

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir:

In my article entitled "A Trip to Yesterday" mention is made of two schools of theatre organ playing which were advertised in *Billboard* 34 years ago. Following an impulse to determine what happened to the staff of these schools I dispatched a letter to each of the institutions and was able to contact Mr. Edward Eigenschenk of the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago.

Eigenschenk graciously lent a copy of *The American Organist* for July 1923 which contained a description of the school and photographs of the faculty. Mr. Eigenschenk, incidentally, was a member of the school staff at that time and according to the magazine played from memory a repertoire of a thousand works! He is still with the conservatory. Other members of the 1923 faculty included Frank Van Dusen, the director; Mrs. Gertrude Baily, Emily Roberts, and Helen Searles.

The article tells how the school had two locations for instruction—one at the conservatory consisting of eight Kimball organs—six two-manual instruments and two three-manual jobs. Both elementary and advanced courses were offered.

The "Little Theatre" was a cooperative project maintained by the conservatory and a neighborhood concern which sold theatre equipment. The former used the premises and facilities for theatre organ instruction while the latter used them for exhibition of equipment and films for its patrons. The magazine article describes it as follows:

"This little theatre is complete in every detail—small stage, drop curtains, plush drape, automatic screen curtains, orchestra pit, and the console of the new Kimball organ; the theatre seats approximately one hundred persons in comfortable leather-cushioned chairs. It will be seen that here at last the student of theatre organ can take his first actual screen practice in comfort without risk of losing his job because an irate theatre manager happens to be listening to his first performances. His first performance, instead of damaging his reputation and making him nervous, only gives opportunity for him to try his wings and for his instructors to give further assistance in the difficult art.

"The new Kimball unit built for the Little Theatre is equipped with the usual accessories of the modern organ, with the minimum of traps. The analysis of the instrument is given herewith. It shows an instrument of six ranks of pipes and twenty-five stops. We may be sure that an organist who will be able to improvise a hurry or a climax and play a feature picture on the limited resources of this little instrument will be a better master of the situation when he comes to the larger organs of the average theatre that make his work so much easier."

Seven areas of playing were pursued during the course at the conservatory: descriptive music for scenics and travelogues; orchestral

transcriptions; mood music for features; cartoon and comedy playing; improvised agitato, hurries, and climaxes; comic effects; and news-reel accompanying.

In addition a special summer course was offered each year. In 1923, according to the article . . .

"Mr. Edward Benedict of the Capitol Theatre, Chicago, has been engaged to give a special course for the summer term in the Capitol Theatre where the larger Kimball Unit will be thoroughly learned by the students enrolling for the special course. Mr. Benedict has had the advantage of close association with the late Robert Hope-Jones from whom he acquired a deeper insight into the hidden values of the Unit Type of instrument. His special course consists of six parts, in three pairs; first is a lecture and demonstration by Mr. Benedict, and then follows actual trials, experiments, and demonstrations by the class. The following subjects are treated in this way:

Improvisation for pictures; song solos  
Double touch; organ demonstrating  
Novelties; Orgologue Slide Bureau  
suggestions; jazz and jazz idiom."

Sincerely,

IRA FREEDMAN,  
Latham, N. Y.,  
46 Bailey Avenue,  
Latham, N. Y.,  
September 1, 1959

Sir:

The enclosed materials were written for the old *Tibia Magazine* but were never published due to the forthcoming demise of that periodical. About a year and a half ago Mel Doner, seeing the "handwriting on the wall" suggested that the *Kinura* might use it. As you probably know, that publication also folded.

I suspect a number of T.O. fans might be interested in what I have to say. With this in mind I have taken the liberty of re-typing the manuscript and sending it to you for consideration.

*Billboard* and the *American Organist* both sent me letters of permission to reproduce excerpts and photos. Unfortunately I did not get these back. However, if you do decide to use the material I believe it is safe to proceed.

Please advise if I can be of further help.

Cordially,

IRA FREEDMAN,  
ATOE member.

Sir:

For subscription renewal on "THEATRE ORGAN".

Good Luck,  
EDDY HANSON  
909 No. State St.  
Chicago 10, Ill.



My sincere best wishes to the members of the American Association of Theatre Organ Enthusiasts.

GILBERT LEROY,  
Organist, Gaumont  
Palace Theater,  
Place Clichy, Paris.



Rudy Shackelford, taken at a recent visit to "The Mosque" in Richmond, Va.

Sir:

I have just received my new edition of "Theatre Organ" and I am wild over its format, to say the least. The Leonard Leigh article was very interesting; and, of course, that type of article fascinates me very much, having been born too late to be a part of "the roarin' twenties". However, I feel that I am just as enthusiastic over the theatre organ and the part it played in the "good old days" as a seasoned veteran.

Yours truly,  
RUDY SHACKELFORD