

A Tale of Two Dreams

by Gwen O'Connor

Dreams do come true, as Terry Robson will tell you, with a lot of searching, hard work and persistence in pursuit of that dream. The realization of his dream is now available for all to share at the Roseway Theatre, 72nd and Sandy, Portland, Oregon.

Terry was first drawn to organs about age 11, and by the time he was 13 he had a small Kimball. Pipe organ recordings stirred up this dream of his. In the mid-sixties he tried to buy the old tubular pneumatic Estey from the Vancouver, Washington, School for the Blind, but someone outbid him. He discovered ATOS in the early '70s and found that pipe organs were for sale.

"Robert Morton Organ Builders, Van Nuys, California." So reads the plate on the console. According to Terry, this is the last instrument to be manufactured and installed by the Robert Morton company, completed in January 1930. If there is other information, Terry would like to know about it. This organ was installed in the First Christian Church in downtown Portland. It started its life in the church as a 3/20 instrument, having four Flutes, six Strings, six Reeds, and four Diapasons. Changing times and music programs brought a desire for a new instrument for the church.

In August 1977 the organ was purchased by Terry Robson, Dr. Gordon Potter and Dick Raupach, with the idea that Terry would have parts of the main organ for his dream of a small theatrical instrument; the other two would have the other parts for their use. As Terry says, the organ begins a second life in the Roseway Theatre with the same key-desk and eight sets of pipes: Tibia, Concert Flute, Viole, Salicional, Salicional Celeste, Vox Humana, Oboe Horn, and Diapason. It is all Robert Morton except the Tibia regulator and tremulant, which are Wurlitzer. A Kimball Glockenspiel has been added. Plans for the future are to open up the chamber on the right side of the proscenium and add five or six more ranks of pipes.

Terry had been elected Chairman of the Oregon Chapter of ATOS, but resigned later to put all his efforts into the organ installation, which was begun in May 1980. The big opening was on June 23, 1981, with the screen presentation of *The Gold Rush*, Charlie Chaplin's most-remembered film.

The Roseway Theatre, built in 1924, is one of Portland's remaining neighborhood theatres. Through the years it has survived the changing scene in entertainment. The coming of sound pictures resulted in the removal of the original organ. By 1979 the Roseway (which once sold "standing room only" tickets for the back of the auditorium) had torn seats, stained carpets and showed the neglect that came with the changes. "The 70 million people who weekly attended the movies dwindled to 22 million." As we know, distributors

interested in volume rather than art came up with cell-like block buildings more suitable for warehouses than entertainment centers. The large opulent houses like the Orpheum and the Oriental had gone down with the wrecker's ball, and many of the neighborhood theatres had traded beautiful auditoriums for two or three small bare screens.

The Roseway stands today as a pleasant phenomenon in northeast Portland. It is the realization of a dream held by Dave Jones and David Evans. In 1979 they set out to restore the theatre to its original grandeur. With the installation of the Robert Morton 3/8 pipe organ by the Roseway Pipe Organ Foundation, this theatre houses the only operating pipe organ in a Portland theatre.

The lobby features a carpet of Art Deco design, a single piece some seventy feet long that was specially woven for the theatre, and thousands of dollars worth of stained and etched glass depicting the famous studio logos. The uniformed staff serves Cappuccino and Espresso coffee, imported candies, Perrier, and fresh popcorn with real butter that's rumored to be the best in town. In

Terry Robson at the Roseway Theatre's 3/8 Robert Morton.



the auditorium, patrons sink into rocking chair seats, watch the forty-foot waterfall curtain rise, and enjoy the great old films of the '30s and '40s. The whole theatre is remarkably clean and comfortable, and the picture on the screen often looks and sounds better than first-run films elsewhere.

The theatre regularly sells all its 533 seats on weekends, and weekday crowds are not far behind. The Roseway has succeeded in recapturing the magic that movie-going once was.

The Roseway Pipe Organ Foundation was incorporated by Terry Robson, Christine Tobkin and Patricia Massey in July 1980. It is an Oregon nonprofit corporation for the purpose of demonstrating how the organ was used in the theatre. The organ was an integral part of the theatre-going experience; it created moods and atmosphere, sometimes overshadowing the movie itself, becoming the main feature.

They plan to show silent classics several times a year, provide intermission music and a regular schedule of concerts. At present there is a weekly schedule of outstanding movies of the '30s and '40s (many of the top musicals of that time) — double features, running from Wednesday through Tuesday, with live pipe organ on Thursday through Saturday. For a nominal fee, the organ will be available to groups and individuals who wish practice time. All proceeds are going to the maintenance and expansion of the organ, and to the various programs using it.

The Roseway organist is Gerry Gregorius. He is not a newcomer to the theatre organ or the fine art of silent film accompaniment. A graduate of Oberlin Conservatory with degrees in both piano and organ, he also studied a year at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria. Gerry is currently the staff musician for Nevah Shalom Synagogue and organist/choirmaster at Grace Memorial Episcopal Church. He has been the staff pianist for the Northwest Film Center for the past nine and one-half years, and he was organist at the Lamplighter Inn in Cleveland, Ohio, and at Uncle Milt's Pizza Parlor, Vancouver, Washington. He is a past president of the Oregon Chapter of the ATOS, as well as its past secretary/treasurer. He has played many concerts for the chapter. □

BOOK REVIEW



The Organ Literature Foundation, 45 Norfolk Road, Braintree, Massachusetts 02184, announces the availability of the following publications:

Vocalion Organs. This 24-page reproduction was originally issued in 1888. The booklet would appeal to church organ enthusiasts, and contains several pages of testimonials. Price is \$3.50 plus \$1.50 for U.S.A. mailing, \$3.00 for foreign.

Duo-Art Aeolian Pipe Organ by George Ashdown Audsley. A 27-page booklet first circulated in 1921. There are ten pictures of the roll players, designed for attaching to Aeolian pipe organs in homes. Price is \$5.00 plus \$1.50 for U.S.A. mailing, \$3.00 for foreign.

The Cinema and Theatre Organ by Reginald Whitworth. This 112-page soft-cover book contains eight pictures, 36 diagrams and drawings, plus a number of specifications of organs in England and abroad. This English text was written in 1932 and the front cover shows the main console of the New York Roxy Kimball. The cut-away views of the inner

(Photo from "FOX — The Last Word . . .")



workings of a theatre pipe organ should be of interest to all enthusiasts, old and new. Excellent drawings of pipes, percussions and toy counters are included. For those who like the technical treatment, the installers and maintenance personnel, this book should be of considerable assistance. Price is \$15.00, plus \$1.50 for U.S. mailing, \$3.00 for foreign.

Lloyd E. Klos

FOX — The Last Word . . . by Preston J. Kaufmann. 380 pages, 600 illustrations, 9" x 12", hardbound. Available from Showcase Publications, P.O. Box 40165, Pasadena, CA 91104. Price \$35, plus \$3.95 shipping. California residents add 6% sales tax (applicable Bay Area counties, 6½%).

Popular demand among theatre and organ buffs has made a second printing necessary for this book about the San Francisco Fox Theatre.

Although the author was never in the theatre, he has done a masterful job of documenting the construction, life and demolition of the ornate movie palace. His research involved contacts with nearly 300 individuals and companies, and the whole project covered a span of ten years, resulting in a massive book with a wealth of illustrations, some in color.

For those who attended the Fox Theatre reading the book will bring back fond memories. Those who never saw the theatre will get a detailed tour of a fantastic palace, the like of which will never be built again. □