....	5
Viol d' Orch.....	Marr & Colton .....	8-4 .....	8
Gamba .....	Wicks.....	8-4 .....	8
Salicional .....	Moller.....	16-8 .....	5
Vox Celeste .....	Moller.....	4 .....	5
Oboe Horn .....	Moller.....	8-4 .....	5
Concert Flute .....	Wicks.....	8-4 .....	8
Clarabella .....	Moller.....	8-2 .....	5
Flute Celeste .....	Unknown .....	8-4 .....	5
Gemshorn.....	Moller.....	8-4 .....	5
Vox Humana.....	Wurlitzer .....	8-4 .....	6
Marimba/Harp.....	Wurlitzer .....		
Chrysoglott .....	Wurlitzer .....		
Xylophone.....	Morton .....		
Orch. Bells/Glock.....	Morton .....		
Chimes .....	Moller .....		
Toy Counter.....	Wurlitzer .....		

\*In place but not yet operating. It is planned to add a Quintadena. Stopkeys for these ranks are on the horseshoe.