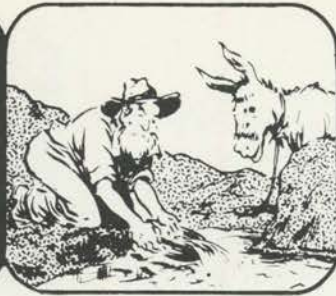


# NUGGETS

from the  
**GOLDEN DAYS**

Prospected  
by Lloyd E. Klos



Detroit, which is hosting its third ATOS Convention this year, was a good theatre organ town back in the great days, too, as this collection of nuggets will prove. References were *Metronome (Met.)* and *Motion Picture Herald (MPH)*.

*July 1, 1927 (Met.)* In 1909 in a small town in Iowa, F. DONALD MILLER, at the age of 12, began his career in motion-picture playing. It was in a theatre where three reels comprised the show, two shows a night, with matinee on Saturday. Don played the piano nights and went to school in the daytime. He started at a salary of \$3 a week and at the end of his first year, was raised to \$7. By this time, a "trap drummer" had been added to this one-man orchestra. It all sounds funny now, but it was a beginning.

As time went on, the two, three, four, and five-reel features were introduced, and Don's musicianship improved accordingly. From the very first, the art of improvisation was foreseen, and every opportunity was seized in this line. He also took up organ study with the hope that the theatre would soon install a unit orchestra. This did occur later.

Don received his early musical instruction from his mother, she being a very fine pianist. His father and sister were also very musical, and this environment helped to stimulate his interest. A separate music room at home afforded plenty of atmosphere for study, and often Don practiced long into the night, improvising melodies and groping for the harmony which has now come into our modern American compositions. You might say Don's harmony is "futuristic," but it has always registered strong with his audiences. To be a thorough theatre organist, he says, "one must be well acquainted with all branches of music, dance, jazz, religious, and foremost of all, he must have a natural talent for improvisation, and understand the construction of the classics."

Other sidelines were taken up by Don, such as court reporter, automobile salesman and the study of law. He sold his music library at one time, thinking he was not cut out as a musician, but in spite of this, he was drawn back into music, stronger than ever.

Don Miller has played in theatres throughout the country. Before coming to the State Theatre in Detroit in July 1926, he was at the new \$5 million Hollywood Beach Hotel in Hollywood-By-The-Sea, Florida, where he gave daily organ recitals. In Detroit, his organ solos have gained in popularity, and one of the leading newspapers recently acclaimed him as "Detroit's most popular organist." His solos are comprised of classics and popular numbers, and a great vein of originality runs through all of them. Some people have said his success has been due to his magnetic personality; others say because of his technical skill. But, it's a combination of both.

Surely, the future holds nothing but the best for this

talented young organist. "And may the gods be with him."

*October 24, 1931 (MPH)* JACK FRANZ, at Detroit's Fox Theatre, plays "Seasonal Songs" and the way the crowd joins in, the singing is great. Franz is as smooth an organist as ever fingered a console key, slipping gently from one melody to the next without a pause. "Guilty" is the first number, followed by "Me," "Dream a Little Dream" and "Just One More Chance." As a change, the next slides offer a chorus of "Two Hearts in 3/4 Time" in German. Even that didn't stump the customers, who joined in with a vim which showed many had more than a casual acquaintance with the foreign tongue.

*November 28, 1931 (MPH)* ROBERT G. CLARKE, at Detroit's Hollywood, just to prove to the home-town folk that this city is famous for something more than autos, puts over an original specialty called "Detroit's Tin Pan Alley." Using a scrim drop in front of the speakers, and a hidden announcer, the piece opens with a few words about Seymour Simons, who turned out "Honey" and "Waiting For a Call From You." Words for both songs are thrown onto the screen and the audience tests its lung power. Then follow "Nothing to Do But Love," by Gerald Marks; "With You on My Mind," by Buddy Fields; "Ninety-nine Out of a Hundred" by Al Lewis; and for a windup, Dick Whiting's "Till We Meet Again." The local angle seems to get 'em.

*June 18, 1932 (MPH)* LEW BETTERLY, at Detroit's RKO Downtown, appears to be finally settling with some ease into his surroundings here. The solo "A Lecture on Applause," is undoubtedly his best performance since his first appearance here over a month ago. Heretofore, there has been more evidence of his ability in incidental playing between screen units than in his actual solos. He has probably been making too great a conscious effort to please. The week's program includes a number of hand-appeal slides, such as a beer stein and a symbol of prosperity. The lyric numbers are "Dream Sweetheart," "Paradise" (with whistling lines), "By the Fireside" and "Somebody Loves You." The last proves a good choice for a strong finish. Betterly's first program on opening day included a tongue-twister composed of an alliteration of M's. In his second show, he substituted a sibilant tongue-twister which drew decidedly better response. Altogether a splendid reception from a sparse house.

*August 27, 1932 (MPH)* MERLE CLARK, at Detroit's Michigan Theatre, has experienced a determination to teach this audience community singing. He does not believe that the idea can be conveyed with any enthusiasm, merely through slides. Consequently, his solos are characterized by generous use of the mike. He opens this week by telling the audience that he is challenging their wits with a musical crossword puzzle, and asks for a 3-letter word, meaning "wordless vocalizing." The answer is "hum" and the song accompanying it is "I'm Hummin' to Myself." The stunt is followed with "My Silent Love," "Down By the Old Mill Stream" (with a rebus lyric), "One Hour With You" and "In My Hideaway." Clark, in a very good voice, sings "It Was So Beautiful."

Detroit is one of our favorite cities. We attended our first convention there in 1967, and were greatly honored by receipt of ATOS Honorary Membership in 1974. So long, sourdoughs!

Jason & The Old Prospector