



## Letters to the Editors

Letters concerning all aspects of the theatre organ hobby are welcome. Unless clearly marked "not for publication" letters may be published in whole or in part.

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Opinions expressed in this column are those of the correspondents, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors or the policies of ATOS or THEATRE ORGAN magazine.

Dear Mr. Gilbert:

I found the "President's Message" in the March/April magazine very interesting. Why is ATOS not better known?

Are you aware that during the past three years there have been several TV specials and one motion picture in which theatre organs should have been used, but were not even mentioned? Several months ago a TV special about old-time radio presented still-living stars, the big bands, comedy sketches, news, soap operas and memorials to deceased stars, but there was not one mention of either organs or organists, despite the fact that they were the mainstay of radio broadcasting for many years. During the "Ann Margret Special" from Radio City Music Hall, everything in the theatre — backstage, mechanical equipment, lighting, Rockettes, operating personnel, former stars, and orchestra were presented — but again there was not a mention of the theatre organ. A TV film a couple of years back was based on the history of the silent movie and used pianos and orchestras, but no theatre organs. Just a few weeks ago there was a special from Radio City Music Hall and this time we were privileged to hear the organ for about eight bars of "Tocatta and Fugue" before it was drowned out by the orchestra. There was even a quick shot of the console and organist, but if you blinked you missed it. The organist was not listed when the credits were run at the conclusion of the program.

How can we expect to have recognition for theatre organs when they are not included where they belong

and when no protest is made? Surely we are a large enough organization that we can protest these omissions. Perhaps we even have the talent to write an acceptable "special" about theatre organs. There have been many shows about big bands, vaudeville and musical stars. Why not one about theatre organs and organists past and present?

As do many special interest groups, perhaps we should have a representative who would make it his job to be aware of planned TV shows and movies and serve as liaison between ATOS and the producers of shows where theatre organs should be used. We'll never gain recognition without exposure.

BOB LONGFIELD

Dear Lloyd:

The death of my friend, Jay Quinby, as reported in the November/December THEATRE ORGAN, brought back many fond memories, since we were once neighbors in Summit, New Jersey.

One afternoon Jay called me, obviously quite excited. "Bill, c'mon over. I have a new rank in the organ!" I went over and began a search for it on the stop rail. "Start playing," Jay commanded. I did, and then he flipped a switch. The result sounded like a diesel locomotive coming through the room! Jay had tuned a series of fire alarm horns, activated by Freon gas. A complete scale, about an octave, but each note was enough to make the most respectable Post Horns blush with shame!

Jay was not without humor. He

had acquired the stately Skinner four-manual draw-knob console from Christ Church Cathedral in Boston. This he hooked into the Moller-U.S.-Wurlitzer, but re-engraved the knobs with rather risqué titles such as 32' Contra-septiv or 8' Keepsem from Vloppin.

Once Jay called M. P. Moller to "build me the biggest Tibia ever!" Moller obliged by building the largest ever seen. At one point on the scale, it's a perfect cube!

Jay once built a harpsichord. "Never again," he muttered when the ticklish job was done. He was scheduled to leave for Cincinnati in the morning for the annual race of the stern-wheelers "Delta Queen" and "The Belle of Louisville." It was three in the morning, and after putting the finishing touches to the instrument, he bolted upstairs to awaken sleeping wife, Margaret. "C'mon down and try the harpsichord," he pleaded.

Best of all, I remember the quiet evenings when, after a bash on the pipe organ, we'd congregate in a corner of the massive living room to enjoy the ethereal music as played by Margaret on her beautiful Lyon & Healey harp. Jay was happy and proud as his wife wove the beautiful patterns of music.

No one ever visited the Quinby home who was not asked to the basement where a beautiful large-scale model train layout was set up. Jay built its every part, and it was run by a real locomotive control which he had acquired from the New Haven Railroad when he was on its Board of Directors. There was a variety of trainmen's caps, etc., which one was induced to wear to enter into the spirit of the occasion.

Being a neighbor and knowing Jay Quinby, was a privilege I will always cherish.

Bill Floyd,  
Richmond, Virginia

Dear Sir:

Despite the AGO being in existence many years more than the ATOS, it has been a continuing study in paucity of spirit, lack of focus and the generally inconsequential regarding the welfare of the classical organ nationally. This is a warning to us in the theatre organ field, because the ATOS so far has let twenty-five years

pass doing so little better as not to warrant a good argument. What has been accomplished has been done almost entirely by a few chapters, rather than as the result of any guidance and impetus from the national level. It has taken a quarter century to do what could have been done in ten years maximum if strong leadership and professional standards had been honored from its inception. Now, always there should be room for all people and activities at what is called the "hobby" level. Such make their contributions and can be a sort of "spawning ground" for reaching those whose interest is just beginning. However, all of that never has brought ATOS to its chief reason for being, its Why. Pseudo-pious declarations and breastbeatings long since have come to fall on deaf ears because they stand revealed as hollow. What is needed from the national level is what can inspire, challenge and motivate chapters to put the *public welfare* of Theatre Organ first, first before any and all matters which otherwise may concern any individual chapter. Specifically, what is needed from the national level is *leadership* setting examples in *integrity* and *quality*. This means integrity in every policy and dealing; this means quality in everything planned and in the terms done. There is a veritable syndrome in the ATOS about quantity and it has been the bane of everything from content of the national magazine to the planning of convention events. Quantity has utterly *no* meaning *or* value in itself. Any meaning and value it may have will come in direct proportion to the amount of its *quality*. LEADERSHIP, INTEGRITY, QUALITY: those are the essentials. Because they were ignored or compromised countless times in past years, everything finally became shortcircuited. Theatre organ was left out in the cold like Cinderella . . . or . . . more like Little Eva stranded on the ice flow!

The national magazine is the prime focus of unity and chief means of communication. No more important need demands attention than its being organized and published on the basis of standards known universally as *professional*. For all the activities in non-professional terms proper to private occasions, the national leadership and the national

magazine should honor *professional standards*. Such standards, *alone*, in every human endeavor, provide a basis for strength, quality and longevity. What *must* be understood and put into practice is the truth that *only* professional standards provide assurance of the theatre organ having any future. The national magazine reaches every member and the example it sets in content and presentation can be, should be, must be a thrust of leadership and challenge. Coupled with this must be national board working policies which equally will challenge and inspire chapters always to put into public view only what is FIRST CLASS in instrument, in programming, in performance and in promotion. Even if only one public event is presented annually by a group, that can accomplish wonders, *providing* it honors professional standards on both sides of the footlights. The public does know and has access to all that is First Class from all other sources of

music. The years are long gone when it could be fooled about this. Strong leadership is needed to open the eyes of chapter officials to this reality, because mediocre to poor presentations of theatre organ in public are deadly to its future. There are countless tragic examples of this filling the history of the ATOS.

There is still much ignorance because there is still much isolation. Information, guidance, challenge and professional standards in the magazine's every section and in every national policy are *mandatory* if the chapters in turn ever are to start fulfilling their potential. There is no question of chronic need; the only question is, will there be enough bravery and determination to make the next twenty-five years count? How can we even *dare* to "mess around" with any motive less than seeing to it that the theatre organ is returned to the mainstream of American musical life?!

BILLY NALLE □

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## Closing Chord

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Long-time Connecticut Valley Chapter member, **John F. Starr**, died on January 3 at the age of 65, and will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

John Starr was a theatre pipe organ buff who realized a dream, his own theatre pipe organ museum which he called "The Crystal Palace." It was located in West Goshen. Housed in a building which John himself built, the museum contained 206 theatre seats and carpet from the Paramount Theatre in New Haven. The crystal chandeliers from which it took its name were from the Allyn Theatre in Hartford. CVTOS member Paul Taylor frequently lent a hand with some facets of the project.

The Crystal Palace boasted a 3/13 Wurlitzer, two pianos, a 70-year-old Aeolian Orchestrall, and an Everett Orgatron, all collected and installed by the owner in his spare time over a period of four years.

The organ could best be described as a Starr, Serial No. 1. Like the building in which it was housed, the organ was a resounding tribute to

John's inspiration — and perspiration. The console was from the Capitol Theatre in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The organ in the main chamber came from the Melrose Theatre in the Bronx, New York, and the solo organ from the Garde Theatre, New London, Connecticut. Other parts came from such diverse locales as

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