

# 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 Connecticut, organist Tom Gnaster writes that he has learned about the vagaries and pitfalls in the lucrative field of composing and scoring music for TV commercials. Hired to score a video plug for a Chicago jewelry company, Tom worked out a text that included organ and a choir (for that Christmassy mood). He arranged to record the session at the Hinsdale Theatre, where there is a fine theatre organ, and the hall is large enough for the choir his script required. He phoned his alma mater, the American Conservatory in Chicago and arranged to have the school's "Chamber Ensemble" (chorus, to you) assembled at the Hinsdale a couple of days later. He then took a plane for Chicago and copied enough of the choral parts during the journey for all the singers. When he arrived at the Hinsdale there was the TV technical crew ready to shoot, but only a handful of the chorus members could make it. Resourceful Tom quickly rewrote the parts "divisi," for fewer voices and more organ. Be-

cause no tenors had shown up, Tom sang the tenor line alone.

He exclaims, "After so many years I was back in my alma mater's Chamber Ensemble once more."

The sponsor apparently approved of Tom's commercial because the message about buying her some "ice" for Christmas was seen and heard on Chicago area TV outlets just before the holidays.



The *Seattle Times* reported on Dec. 22nd last that the 3/8 Kimball installed in the auditorium of Queen Anne High School is in danger, unless \$5,000 can be raised to overhaul it. Even then, the school board is making noises about closing the school permanently.

Organbuilder Sandy Balcom, now retired, recalls installing the then 2/8 Kimball in the local Everett Theatre in 1926, then moving it to the high school auditorium in 1956, when the school's budget had a surplus and its organ-fan principal, George Farmer, put aside funds to buy and install the organ. Balcom built a 3-manual console for it, and the organ expenditure totalled \$18,000. The organ has seen much use in the school and has had its ups and downs from the maintenance viewpoint. Now it needs about 5 grand to get it back in shape.

One possibility came in the form of an offer by the Puget Sound ATOS chapter; members agreed to perform the work if the Kimball can be a part of the 1981 ATOS convention.

So maybe we'll hear it.



A rumor has it that Ashley Miller's next record album will be played on three so far unrecorded pipe organs.



Billy Nalle's reputation in connection with the "Wichita Wurlitzer" is getting around. His latest biggie was playing a concert for an October international sales meeting for the Beech Aircraft Co. which was held in the Century II home of the "Dowager Empress." Nalle was pleasantly surprised because the firm had never before presented a concert of any kind at their conclaves. The concert was considered of sufficient importance that Beech flew in light-



Billy Nalle.

ing technicians (and equipment) fit for a stage extravaganza, from New York. The meeting drew over 1500 Beech employees. Billy's not complaining.



*Bad news dept.* From Vancouver, B.C., organist Steve Dunsmore informs us that the local Organ Grinder Restaurant ceased operation in September '80 and has since been sold, and the new owners have announced no plans.

He writes, "As one of the organists at the Organ Grinder I miss this unique-to-western Canada restaurant. The other regular house organists, Brian Tingle and Ron Poll, will be missed too."



*Bad news explained dept.* Member Rudolph Frey takes us to task for hanging a crepe where there's plenty of life. In a recent issue we Vox Popped the non-existence of an organ-equipped California pizzeria. Not so, says Frey. The Cap'n's Galley restaurant in the Serramonte Center in Daly City and its style 260 Wurlitzer (plus Posthorn) are in full operation and the organ is played nightly and (afternoons on weekends) by Larry Embury, Warren Lubich and others.



Wurli Opus 987 (style 260) was originally installed in the Diversey Theatre, Chicago, adds Frey, and is as mighty a Wurlitzer as one could hope for. For proof he sends photos.



This "Pizza & Pipes" is going strong in Daly City, Calif.

(Frey Photo)

So far, so good, but the April/May '80 *Pipe Piper* column listed also a Pizza and Pipes restaurant with a 3/22 Wurlitzer in Daly City. That's the one no one can locate. But Mr. Frey is justified. The item should have been more explicit.

In spite of over 80 million television aficionados staying home to find out who shot J.R., a total of 1770 theatre organ buffs attended the Lance Luce concert at Rochester's Auditorium Theatre on November 21st. The 20-year-old pizza parlor organist from Warren, Michigan provided a fast-stepping show for the largest RTOS audience in over a year and a half. Following the first number after intermission, the ex-Radio City Music Hall staffer swung around toward his audience to exhibit his raiment. It consisted of rhinestone-studded heels, shocking silver jacket and silver fish-scale vest. The gasping audience agreed that it was just about the most ram-bunctious attire ever presented in staid Rochester, at least for RTOS events. From pizza parlor to concert hall, Lance Luce's legion of fans took a sharp rise. But those threads!

There's an encouraging note from organist Jane McKee Johnson about the Kimball organ in Tacoma's Temple Theatre. The manager had heard Jane giving the 9-ranker a workout when she played some Junior League and travel shows there. He was looking for something novel to set the scene for the premiere of the new *Flash Gordon* movie and he decided Jane at the organ filled the bill.

What amazed Jane, who has built up a following playing in a local pizzeria, was the enthusiasm of the young audience for her 15-minute

organ prelude to the sci-fi movie. Not for 50 years had the Temple organ been used for solos and intermissions, so Jane had a brand new audience. She fed them score music from *Star Trek*, *The Motion Picture* and *Superman*, not to mention "Jingle Bell Rock." The youngsters ate it up, and thundered out applause each time Jane hit an end chord.

Later, a delighted Jane said, "It sorta closed the generation gap." The Friday night organ overture, and intermission, were extended also to Saturday night. "Ming, the Merciless" never had it so good.

When it comes to the west coast's Gordon Madison, there couldn't be a more avid theatre organ enthusiast. He reports that he and his wife have entered into negotiations to buy a theatre in Chambersburg, Pa. "It is an old theatre, complete with operable (but sadly in need of a tuneup) 3/14 Moller, Opus 4800, an original installation. This combination was just too good to pass up, especially with real estate prices on the east

coast being far more realistic than out here in tinsel land. So, we, with the offered help of the Potomac Valley ATOS Chapter, may some day soon put this 'Mighty Mo' back in its original condition.

"It is our plan to restore the theatre, reopen the stage, bring in vaudeville, live theatre, and many of the great old movies, both sound and silent. Of course, the organ will be a big part of every presentation. It is possible we are dreaming, but with so much cooperation as seems to be proffered, not only from ATOS people, but from Pete Daniels of the Moller Co., plus the business and theatre community of the city, we are going to give it our all."

From time to time we report on Ken Ladner's progress regarding the 'Heinz 57' 2/4 he is installing in his Howard Beach, N.Y. home. Progress has been slow because Ken is one of those gallant persons who loves to assist with other people's installations e.g. the 3/11 Austin in Chaminade school on Long Island.

So far Ken has three ranks of Austin pipes, a Moller Vox, plus Wurlitzer Bourdon, tremis and percussions. The console posed a problem. It is a Wurlitzer style 2/10 (designed for 9 ranks) and it must have soaked in a horse trough deeper than the expression pedals for a week. The bottom and sides were ruined. Ken has always admired the Radio City Music Hall console profile, so he decided to restore his console to resemble it. The photo shows the new



Ken's rebolstered console. Just like RCMH.

(Kenpic)

bolster legs before they were painted glossy black like at RCMH.

"I suppose my excursion may offend the purists," says Ken, "and believe me, they have a point. It sure alters the appearance."



From "down under" Bob Gliddon informs us that Australians are also weighing values when the item in question is a 1929 cinema palace. His news is that Sydney's State Theatre has been classed by the National Trust in the "A" category, which means it's safe from the wrecker's ball. Over the past 6 months workmen have restored or replaced brass fittings and glass (chandeliers included) has been cleaned and polished. About 6 rows of the original 2,584 seats have been removed and the rest repositioned for more room between rows. The proscenium drape has been restored to its former burgundy glory. As a mix of Baroque, Gothic, Rococo, Neo-Classical and quasi-Sistine Chapel architecture it had many paintings. These, too, have been restored.

The one remaining large task is restoring the theatre's 270 Special Wurlitzer (4/21). Over the years water damage has silenced some of the Solo chamber voices but the Main is in mint condition, adds Gliddon. We trust that Theatre Organ Society of Australia members (or ATOSers) will soon have the situation well in hand.



ATOS veteran Judd Walton assures us he has not sold the Wurlitzer he accumulated over the years, and which is installed in his Vallejo, Calif. home. He merely gave it to his son, Larry, who will eventually move it to his Placerville home, but not immediately. Judd informs us he bought a 1934 Model A Hammond to put in his mountain cabin. It's Opus 971 and a Leslie and Krueger Bass have been added. He says "I like that (electric) sound best of all. It doesn't try to be a pipe organ."



Barrister/organist Dolton McAlpin writes from his office in Starkville, that the State of Mississippi will soon have two organs in theatres (the Temple Theatre in Meridian has a

3/8 Morton). A few years ago, organ tech Frank Evans bought the 2/6 Morton in the Saenger Theatre, Hattiesburg, Miss. and installed it in his Meridian home. Then he decided to move to smaller quarters so he put the organ up for sale.

Meanwhile, back in Hattiesburg, the aging 1800-seat Saenger Theatre was given a new lease on life; it became a civic center. The interior has been completely refurbished and it now looks like a million bucks. Best of all, the management noted the empty organ chambers and decided they should be filled with pipes.

You guessed it; they bought back the same 2/6 Robert Morton that had lain dormant in the chambers until Evans bought it. There will be some changes. Evans will add two ranks of pipes and a third manual, so it will go back in as a 3/8.

We can't think of any other cases of an organ being installed in the same theatre twice. But we'll wager some of you can.



Bill Thomson had never heard of the So. Calif. organ club which hired him for a concert at the Quiet Cannon restaurant in Montebello late last year, but he wasn't suspicious until he arrived on the scene and noted familiar faces scurrying around the fringes. The full impact struck him when he was led into the Cannon's dining room, and a large audience let out a roar. This would not be a concert, it would be a roast in the best Dean Martin tradition.



Happy Judd Walton. He just discovered the Hammond Model A, 1934 vintage. (Bill Lamb Photo)



Bill Thomson, Roasted!

(Stufoto)

After dinner, which was accompanied by music played by some of Bill's students, Bill's friends, colleagues and critics took turns telling the enthusiastic crowd what was good and bad about Bill Thomson, among them, Bill Worrall (who helped organize the roast), Danny Brown, Bob Dove, Carol Jones, Tom Sheen, Tracy Hammer, Fran Linhart, Ron Walls and Bob Power. The good-natured ribbing was spiked with implied praise.

After it was over, bemused Bill was heard to say, "Now do I get to play the concert I practiced?"



Dave Singley of New Tripoli, Pa. has informed us of another theatre organ in regular use. It is the 3/7 Moller in Allentown, Pa.'s 19th Street Theatre. It is Opus 5087, the original installation of 1928. It has a "fully loaded" toy counter and is played often by resident organist, Gary Reider.

Dave is on the trail of yet another pipe installation. He says that one is supposed to be installed in a bar in the Scranton-Wilkes Barre area. Should anyone hear of this, let us know.



From Reno, Nevada, organ enthusiast/technician Fred Beeks, describes Candi Carley's visit to Reno in October. Her first concert was at the Marvin Piccolo School for handicapped children (Candi is blind), played on the school's Hammond. Next day she had to play two concerts on the Beeks' home installa-



Candi in Reno. She was a hit playing Fred Beeks' "WurltSmith" for two shifts of parlor packers. (Fubbfoto)

tion, a Smith-Wurlitzer pipe job, both times to packed houses. Candi was such a hit with both the school children and the Beeks' parlor packers, plans were made for her 1981 Reno concert; it will be held in the Pioneer Theatre to make more seating available for Candi's growing Reno audience. "Reno loves Candi" admitted Fred Beeks.



Bob Legon writes of a remarkable event — the opening of a true movie palace in Canton, Mass. (near Boston), the New Oriental Theatre. Actually it's the old Orpheum-Strand with a facelift plus a cloud projector, twinkling stars from the Boston Mattapan Theatre and a Wurlitzer theatre organ.

The man behind the project is Fred MacLennan, advises Legon. Fred had long nurtured a dream about opening a theatre which would show film classics in the old movie palace style, a place where kids could go for a rousing Saturday matinee. So he leased the Orpheum-Strand and went to work. One of his priorities was locating a proper Wurlitzer. He finally settled for a composite 2/8. Bob Legon is serving as house organist and tuner. The basic organ is the 2/8 Wurlitzer originally in the Dedham Community Theatre (1927) which later acquired a church-type console while serving in a Nova Scotia church. The current Wurlitzer console came from East Boston's Saville Theatre. Other Wurlitzer

parts came from Boston's Bijou Dream Theatre and the Liberty Theatre, Roxbury. On display is theatre memorabilia from the Mattapan Theatre.

In charge of the organ installation was Charlie Bolton, a member of a family of organ techs whose pedigrees go back to Hook & Hastings in England, and Skinner in the U.S.A.

Bob Legon's letter was written in August. More recently we received a clipping from the *Brockton Enterprise*, from Col. Harry Jenkins, who played in Boston theatres in silent times.

It says the New Oriental opened in October with *The African Queen*. Also shown was a silent movie short subject with organ accompaniment. The name of the organist was not listed.

There was still work to be done in August. The pipework was not yet behind swell shutters and there were plans to increase the pipe complement. But opening a refurbished theatre with a wholesome entertainment policy is worthy of note. No, it's something to shout from the rooftops. Thanks, Fred MacLennan.



Weather is a very important factor in the running of a successful concert. Take the Rosa Rio event on October 25th at St. George Church in Guilford, Conn. The organ is a 2-manual, 42-stop Allen, a recent gift to the church. Everything turned

out perfectly except that a storm descended on the area, accompanied by 75 mph winds and drenching rain. Power lines were downed, homes flooded and damage wrought to the tune of \$4 million in two counties. St. George's church was cut off from power, and just three hours before the program the power was restored.

The concert went on, the organ console was moved to the center of the church, and while destruction outside continued, Rosa played her program. Her encore was pure whimsy — "On a Clear Day," and just before the final note, another power interruption ended the rendition. Rosa is mailing the missing note to the brave attendees, we heard.



ATOS' 1980 "Theatre Organist of the Year," Lowell Ayars, starred, with pianist Austin Gould and an able cast of vocalists, in an all-Gershwin program on Oct. 26th last — in church, yet. Lowell played the 3/31 Moller in the Bridgeton (N.J.) First Presbyterian church (he's played there for 32 years!) and offered such Gershwin fare as "Wintergreen for President," "Of Thee I Sing," themes from "Concerto in F" and "American in Paris" as organ solos, and "Rhapsody in Blue" as a duet with Gould. The vocalists sang 16 Gershwin show tunes and Lowell lent his vocal prowess to "I Got Plenty of Nuttin'".

Lowell arrived on the scene to find over 500 enthusiasts packed into the 460 seat church. "Guess the Ger-



Lowell Ayars. Crowds packed the church but Lowell gives Gershwin all the credit. (Stufoto)

shwin reputation packed them in” mused a modest Lowell.

As for the idea of offering Gershwin played on a church organ, Lowell has thoughts “Whoever said that a 1947 church Moller couldn’t sound theatrical?” asks Ayars.

We wouldn’t dare!



The small screen offered a few scraps dealing with theatre organ since our last issue. Late night viewers may have caught a shot of Errol Flynn as John Barrymore in *Too Much Too Soon* doing a tantrum in his living room. In the background is a horseshoe console and a wall of display pipes, but no organ music is heard. Organ played a much larger part in *The Dead Don’t Die* (1975), now being scheduled on late night TV. Much of the action is played in the “Loveland Ballroom” and behind the dialogue can be heard an organ putting out with “Sunny Side of the Street,” “Bye Bye Blackbird,” “Million Dollar Baby” and “Object of My Affection” played for a gruelling ’30s-style dance marathon. At the close of one set the camera zooms in on a rather austere looking console while the organist takes a bow. It’s Chauncey Haines.

By far the most eye catching T.O. coverage came from Indianapolis. The CBS Morning News offered a brief reportage on the Paramount Music Hall pizzeria and its 4/42 pipe organ. It was the last item coming up 8:00 a.m. and the mini-camera showed the interior of the organ-dominated restaurant, then wandered into a chamber for some visual pipe symmetry while the music soared. Finally the camera came to rest on lovely Donna Parker at the console for a few seconds (without identifying her) then the programs credits were superimposed over chamber shots. Must have lasted a whole three minutes. The subject deserved more detailed coverage — especially Donna.



George Wright was in a happy mood for his November concert at San Gabriel (Cal.) Civic Auditorium, and it showed in his humor. His intro to one selection was an involved story about J.S. Bach’s “unknown” trip to the U.S.A. during his



Mail to . . . ATOS National Headquarters  
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**MUST BE POSTMARKED BY APRIL 11, 1981**

It is time to place names in nomination for the National ATOS Board of Directors for the two-year period from July, 1981 through June, 1983.

All those who wish to run in this election are asked to send a photo and short resume.

Written consent of the nominee is mandatory and must be received before the nominee’s name can be placed on the ballot.

lifetime. According to George, the German master joined a covered wagon settlers party going west. It was only natural that the great vistas of the westward journey would later be reflected in Bach’s music, and George revealed one result of the trip by sorta counterpointing on the 3/16 Wurlitzer (sans tremms) Bach’s “Jesu, Joy of Mans’ Desiring” with “Home on the Range.” At least he played them simultaneously and they fitted together remarkably well in his hands, much to the amusement of the full house (1492 seats) he always draws.

Later George gave enthusiastic plugs for organists Dan Bellomy and Jerry Nagano after spotting them in the audience.



The New York press is finally discovering Lee Erwin and his “Little Mother” theatre organ interludes at the Carnegie Hall Cinema in the basement of the famed concert hall. Both the *N.Y. Times* and the *Soho News* have run extensive stories about Lee and his silent movie shows which he takes on tour. The *Soho News* devoted considerable space to Lee’s views on cueing silent films; which in brief are: (1) avoid familiar music, (2) avoid playing music whose only connection with the scene is in

the tune’s title, (3) avoid adding crashes, bangs, gunshots, smacky kisses and other effects which poke fun at a film or distract, (4) compose an appropriate score for each movie accompanied. The *Soho News* is aimed at youngsters and Lee wanted to start them off with the attitude he hopes to find in his audiences.

One statement by Lee may cause arched eyebrows among Gothamites with long memories: “New York was never really much of an organ town,” meaning, the writer continues, that Lee feels that the organ never achieved the importance in this city (New York) that it had in other areas.



Have you missed anything, photos perhaps. The fewer photos in VOX POPs this issue is because the nice people who sent in the items just didn’t include many photos. We can use black and white snapshots, Polaroids included, in this column. Color pix are less useful, because they may or may not translate to monochrome required for publication. Many of this issue’s VOX POPs were enclosed with Season’s Greeting cards. We appreciate hearing from you. But don’t forget to send black and white photos to illustrate items. □