

# All About The Emery Theatre

An ATOS chapter whose members have responded over 1,800 times in less than two years, for one project? Sounds impossible? Well, it's very real and it's the Ohio Valley Chapter in Cincinnati. The figure shows the number of times members have appeared at Emery Theatre to staff the house for the chapter's continuing weekend series of classic films.

And always at every performance the chapter's 3/23 Wurlitzer theatre pipe organ is played by its member staff.

The theatre's organ staff can be said to be one of the largest of any theatre in the country — ten volunteer members appear regularly. Movie organ chairman Claire Lawrence has even other highly-talented organists to choose from, but because of other chapter involvements they have not had to be drafted. One of the staff is Jack Doll, Jr., who is known to Baldwin dealers and customers throughout the country as a sales rep and demonstrator. Another of the staff, Henry Garcia, drives 120 miles round trip from his home in Wilberforce, Ohio, when he appears at the console.

Movies are shown every Friday and Saturday evenings and Sunday continuously from 2 p.m. The term "Classic Films" simply refers to great films from the Golden Days of Hollywood. Except when a very long film is used, double features are shown. Fred Baum, who supervises the chapter's movie activities, is an experienced "pro" having operated

his own theatres generally showing classic films.

Silent films aren't overlooked either, as these become real "show-cases" for the organ accompaniments. Two such weekends were scheduled in the first half of 1980.

All the atmosphere of the large theatres is present (Emery seats 1,364) and concession stands dispense soft drinks, coffee (when the weather dictates) and popcorn popped on the spot, and candy.

Emery Theatre's facilities include completely rebuilt 35 mm Simplex projectors with Xenon lamps, a new \$17,000 Phillipps 16 mm projector capable of handling a 3-hour show on one reel, and the largest fly-type movie screen in Ohio. Much of this equipment has come to the chapter through the generosity of organ buffs Mr. and Mrs. John Strader.

Through the genius of member Lyman Breneman, (who in more tranquil moments is head of the Physical Plant department of Miami University at Oxford, Ohio), a Style 312 Cleveland Switchboard Co. dimmer board was donated to the chapter by the Archbishop Hoban High School in Akron, Ohio. This complex piece of stage equipment was duly rebuilt by Lyman and the board now gives Emery Theatre something it has never had — dimming capability for both the house and stage. As part of Lyman's work the long-dark lights at the edges of the balcony and the gallery, as well as "framing" lights on each side of the proscenium, are again operational, and the

theatre takes on the fairyland.

Emery Theatre is a facility of the University of Cincinnati and was built originally for the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. Almost unused for a quarter century, Emery started to come alive again when the Ohio Valley Chapter and the University of Cincinnati agreed to the installation of the former Style 260 Special which the chapter had removed from the RKO Albee Theatre. This theatre sank into a pile of rubble a few years ago to make way for "progress."

Following a complete refurbishing of the organ into "mint" condition over an eight-year period, the organ was dedicated at Emery in October, 1977 with concerts by Gaylord Carter and Searle Wright. At that point, no one foresaw that the chapter would succeed in launching a movie series that would end Cincinnati's comments of "Where's Emery?", and "Oh, is that still there?" to complete awareness of even the man in the street as to what goes on there every weekend . . . movies shown as they were meant to be shown — in a large theatre and on a screen capable of accepting all sizes of films including CinemaScope.

Maybe the chapter should use the phrase "There is a choice . . ." for the option customers continually talk about — movies in the style of Hollywood's Golden Age. Customers are vocal, with a continual flow of fan letters filling the chapter's mailbox at 1112 Walnut Street, Emery's location. Even the "short" shown after every feature, "Let's Go Out to the Lobby" and complete with bouncing popcorn on the screen, was the subject of a fan letter. Woe unto the projectionist who skips that! Escape from the first floor projection booth might be dangerous!

And that projection booth! Built prior to the organ dedication at Emery, it is completely temperature-controlled and has sound-deadening carpeting on the walls. Since Emery has always been famous for its great acoustics, the booth is just about the only spot whispering can occur with any real hope of it not being heard somewhere else! Recognition of those acoustics have led Baldwin Piano and Organ Co. to use Emery as a life-size testing laboratory for grand pianos.

Other additions made through chapter accomplishments were the addition to the south box office of an automatic ticket vending machine; obtaining, rebuilding and installing theatre display cases for the front of the theatre (it never had any previously); repainting the marquee and the front of the theatre; and restoring outer-lobby and inner-lobby paint, including regilding decorative portions.

Refurbishing Emery Theatre is of rather low priority by the University because of other projects that were in line first. But the chapter continues to raise money for refurbishing and to do as much of the work as is practical. The doors that continually seem to open as talented persons

make things happen, continually amazes the chapter. And why this priority on a theatre? Simply to make a fitting home for a grand Wurlitzer. And the priority of the movies? What better way to show off an organ than the way in which these organs were born . . . as part of movie presentations. One thing seems certain — the organ has been seen and heard by far more people than it would have if the Ohio Valley Chapter's presentations had been limited to only a few major concerts each year.

Two major record projects have been accomplished: One was a chapter project, *Moon River Revisited*, based on the long-running WLW Radio midnight show. This was re-

corded on the Emery organ by Lee Erwin who spent 11 years at WLW doing that show. This record can be obtained from ATOS-OVC, Emery Theatre, 1112 Walnut Street, Cincinnati, Ohio 45210.

And need we say all this work at Emery has been volunteer? We can go further than that and say no member has ever received payment for his services in any chapter function.

The organ itself is constantly under the guiding hand of a real "pro," Everard Pratt, Jr., known better as "Tote" Pratt. His crew works at installing new ranks as part of a master plan, and maintaining the organ every Thursday and Saturday morning. On those mornings it's all work and no play! □

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