

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

From Florida, house organist Terry Charles reports that the Kirk of Dunedin organ is now a 4/30. A new set of chimes is being installed, a gift of George Wright and Charles. And famed reed voicer Jack Steinkampf was there for five days to touch up the reed voices where needed. "We had our summer concert on July 10 which was most successful," says Charles, "and our season ticket advance sale is ahead of last year's. Each concert will be played three times, the first two evenings devoted to season ticket holders. From all indications, the Kirk series of organ concerts is the largest in the country, and we never fail to be surprised at the terrific response from residents and tourists alike." The Kirk's 13th season of organ programs will include artists Terry Charles, Rex Koury, Ray Bohr and Larry Ferrari.



When the name of Ira Swett, a California theatre organist of the

twenties, was mentioned in the June issue, the Old Prospector remembered. "Prior to 1956, the name of Ira Swett was a byword with trolley enthusiasts. Swett authored for several years a newsletter *Interurbans*, which was sent to "juicefans" all over the country and abroad. The editor was especially well versed on the Pacific Electric, a 400-mile system, based in Los Angeles, and running its Big Red Cars to Long Beach, the San Fernando Valley, San Bernardino and elsewhere. Swett also authored several special publications on the PE. So many theatre organ enthusiasts have a love for electric and steam railways. There is great nostalgia connected with both, and that may be the reason for the dual interest. I can readily give the names of a dozen ATOS members in this category.



Another mention of a theatre organist of the great era, Don Williams, sent the same Old Prospector through his files, and in a December 1928 copy of *Around the Town*, he found some material on the organist, now living in the San Bernardino area. "There is an inspiration about Don Williams, solo organist at the Fox Japanese Gardens in New York City, where he has been for five years. Mr. Williams has been private organist for William Fox for two years. He has several descriptive compositions to his credit, such as "Despondency," "Agitato," and "Eastern Twilight." Besides his organist duties, he is now assistant director of the Gardens' orchestra. He formerly played at the 1438-seat Palace Theatre in Wichita, Kansas."



Late night TV movie oglers can catch a brief glimpse of the Atlantic City Auditorium 7-deck console if they look for the showing of *The King of Marvin Gardens*, a depressing movie despite the efforts of such luminaries as Jack Nicholson, Ellen Burstyn and Bruce Dern. About halfway through the movie, the stars are clowning in the huge hall and one is doing a tap dance on the stage to organ accompaniment. Later a girl is shown at the console playing an end chord "sting." The console is very impressive for the moments it is shown, but don't blink. The catch

is that the sound which comes from the giant is that of a tone-wheel Hammond!



Donna and Bob. Proud parents.

From Indianapolis, organist Johnny Ferguson reports that organist Donna (Parker) McNeur gave birth on Aug. 25th to a 9 pound, 4 oz. girl — Bethany Louise, by name. Both pappa Bob and mama Donna are doing fine, says Johnny. So is their pizzery.



Speaking of pizzeries, we have trouble keeping pace with Mike Ohman, who operates the Great American Wind Machine dough dispens-



Mike Ohman. Always in motion.

(Zimfoto)

ery in Reseda, Calif. Since taking over the place, he has enlarged the chambers occupied by the 2/10 Wurlitzer, rearranged the pipework for better balance and visibility, added five additional ranks (a Kinura is yet to go in), replaced the original 2-deck console with a custom 3-decker (with Trousdale electronic switching), hired Dan Bellomy to play opposite Candi Carli, and even takes a 2-night playing shift himself to fill out the Wind Machine's 6-day week. On top of that we started getting reports about a marvelous organist playing during meal times at the former Elk's building on the 4/61 Robert Morton for the posh parties the operators cater in the converted ceremonial hall, now a lavishly-appointed dining hall. Yes, it's Mike Ohman at the console for several parties each month. To see if there was anything we missed we phoned the Wind Machine. Sure enough there was. Mike had just departed for Telluride, Colorado where he's scheduled to cue silent films on an electronic during the town's annual five-day August film festival. In his spare time he's a husband and father of four diminutive Ohmans.



Those who read our recent mini-feature about 16-year-old Chris Elliott will be interested to know that he will play his first professional concert for the ATOS San Diego Chapter on Sept. 13th, including some silent comedy cueing, on the club's 2/13 Wurlt in the California Theatre.



Candi Carli's friends and fans really came through for the blind organist in celebrating her 27th birthday. Plans were made a couple of months before the August 21 date to collect funds to buy her a talking calculator which sells for about \$400.00. Collections were centered at the Reseda (Cal.) Great American Wind Machine pasta parlor where she plays, and former LA Chapter Chairman Deke Warner, who spearheaded the effort, kept us informed. More than twice the sum required for the purchase was accumulated, so at 9:00 p.m., during her regular Aug. 22 stint, bossman Mike Ohman and Deke shouted "stop the

music" and presented Candi with the gabbing computer and a bucket full of coins for the difference. The secret had been well kept and the presentation caught the attractive musician by surprise. Candi was overwhelmed and very nearly blubbered. "My tear ducts are intact," a delighted Candi exclaimed.

Then she went back to work, talking intermittently with her new pal, the calculator.



In Wichita, the symphony people have taken a cue from the successful (e.g. well-attended) popular Wichita Theatre Organ Inc. concerts such as the one which featured Billy Nalle (organ) Peter Nero (piano) plus



Wichita's Century II Civic Center. One slice of the pie houses the New York Times Square Paramount's 4/37 "Dowager Empress." And she still "has it."

rhythm, presented in the Century II convention hall where food and beverages are available at the tables à la Boston Pops concerts. Now the symphony people will stage their light music shows this season in the convention hall instead of in the concert hall, and with refreshments on hand. And noting the audience reaction to the WTO concert featuring Peter Nero, the symphony has engaged him for a return concert.

Nalle sums it up with a rhetorical question: "Does anyone know of a major symphony orchestra (previously) copying the approach of a theatre organ concert sponsor?"



Retired organist Bob Pereda, gives us some unusual information about the Brooklyn Strand where John

Hammond once performed. "I remember meeting John, long ago. I was told that the original Austin, a backstage installation, was retained when a Kimball was installed on either side of the Strand's proscenium. When the orchestra played on stage, they continued to use the Austin with the orchestra!"



Another pizza parlor with pipe organ has reportedly bit the dust. This one was Big Bob's Pipe Dream Restaurant in Burien, Wash. Installed was the Wurlitzer originally in Seattle's Coliseum Theatre in 1918 at a purported cost of \$72,000. According to Diane Whipple, Big Bob Koonz died several months ago and

the restaurant was closed. "Despite efforts to keep the organ in the Seattle area, it has been purchased by Milton Kiefer, owner of Uncle Milt's Pizza Co. in Vancouver, Wash. Early last fall Mr. Kiefer told me that the organ had been placed in temporary storage to be possibly installed in a future restaurant in Spokane or in Eugene, Oregon."

Publication of the 1980 Pipe Piper has bestirred some conscientious readers into reporting the demise of installations, some of which should have been deleted years ago. Tom DeLay of Fresno, Cal., for example, gives us a report on the following: Pizza & Pipes, Daly City, Cal., does not exist; House of Pizza in Fremont, Cal., organ removed; Orange (Cal.) Theatre, organ sold; Pipe Organ Pizza in Santa Ana, Cal. organ re-

moved; Sally's Stage in Lombard, Ill., organ removed; Hoosier Theatre in Whiting, Ind., organ sold; Russell Stover Auditorium in Kansas City, organ removed — years ago. The 1981 listing will reflect the above deletions. Maybe readers know of more closings — and openings.



The 1545-seat Tennessee Theatre in Knoxville, which had been closed most of 1979, has been reopened, according to Prof. William T. Snyder, who is serving as organist. "The theatre is in the charge of Robert Frost, a Knoxville-based promoter, and is used to show vintage films twice a month. The 3/13 Wurlitzer is played in a 10-minute concert before the showing of each film." Snyder is head of the University of Tennessee's Department of Engineering Science and Mechanics.



Burt Buhrman.

For the past eight years, it has been an annual custom at the School of the Ozarks in Pt. Lookout, Mo. to feature the artistry of house organist Bert Buhrman at the school's 3/15 Wurlitzer in a July concert series. This year, Bert changed the format to include a silent film and sing-along on each program. Also, from the "French Riviera," Bert's "Phantom Twin" was featured at the "Mythical Mighty Wurlitzer" and grand piano. The audiences were a little smaller than last year's record crowds, due to the mid-west heat wave and the recession. The concerts were held on July 13 and 20, and the proceeds were earmarked for the Student Scholarship Fund.



There's a story out that we can only hint at, because its full disclosure could result in an international incident. It seems that a prominent console personality somehow managed to get a theatre organ record into — er — let's call it Lower Slobbovia, at the request of a visiting citizen. The personality was unaware of the strict rules of that country: no western pop records allowed, and violations could result in nasty penalties and even a stretch in a slammer on the Steppes.

Hoping to use the foreign import story for promotional purposes, the organist learned that disclosure could not only endanger the recipient but could be blown into an international incident and a problem for our State Dept., which is already up to here in problems. So, that's all we can reveal. But it's consoling to know that somewhere in that bleak piece of frigid real estate, a few cultural rebels hover around a record player and enjoy, at very low volume, a sound their country never experienced — that of a real theatre pipe organ.

Now, who'll be first to smuggle a TO pressing to the Ayatollah what's his name? Might help.



The 4/22 Marr & Colton in Elmira, New York's Clemens Performing Arts Center continues to gain popularity to the point that it is a lure for organists passing through the area. This is due to the energies of organ maintenance chief Loren Peckham, his organist son, Dave, and the guiding light of the whole project, Dave Teeter. Back in June, Bill Floyd, ex-N.Y. Paramount organist, who was born in Elmira, passed through town enroute to a conference at Cornell. Though it was one in the morning, Dave Teeter opened the organ for Bill. In July, Tony Fenelon, enroute to Niagara Falls, stopped at the Clemens and played the beast for a couple of hours. He was loud in his praise of the instrument, but didn't know when he could perform in concert there, due to uncertainty as to when he'd return to the States.



Our favorite Japanese import, Maria Kumagai, is enjoying an ever-increasing romance with classical organ literature, a real adventure in

discovery for the little gal whose entire organ experience dates back only a decade. In that time she has attained concert status in both classical and pop organ. In August, Maria reached an encouraging milestone. She was invited to play a concert on the famous organ in Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris, June 7, 1981. "I'm a little afraid but so excited and happy," exclaimed Maria as she took off for Osaka, Japan, for several October concerts on the Rodgers pipe/electronic classical organ.



Marilyn Libbin. She hones fine scores on the Emery for TV silent movie presentations.

Another tribute to "Hitch" was made by Cincinnati's newest commercial TV station, WBTI, with a weeklong showing of his films. Accompanying the one silent one, *Easy Virtue*, was Marilyn Libbin, who recorded the music before the screeching, playing the Emery Theatre Wurlitzer. Marilyn's music is no stranger to WBTI. The station uses cuts from her "Here's Bubbles" album as themes for its classic film programs.



Scheduled for the Eisenhart Auditorium, Rochester, N.Y., on Sept. 2 were four Alfred Hitchcock silent movies at 2:00 and 8:00 p.m. to be accompanied by Irv Toner at the 3/8 Wurlitzer.



Every once in awhile, something crosses our desk about John Kiley, ex-Boston area theatre organist (Olympia, Metropolitan, Keith Memorial, among others). Since 1963, John has been playing a Ham-

mond in a rooftop booth at Fenway Park, and American League baseball fans insist he plays the National Anthem better than any organist in that circuit. On June 29, 25,000 fans at Fenway received a rare treat during a two-hour rain delay. Usually the organist fills the void with spirited music. On this occasion, Baltimore catcher, Rick Dempsey, gave an impromptu slipping and sliding exhibition on the wet tarpaulin, clowning in an oversize uniform to the accompaniment of organist Kiley. Entertaining as it was to the fans, Dempsey was slated to receive a bill for repair of the tarp. Several seams were opened during the player-comedian's performance, even though he had on sneakers.



For some time we've been hearing about an Austin organ being installed in a high school auditorium in Long Island. We tracked it down and requested further info. Bob Atkins came through.

The organ in Chaminade High School, in Mineola, N.Y., was removed from the Queens Village Theatre and installed in the school's auditorium by a crew of volunteers headed by Brother Robert Lahey, S.M. of the school's faculty, with help from Jim La Vake, Ken Ladner and Allen Miller. It is believed that this is the only operating theatre pipe organ in any auditorium on Long Island and is probably the first

theatre organ auditorium installation in the area since the advent of sound motion pictures.

The organ was installed in the theatre in 1927 by the Austin Organ Company of Hartford, Connecticut. It consists of a three manual console and eleven ranks of pipes. In addition there is a full battery of percussion instruments, including orchestral bells, xylophone, cathedral chimes, even a fire gong and bird whistle, among other effects.

In addition to Brother Lahey, the June dedication concert featured two other organists: Kenneth Ladner, who revised the original Austin tonal design to give the instrument greater flexibility and power, and Madeline Atkins, formerly organist at Port Washington's Beacon Theatre. The program was narrated by Bob Atkins, one of the organ crew members.

Although the Chaminade auditorium was built with organ chambers on each side of the stage, these were found to be too small to accommodate the more than 800 pipes so new chambers had to be constructed on the auditorium balcony. Over twenty miles of wire were used to connect the pipes, console, and the custom-designed electronic relay, and there were over two thousand connections which had to be soldered. The organ is powered by a seven and one half horsepower blower and a twenty ampere rectifier.



Brother Robert Lahey at the console of the Chaminade High School 3/11 Austin. Bob Atkins looks on.



Roger Nyquist, organist on the faculty of the University of Santa Clara (Calif.), is ecstatic these days. He had long wanted a recital organ for the University's concert hall but couldn't raise the \$175,000 required, college budgets being what they are. Then he heard that a church in nearby Menlo Park wanted to unload its 1960 "romantic" Casavant — to make way for a plug-in. Roger checked the instrument; it was exactly what the school needed and the church would let it go for only \$20,000! Roger lost no time in closing the sale. That happened a couple of years ago.

The 3/29 Casavant was ready to play in the university concert hall late last year and for the dedication concert Roger Nyquist, who has 10 classical albums in release, offered selections by Bach, Franck, and Messian plus Jongen's bombastic "Toccata." Nyquist was pleased on all counts, and made statements to the press rare among top flight concert organists since Mr. Biggs used his tremendous influence to sell classic organ enthusiasts on the chuffy "baroque" thing years ago. It seems that Nyquist takes exception to the "barocultists."

"It's too artsy-craftsy for me with those old style shortened keys, uneven wind pressure and changed tuning," he told music critic Paul Hertelendy of the San Jose *Mercury-News*.

"I want an organ that first will play Bach well . . . and second, do the Franck and Widor repertory of the 19th century. If you have that, then the contemporary repertory will go well, too."

Such publicly-expressed uncommon sense from a prominent recitalist is encouraging to those who stood helplessly by in the '50s and '60s while their churches junked often magnificent romantic organs to make way for instruments with no swell boxes and sometimes described as "a tinsmith's nightmare." Perhaps wisdom is returning.

The Santa Clara instrument has been since enlarged by four ranks plus a 32' electronic pedal grunter.



Married: Heidi James, former pianist member of the James Family organ-piano duo, and Jay Petach, in

Cincinnati, Ohio, on August 2. The design by Heidi for their wedding announcement shows Jay as a Jay-bird and the bride as a baldheaded halfnote "High D." Since the promised photo of the newlyweds didn't beat deadline, here they are as Heidi sees them.



Jay + Heidi



When Chard Walker practiced hymns for Sunday school on a straight church organ in the late '30s, he got to know the organ maintenance man who came around once a week to touch up tuning and unstick ciphering armatures in chests. The maintenance man was Bud Gardner, who had once been a theatre organist. Bud was full of tales about the silent movie days and would relate them to anyone who would listen.

One story involved a dull and boring feature film Bud had to accompany. The audience was restless and noisy and there were even a few "razzberries." Bud wondered what he could play to improve matters.

Fully aware of the rules about drawing attention from the screen by musical tricks, Bud decided to throw caution to the wind.

Near the close of the film, the unconvincing girl and her listless boyfriend were about to get married. Naturally, the audience anticipated the usual wedding march — but no! What they heard was a tune dating from the Civil War which had been revived for World War I, a sentimental piece of froth everyone rec-

ognized.

When the bride and groom marched solemnly down the church aisle, their wedding march was "Just Before the Battle, Mother."

First came snickers, then ripples, then a chorus of belly laughs at "full organ." After that the audience felt a lot better. Bud had saved the day by diverting attention to the music, a no-no to be sure. "I'm glad the manager was out," said Bud, "He'd have fired me." □

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