

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 □

Closing Chord

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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Boston, Providence, Buffalo, North Tonawanda and various other points east and west. It included a Piano, Marimba, Harp, Xylophone, Chryso-glott, Glockenspiel, sleigh bells, saucer bells, Swiss bells, orchestra bells, two sets of chimes, drums, car horns, cymbals and many other sounds. Allen Miller advised him on such technical phases of the organ as voicing and tonal balance.

A Connecticut Valley Chapter meeting on November 10, 1973, marked the official opening of "The Crystal Palace," and was only the first of many chapter meetings held in these ideal surroundings. On Saturday evenings and Sunday afternoons the Palace featured organ music and a silent movie. Unfortunately, the energy crunch and skyrocketing costs forced John Starr to close "The Crystal Palace" in 1976 and offer its contents for sale. He donated his extensive and precious store of silent films to the Connecticut Valley Chapter library.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Thomaston Opera House Historical Commission, 52 Main Street, Thomaston, Connecticut 06787.

JUNE L. GAREN

Five years ago, Patty Barnes worked for Dick Simonton, managing his organ tours of England. During her travels with the group in Britain she met organist **Rod Skelding** and a romance developed. Patty returned to the states with the group, but the romance continued by mail and by trans-Atlantic phone calls. Rod came to the United States, specifically to Los Angeles where Patty was. They were married in the Simonton home.

Patty started a travel agency and Rod became a salesman for a Los Angeles organ store. For a time Rod was active in the Los Angeles chapter of ATOS, then he concentrated on his work, which rewarded him with the assistant managership of the most prestigious music store on Los Angeles' fabled Wilshire Boulevard.

On March 22, Rod locked up the store a little before 8:00 p.m., then apparently walked to his vehicle in the nearby parking lot. What happened then is not clear, but it was later determined that attempts had been made to jimmy a car door. Evi-



Rod Skelding.

dently, Rod surprised the criminal, who turned vicious. Rod was shot and with waning strength made his way to Wilshire Boulevard, where he collapsed and died, just before police arrived.

A memorial meeting was held at the home of his long-time friend, Ralph Sargent, and Candi Carley played "Memories of You" for Rod at her concert a few days later.

Rod was born in the north of England. He began lessons on the piano at the age of five, turning to the organ at 14. During his career as an organist in England he played at the famous Tower Ballroom and broadcast on Radio Manchester.

The photo of Rod was taken by Ashley Miller in September of 1978 at Radio City Music Hall. Rod and Patty had waited until the theatre cleared at 1:00 a.m. for him to have a chance to play the Wurlitzer.

A member of Nor-Cal Chapter has written of pleasant memories of Rod as a "one-man welcoming committee" upon the arrival in Manchester of the "Organ Safari '76" tour group.

One of the super great minds and musicians of the first era of theatre organ departed this life in late March and we all are much the poorer. The man and musician was **Dick Hull**, a Denver resident for several years.

We should envy those who had oc-

casional to hear him make music, beginning in Rochester, New York in his theatre years. They tell me, and I believe them, that his accomplishments were born of superb playing and extraordinary musical sensitivity. He recorded only little, including one album at The Three Coins restaurant in Denver. For some friends, he made a tape recording on a four-rank Morton theatre organ in that area. Never in this life would most people ever believe how much music in how much variety he managed while improvising on that "little bit-ty." It was a stunning revelation of the man and what he could do in creating a great musical tapestry with only minimal means.

That Dick retired from public playing in the mid-sixties means that many of today's players, as well as many listeners, never heard him and have no faint notion of his being a musical giant. That is the highest irony, given all the untold stories of how much he contributed in music and example.

When "The Saints Go Marchin' In," and you see Helen and Jesse Crawford, Eddie Dunstedter, Buddy Cole, Quentin Maclean and Sidney Torch leading the procession, look again and you'll see Dick Hull.

BILLY NALLE

Helen Ankner (Kondolf), one of the best-known theatre and radio or-

ganists in Rochester, New York, died on March 28, 1982.

A native of Montour Falls, New York, her early education was in Elmira schools, and she served as organist in Elmira's Majestic Theatre. She enrolled in the Eastman School of Music in 1927, and, in time began to accompany the silents in the Eastman Theatre. She became staff organist and pianist at WHAM in 1928, subbed at the RKO Palace in 1932, and for several months was at the Century Theatre. For four years after her marriage, she taught piano at the Richter School in Philadelphia. Returning to Rochester, she was associated with WHAM until live musicians were dropped from the staff.

For a number of years she taught organ and piano, was a church musician, and on staff at Nazareth College. Besides her husband, William O., Mrs. Kondolf is survived by her daughter, Connie, nine grandchildren, and one brother.

LLOYD E. KLOS

Donald "Kirk" Collins, 50, died April 2, 1982, a victim of multiple sclerosis. He was associated with J. C. Deagan, Inc., and the Wicks Organ Company in the 1950s. From 1960 to 1975 he was general manager of Martinetti's Restaurant in Crystal Lake, Illinois, in which he installed and played a 2/8 Wicks theatre organ. From 1975 to 1980 he was co-owner of Junchen-Collins Organ Corp., Woodstock, Illinois, specializing in the restoration of theatre organs for commercial use. He was a member of the American Institute of Organbuilders, and is survived by two children.

DAVID L. JUNCHEN

George R. Stitzer, Sr., 72, manager of the Byrd Theatre in Richmond, Virginia, was killed in an apparent robbery attempt just after midnight on April 4, 1982. He was driving to a nearby bank to make the nightly deposit when he was shot. It is believed that several men were involved in the crime.

Mr. Stitzer began his theatre career as chief doorman when the Byrd opened on Christmas Eve, 1928. He was a 17-year-old high school student at the time. In 1937 he became

assistant manager, and succeeded to the manager's post in 1971. In his 53 years at the Byrd he rarely missed a day at the theatre. He considered the Byrd as something special, and tried to make it so. He was a great organ buff, and was happy that the Wurlitzer was used often.

George Stitzer was a quiet man, a true gentleman, with a positive outlook on everything about him. He encouraged everyone and always saw the bright side. Everyone liked him

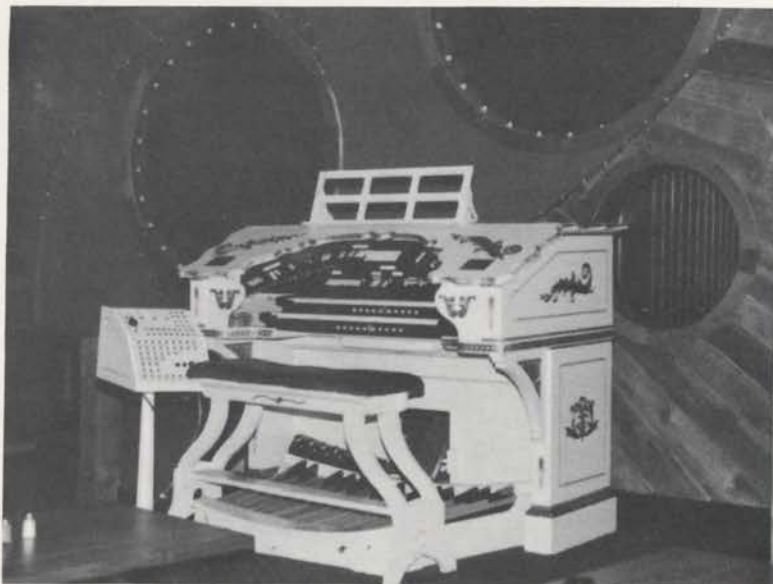
for his friendly manner and cheerfulness.

He is survived by his wife, Edith E. Stitzer, and a son, George R. Stitzer, Jr.

TOMMY LANDRUM/MILES RUDISILL

Stillman Rice, president of ATOS from 1970 to 1972, died at his home in North Haven, Connecticut, on Thursday evening, March 29, 1982. A "Closing Chord" will appear in the next issue. □

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