

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.

When Ray and Norma Hoepfel stage a musicale in their Ojai, California, home, they do it right. Ray has a much-doctored Allen organ in his parlor studio and he enjoys (a) adding voices to it, (b) hearing it played by legendary organists. His New Year's bash included such luminaries as Irma Glen, Del Castillo, Arlo Hults, Ann Leaf, and Milton Charles. All did stints at Ray's much altered Allen and it was a matter of skilled organists playing for skilled organists, no holds barred. Results were electric. One non-luminary, Stu Green, in deference to the impressive array of talent, limited his key thumping to a very non-military version of "chow call" to announce eats.

When Tom Grierson was organist at Rochester's Strand Theatre in the early twenties, he also doubled at the Brick Presbyterian Church (now Downtown United Presbyterian) on Sundays. He enticed a wealthy parishoner into giving a substantial sum

for the purchase from Wurlitzer of a "celestial organ," a sort of theatrical Echo Division. This section, augmenting the Main Organ of 60 ranks, contains eight sets: Tibia, Quintadena, Viol d'Orchestre, Viole Celeste, Vox Humana, Kinura, Saxophone and Tuba, all with tremis.

On January 13th, J. Melvin Butler, director of music at the church, played a concert on the organ. The well chosen numbers, which showed off the "celestial organ" to good advantage, included "Finlandia," selections from *Sound of Music*, "Maple Leaf Rag," and "Stars & Stripes Forever." The sound, enhanced by a barrel-vault ceiling, fills the auditorium. In a couple of years, a 3-manual tracker will replace the 60-ranker, but the Wurlitzer section will be retained for use on special occasions. Check up one for our side, even if the Wurli ranks go tracker.



Remember when theatres popularized their organists with billboards, or in large newspaper ads, e.g., "Eddie Horton at the snortin' Morton?" That sort of thing has disappeared but in Westchester, N.Y., the Playland Ice Casino ran a full-page display recently, with the boast "Now You Can Do Almost Anything On Our Ice!" In a prominent spot was a caricature of Jack Skelly

Playland Ice Casino



JACK SKELLY AT THE ORGAN

The big good-time sounds for skating, every Thursday, Saturday and Sunday evening, and the first 2 sessions on Sunday afternoons. Main Rink only.

at the organ "attacking" the beast. "The organist is certainly not that wild," says Jack. He should know.



Did you know that ATOS has a member in Norway, a land without theatre organs? Wilfred Hesteland, of Bergen, has a question: is there an organist named Granger Keyes? Wilfred has a recording labelled *The Grand Organ, Majestic Melodies*; label is Manhattan MAN 546, Hi-Fi Supertone (TRF 287). He has been trying to pinpoint the artist and



Ray Hoepfel's distinguished guests whoop it up on New Year's Eve. Shown are veteran organists Irma Glen, Del Castillo, Ann Leaf and Milton Charles. (Raypic)

instrument since 1963.

Pseudonyms are not uncommon among recording organists, either voluntarily to evade contract restrictions or assigned, as in the case of piracy. We recall old 78's played by "Franklyn Ferris" and "Carol Wynne" (both were Emil Valazco) and more recently LP's by "Montabla" (Bob Hunter) playing a Wurlitzer theatre organ in Nice, France (actually the Whitney studio Wurlimorton in Glendale, California), "Kenneth Lane" (Hi, Ashley!), "Eric Silver" (often Buddy Cole), and "Guy Melindy" (Hi, George!). In the past, discographers have managed to identify those using an alias. How about Granger Keyes?



Take one theatre organ, add three veteran accompanists of silent films, mix in generous portions of newsreels and comedies, and stir well before 841 devotees of entertainment as it once was and you have the recipe for a Silent Film Festival. This was the bill of fare during January when the Rochester Theater Organ Society presented a weekend series at Eisenhart Auditorium. Production supervisor was Ken Veneron, and doing the honors at the 3/8 Wurlitzer were area organists Dean Robinson, Doc Bebko and Irv Toner. Two shows an evening were presented, and the patrons were regaled with organ-accompanied newsreels of the twenties, episodes of *Perils of Pauline*, *Hazzards of Helen*, and the antics of Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, Harold Lloyd, Charlie Chase, Will Rogers and Buster Keaton. Judging from the response, more of this type of program will be scheduled.



From Hope-Jonesville (all right, Elmira), New York, David Peckham writes to inform us that the big Marr & Colton in the Clemens Center is getting plenty of exposure with recent concerts by Gaylord Carter, Ron Rhode, Don Thompson and, yes, Virgil Fox (Virgil Fox at the M&C; there's an act). Coming are Lyn Larsen and, in June, David Peckham.

Dave is studying classical organ at Eastman with David Craighead. One line of his letter turned us *green* with envy:



David Peckham. He practices on a very special console.

"Most of my practicing is done on the former Syracuse Harvard theatre console now installed in my home."

Memories! It was the Harvard's style B Wurlitzer your Vox Popper broke in on in 1927.



A J. R. Nelson release reveals that George Wright gave himself a "be-lated Christmas present" when he purchased a 1929 vintage rank of Wurlitzer brass trumpets from private collector George R. Burns of Reno, Nevada. John R. Nelson, Wright's concert booking agent,

represented both principals in the transaction.

Wright commented, "Because of their scarcity, I had hardly counted on a rank such as this for my new studio installation. I was particularly elated to acquire this set because it came from the Wurlitzer organ of the Golden Gate Theatre in San Francisco, a really superior organ with beautiful voicing. This trumpet is one of the best I ever heard and I remember it well from my lessons with Floyd Wright on that organ in my high school days. Too bad it was broken up and ruined.

"A further favorable aspect which clinched my decision was the physical condition of the pipes. With the exception of one tiny dent, they are in A-1 condition, having been professionally packed and stored."

Wright added that this deluxe acquisition completes his inventory of pipes. End of release.

What wasn't stated was that the set of Trumpet pipes got a checkup by famed Hope-Jones voicer James H. Nuttall when he overhauled the 3/13 Wurlitzer in the late '30s or early '40s. The only recording we recall played on the Golden Gate organ was made by Larry Vannucci 18 years ago.

The console shell, ordered from



Organfan Louise Harrison, of Laguna Hills, Cal., examines the wooden shell which will one day control George Wright's planned studio organ, after Bob Trousedale transforms it into a console. (Stufoto)

Devtronix by Wright, has been delivered to the Bob Trousdale studio in Santa Ana, California with manuals installed. It will be fitted with the sophisticated electronic switching system developed by Trousdale to replace all mechanical unification and coupler switches as well as relays. The miniaturized switching board will occupy a small area within the console. George will do his own console decorating and finishing.



Bob Balfour. His little Wurlli doesn't cough anymore. (Bill Lamb Photo)

Bob Balfour reports that the "biggest little Wurlitzer," the 2/7 divided organ in the Rahway Theatre, Rahway, New Jersey, has suffered its last gasp. No, it's not being removed, but improved. Until recently the little Wurlli had gone through life with insufficient lung power. The 3 hp blower which came with it could supply a 2/7 all in one chamber with plenty of thrust, but this is a two-chamber affair and there never was enough reserve to sustain full organ passages without the regulators chattering.

It's all okay now; the 3 hp blower has been replaced with a 5 hp job.



Time was when whole families were devoted to taking part in a vaudeville act, as evidenced by the George M. Cohan and Eddie Foy families. A remnant of the trend lives today in "The Rhode Brothers, Ron and Chuck." Of course we are

well aware of Ron Rhode's nationwide organ concerts when he isn't playing for pizza enthusiasts at the La Mesa (Arizona) "Organ Stop." But recently Ron's younger brother, Chuck, joined the act as a vocalist. At this writing the brother act has played the South Hills Theatre in Pittsburgh and the Thomaston Opera House, the latter for the ConVal-Chaps.

Tenor Chuck offered such varied fare as "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and Victor Herbert's "Toyland" while Ron soloed with such thrillers as E. T. Paul's "Ben Hur Chariot Race."

Writing in the local press next day, reporter Jean Reid stated, "The results were great."



Horrible rumors continue to come in about the fate of the 4/23 Wonder Morton removed from Brooklyn King's Theatre for installation in New York's Town Hall a few years back. The Hall went bankrupt and the organ reverted to the sponsors, New York University. The school put it in storage. So far, so good. Now comes the unbelievable sequel. The storage space had to be relinquished and a much smaller storage area was leased. According to usually reliable sources, the organ parts were "fitted" into the new space by cutting the larger pieces (e.g., bass pipes, chests, etc.) into more manageable sizes. One source insists the console was chainsawed into seven pieces. If true, one wonders why they went to the trouble to reduce a fine instrument to junk, especially when it had commercial value. For example, the Landmarks group which is restoring Syracuse Loew's was interested, needing an organ to replace the 4/20 Wurlitzer removed from Loew's by the late broker Doug Erdman some years ago.

We hope this alleged destruction of a fine instrument turns out to be a rumor, but we'd like to know the truth.



In what many praised as the best of the RTOS 1979-80 season so far, David Reese captivated 1039 attendees at the Rochester Auditorium Theatre on January 11th. No one went to sleep during this program, as



David Reese. No one snoozed.

the California-based organist had toes tapping throughout the two-hour program. Marches and other lively music, interspersed with a few ballads, plus Dave's constant humor, all combined to produce a standing ovation at the end. This was his first eastern tour.



Mrs. Dolph Gobel, widow of the well-known New York organist, says that her friend, Lenore Feibel is still working for the Riverside Community Theatre in Vero Beach, Florida, where she and her late husband, Fred, were "angels." She also helped to over-subscribe the Scholarship Trust Fund at the Indian River Community College, which was enriched by donations from near and far and from Fred Feibel Memorial Concerts.



Clarence Briggs reports that Tuesday, January 15, 1980, was another sad occasion for the theatre organ buffs in Utah. It marked the final night for the Provo Pipes & Pizza Restaurant. As the Salt Lake Pipes and Pizza closed its doors last June 23rd, it marks the end of an era in Utah.

Mike Ohman and John Ledwon from L.A. spent two January days in Ogden, Utah. On Tuesday, January 22nd, members of the Beehive Chapter Capitol Theatre Organ restoration crew, Gene Breinholt, Clare Briggs, Paul Hansen and John Woodmansee assisted Mike, John and

Doug Eddington in removing a 6-rank Wurlitzer organ from the Ogden 4th Latter Day Saints Ward where it had been in continuous use since 1938. Prior to that time it was installed in the Ogden Theatre, Ogden, Utah, approximately 1922 and then removed to the White City Ballroom for a few years before finding a home in the church. It will now be replaced with a 14-rank Wicks.

The two restaurant Wurlitzers have since been disposed of.



About the time this issue reaches ATOSers, Rex Koury will have released his latest album. Rex seeks out a variety of organs to record, e.g., Death Valley Scotty's Welte, the 2/7 Wurli in the Rahway (New Jersey) Theatre, the 4/25 Wurli in El Segundo's (Calif.) Old Town Music Hall and the 4/37 "Dowager Empress" in Wichita's Century II Civic Auditorium.

For several years Rex has played concerts on the 3/14 Hillgreen-Lane organ in Pierson Auditorium, part of the New Mexico Institute at Roswell. It occurred to Rex that Hillgreen-Lane organs are something of a rarity and that this may be the only one now playing in a public auditorium in the U.S.A. He felt that there should be an audible record of this brand of instrument, which has both theatrical and concert voices. The



Rex Koury at the Hillgreen-Lane organ he recorded. The brand is rare.

Theatre Organ Club of Roswell is handling distribution.

"It's a most unusual instrument," says Rex.



Jack Skelly sends us the good news that the interior of the 2673-seat Beacon Theatre on upper Broadway, has been designated as a New York City landmark by the city's Landmark Preservation Commission. The body declared that "the dramatic effects of rich ornamental details, including ceiling and wall murals, friezes and sculptures," was expressive of the film business of the late 1920's. The theatre for some time has been used as a performing arts center, and recently Lee Erwin presented his "Silent Clowns" show, utilizing the 4/19 Wurlitzer.



The story of the Eastman Theatre Organ in the October 1979 issue brought warm memories to Howard and Jan Reagan of Potomac, Maryland. Former residents of Rochester, the couple remember hearing the 155-rank organ several times.

"The most interesting occasions were when Bob Berentson had to play light classics for the Civic Music Association's annual fund drive dinners. Jan and I, on separate occasions, sat on the bench with Bob. The console was at the bottom of the pit, amid odors of the lift grease; the orchestra lift at stage level for the catered dinner, served on the extended stage. The clatter of countless feet, noise of scraping chairs and tinkle of silverware were most disconcerting, and hearing the organ was a lo-fi experience. Bob had to play softly enough so as not to drown the chit-chat of the diners, yet loud enough to hear it way down in the pit. His thorough familiarity with the beast was vital."



Dr. John Landon reports on a recent trip to Hawaii, his second to the mid-Pacific paradise. Theatre organ activity is still very much alive in America's 50th state.

"The first time I went, I spent considerable time with the late John DeMello, a gentle, kindly person who played the organ with a quiet, melodious style. This time, I went to



John DeMello. He is fondly remembered.

the Waikiki Theatre to hear Frank Loney do his regular intermissions. We had a nice visit, and I also spent an evening with Roger Angell and his wife, whom I have known for several years. Roger had installed a pipe organ in his parents' home before he married.

"I also attended one of the Sunday morning ATOS social hours, and played the Hawaii Theatre's 4/16 Robert Morton in downtown Honolulu. This chapter is most fortunate to have a large club room in the theatre which they can use even when the theatre is operating. A Hammond reposes in the room. The enthusiasts meet nearly every Sunday and enjoy the Robert Morton before the house opens at noon."



From Salt Lake City visitor Doc Bebko writes: "Heard organist Robert Cundick and Roy Darly at the Mormon Tabernacle Aeolian-Skinner. It's a superb instrument. On Christmas Eve we were at St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral where I found a new Holtkamp interesting with its strings and brass. But the piece-de-resistance was when Larry Bray al-

lowed me to play his five-manual Wurlitzer for two hours at the Organ Loft nitery. This instrument has luscious tones; rich pedal sounds, although not overwhelming; the brass is strident but not harsh; and it has the largest Chinese Gong east of Shanghai. If I could only have this instrument when I cue a silent film! Everything works and is in tune, a credit to owner Larry Bray.



To those "moderns" who insist that the stylings of such veterans as Jesse Crawford are of little interest nowadays, Terry Charles, curator of the 4/23 theatre organ in the Kirk of Dunedin, Dunedin, Florida, has an answer. On January 10th, 11th and 12th, Terry played his 2½-hour *Tribute to Jesse Crawford* to packed houses.



Lee Erwin reports that the late Ben Hall's "Little Mother" style 150 Wurlitzer (1930 vintage) has grown to a 2/9 in its present home, New York's Carnegie Hall Cinema. Ranks are Flute, String, Tibia, Style D Trumpet, Vox Humana, French Horn, Clarinet, Solo String (down to 16' pedal) and a Robert Morton French Trumpet. Organbuilder Don Schwing plans to add a Horn Diapason, Oboe and two strings to complete the ensemble.

As for Lee's *Kings of Comedy* shows, he says Buster Keaton's movies are the most popular, with the rarely seen Harry Langdon comedies a close second. And he includes



Lee Erwin. 500 shows in a year! (Stufoto)

several "rediscovered" Harold Lloyd shorts, some dating back to the comedian's "Lonesome Luke" days before he donned the horn rims.

During 1979, Lee presented 500 showings within 365 days in eight cities. Any hobbies, Lee?



During February, there was a distinguished pipe organ enthusiast from Great Britain in our midst. Back in her Hyde, Cheshire studio (above her husband, David's music store) Joyce Alldred enjoys a 10-rank playing Compton organ. On weekends Joyce plays intermissions on the Compton pipe organ in the Davenport Theatre in nearby Stockport. Why did she visit the U.S.A. at this time? Partly to visit the Wurlitzer factory (her husband sells that brand of electronic), but mainly to indulge



Visitor Joyce Alldred. She went home with stars in her eyes — plus a load of advanced harmony.

in a three-week crash course in modern harmony with organist Gordon Kibbee. Gordon rated her as an apt student. Then there was that 5-deck, 65-rank monster at the Wurlitzer HQ. Joyce returned to England with stars in her pipe-happy eyes.



Philadelphia organist Shirley Hannum is considering renting her rainmaking abilities to southern California. Each time she gets booked for a concert in Los Angeles, it rains heavily in the usually arid area. Her first concert for the LA Chapter in the early '70s ended a long drought with a week of steady rain, during which Shirley visited a soggy Disneyland.

Her recent concert in LA was accompanied by a 10-day downpour which cleared just before concert time, but only briefly. This time the rain picked up after Shirley left for home and many Californians are neck deep in primordial goo. Turn it off, Shirley!



From north of the border, Jim Lahay informs us that the 6th anniversary concert of the Toronto Theatre Organ Society on February 18th included a tribute to the late Kathleen Stokes, known to the club as "our beloved sweetheart of the Canadian theatre organ," who departed for that great solo chamber in the sky last December at the age of 85. Kathleen rarely missed a Society concert, and was honored by ATOS' Hall of Fame membership. The featured organist, Dennis James, played a 15-minute musical tribute to Kathleen.



From Connecticut, organist Tom Gnaster tells us that he's been spicing his organ concerts with interludes on piano when the hall he's playing in has a suitable instrument. He likes those big nine-foot Steinways but has found several with black keys with straight sides rather than beveled, and the black keys thus seem taller. This can become problematic while playing such display pieces as the Schulz-Evler "Concert Arabesques on the Beautiful Blue Danube," which is Strauss plus intricate ornamentation, or



Tom Gnaster. His fingers sometimes itch for the 88.

about 8,000 notes in just over 8 minutes.

Do organ-oriented audiences like the piano interludes? Apparently they do; Tom Gnaster let his audience decide which instrument he should play on for the encore during a recent concert for the Keyboard Concert Club at Laguna Hills, California. The show of hands was for the piano and Tom complied, despite those protruding, straight-sided black keys, and not one "clam" resulted.



The Radio City Music Hall continues to function successfully with top-notch stage entertainment. Following the return of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* by popular demand, from January 11th to March 13th, the *Easter Show* with the Vienna Boys Choir took over on March 18th. The *Rockettes' Spectacular* is

BOOK REVIEW

by Lloyd E. Klos

KIMBALL ORGANS, FROM A TECHNICAL STANDPOINT. Text plus 69 photos, numerous sketches and drawings, 70 pages. Vestal Press, Box 97, Vestal, N.Y. 13850. Price: \$6.95 plus 50 cents for shipping. (New York state residents must add 7% for New York state sales tax.)

THEATRE ORGAN readers are familiar with the excellent reproductions which Harvey Roehl's presses have produced through the years. His latest is an 8½" x 11" slick-

in for May 2nd through the 26th; *Manhattan Showboat* will play from June 6th to September 14th. The *Christmas Show* will return on Thanksgiving Day, November 27th. The 4/58 Wurlitzer is heard during all performances, played by Tim Stella and David Messineo, using both consoles.



Paul Haggard, OKC Chapter, reports that the 4/15 Kilgen installed in the Oklahoma City's Civic Center Music Hall is getting plenty of exposure to the public. He recalled that the late U.S. Senator Robert S. Kerr had donated generously toward the restoration of the Kilgen which had gone to seed since being moved to the Center from a local TV station's studios.

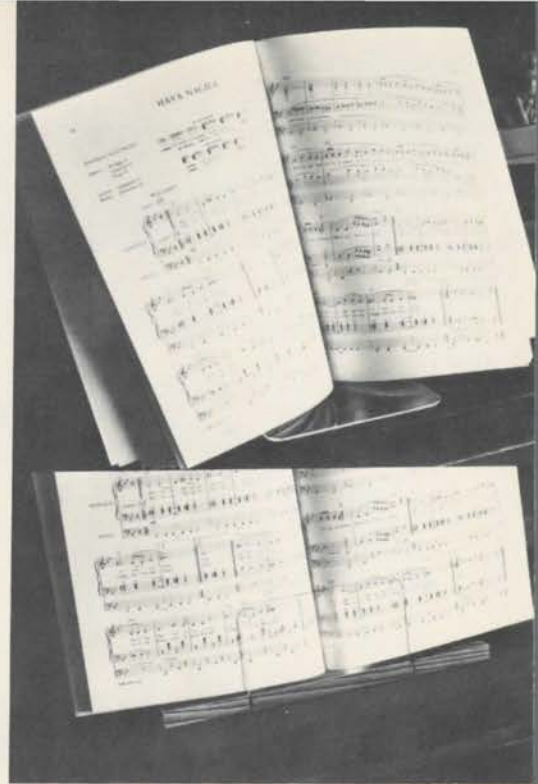
It was in fine shape for the 1979 Christmas party of the Kerr-McGee Corporation when 3000 employees crowded into the auditorium to hear radio commentator Paul Harvey and the Christy Minstrels. The crowd had been "softened" by an hour of organ music played by talented chapter member Dorothy Hamilton. The program closed with an engaging "White Christmas" with participants being "snowed on" via the magic of stage manager Richard Charnay, who is interested in the ATOS organ concerts presented there, according to Haggard.

Getting a stage manager on one's side is a mighty advantage. □

paper booklet, combined from two original catalogues, one dated 1938. Churches, municipal auditoria and educational institutions were advertising targets.

There are topics on building a Kimball pipe organ: console, wind supply, action, controls, wiring, magnets, pneumatics, pipes, voicing, testing and purchasing. There is also a page of endorsements by some of the country's foremost classical organists of that time.

We regret that reference to Kimball theatre organs is nonexistent; the firm was out of that business by the late thirties. The publication can, however, offer an education to those whose knowledge is minimal concerning the building of a pipe organ, classical or otherwise. □



NEW GADGET FOR ORGANISTS

Pianists, organists and other instrumentalists have long been plagued by the problem of music albums that won't stay open to the wanted pages. To try and overcome this, it has been customary to "crack" the spine of the album or bend the pages backwards, resulting in damaged books. Yet, in spite of such drastic measures, pages would still insist on flopping back.

Presto-HOLD solves the problem. It holds any music album flat at any page, no matter how thick the album or how stiff the binding, without mistreating the binding. The beautifully finished walnut base mounts on the music rack of any piano or organ with pressure sensitive tape provided. No tools are needed. The notes on the pages are clearly visible through the clear Plexiglass spring-activated holder when it is in vertical position.

When a new page is wanted, the holder is flipped down and back up to vertical after turning the page.

The price of Presto-HOLD is \$15.95 postpaid, from HGR Co., Division of Gibson Holders, Inc., 529 South 7th Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55415, or see your local music dealer. □