

THE PIZZA/PIPES EXPERIENCE

Part II

Story & Photos by Gary Konas

In Part I we explored the birth of the pizza/pipe parlor at Ye Olde Pizza Joynt in California; we then described many of the restaurants in the West that feature pipe organs. Here in Part II we'll continue our tour by sampling several places east of the Rockies. We'll conclude by listing several questions connected with the operation of such restaurants.

Heading East

We pick up our high-calorie odyssey in Texas. One general note about pizzerias in the Lone Star State: nearly all the organs are played at lunchtime as well as at night.

First stop: Austin, the home of Scampi's. Gail Hicks and Ralph Kies take turns playing the 3/11 Robert Morton, originally installed in 1925 in the Loew's Theatre, Canton, Ohio. Scampi's provides tables and chairs instead of the standard picnic table and bench arrangement.

Where else but Texas would you find feuding pizzeria owners? E.D. "Gene" Wood owns the two Pipe Organ Pizza locations in Houston and one in Richardson (near Dallas). Charles "Bud" Yeoman is the pro-

prietor of Scooby's Fun Factory in Houston and Landmark in Dallas. The competition may be perfectly cordial, but one has to wonder. One staff organist, who will remain nameless, told us that he would probably be fired if he were caught visiting one of the competitor's places.

The walls of Scooby's are lined with murals of (who else?) Scooby-Doo and other Hanna-Barbera cartoon characters; periodically some of them pop out in the flesh to play with kids. The organ is a 3/21 Wurlitzer out of Shea's Seneca Theatre in Buffalo, N.Y., and it's capably played by Jon Steen and John Steele.

Not to be outdone, Pipe Organ Pizza's menu shows Donald Duck proffering a pizza and Mickey Mouse playing an organ. The Memorial City location features a Wurlitzer billed as 3/30, though when we played it in April, 1980, there weren't nearly that many ranks playing. The original thirteen ranks came from the St. George Theatre on Staten Island. The Gulf Freeway location houses a Style 235 Wurlitzer (now nineteen ranks) out of the Palace Theatre in Memphis. Pipe Organ

Pizza's staff includes Steve Schling, and Bill Van Ornam, and no, they're not Mickey Mouse organists.

Time to move far to the north to the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. Cicero's #1 in St. Paul has a 3/12 hybrid played by Tony Tallman and Karl Gillers. Cicero's #2 in Edina is the home of lovely Beulah Barton. With measurements of 3/15 she doesn't look fifty, but she was installed in Hamilton, Ohio's Paramount Theatre in 1930. Mike Grandchamp and Mike Kline tickle her fancy nightly. Grandchamp, who named Ms. Barton, seems to have a hat or mask to go along with just about any song he's asked to play.

Moving now to Milwaukee, Wisc., we find two locations of Pipe Organ Pizza. The first, on W. Oklahoma, has a genuine hybrid. What started out as a Style D Wurlitzer in Cleveland has become, by addition of eight brands of pipework, plus a Moller console from Jersey City, a 4/20. Clark Wilson and Don Lorusso preside over this electro-pneumatic smorgasbord.

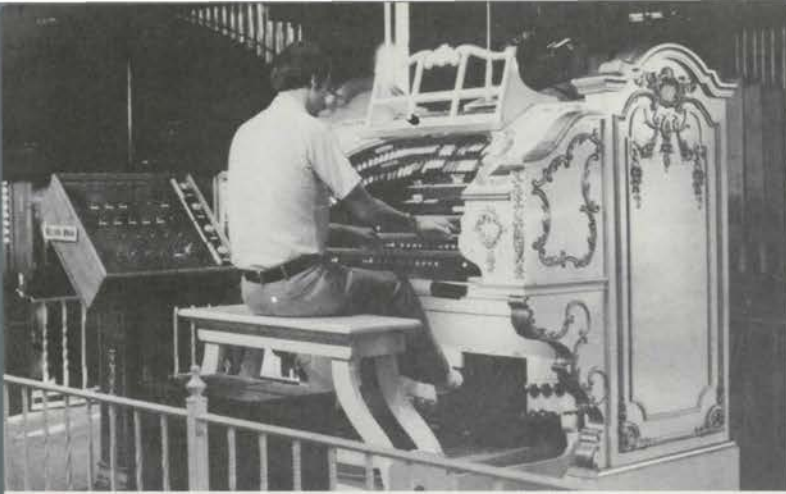
The organ in the Pipe Organ Pizza on W. Capitol has as its nucleus the 2/7 Wurlitzer that was housed in the Sheboygan Theatre until its removal in September, 1978. With the addition of Wurlitzer pipework and a Barton Kinura, it reached its present 2/12 status. Gary Hanson and Perry Petta are the organists.

As we move into Michigan we meet a man who is becoming a major force in the pizza/pipe industry, Ron Walls. So far he has opened two locations of Roaring 20s Pizza, both with large, highly-regarded organs. Plans include at least one more in Michigan and up to five in Canada.

The Roaring 20s of Grand Rapids features a 3/33 Wurlitzer. It came originally from the RKO Stanley Theatre in Jersey City, N.J. Before

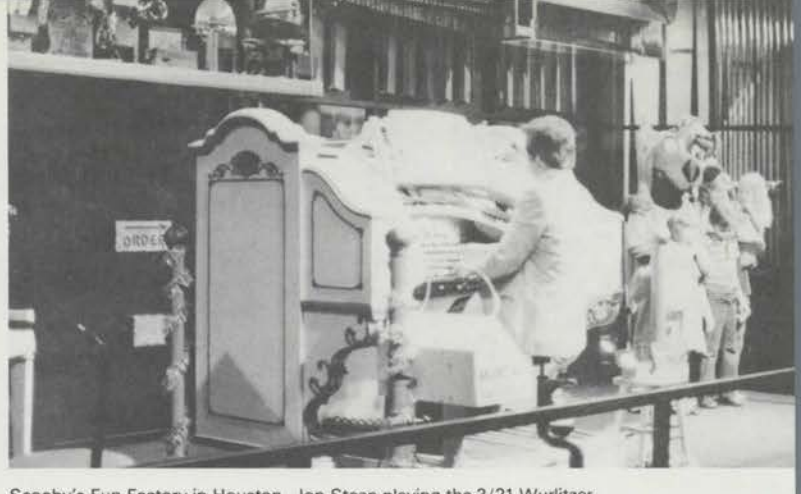
The 3/11 Robert Morton at Scampi's in Austin. Note tablecloths.





The author tries out the Houston Pipe Organ Pizza organ.

(Konas photo)



Scooby's Fun Factory in Houston. Jon Steen playing the 3/21 Wurlitzer.

(Konas photo)

installation a solid-state relay and combination action were put in. Five ranks have been added, including a Moller Post Horn and an Austin Trompette en Chamade. Charlie Balogh and Gary Reseigh share playing duties on this fine instrument.

The Roaring 20s Pizza of Okemos (East Lansing) has a 3/26 Wurlitzer that was assembled over several years by Ken Crome, who has installed several pizza organs lately. After selling his assemblage to Walls, Crome installed it in 1979 in the new pizzeria. The console, which is on a lift, has a solid-state combination action. Trompette en Chamade, Solo Post Horn and Brass Sax were built for this installation by Trivo, with 4' Principal and Mixture III by Organ Supply. Dave Russell is currently one of the staff organists here.

At both locations the organ is played: Monday, evening only; Tuesday-Thursday, lunchtime only; Friday-Sunday, afternoon and evening.

The newest major installation in Michigan is Henry Hunt and Ken Saliba's Pied Piper Pizza Peddler in Warren (near Detroit). The 3/22 Wurlitzer is out of the United Artists Theatre in Detroit. Hunt plans to add a nine-rank Rufatti classical division. Lance Luce and Karl Cole ride the mural-covered console up on a lift; glass shutters with a stained-glass look complete the colorful motif.

We next visit one of the country's major installations, Paramount Music Palace in Indianapolis. As the name hints, the nucleus of its organ came from the Oakland (Calif.) Paramount Theatre, which in 1931 took delivery on the last of seventeen 4/20 Paramount-Publix Wurlitzers built. John Ferguson has added voices, but judiciously.

Present specifications show 42 ranks, including six different Celeste ranks and a classic division, a separate percussion chamber, and toy counters containing thirty effects. The console is stunning: ebony with Art Deco designs in gold, bronze, copper and silver leaf.

Two experienced young concert artists, Donna Parker and Bill Vlasak, play this remarkable organ during lunch and dinner hours.

Pasquale's Pipe Organ Pizza is located in the Indianapolis suburb of Carmel, Indiana. Pasquale's is an example of the more intimate (seating only 90) neighborhood house. It features a 2/8 hybrid. The red console with ornate gold trim sits almost unelevated among the tables. Kurt Schakel and Rick Moore take turns playing nightly.

The Shady Nook Theatre Restaurant in Hamilton (near Cincinnati), Ohio, seats only 125, but it has a big organ. A Wurlitzer, originally from well-known Cincinnati radio station WLW, was installed in 1968, and it has grown to its present 4/30 size. Specifications include such unusual reeds as Cornet and French Trumpet, four 16' reeds, two 16' strings, and a Baldwin grand piano on stage to complement the Wurlitzer piano under expression. The man who presides over all these goodies is Carl Creager.

We find yet another intimate setting at the Lamplighter Inn in Olmstead Falls, Ohio. In 1947 this supper club installed a 3/11 Kimball intact, without additions, from the Variety Theatre in Cleveland. Their claim to have the first and longest operating supper club installation is probably quite valid.

We head almost due south now to view J. Burns Pizza & Pipes in Tampa, Florida. The 3/20 "mostly Wur-

litzer" has a white console that appears to have had a stoprail and maybe a manual added at some time. It is scheduled to be replaced by a four-manual console. Charlie Stanford, Tom Hoehn, and Lindsey Phelps play on a rotating basis, with two of them playing each night.

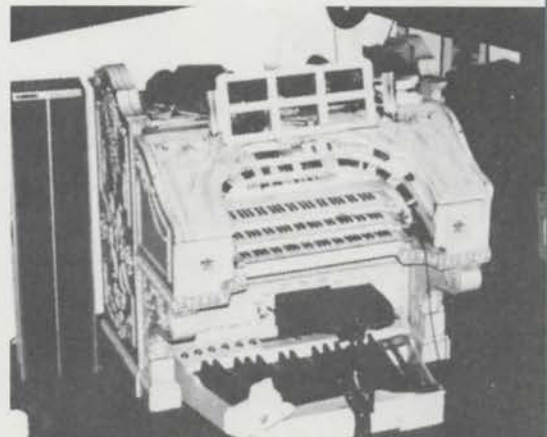
Back north again to Toronto's Organ Grinder. A 3/12 Wurlitzer, originally from a theatre in Milwaukee, Wisc., is played nightly and all day on weekends by Don Thompson and Craig Stevens.

Our Eastern tour ends in Wanaque, N.J., home of the Suburban Restaurant. Frank Cimmino plays the Wurlitzer Model 260 Special, Opus 1793, Wednesday through Sunday. The organ, now 3/17 with the addition of Morton Tibia and Vox, was originally installed in 1927 in the RKO Chester Theatre in the Bronx. It's been in its present home since 1971. In keeping with the nature of the present setting (a restaurant), the percussions are all under expression in a separate chamber.

ISSUES AND ANSWERS

Now that we've sampled pizza/pipes installations all around the country, it might be instructive to step back and ask some questions

"Beulah Barton" — the 3/15 Barton in Cicero's No. 2, Edina.





Ron Walls.



Charlie Balogh.



Karl Cole.



Don Lorusso.

about today's situation and that of the future.

1). What kind of music is being played, and by what kind of organist? The playing ability and musical taste of today's restaurant organists vary considerably. Some seem content to turn on all the percussions and play the same overworked material every hour, night after night. Others play concert-quality arrangements of requested numbers, and frequently manage to slip in worthy nonrequested pieces. The latter type makes a more lasting positive impression on the general listener.

Why? If the crowd only asks for "Star Wars" and "Chattanooga Choo-Choo," why not give them only that? Our experience shows that while people have limited imagination in making requests, most enjoy a wide range of music. In other words, the organist can play numbers that the listener didn't *know* he wanted to hear. The result is a more satisfied listener who is likely to come back another time to hear more.

Fortunately, many fine young organists are now entering the job market. Since employment opportunities for theatre pipe organists are rather limited, many of the best are finding themselves playing in pizza parlors.

This leads to the next question: 2). Does this situation help or hurt concert business? One can argue that the pizza parlor provides the customer a nightly "free" concert (assuming that he was going to eat out anyway), giving him less incentive to attend local ATOS-sponsored concerts. In some cases the pizza parlor may cause some decrease in concert attendance. However, there are positive factors to consider, too. For example, as all the new pizza parlors in

Michigan, Indiana, and surrounding areas become established, there will undoubtedly be concerts at these places with guest artists from other pizzerias in the area. There will be a built-in audience for these concerts, namely the regular patrons of the host pizzeria. It should be fairly easy to convince people that the format and repertoire of a concert differ from that of the regular nightly routine. Add local ATOS members to the audience and the result will be success.

3). To what extent should the pizza/pipe format be geared to children? Toy counter sound effects and exposed percussions have always held the attention of kids, and these devices help to make the theatre organ interesting to all those poten-

tial future ATOS'ers. However, new competition is developing in the form of other family-oriented pizza formats, for example the Pizza Time Theatre chain. These offer live-animated animals and free pinball machine tokens to entertain kids.

We don't know yet what effect such chains will have nationwide. We have, though, seen one specific example where the pizza/pipe place, located in a city having a new Pizza Time Theatre, has installed apparatus for kids to play on, supplemented by free pinball machine tokens. We worry about the effects of such distractions on the organist and his music, unless they are put in a separate room away from the organ.

Is it possible to have a successful family-oriented pizza/pipe opera-



Author Gary Konas.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gary Konas lives in Northern California where one of his interests is wine culture. Another interest is pipe organs; he's been "pipe happy" ever since he heard his first George Wright record. He is currently playing concerts and made a fine impression on California State Fair audi-

ences, playing the 2/7 Wurlitzer in the Golden Bear Theatre on the fairgrounds at Sacramento. This is his second feature assignment for THEATRE ORGAN Magazine; a previous story dealt with an organ in a winery. For this story he visited the places he writes about in this round-up of "eatery organs."

tion without noisy games, without kids running amock and turning in dozens of request slips? Yes, Portland's Organ Grinder, for one, proves it (see Part 1).

4). Does the future of the pipe organ-equipped restaurant appear to be rosy or dim? Let's first consider the nonpizza type of restaurant. There are relatively few of them, and we can think of at least three in Northern California that have removed their pipe organs. Nevertheless, there are a few having sufficient longevity to indicate that they have found a niche. Suburban, Shady Nook and Lamplighter Inn are prime examples.

For the pizza parlor, it all started in California, and the fact is that many in that state have either gone out of business or have sold their organs. Is this a trend that will sweep across the country? Not likely. Most of the closures seem to be due to one or more of the following: a) poor location; b) an organ, or organist, of insufficient quality to generate interest.

Some failures are harder to explain. Still, overall the evidence indicates that a well-located restaurant with a large, professionally restored and installed organ, and with excellent staff organists will almost always succeed. Oh, yes, the food had better be good, too! We cite as an example one place that had a fine organ and an excellent organist, yet was doomed because of consistently poor food.

It's gratifying to see that most of the new pizza/pipe places are striving to learn from their forerunners to evolve into successful operations. For this reason, we think the pizza/pipe experience will be an enjoyable one for years to come.

CLOSING NOTE

We'd like to thank all the restaurant owners, managers and organists who took the time to supply us with information. Due to the lag time between interview and publication, plus the fact that things are happening quickly in this business, inaccuracies are inevitable. We repeat the



2/8 hybrid in Pasquale's Pipe Organ Pizza, Carmel, Indiana.

advice given last time that you call before visiting a restaurant to find out who is playing and when. Below you will find a table listing basic information on all places we know of east of the Rockies. □

Where the Eatery Organs are Playing East and Midwest

Organ Grinder 2370 W. Alameda Ave., Denver, CO 80223 3/37 Wurlitzer (303) 934-5864	Pipe Organ Pizza 7114 Capitol Dr., Milwaukee, WI 53216 2/12 Wurlitzer (414) 462-8082
Scampi's Organ Palace 5555 N. Lamar Blvd. B-110, Austin, TX 78751 3/11 Robert Morton (512) 451-1115	Organ Grinder 4353 S. 108th, Milwaukee, WI 53228 3/28 Moller, Tuesday-Sunday (414) 529-1177
Scooby's Fun Factory 141 Greens Rd., Houston, TX 77070 3/21 Wurlitzer (713) 443-7477	Roaring 20s Pizza 4515 28th St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49508 3/33 Wurlitzer (616) 942-6460
Pipe Organ Pizza 245 Memorial City Shopping Ctr., Houston, TX 77024 3/30 Wurlitzer (713) 464-4621	Roaring 20s Pizza 1850 Newman Rd., Okemos, MI 48864 3/26 Wurlitzer (517) 349-6330
Landmark Pipes & Pizza 6522 E. Northwest Hwy., Dallas, TX 75231 3/11 Barton (214) 692-7027	Pied Piper Pizza Peddler 28400 Dequindre Rd., Warren, MI 48092 3/22 Wurlitzer (313) 751-6770
Pipe Organ Pizza 8539 Gulf Freeway, Houston, TX 77017 3/19 Wurlitzer (713) 947-2944	Theatre Organ Pizza & Pipes 4507 South Blvd. E., Pontiac, MI 48057 3/21 Hybrid (313) 334-0775
Pipe Organ Pizza 362 Promenade Ctr., Richardson, TX 75080 3/21 Wurlitzer (214) 231-5608	Paramount Music Palace 7560 Old Trails Rd., Indianapolis, IN 46219 4/42 Wurlitzer, Tuesday-Sunday (317) 352-0144
Old St. Louis Noodle Factory 14 Maryland Plaza, St. Louis, MO 63108 (314) 367-3673	Pasquale's Pipe Organ Pizza 2284 E. 116th St., Carmel, IN 46032 2/8 Hybrid (317) 844-0145
Cicero's #1 2100 N. Snelling Ave., St. Paul, MN 55113 3/12 Hybrid (612) 631-0250	Band Organ Restaurant 211 E. Day Rd., Mishawaka, IN 46544 3/25 Wurlitzer (219) 259-0050
Cicero's #2 7101 France Ave. South, Edina, MN 55435 3/15 Barton (612) 925-3344	Village Inn Pizza 4224 Coldwater Rd., Fort Wayne, IN 46805 3/12 Barton (219) 484-9054
Diamond Jim's 801 Sibley Mem. Hwy., St. Paul, MN 55118 2/7 Wurlitzer (612) 457-6610	Shady Nook Theatre Rest. 879 Millville-Oxford Rd., Hamilton, OH 45013 4/30 Wurlitzer, Tuesday-Sunday (513) 863-4343
Sally's Stage 6335 N. Western, Chicago, IL 60645 3/11 Barton (312) 764-0990	Lamplighter Inn 7068 Columbia Rd., Olmsted Falls, OH 44138 3/11 Kimball (216) 235-4116
Sally's Stage #2 800 E. Roosevelt, Lombard, IL 60148 3/10 Barton (312) 620-1000	J. Burns Pizza & Pipes 103 E. Fowler Ave., Tampa, FL 33612 3/20 Hybrid (813) 933-7691
Pipe Organ Pizza 3110 W. Peterson, Chicago, IL 60645 (312) 973-3836	Organ Grinder 58 The Esplanade, Toronto, Ont. M5Z 1A6 3/12 Wurlitzer (416) 368-1726
Pipe Organ Pizza 620 W. Oklahoma, Milwaukee, WI 53215 4/20 Hybrid (414) 744-9790	The Suburban Restaurant Belvedere Ave., Wanaque, NJ 07465 3/17 Wurlitzer, Wednesday-Sunday (201) 835-3903

*All organs played nightly unless otherwise noted.