

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.

Where are this country's remaining operational municipal pipe organs? Minneapolis? Memphis? Pasadena? The ones in Cleveland and San Diego are undergoing restoration. Then there's the 60,000-pipe, 177-stop Austin in the Portland, Maine, City Hall Auditorium. It's been there since 1912, the gift of Cyrus H. Curtis, of publishing fame, and is named the Kotschmar Memorial Organ. It is actually eight straight divisions of one organ — Great, Swell, Orchestral, Solo, Antiphonal, Echo, Percussion and Pedal, and the instrument is capable of playing everything from Widor's "Toccatto" to Joplin's "Sting." The organ hasn't been given much publicity through the years, but an endeavor is being made to secure pictures and information for a future story.



April 23rd saw an old friend in a new and hopefully permanent home. The famed Reginald Foort 5/27

Moller, skillfully installed in the Pasadena, California, Civic Auditorium, was dedicated by Tom Hazleton with a concert which included music to appeal to many tastes. The event closed nine months of adapting the bulky instrument to the auditorium's hitherto unused chambers, installing it and coaxing theatre organ sounds from an essentially concert-style instrument.

The house was full, including the balcony; the 3000 reserved seat tickets were free.

In the audience were three men whose lives were entangled with the Moller's destiny: (1) Reginald Foort, who designed it in 1937 as a "portable" for use in English music halls, (2) Sandy Fleet, who brought it back to the U.S.A. for a brief life as a "pizza" organ, and (3) J. B. Nethercutt, who purchased it and donated it to the City of Pasadena. Each was introduced and took his bow. Among the unsung and invisible heroes were Dave Junchen and Steve Adams; they managed all technical aspects of the installation, even managed to make it sound more theatrical.

The white console is on a lift and Tom Hazleton came up playing "From This Moment On." For standards Tom offered medleys of *Aint Misbehavin'* tunes, a Gershwin set, tunes from the *Superman* score, a hymn and a grouping of tunes popular in 1938 when Foort first astounded the British public with his giant "portativ."

Classical selections included Bach's famous "Toccatto," DeFalla's "Ritual Fire Dance" and Moussorgsky's "Great Gate at Kiev," a thunderer which figuratively rattled masonry on those sitting close to the Solo Chamber (right); so great was the volume, a few sensitive souls



Tom Hazleton. (Stufoto)



Reginald Foort at the console of his 5-deck brainchild. A new home, hopefully permanent, its fifth. (Stufoto)

were noted departing the area. As we said, it's a giant and its 27 ranks have been augmented by a 32' pedal grunter.

Of interest to buffs was Tom's "trip through the organ," wherein he demonstrated each voice separately.

One of the most effective audience pleasers was Tom's classical-style development of the familiar Alka-Seltzer jingle. He "plop-plop, fizz-fizzed" his way through a number of vaguely related "variations," always building in volume and intensity, then, when the suspense was overpowering, he pounced on the raw basic theme with everything the organ had. He had said absolutely nothing musically with this ditty, but he had done it beautifully. His huge audience loved it.



The situation with regard to Shea's Buffalo Theatre as reported in the February issue seems to have improved. The organization which saved the house from the wrecking ball, "Friends of the Buffalo," has disbanded. However, an organization with a new name, "The Preservation Guild of Shea's Buffalo," has come to the fore and it includes many of "The Friends." The PG will concern itself solely with restoration; another group will take over the management and booking operations at the house.

Meanwhile, efforts are being directed toward restoring the 4/28 Wurlitzer. In addition to Curt Mangel, other leaders in the organ's refurbishing, which was continued during the upheavals previously reported, are Gorden Gillette and Charles Koester. Console work is being handled by Dave Junchen.



Tom Gnaster. (Stufoto)

However, the dedication, previously hoped for in the spring, has been delayed.

And we can add a report from Tom Gnaster, one of circa 20 musicians who played at the Buffalo during the gala premiere on March 20th of *Hide in Plain Sight*, a feature film shot entirely in the Buffalo area. The event found Tom soloing an Allen electronic, and there was a pit orchestra, too. Ceremonies included turning over the Keys to the City to Curt Mangel, III, who is perhaps the most active worker for the Buffalo Theatre. The presentation was made by Buffalo's Mayor Griffin.

Says Tom, "I have known Curt Mangel since he was first in Shea's. He's been faced with seemingly insurmountable fiscal problems, ineffectual corporations, politics, and

any number of other factors, personal and logistical — and he has ridden the crest. Shea's Buffalo is alive and well! Love and money are being pumped into the building by state and local governments, and certainly by Curt and his staff."



Don Baker, weary of the Houston pizza parlor routine, is now playing a well-amplified Kawai in the Houston Astrodome for ball games, reports tourist Gary Konas of Davis, California.



The good word comes to us from Philadelphia, that the Wanamaker Grand Court Organ will be alive and well for a long time. Doc Bebko reports, "The firm which owns the famed Neiman-Marcus store in Dallas, Carter Hawley, purchased Wanamaker's two years ago for a reported \$60 million from the original heirs, and is determined to re-establish the glory and grandeur of everything which the founder created. The Crystal Dining Room, about the size of a football field and sporting 16 theatre-type chandeliers, has been restored by a \$1 million expenditure.

"About the same sum will be earmarked to refurbish the Grand Court and the organ. When we heard the instrument, the soloist did a half-hour program of light pops and

closed with the 'Warsaw Concerto,' to the resounding approval of the aficionados nearby. What an organ!"

It is gratifying to hear of an instance where the new owner of an establishment can fathom the value of priceless assets, and restore them rather than remove them.



Tom Delay took time off from getting married to report that the large Tulare Theatre in relatively small Tulare, California, finally bit the dust. The house opened in 1926 with a 2/7 Style E Wurlitzer which was sold to Bob Baese in 1960. Bob installed it superbly in his Cupertino, California, home. In the theatre organ was a rare overhead proscenium installation. Opus 1496 (to keep Wurlitzer historian Judd Walton happy).



Also from the mid-California area comes a report from Salinas that our editor, George Thompson's kids gave him a brand new Moller Orchestral Oboe rank as a retirement present from his job. This will be added to his studio Opus 1900 (Hi, Judd!) Style 165 (2/6) Wurli. The Oboe has full-length resonators, not the more common Wurli half-length type. The Oboe chest is being re-leathered by able Bert Robinson. The console will also be re-leathered and, for the first time in the Thompson music room, wined to activate the combination action. Thompson sold his French Horn pipes to John Ledwon of Agoura, California, who is collecting parts to restore the 4/24 organ nearly wiped out in a brush fire a few years back.



Again from the Salinas, California, area, we hear that Bert Robinson has purchased the 2/4 Wurli that has seen much service in the First Baptist Church. Bert plans to add a Morton Trumpet and a Wurlitzer Tibia next time he installs it. Why did the church part with Opus 209? No, not in exchange for a plug-in. A 3/22 mostly Wurlitzer was donated to the church and 19 ranks are already playing. It's a composite organ which includes Wurli pipe-work from the historic Denver Isis



The Wanamaker giant. Safe for the foreseeable future.

Theatre (see the first issue of this mag, then called *The Tibia*) namely, the Tuba Mirabilis and Clarinet ranks.

It is played for services in theatre style by ATOSers Nancy Hoffman and Shirley Hansen.



Making his initial RTOS appearance on March 22nd, Rob Calcaterra drew 1292 to the Rochester Auditorium Theatre. This young man's endeavors at the 4/22 Wurlitzer were a fitting reward for those who ventured out in the blustery, snowy clime. He ran the gamut of selections from Bach to show tunes. His "Stars and Stripes Forever" was a pulsating windup with all the nuances of the Boston Pops, including the standard piccolo obligato. It was Rob's first eastern tour, and judging from the crowd's enthusiasm, it won't be the last.



Those who attended the 1972 ATOS convention in the Washington area, remember the "America On Wheels" roller rink in Alexandria, Virginia, with its big Wurlitzer, presided over by Jimmy Boyce. Last summer, the rink was closed, and the organ sold to Bill Brown of Phoenix. Now, the place is open again with new personnel. A \$10,000 sound system blasts the "Top 40" over eight 300-watt speakers, fed by two 1,000-watt amplifiers. The skaters, primarily middle-class, desire music with at least 120 beats to the minute, something the Wurlitzer didn't provide. Plans call for painting and refurbishing the cavernous interior and possible installation of flashing disco lights. From our viewpoint — how sad.



Remember Bob Montgomery who was the sparker for the Hoosier Theatre project in Whiting, Indiana, for so many years? Billy Nalle submits a clipping from a recent *Albuquerque Journal* which indicates that New Mexico will soon have a 3-manual pipe organ in a unique setting, the new Classic Hotel banquet hall. Bob Montgomery supplied the organ.

The story rates the organ at 10,000 pipes and adds that it's a mix of

church, classic and theatre organ tonalities. It will be recalled that the Hoosier Theatre was equipped with a circa 3/11 composite instrument that played a part in at least one past ATOS convention, a remembered sequence being a search for "Chloe" by organist Eddie Weaver, assisted by swamp-trekker Stu Green bogging the audience. Apparently the pipe compliment has been greatly enlarged, as 10,000 pipes divided by even 73 (pipes to a rank) could exceed 120 sets. A photo shows a 3-

manual console, about "Style 260" size.

Bob Montgomery will serve as music director for the new hotel, says the *Journal* story, and will supervise the installation. He will also play the instrument on occasion. It is estimated that installation will require about three years.



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John Hammond. (Bill Lamb restoration)

Center. The atmospheric house, thanks to E. N. Breazale who purchased it in 1978, has been repaired and repainted to restore much of its original glory. The 4/26 Robert Morton, once played by John Hammond and Rosa Rio, has been refurbished. More than 23,000 residents of the metropolitan New Orleans area are season subscribers to the "Broadway at the Saenger" stage series, and this season such shows as *Dancin*, *Annie*, *Sugar* and *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, will have been included on the bill of fare. This shows what can be done to retain a theatre possessing good acoustics and facilities for every kind of stage production.

Remember our story about the 3/11 Morton in the River Mansion Restaurant (near Sacramento, California) a few years ago? The organ was advertised "for sale" at 50-grand in a full-page advertisement in these pages not long ago. It was originally in Sacramento's Senator Theatre.

Well, the 3/11 has been purchased by ATOSer Bert Atwood of Novato, California, according to Tom Delay, and after a refurbishing it will be installed in a proper studio in Northern California. The ranks will be increased to circa 17 voices. Incidentally, Bert Atwood is a fine organist, classically trained on piano, he switched to the versatile theatre organ.

ATOSer Chard Walker always has a goodie for us. He attended a concert at the Old Town Music Hall in El Segundo, California, to hear proprietors Bill Coffman and Bill Field play duets at their 4/24+ Wurli, now that they have installed a second console. Chard informs us that the extra keydesk came from the Polytechnic High School in Los Angeles, where organists Truman Welch, Phil Olson and Ira Swett got their starts back in the '20s. Says Chard: "I remember Ira telling me how



Bill Field and Bill Coffman. Their "Old Town Music Hall" has a new toy. (Stufoto)

the Polytech students raised money to buy the organ; they put up posters around the school showing a parrot saying 'Poly wants an organ.'

Apparently Paul Richardson, organist for the Philadelphia Phillies and New York Yankees, doesn't have a very high opinion of pipe organs, if a biographical sketch in the May/June '79 issue of *Hurdy-Gurdy* is indicative. The AOAI mag quotes Richardson:

"Compared to a pipe organ, the Yamaha is like a 747 jet versus a Piper Cub." That opinion may be somewhat leavened by the fact that the baseball organist is employed by Yamaha. Meanwhile, viva the "Piper Cubs!" We trust they compare favorably with Yamaha's motorcycles.

When the Rochester Theater Organ Society decided to make its April 10th concert a benefit for the financially distressed Auditorium Theatre (home of its organ), it selected a long-time favorite, Dennis James, to



Dennis James.

play its 4/22 Wurlitzer. With 1375 in attendance, the organ in top condition, Dennis still improving, and the weather perfect, the event proved to be the highlight of the 1979-80 season. The program embraced a wide spectrum of music, with Tchaikovsky's "March Slav" the major work. Also shown were slides of the refurbished Ohio Theatre in Columbus where the young man serves as house organist, a hilarious silent short entitled *Super Hooperdyne Lizzies*, and a sing-along. Accorded two standing ovations, Dennis obliged with three encores. He said, "Each time I've come to Rochester, the organ improves in over-all sound and performance." It was his seventh RTOS concert.

Reader Ken Ladner calls our attention to an item in a recent *Reader's Digest*, an article entitled "Remarkable Names of Real People." Following such unlikely handles as "Cheatham & Steele" (bankers) and "Ophelia Bumps" (girl) was "C. Sharpe Minor" (silent movie organist). Yes, there was such an organist and it was his correct name. The "C" stood for "Charlie." He was more showman than silent movie cuer, and peddled sometimes outlandish novelties during his "Organlogues," such as the now familiar "phantom console" duet, or putting a male quartet in a chamber to show how perfectly the organ could "recreate" a male quartet humming. Charlie's musical acumen may not have been as profound as that of his

more gifted colleagues, but how he wowed 'em with those drums and toy counter effects.

Need proof? One Los Angeles theatre paid him \$1500 weekly at the peak of his career. That wasn't hay in 1926.



"The silence in old movies was an asset," says Donald Williams, former theatre organist. "Movies nowadays have too much violence. You didn't see that in silent films."

The occasion was Donald and Evelyn William's 50th wedding anniversary, and they were expounding to the local press. The Williams' playing career was in the eastern U.S.A. He was the personal organist for famed film magnate William Fox and played many movie previews on the organ at the Fox Long Island estate. Came "talkies" and Donald went into theatre management, specifically the Brooklyn Fox where he met and married Evelyn. Since their arrival in the San Bernardino area of California in 1962, both have been involved in music publishing.



Returning from a Hawaiian honeymoon, Tom Delay brings us the distressing news that the Waikiki Theatre in Honolulu is due for closing and the steel ball will follow, unless there is a last minute reprieve. He

could not determine what plans have been made for the disposal of the 4/16 Robert Morton, but we trust the Aloha Chapter members have the situation well in hand.



It's always good news when we learn of theatre organ broadcasts, either live or recorded. Jesse Waller, Promotion Director of WTBS (radio) in Atlanta informs us that a program of recorded TO music is being planned, to be sponsored by the Atlanta ATOS Chapter. Here's a chance for organists with records to sell to get on the air, if they can spare a pressing. The station will provide source information to local inquirers. Contact Waller at WTBS, 1018 West Peachtree Street, Atlanta, Ga. 30309.



Organist Warren Clark sends in a clipping from the March 30th *Philadelphia Inquirer* about the closing of the local Fox Theatre after the showing of the *Star Trek* movie. It was a true cinema palace with all the opulence of the showcase Fox theatres. Designed by Thomas Lamb, the Philly Fox opened on November 25, 1923. After the mayor's speech, Erno Rapee conducted the 55-piece Fox orchestra through the "Orpheus Overture." The feature film was *The Silent Command* with Edmund



"Cass" Parmentier in 1923. (Parmentier Collection)

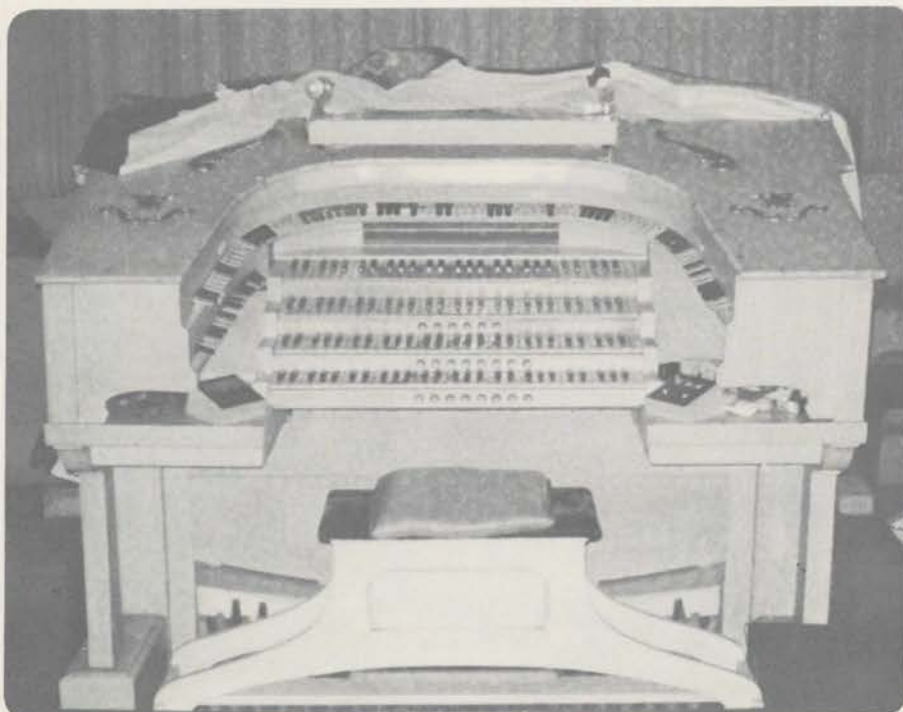
Lowe, Alma Tell and newcomer Bela Lugosi. After the film came a spotlight solo by C. A. J. Parmentier at the Moller organ. A memorable evening.

Linda Kouvall's *Inquirer* story traces 57 years of Fox history in some detail and Warren Clark supplies the names of subsequent organists through the years — Ron and Don, Harry Hartung, Kenneth Hallet, Karl Bonawitz, Leonard MacClain, and in the late '30s, Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Crawford on stage, playing twin Hammonds.

The theatre building will be replaced by a 37-story office building, including three cheesebox movie houses.



Closing on an upbeat note, Bill Brown informs us that the ground was broken on March 6th for Organ Stop Pizza (No. 3) in Tucson, Arizona. Bill's great success with his Phoenix and Mesa pizzerias (both with pipes) has encouraged the expansion. He says that the general plan will resemble the Mesa installation, but that the organ console will slither out from between the chambers on a dolly rather than the more familiar vertical thrust. Bill didn't say so, but the Tucson installation just might be the 4/34 Wurli from the Alexandria, Virginia roller rink Bill bought recently from Jimmy Boyce. As we mentioned earlier, it has been replaced by a \$10,000 sound system.



The Waikiki Morton console. Looking for a home?

(Delay Photo)