

Planting Theatre Organ-ic Seeds

Story by Randy Warwick

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If the efforts of Sue Lang and Arden Pizza & Pipes come to fruition, there will be no demise of a listening public for theatre organ in the next generation of Sacramentans. Following the article about Dick Schrum's activities in Seattle, we thought it would be interesting to note that in Sacramento, California, the planting of theatre organ seeds

Sue Lang at the 4/20 Wurlitzer at Arden Pizza and Pipes.



Sue Lang planting theatre "organ-ic" seeds among school children on a field trip to Arden Pizza and Pipes.

has been happening season after season for almost eight years.

The project was initiated by Pizza & Pipes organist Stu Boyer and organ technician Dale Mendenhall. Two years later organist Don Croom started his two-year stint, before being transferred to the featured organist spot at Fresno Pizza & Pipes. At this point Dale's wife, Maryanne, played for the kids' sessions until Sue started her own series that has now been running almost four years.

In cooperation with local school districts, as field trips, Sue and Dale conduct an introduction to theatre organ every other Thursday (the sessions were running every Thursday, but apparently California's famous tax revolt measure, Proposition 13, has forced school districts to cut back on field trips). The schedule is booked solid for the entire school year with ages ranging all the way from preschool to age 14. Sue has found ages six to about twelve to be the most receptive.

As we all know at around age 13 or 14 most kids enter an impenetrable "hard rock era" that lasts as least six or seven years before they will accept any music outside the bounds of the play list of the local rock radio station. Then it may take a few more years before they venture away to anything as distant from rock n' roll as theatre organ. But at least before they enter the rock world and don the hard hats that are the peer pressures that block their ears from wanting

anything but rock, Sue has planted the seeds that may well sprout in later years.

Each session, which is scheduled by Dale, who is also present at the "classes" to aid Sue, usually numbers around 150 although there have been as many as 250 bouncing, restless kids. How does she do it? How does she keep the attention of so many children on an outing from their normal school routine, which usually makes them even more restless and rambunctious than usual? Well, for one thing Sue has an outgoing, lively personality with a flash of southern hospitality that seems to say, "Hi, we're gonna have a good time here today." Having tried several different approaches to presenting theatre organ to children, she found a routine that worked well, and stuck to it. It never changes. Her routine mixes information and entertainment, alternating a bit of knowledge with a bit of music. And, then attention stays — since they don't have to sit through a lecture on the organ followed by a too-long-for-young-ears set of music.

A typical session goes like this. Sue bounds up to the console and immediately opens with "Bye Bye Blues" featuring extensive use of the toy counter. The young audience is now enthusiastic about why they were brought to Pizza & Pipes and its a good time to tell a little history and offer some facts about the organ, before the ether of the opening number

wears off. After Sue has related several facts, such as the instrument is over 50 years old and weighs twelve tons, it's back to the action, to re-secure wandering attentions, with a demonstration of the percussions mounted around three walls of the "parlor." Next, Sue demonstrates a few of the mechanical workings of the instrument such as the swell shades. Then it's back to some attention-grabbing music as Sue belts out "Popeye the Sailor" with one of the most raucous and most effective sounds available, the tuned sleigh bells.

While demonstrating the different ranks Sue gives the children a real comparison of the basic, essential difference between the sound of a church organ, which most children and adults think of when "pipe or-

gan" is mentioned, and a theatre organ, by playing "I Believe," first with Diapason and no trem, then with Tibia 16' and 4' with trem. And here appears the ray of hope that the instrument will live on for future audiences, for Sue says that the children seem to favor the syrupy, throbbing, wonderful Tibias.

After the Tibia indoctrination Sue introduces Dale Mendenhall and credits him with attending to the needs of the 4/20 Wurlitzer (this is the same instrument that was once owned by Bill Huck and recorded in the mid-fifties on his Replica label). At this point ATOS receives a nice plug as being largely responsible for saving and restoring theatre organs. Then it's a break with free soft drinks for the kids. A few minutes later Sue accompanies a silent car-

toon to give the youngsters an idea of the original motivating need behind the development and use of theatre organs. The presentation is wrapped up with a piece of music that the current flock of kids relate to very well, the "Star Wars Theme" with everything, including the spotlighted, rotating mirrored ball.

That's how it's being done in Sacramento to foster interest in the theatre organ for the younger generation. Sierra Chapter members Sue Lang and Dale Mendenhall are certainly doing their part, and they love it. Owners of Arden Pizza & Pipes, Bill and Kathy Brewer, are to be commended as their organization heads into its ninth year of introducing the theatre organ to future organists and to the really endangered species, the audience. □

DINNY'S COLYUM

as
transcribed
by
Del Castillo



Mr. Stew Green he sez to me when I told him I was goin to London why dont you keep a Diery like Mr. Peepees and I sez who is Mr. Peepees and he sez Mr. Peepees is a Englishman who kep a diery a long time ago and it become famous and is printed in six different langwages and I sez I dont know about six different langwages plain old American is good enuff for me espeshally since peepul come up to me and tell me how good I rite so maybe I can become famous and rite a diery like Mr. Peepees and so here it is.

July 17th. I get to Noo York and I see a lot of chicks on the street with shirts that say I Love Noo York well they must be blind or dum or both. I am at the Taft Hotel on acct I voted for Mr. Taft and the guy at the door

takes my valise and carries it 20 feet into the lobby and sez that will be a dollar. When I come down to breakfast I had eggs and bacon and that was five dollars which is the lowest I was able to get any meal in Noo York. And when I went down to the Music Hall to see the stage show why that was \$8.50. All the streets they was crowded with kids that had on them Tea shirts like I said and Jeans that was cut off at the hips and a lot of the fellers dint even have on shirts. I see one chick go by that had on what they call a body stockin all in blue she look like she just come out of the oshun on a cold day.

July 18. That there Music Hall show was pretty good and now they got two big organs on both sides of the stage that play a kind of a two organ concert before the show. I think maybe I will walk around to Times Sq. and back and everything was honky tonk and porno which is a short word for pornogaffick and the sidewalks look like they never been swep up, and they been patched so much you like to stub your toe, and they is guys with carts at all the street corners selling clothes and eats and Tea shirts.

And the bus to the airport has a sign that says Drivers Tips Not Included and I see two guys get into a fite to see who gets the street corner. So I decided this aint The Big Apple, this is the Big Rip-off.

July 19. It cost me \$22 to get to the

airport and when I give my passport in at the desk they look at it and say it aint no good because it is 20 years old and I will have to go back to Noo York and get a new one. And back in Noo York it is 100 degrees and so I have to stay there until Monday when I go to the passport office and it takes most all day to get a noo one and so I dont get to London until Tuesday and so I miss two days of the Convention but at that it was pretty good because everybody give me the glad hand and where you been and we thought you was lost.

July 23. Boy, they certainly know how to wear you down they got so many places to go. All the busses has names of organ stops like Tibia and Vile and Clarinet and like that there and we start out at 9 A.M. and wind up lissenin to organ concerts at places like Walthamstow and Hornchurch and Henley-on-Thames and Harrow and Thursford which is a museum of big circus mechanical instruments that sound like a whole brass band and that is the last day on July 27 and by that time I got a cold from tryin to do too much and the next day I come back to Noo York and like a dum fool I take a plane to Washinton and spend two days trampin around to museums when I otto be home in bed.

July 31. So I come home feelin terrible and the Doc says I got noomonia and that is the story of my trip to London. □