

## Closing Chord

**Dr. William Harrison Barnes**, noted pipe organ architect and consultant, died at age 87 in an Evanston, Illinois, hospital on October 11, 1980. Dr. Barnes' book, *The Contemporary American Organ*, now in its ninth printing, is considered to be the definitive text on the subject.



Dr. William Harrison Barnes.

A strong voice for pipe organs, Dr. Barnes built his first organ at age 15. During a 65-year career he designed and built more than 400 pipe organs throughout the United States. He was an accomplished organist and was acquainted with most of the better-known classical recitalists. At one time, his Evanston resi-

dence contained a pipe organ designed with parts from the 1889 Roosevelt organ in the famed Auditorium Theatre, Chicago.

Dr. Barnes was a supporter of the theatre organ, liking particularly the Chicago Theatre Wurlitzer. He was a frequent guest at CATOE events and was called upon more than once to delight audiences with his anecdotes and limericks, for which he was well known.

Dr. Barnes was a life-long resident of Evanston but in recent years spent winters in Arizona where he and the late Dr. John Klein were frequent companions. He was president of A.R. Barnes Printing Co. and was a director of the First Bank of Evanston for over 30 years. The YMCA and other philanthropic endeavors also occupied much of his time.

Dr. Barnes is survived by his wife, Katharine; a daughter; a step-son; five grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

**Anna Walker Goss**, organist, who played several theatres in Rochester during the great era, died on June 14th.

She studied with noted teachers George Fisher and Joseph Bonnet, after beginning her career as a pianist. When a church organist failed to arrive for a service, she was "drafted" and was an organist from then on. She played at the Piccadilly, Regent and Eastman theatres, and in

her later days, as a church organist and teacher. She was grateful for her theatre experience, "because it gave me more training than anything else."

Mrs. Goss is survived by a son, Robert.

**Richard Dwight Betts** realized he had a precious gift when he was very young; the ability to play any piece of music, simple or complex, after hearing it once. The family home was in Batavia, New York, but young Dick went to New York and haunted theatres with organs during the silent movie era. All of this was a disappointment to his family who wanted him in the family car wash business. He tried it for one day and quit. One day, when he was 15, an organist failed to show and Dick got his chance.

He developed into a fine showman and entertainer at the organ. When talkies arrived, Dick turned his inventiveness to sing-along novelties. He loved audiences and in order to get nearer the people he devised a keyboard on a long cable wired to the organ (see the Dec. 1965 *Bombarde*) so he could walk and play among his audience members. His smooth singing voice helped. In later years he played electronics in hotels, appeared on radio and TV with his act. He settled in Florida 32 years ago and was active until 1½ years ago.

His musical career was the more remarkable because he never had any musical instruction and could not read music. He was a "natural."

Dick Betts died at 73 on October 15th, survived by his wife, Catherine, five grown children and four grandchildren.

**Virgil Fox** was the most prominent, flamboyant, wonderfully talented and beloved organist in the world. While classical organists at large shunned his showmanship, he, more than any other human being, brought the classical organ to the masses.

Early on, Virgil decreed, "Who would pay to watch Heifetz fiddle behind a potted palm" and went to a major electronic classic organ builder. They designed "Black Beauty," a touring organ. Coupled with the light show, Virgil hit the road concertizing to packed houses across

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Virgil Fox.

this country and the world at large. They danced in the aisles and clapped in time to the "Gigue Fugue" and "stayed between God's walls forever free" in the "Prelude and Fugue in E Minor (the wedge).

They stood in lines and then sat in awe of the beauty of Bach's "Come Sweet Death" and "Sheep May Safely Graze," (both of which were played at his funeral services in Palm Beach and Dr. Schuller's crystal cathedral in California).

Flamboyance was his forte. No one can forget Virgil in his beret and cape taking his bows or standing on the pedals with his hand pushed heavenward at the end of a piece.

Best of all he was a friend of the theatre organ. It started when he was a boy in Princeton, Illinois. He played the theatre organ in his father's theatre and always took delight in the growing popularity of the theatre organ.

He made one recording on a theatre organ, the 4/37 "Dowager Empress" Wurlitzer in Wichita's Cen-

tury II Civic Auditorium. After this recording, even his classical concerts included arrangements from this album.

Simply, Virgil loved the organ as long as it was *music* and was brought to the world to enjoy.

Virgil Fox was unique, witty, wonderful and to quote the order of the memorial service, "A sunbeam has gone from the world." □



## the letters to the editors

Letters to the Editor concerning all aspects of the theatre organ hobby are encouraged. Send them to the editor concerned. Unless it's stated clearly on the letter "not for publication," the editors feel free to reproduce it, in whole or part.

Address:

George Thompson  
Editor  
P.O. Box 1314  
Salinas, Calif. 93902

Dear George:

Page 18 of the Aug./Sept. issue of THEATRE ORGAN has a paragraph on Knoxville's Tennessee Theatre with several errors. Here are the correct facts:

The Tennessee reopened October 18, 1979, under the management of Bob Frost with the film *San Francisco* which played to capacity crowds for its 3-day run. The theatre originally seated 1,996 (not 1,984) and after being redecorated and reseated in 1966, reopened December 25th with 1,545 seats.

The Simpson Theatre organization has never had any connection with the theatre, being a competing company to ABC Southeastern Theatres that operated the theatre for many years until closing it November

1, 1977. A brief six-month operation, showing Hollywood classic films, ended in failure October 3, 1978, and the theatre was dark until Bob Frost and his father, Ralph Frost, leased it in 1979.

The theatre is owned by the Atkin Realty Co., which also owns the 11-story Burwell Building through which the theatre is entered. The theatre is of Spanish-Moorish design, and there are no "four-foot golden water vases circling the top of a narrow ledge" above the dome ceiling. Pictures in your Oct./Nov., 1978, issue (including a color cover) on pages 5 and 6 may refresh Mr. M. Lee Green's memory of the auditorium's appearance. There are four large celedon urns in wall niches — two on each side of the proscenium, framing the two organ chambers.

Mr. Bill Snyder, University of Tennessee engineering professor, is the house organist and plays for all movie intermissions. Films are shown on an irregular basis two or three times a month for a three-day weekend run including a Saturday matinee. Over 18 films and several stage shows have been presented at the theatre during the last year, and the 3/14 Wurlitzer has been constantly maintained and is in good playing condition.

Sincerely yours,  
Wallace W. Baumann  
Knoxville, Tennessee

Dear George;

Regarding the story in THEATRE ORGAN October/November 1980, "This Church Prefers Theatre Organ," there are a couple of points I would like to clarify. In the interest of accuracy, it should be noted the story constantly mentions 20 ranks, yet the specifications list shows only

**Moving?**

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Lee Prater  
ATOS Membership Office  
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