

Detroit '82 in Review

by Geoffrey Paterson

The 1982 ATOS convention in Detroit was quite the musical experience. The array of organists and venues presented opportunities to hear many makes of theatre organs played in many different styles. Each organist "did his own thing," as emcee Father Jim Miller put it so succinctly, and though the phrase is hackneyed there really was something for everyone.

We all have our own likes and dislikes, and everyone can't be expected to like everything. Nor can one person speak for all in formulating reports or giving opinions on concerts. What follows is what one person saw, heard and felt; one man's experience, nothing more.

The main thing is that, despite anything else, the organists in all but two instances put on shows that were *entertaining*. They played to their audience and they got the reaction they were after. Audience enjoyment is, after all, what ATOS concerts are about. But here's the catch:

There is one term I have tried to use as the foundation for these thoughts and comments — I hesitate to use the words "review" or "critique." It is *professionalism*. That the Goals Committee put this first in their report is an indication of the direction ATOS wants to head in terms of performance. If theatre organ is ever to become publicly accepted as a legitimate musical instrument, never mind become popular as one, then levels of performance, musicianship and presentation — professionalism — must

be as high as possible, and must be encouraged with unyielding persistence. They must be appraised in the same way.

Here, then, is a commentary on Detroit '82.

Sunday, July 4: Don Baker

At three o'clock on a warm Independence Day afternoon, the convention was officially launched with a "Pre-glow" concert at the Senate Theater, home of the Detroit Theater Organ Club and their impeccable 4/34 Wurlitzer. Again this year, the convention emcee was the exuberant Father Jim Miller, who bade us welcome and made a pitch for the DTOC House Recording — all in full clerical raiment, of course.

Don Baker has been playing theatre organ for 59 years. He not only looks the same as he did thirty years ago, he plays the same — and the same things. He uses the line "I keep playing the same things because I keep getting asked to" as a reason for not learning anything new. It is less a reason than an excuse. He plays by rote.

Baker is always in relaxed control. In fact he is so stately and aloof while he plays that World War III could erupt in the first row and he'd likely carry right on, relentlessly, chorus after chorus after chorus, getting louder and louder, all in andante or vivace duple meter, noodling away, playing lots of notes with no imagination or feeling whatsoever. Over the years Baker has turned the chromatic run and manual bridging into art forms. He has developed bits of musical business all his own. He is without question a living legend who has, alas, become a caricature of himself.

As he strode across the stage with the ageless majesty of an ocean liner,

Baker gave that unassuming smile, the wave of the hand, the nod of the head, and got right down to work. Opening with a brassy "There's No Business Like Show Business," which came to an abrupt, discordant halt, he then showed off the softer sounds in "With a Song In My Heart." The luxurious String Celeste chorus and fluid Vibraphone are favorite Baker voices on this organ, as are the 16' Tuba and Posthorn. Wishing us a happy Fourth of July he dove into a barely recognizable "Music Box Dancer" (I don't get the connection, either), demonstrating how a trite tune can be given percussive variety and still sound trite. For over an hour, golden oldie followed golden oldie, all faded facsimiles of the Baker originals, all introduced in that mournful, tired voice. The anthem-like "God Bless America" was an obvious finale. The only things missing were Kate Smith and a flag snapping in the wind. It was a splendorous sound and sight as most of the audience rose to its collective feet to sing the second chorus with a moving sincerity that can only come from the heart.

Baker was in top form. The tech-

Bashful (?) Don Baker preparing to play during the "Pre-glow" at the Senate Theatre, July 4. (CN)



Photos by
Claude Neuffer (CN)
and
Rudy Frey (RF)



Lyn Larsen and Chris Elliott.

(CN)



Helen and Frank Doka, Motor City, met in organ circles and were married in the Redford Theatre. (RF)



Thomas Remington and Burton Castle man the record counter at the Senate Theater. (CN)

Lyn Larsen and Chris Elliott at the Senate Theater, July 5/6.

(CN)



At the candy counter, Senate Theater: Alice Aston, Lois Page, Tom Rys, Joan O'Piela and Elizabeth O'Piela. (RF)



nique may be flawed, but those huge hands can still move around. His un-subtle registrations tend to tubbiness, but when he opens up an organ in his broad, lazy rhythm there is simply no sound like it. He plays few intros and no verses, goes from a standing start to that persistent 2/4 beat in less than half a bar, and says all he has to say musically in less than eight. But there is a magnificence in his monotony; the audience ate it up. I only hope I'm half as energetic when I'm his age.

The DTOC Wurlitzer was glorious. It is a lush, sparkling wall of studio-clear sound that lunges straight at you in that bare auditorium. (Well, not quite bare. Some memorial statuary has been added to the walls at the rear.) The organ was tuned and regulated to its usual perfection. The visual effect of that Mayan-altar console sitting off-center and off-square, grand piano open to its right topped by a pot of geraniums (gerania?), all against the blank back-lit wall of shutters spread behind, was one of quiet, understated grandeur.

Monday, July 5: Lyn Larsen

The next morning, half of the conventioners went to hear Lowell Ayars at the Punch and Judy Theatre, and my half, Pooh-bears clutched firmly to bosoms, returned to the Senate to hear Lyn Larsen. (The following morning the groups were to switch, and to avoid any confusion our badges were adorned with the first of two colored dots.)

Father Miller was conducting services at the Punch and Judy, so an unidentified but nevertheless clean-cut and charming young man introduced Larsen. After the usual announcements and another pitch for DTOC's excellent album, of course. (The young man turned out to be Stuart

Grigg, vice president of Motor City Chapter, whose ingenious convention logo was printed on everything in sight.)

Larsen bounced onstage in French-vanilla whites and jumped right into Schubert's "Marche Militaire" feet first: he pedalled the introduction. Without comment he moved Wright along to a bouncy "Back Bay Shuffle." Though the first chorus was awfully familiar to us Guy Melendy fans, the second time around he took off into a pure Larsen arrangement that left us mentally out of breath. It may have been only ten in the morning, but by the end of the Rachmaninoff-inspired "Russian Rag" you can be sure every ear in the room was paying attention. Amid the pops, his classical touch shone in a stately and precise portion of the Handel "Water Music," during which the DTOC Wurlitzer sounded positively baroque.

Up to this point, what comments he made had been informative, concise and whimsical — Larsen's warm personality and ready wit are disarming to the point of seduction. But he became somewhat long-winded in a speech about encouraging the younger generation of organists. I'm sure everyone in the room had agreed with him a lot sooner than he thought they did.

All of that was leading to the introduction of 18-year-old Chris (for Christian) Elliott, a blond bundle of talent and energy from Santa Ana, California. While Larsen retired to change his shirt and tie, Elliott gave a pristine performance of Delius' descriptive essay "Winter Night." A student of Gaylord Carter and Gordon Kibbee, Elliott is another young organist with potential who should with time become less mechanical and more sensitive to the music. His regis-

trations and touch tended to heaviness rather than delicacy, giving the Delius a coarseness it should not have.

Larsen reappeared and, while Elliott remained at the organ, sat at the piano, whence the two presented a spectacular version of Schulz-Eveler's flamboyant concert paraphrase of "On the Beautiful Blue Danube." Despite Larsen's back being to the console, their timing had micro-chip precision. Unfortunately the Senate's grand piano, even miked as it appeared to be, was drowned out entirely during the furioso finale. But it was a wonderful duet performance. And more impressive for being played entirely from memory.

Lyn continued after riotous applause and yet another speech — we got the point already — with the good old "Tritsch-Tratsch Polka," then paid tribute to Ashley Miller and Henry Hunt with Ashley's atmospheric arrangement of "Poinciana." His finale, Thomas Arne's transcription of "Rule Britannia," was electrifying.

The first of the three deserved standing ovations of the convention brought him back for two encores: Adam Carroll's 1927 novelty "Nanette," and Ashley Miller's arrangement of "Fantasie Impromptu" which, despite some cheating on the fingered runs, was literally spine-tingling.

This was the perfect combination of organ and organist. Larsen's concert programming has become more varied and interesting in recent years, and he has succeeded in developing a subtle style and sound all his own. If only he wouldn't talk so much sometimes. A past-master of hand-registration and second touch, his feeling for tempo and mood is exact. A Larsen concert is always tasteful, controlled, elegant and, above all, musical. He generated an electricity that morning that charged the air; we could all have gone home right then and have been perfectly satisfied.

As for Chris Elliott, once he relaxes, develops his sensitivity and evolves his own style, watch out.



Waiting to tour the chambers at the Senate Theater.

(RF)





John Lauter, David Martin, Lyle Henry, Jerry Nagano and Father Bill Biebel guarding John's classic Packard. (Rudy Frey photo)



Ron Rhode at the console. (Rudy Frey photo)



Jerry Nagano. (Rudy Frey photo)



John Lauter of Motor City. (Rudy Frey photo)

Ron Rhode

At the Senate we piled onto more buses, this time to split three ways (hence more self-adhesive dots) to go to either of two pizza restaurants or a church.

Our bus ended up at Theatre Organ Pizza and Pipes in Pontiac (Try saying *that* one fast!). The end of the lineup took about 45 minutes to get in the door — not too comfy in the blazing sun — because we had to pay our \$3 for lunch, get our beverages, then our salad, then sit down at the long tables while pizzas were trotted out. The food was fine, but the system was cumbersome.

The organ, now a 3/21, was originally a 1928 3/10 Barton from Detroit's Birmingham Theatre. Ornately decorated shutters above glass chamber walls spread across the front of the room, the plain gold ormolu console sitting front and center on its platform. The room is low and not very big; the organ fills it well, but the reverb unit that has been installed is severely distracting. (Why does artificial reverb have to be added to the sound of theatre organs? That tinny hollowness is no substitute for big theatre perspective. Why can't they just be left alone to sound natural in their environment?) The room itself is cluttered with washboards, signs, old mechanical devices, gumball machines, statues and even an old 1919 Graphoscope projector.

Staff organist John Steele introduced Ron Rhode, who appeared in dove-grey ultra-suede, a visual portent of what we were about to hear.

It is impossible to find fault with Rhode's technique or musicianship. His fine-tuned precision and his diversified program are second to none. But when he is dull he is excruciating. It was just another night at Organ Stop, and a tired one at that. Even his

usual charming and informative commentary was whiney and detached.

Rhode gave us his usual blend of the familiar and the offbeat. In an extended arrangement of "If I Should Love Again" he used a variety of lachrymose registrations to wrench the last sob of despair from the organ — something he does very well. He is always finding marvellous forgotten pieces — "Silver Sleigh Bells" by the prolific E. T. Paull. Lots of sparkling percussion and the suggestion of cooling ice and snow gave this Christmas version



John Steele makes an announcement. Theatre Organ Pizza & Pipes. (RF)



John Muri. (Rudy Frey photo)

Lined up for food at Theatre Organ Pizza & Pipes. (RF)



of "The Burning of Rome" extra appeal on that hot day. (It also just happened to be on his new Christmas album, which just happened to be for sale right there.) Ron's pedal dexterity was dynamically displayed in the seldom-heard "Pomp and Circumstance No. 4," one of five concert marches in Elgar's Opus 39. The interlude was played on, of all things, Tibia and Vox — a classic combination in a new role. Raymond Scott's "Powerhouse" is a driving, syncopated number from the early forties which is regaining popularity on the pizza circuit, and it provided a showcase for the tuned percussions. Broadway was represented by a fresh re-arrangement of an old Rhode standby, selections from *Annie*.

The audience was not only distracted by food, drink and conversation, it was itself distracting to those of us who wanted to listen, particularly toward the back of the room. A concert in this atmosphere just isn't taken seriously by many, and this must be very disheartening to the organist. Audiences I've observed where Ron plays in Mesa were better behaved than this ATOS crowd, who should have known better. If it had been treated as a concert instead of just another organist playing over pizza and beer, I'm sure Ron would have been better motivated to give his all, instead of the lackluster and uninspired performance we got.

Rex Koury

The suburban Redford Theatre is the flagship of the Motor City Theatre Organ Society, bought by its members in 1976. Opened in 1928, the 1900-seat Japanese atmospheric house is in the throes of a much-needed restoration by chapter members. Progress is slow, but when it is

Rex Koury at the Barton, Redford Theatre. (CN)



finished it will be a jewel, if what has been accomplished so far is any indication.

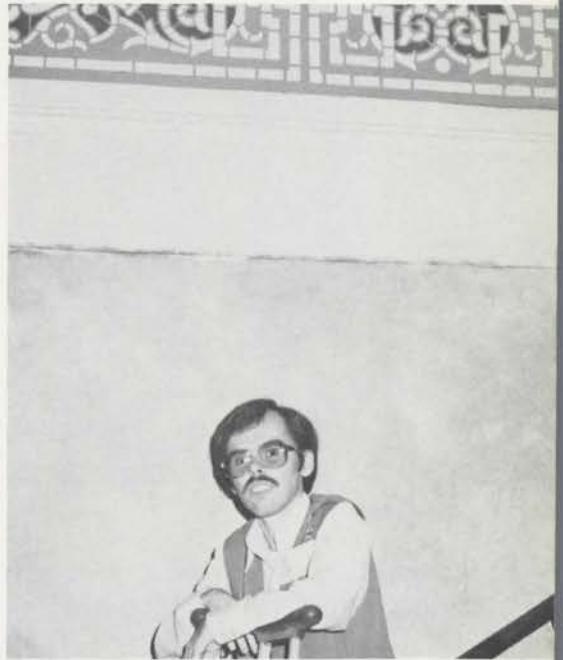
The 3/10 Barton has a rich, sweet sound — well-defined but mellow. The stereo effect is always more pronounced in smaller houses like this where the sound has no room to mix, but the ensemble at the Redford holds together smoothly. An instrument as well-regulated and tuned as this is a joy to hear — especially in its original home. Unfortunately the piston action is so loud, as it is on many other organs, that a carefully created mood can be shattered with the touch of a thumb. And the light in the pit piano is distracting when it goes on and off all the time with the stop. Why not just leave it on, like the console lights? (The piano has been finished to match the black and gold bound-leather look of the console.)

First playing the national anthem against a huge proscenium-filling flag, Rex Koury gave us the first rising-out-of-the-pit overture of the convention. In white, with a big red bow tie and cummerbund, he charmed us with his informal good humor and relaxed manner which came across both in his introductions and his playing.

Koury is a master of the ballad, using for the most part standard registrations and harmonies. The odd harmonic twist he occasionally adds thus becomes more refreshing. Though I heartily disagree with his statement that "theatre organ is essentially a ballad instrument," I cannot fault his

attempts to prove it, spiritless though most of them were. His musicianship is smooth and professional with a good sense of feeling, but the faster he plays the more his tempo and rhythms suffer.

Highlighting his program were a selection from the recent Broadway smash *Sugar Babies*, something fresh and delighting to these ears; a spry "Kitten on the Keys" which due to a minor flub was not quite purr-fect; Gabriel Pierné's light obbligato frolic "Hide and Seek;" and a provocative and moody "You and the Night and



Don Martin, who is the artist responsible for repainting the decorative patterns throughout the Redford. (RF)

Waiting for the buses after Rex Koury's concert, Redford Theatre, July 5.

(CN)





Lobby scene, Redford Theatre.

(CN)



Tom Wibbels, left, and Ron Cartmell, right, cameo artists at the Redford, Monday evening, July 5.

(CN)



Interior of the Punch and Judy, Lowell Ayars concert.

(RF)



Lowell Ayars at the console, Punch and Judy Theatre.

(CN)

the Music.”

I spent the evening waiting to hear some of the zest and imagination he displayed decades ago in a stimulating album titled “Stairway to Heaven,” but it was not to be. Certainly the song and picture slides, the rare Crawford film clip, the “Koury Korny Klassic” and the composers’ variations on “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” were original and clever, but the latter two went on so long to no purpose they bordered on self-indulgence. In fact, the entire concert went on so long without a break (just short of two hours) that by the time Koury got to his expansive Borodin selection the lobby was half full of milling ex-audience.

So many back-to-back ballads, no matter how much one likes vanilla, become a cloying bore.

A word should be said here about the people in the booth. Their smooth projections and interesting spotlighting added warm, traditional atmosphere to the show.

Following a ten-minute break, Nor-Cal Chapter presented a narrated slide show about next year’s convention city, San Francisco. Accompanied by Warren Lubich at the Barton, it was a good taste of what to expect next summer. It was well writ-

ten and produced a presentation that showed the kind of professional standards we are capable of in ATOS. And the Golden Gate Bridge in pipes logo is very clever.

Two cameo spots followed. They could have been left out altogether. People were simply too tired at 10:30 to pay attention.

Tuesday, July 6: Lowell Ayars

Next morning, those dreadfully hot buses took our dotted half of the convention to the Punch and Judy Theatre in Detroit’s well-monied, scenic northern suburb of Grosse Point Farms. Lowell Ayars was to give the second of his two concerts while Lyn Larsen repeated his for the other group.

Ayars is no stranger to the Punch and Judy, having played there for the 1974 convention when it was a 2/5 Wurlitzer. The recently-added Diapason is controlled from an awkward cable-box as there is no more room for stops on the console. The organ has a mellow Tibia and nice breathy Vox, but the ensemble has a thin, almost English, character helped along by fast, shallow tremols.

Father Jim introduced Lowell with his usual jocularly and announce-



Balcony scene, Punch and Judy.

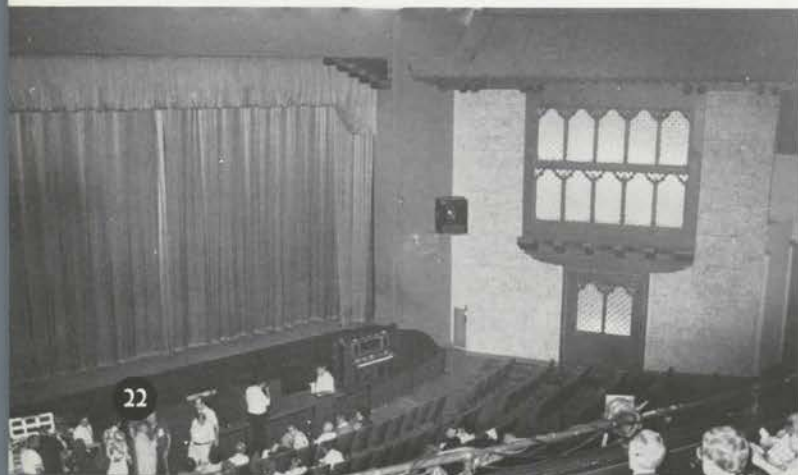
(CN)

Interior of the Redford Theatre auditorium.

(CN)

Punch and Judy Theatre, Grosse Point Farms.

(CN)



ments. The house lights were on throughout the concert, so the big, well-worn armchairs (in the only smoking loge in the state) and traditional early-American decor lent a homey atmosphere to the proceedings.

Lowell later admitted to being rather ill that morning, but that didn't prevent him from projecting his pleasant, droll, eminently educational personality. Lowell's commentaries are just right: relevant, informative, concise. His choice of material is always varied and unusual. And watching him get around on that little organ was a study in "how it is done": you have to work hard with only six ranks, and Lowell — hand-registering everything — got some pretty subtle sounds out of it, though some of the fuller combinations tended to be strident.

Unfortunately the warmth of the man did not come across in his playing. Reading almost everything, he seemed to be playing just to get through things. There was little elaboration on the printed notes. Even that baritone voice was not up to snuff. His inclement health likely had a lot to do with it.

His more unusual selections included "Green Serenade," a bit of potted palm music from the old Bayer Aspirin radio program; "Aragonaise" from Massenet's *Le Cid* (to even attempt something so overwhelmingly orchestral on a 2/6 is admirable, and Lowell pulled it off with aplomb); the old musical question "What Are You Waiting For, Mary?" for the Helen Crawford Fan Club; a mysterious European fox-trot by Ivor Novello titled "The Rat Step;" and a suite from the film *Charade* which began with a sprightly item appropriately titled "Punch and Judy."

When Ayars sings, you know you're in for a bizarre treat; as a vocalist he's the perfect accompanist. "Colors of My Life" was a lovely love song, and his penultimate selection "We'll Meet Again" proved that Vera Lynn has nothing to fear. The most touching moment of the morning, dedicated to the late Rod Skelding, was "A Nightingale Sang in Berkley Square." Lowell sang and played with the emotion he was feeling, and it was the best of the program.

Still trying to top the "Yeast Foamer's March" which he dug up

for the Chicago convention, Lowell ended with Harry L. Lincoln's "National Federation March." Four pages of every march cliché ever heard, it was tongue in cheek and strictly for laughs.

One wonders why an organist of Lowell's calibre always gets stuck on the small or unusual organs. Is it because he can get more out of them than anyone else? Perhaps, but judging by what he can do with only six ranks, Ayars on 16 or 20 would be that much more joyful unpretentious entertainment.

Home Tours

The afternoon was given over to a choice of home tours, a tour of Stroh's Brewery, or a concert by Carl Creagar at the Macomb Theatre in the spa town of Mount Clemens. In opting for the home tours I hoped to avoid what I was warned would be disaster.

The home tour buses had a choice of five locations to visit. Ours went to three, covering a lot of territory between the half-hour stops. First was Wurlitzer House, downtown home of David Voydanoff and Glenn Rank (I've always thought that a singularly appropriate name for an organ enthusiast) where Pierre Fracalanza was playing pleasant pieces on the 3/6 Wurlitzer. It was a relaxed atmosphere, everyone walking about and inspecting the upstairs hallway and bedroom chambers. Fracalanza's quiet playing only hinted at both the organ's potential and his own; a bit of "Bugle Call Rag" might have livened things up.

A long, hot hour's ride up the coast of Lake St. Clair brought us to the home of Lee Hohner's parents some-

where near Mount Clemens, where Lee has installed a 3/10 Morton. This was a more formal setting, with seats set up in the music room. Lee played a short program followed by Larry Gleason, who maintains the instrument. Then Lee and his mother knocked off a few hot piano-organ duets while visitors inspected the immaculate chambers and partook of a welcome supply of ice water. It was a well-balanced sound for the room, the playing was pleasing and the organ appeared to be in envious shape.

The final stop, after another long ride, was Roger Mumbrue's basement fun-house and organ studio in his Bloomfield Hills home. The organ is a 3/32 hybrid put together very carefully over the years and controlled from a Marr & Colton console. It is, to say the least, overbalanced for the room, but the ensemble is remarkably cohesive considering its piecemeal origins. Young John Lauter gave us the most formal presentation of the afternoon, and is yet another talented up-and-comer who bears watching. Although more concerned with gimmicks and registrations than with making music, he showed off the organ to its fullest. Another potential star who needs to settle down.



Picnic at Belle Isle, July 6.

(CN)





Macomb Theatre crew, L to R: Henry Carson, Harold Schuman, Jack Velsmann, Pat Degens, Bob Calehuff, Carl Creagar and Marvin Spears. (CN)



Carl Creagar in concert, Macomb Theatre, Mount Clemens, July 6. (CN)



Ashley Miller, Father Jim Miller and Warren Lubich laugh it up outside the Macomb. (RF)



Four dolls — Sue Lang (Sierra) and Doris Taylor (Nor-Cal) with friends, Macomb Theatre. (RF)



Checking over the cruise ship engine. (CN)



Excursion steamer Columbia at the dock near the Westin Hotel. Conventioneers cruised on her Tuesday evening, July 6. (RF)

Dancing to the music of Dale Zieger at the Conn. (CN)



Carl Creagar

Meanwhile at the Macomb Theatre, Carl Creagar was giving a concert on the alleged 3/9 Kilgen. The scene is described here by my acting honorary stringer, Frank Pratt of Kingston:

After a seemingly pointless lunch break on Belle Isle (too hot and sultry to be enjoyable) where the sanitary (?) facilities were on a par with a World War I trench, there was an over-long and steamy bus ride (admittedly scenic if one was not back beside the washroom) to the faded rococo glory of the Macomb Theatre in Mount Clemens, a nice, clean town forty miles north of Detroit. Here, the valiant efforts of the Macomb Theatre Organ Society have brought a long-silent 3/9 Kilgen back to life. With much work still ahead it did fill the theatre with a rich, mellow sound. A bit light on the pedal, though, and not much string sound was evident.

The overall impression of the program, though, was "tired": tired artist, tired selections, tired arrangements and a poor, tired theatre which will be glorious when a few more dollars have come its way. The music was more suitable as background during dinner, say, or while awaiting something more exciting on the screen. The best thing was the lighting with tastefully contrasting colors sweeping the white console. Contrast and drama were, however, missing from the music — most of it at a constant volume with little expression. An under-organized *Showboat* medley ran over twenty minutes and was pretty sleepy, with an understated climax. The best thing in the show was a re-creation of WLW's Moon River radio opening. Even in this, though, Carl Creagar's limited bag of technical tricks came up for re-runs. A few softer passages would have been welcome.

Dale Zieger takes a turn at the Conn.

(Len Clarke photo)





The 80th birthday of the steamer Columbia was on the day of our cruise. Here the captain is showing a birthday card while Tim Needler plays and Don Lockwood makes an announcement. (RF)



Dennis James at the Conn during the cruise. (Len Clarke photo)



Mary Jo Degens, 16, tries her hand at making music. (CN)

John Ledwon entertains at the Conn during the cruise. (RF)



Maybe when the work's all done this fall this Kilgen will sound more like the KMOX and WHAS organs of fond memory.

Wednesday, July 7: Ty Woodward

At 9:30 Wednesday morning we assembled en masse in the Renaissance Ballroom for a smoothly served quiche-and-croissant breakfast, which was followed by an equally smooth membership meeting. Seems the new board is doing a lot of things right.

There was considerable time to kill until buses loaded at 1:15 for the Italian Renaissance stone and marble splendor of the Detroit Institute of Arts. It was incredibly hot and humid, but the auditorium was cool, if clammy. Construction in the foyer had caused the inside stairs to be closed, forcing those wanting a balcony seat to mount a grandiose outside staircase and enter through a side fire exit. (Unfortunately the noise of construction continued through the concert; it undoubtedly would have

cost too much to have them stop.)

The auditorium is a hard old hall, acoustically live. Nicely kept up though a trifle dusty, it is predominantly burgundy with blue and gold trim — and a pink ceiling. The 4/79 Casavant is concealed behind grilles on either side of and above the proscenium, with the console looking remarkably out of place in the right box. I was told later that there were no tremos or crescendo working, and the pistons were doing funny things, forcing the organist to hand-register. He covered these defects well.

Ty Woodward was the organist of the afternoon, an engaging California lad with a winning smile and amusing disposition whose training (a brand new B.Mus. from USC) is certainly obvious. Though he plays regularly at the Redwood City Cap'n's Galley in addition to his church post, he showed remarkable restraint in playing a completely classical concert without giving in to the temptation to be cute by trying some pizza pyrotechnics on an instrument not intended for the purpose. But I'm sure it would have been tasteful if he had.

Sometimes from memory and sometimes with the music, Woodward played a lineup of familiar compositions with the confidence and poise of a seasoned performer. Though the classical repertoire by its nature is not open to elaborate arranging or creative interpretation to the extent that popular music is, Ty's performances were fresh and crisp, displaying accuracy of technique, precision of mood and a feel for the subtleties of the music.

Membership meeting in the Renaissance Ballroom, July 7. Breakfast served first brought out nearly everyone for the meeting. (CN)





Boarding buses after Ty Woodward's concert at the Detroit Institute of Arts, July 7.

(RF)



Mildred and Leon Berry, of "Beast in the Basement" fame. (CN)



Eric Schröder and Ray Allan, ATOS members from South Africa, on board the Columbia. (CN)

He began with the familiar Sinfonia from Bach's Cantata No. 29 and followed with Schumann's "Sketch in D Flat," a bucolic piece calling up almost cartoon-like images of sheep lazily cavorting about rolling meadows. There is a lot of life yet in that romantic old organ as Ty demonstrated during Léon Boëllmann's "Suite Gothique." His registrations, though tending to be heavy in the louder passages, were dead on otherwise. The lovely dream-like voices in "Prière à Nôtre Dame" contrasted with the power of the Toccata during which both 32-footers could be felt rumbling beneath. There was even a phantom hand reaching out to turn pages, adding to the mood.

Dale Wood's modern minor setting of the traditional lullaby "All Through the Night" provided another opportunity to hear those ethereal celeste ranks. Marcel Dupré, who dedicated the Institute's organ, was represented by his dramatic "Cortège et Litanie," and then the mellow Tuba Mirabilis — so it's called — took part in a little counterpoint dance, "Tuba Tune in D Major."

Charles Marie Widor wrote some excellent movie-cueing music, and Ty



Ty Woodward acknowledges the applause of the audience, Detroit Institute of Arts. (CN)

proceeded to demonstrate this unintended application with the first movement from his Symphony No. 5, an allegro vivace theme and variations. Two more "oldies," "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" and the finale from Widor's second symphony for organ, then it was ritual encore time. What else but the Fox arrangement of "Now Thank We All Our God?"

By this time the organ was slipping badly out of tune, and Woodward was having a few technical problems — but it was a fabulous fortissimo finish to a recital of taste, technique and talent.

Lance Luce & Karl Cole

The convention again split into three by dots — ours became the "red dotters" — and we headed for the Pied Piper Pizza Peddler in Warren.

A much higher and less cluttered room than the Pontiac restaurant, the Four Ps was designed in a sort of

Audience at the Detroit Institute of Arts. (CN)



McDonald's Tudor style; heraldic banners and crenellated battlements abounded. Even the console was hand-painted with scenes from the Pied Piper story. The sound of the 3/22 Wurlitzer is immaculate and clear; the big, hard room provides a good mixing chamber and there is little to soak up the details. No artificial reverb needed here. There seems to be a formula for pizza organ layouts: the console — lift optional — sits in the center between two windowed chambers, elaborately painted shutters spread above. Lance Luce rode the console up first, dressed in a red lamé jacket and black patent-leather shoes with rhinestone-dipped heels. He looks more and more like Liberace as the years progress. His playing is loud, brash pizza-style (as opposed to tasteful, classy pizza-style) done with accuracy, precision and a fairly standard sound. His restrained use of tuned percussions should be noted: he didn't feel he had to use them all at the same time.

Karl Cole took over for a set in a black jumpsuit under a white jacket with silver sequined trim. Karl uses more body-English than Lance and his registrations are fuller, but it's hard to tell the two apart. Karl is the one who sings.

The most interesting parts of the show were the organist and costume changes. The lift went up and down more often than my bank account. Luce appeared a second time in a blue sequined vest, took the console back down and — without stopping — rose almost immediately in silver jacket and top hat with flags flying playing "Yankee Doodle Dandy." The only thing he played of any particular note was a presumptuously contemporized arrangement of "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue," in which all that was slaughtered was the music.

Cole's best number of the afternoon was a novel arrangement of "Zing Went the Strings of My Heart." Then his cohort in capers, a matronly puppet named Miss Anna Chovy, sang a couple of songs in good voice. His rainbow-sequined jacket was almost matched by Luce's next outfit, and when Cole then appeared in his rhinestone cowboy outfit (no points for guessing what he was playing and singing) I threw up. My hands. In supplication.

It was an entertaining double bill,



Lance Luce, half of the regular duo at the Pied Piper. (CN)



Miss Anna Chovy sings, with the assistance and accompaniment of Karl Cole. (CN)



Karl Cole at the Pied Piper Pizza Peddler. (CN)



Victor Borz. (CN)



Jimmy Paulin, New York. (CN)



Dave Peckham, New York. (CN)



Kevin Werner. (CN)



Bob Godfrey, New York. (CN)

Lyn Larsen at the Pied Piper console.





Royal Oak Theatre, Royal Oak, Michigan, with Father Miller equipped for action. (RF)



L to R: Erna Gerrand, Netherlands; Melvin Robinson, New York; Ashley Miller, Garden State; Rene Winkel, Netherlands. (RF)



Stephen Vincent, 1979-80 winner of the "Young Theatre Organist of the Year" competition sponsored by the London Chapter, with friends from England, and Jack O'Neill of Nor-Cal. (Bruce Grulke photo)

Interior views, Royal Oak Theatre, July 7. (CN & RF)



tolerable because of the pizza and beer, not in spite of it. Both are fine if unspectacular showmen, and both are competent if unsubtle organists. But enough with the sequins and bugle beads!

Father Jim Miller

Father Jim Miller, our convention host and off-the-wall white collar



Father Jim Miller at the Barton, Royal Oak Theatre. (CN)



worker, was the attraction that evening at the Royal Oak Theatre's 3/16 Barton. Delayed about half an hour by a flat tire on a bus, the concert finally got underway when stand-in emcee Jerry Nagano announced in his best Engrish that Father Mirrer was going to pray for us. That was the first crue that we were in for a good time.

Miller brought the console up and the old moderne house began to bounce to "The Best Things in Life Are Free." Miller's playing is by no means perfect, but he puts his heart into it. His manner is so relaxed and his personality so easygoing that one is never uncomfortable. Let's face it: if a Ukranian Orthodox priest can sit on a gold-fringed Howard seat swinging his cross and tell his audience with a straight face that his organ teacher once told him "Whatever you do, honey, get *down* on it!", you know you have an original on your hands.

"Boom-Boom" Miller's playing is, like his ethos, full of honesty, vitality, whimsy and love. Broad, rhythmic and somewhat unrefined, the fun in his arrangements and console antics is never at the expense of the music. His combinations are imaginative and particular and though he likes block chords and the circle of fifths — or is it fourths? — his harmonies are sometimes so open you could drive an un-air-conditioned bus through them. When he plays, man, it *cooks!*

Hearing Dick Leibert's "Jasmine" was a surprise to this Leibert fan. Miller gave it a translation the composer never imagined. "Night Train" was heralded by a few toots on the train whistle *au main* borrowed from the record shop, and barrelled along in big danceband style. Jelly Roll Morton's "Mister Jelly-Lord" ran the gamut from slinky slow drag to quickstep to burlesque whoopee-whistle. Some revealing comments about understanding lyrics turned Fats Waller's tormented "What Did I Do To Be So Black and Blue" into a study in composer's intent against popular interpretation.

To contrast with the rhythmic abandon of his secular selections, Father Jim included "It Is No Secret What God Can Do," a lush gospel ballad with a lovely verse. "The Old Rugged Cross" came a bit later, and as if to quietly drive home his message that love and tolerance are what it is all about, he followed a moving "How Great Thou Art" with an un-

inhibited "Makin' Whoopee."

As has been said before, Miller's concerts are truly sermons in music. He talks far too much — a professional hazard, I guess — and one can take just so much religious banter, but it's such fun one scarcely notices. His verve, talent and probity produced an inspired and inspiring concert, and the second deserved standing ovation of the convention. Trust me.

Thursday, July 8: Kay McAbee

By Thursday morning some of us were wondering if we'd survive until the banquet that evening. After-hours carousing was beginning to take its toll. But the promise of the totally unique sound of Kay McAbee at the Detroit Fox 4/36 Wurlitzer could not be ignored.

It would be redundant to add more than a few words to the thousands already written about the Fox and its organs. The sight and sound are magic. It looked like Don Jenks playing the 3/12 lobby Moller as we walked in, but it was barely audible above the noise of the crowd.

The Detroit Theatre Enthusiasts, formerly Friends of the Fox, maintain both instruments and help out with operating the theatre. They deserve every kudo and pat on the back we can muster for the unsung toil, sweat and time they have lavished on that huge Wurlitzer over the years. It is in superb voice. Even the console has



Kay McAbee at the Detroit Fox, July 8.

(CN)



Don Jenks playing the lobby 3/12 Moller, Detroit Fox.

(CN)



Simulated organ grille in the lobby, Detroit Fox.

(CN)

Crowds in the lobby of the Fox. (CN)



been redone since '74 in rich Chris-Craft wood browns and gold.

Being in that auditorium is a sensory experience without equal. It is as close to heaven on earth as any theatre organ or movie palace buff is going to get though heaven, it is to be hoped, will not be so muggy.

Kay McAbee is the master of the colossal sound, rotund, heavy, spine-chilling masses of Tibias, Horns, Strings; a sound so big that it unfortunately turns to mush when cranked up full. His subtler touches of technique, fancy pedalwork and extra voice lines got completely lost in the magnitude of sound rolling around that huge room. His phrasing and poise also suffered from an unreliable piston action; I saw it work once during the entire concert. Kay carried on stoically though, trying to look like hand-registering those hundreds of stop tabs was the easiest thing in the world.

As Kay brought the gleaming console up — an impressive sight in itself — with a brassy, athletic “Cherokee,” the asbestos curtain slowly rose to reveal the original grand drape, its tasselled, glittering filligree design intact and sparkling in the spotlights. The stunning stereo effect of all those Tibias, Voxes and Strings was displayed in myriad combinations during the ballad “Wanting You,” the sweetest piece of the morning. Kay’s *Oklahoma!* selection included the old favorites and some lesser known tunes like the spurious dirge “Pore Jud Is Daid” and the coquettish “I Cain’t Say No.” It was a fine piece of intermission-solo playing. Impact was the operative word for the “Pilgrim’s Chorus.” With a tongue-in-

cheek glance back at the opening of the Roxy Theatre, Kay gradually hand-registered his way to an overwhelming Wagnerian climax. The old McAbee war-horse “Fiddle-Fiddle” started out with dazzling precision but began to fall apart long before the exotic modulations of the final chorus. “Joey,” a lovely, lyrical ballad, was completely destroyed by an intrusive TV camera crew about which more later. The same thing happened to “Pomp and Circumstance No. 1,” which was striding and broad nevertheless.

McAbee almost succeeded in bringing down the temple with his swinging version of the “Bacchanale” from *Samson and Delilah*. Taking full theatre organist’s license he put rhythm and bounce into it, neatly interpolating “My Heart at Thy Sweet Voice” into the proceedings. Not quite what Saint-Saëns wrote, it did seem to fit the cavernous Siamese Byzantine surroundings. With his finger-busting version of “Dizzy Fingers,” shimmering cascades of Tibias and all, he took the console down leaving us pleasantly stunned by the volume of sound that organ can produce when played full out.

Kay’s dry wit was evident in his comments as well as in his playing. At one point, trying to pretend the TV camera lens was not almost in his left nostril, he calmly removed his jacket, looked straight into the crepuscular gloom and said, deadpan: “This is the only place I’ve played in where you *should* sweat.” And he had every reason to. Between the TV crew, the heat and the lack of pistons it’s no wonder his composure began to slip and his playing began to show it. By the end it

was really pretty sloppy.

It would have been nice, too, if he had programmed a better display of the organ’s mellifluous voices; too much Big Sound, even though it is one’s trademark, can get tedious. Thrilling as hell, but tedious.

Whoever allowed that camera crew full run of the theatre during the concert showed an astonishing lack of consideration not only for the audience but primarily for the artist. I don’t know how — or why, for that matter — Kay put up with it. It was just plain tacky. Having that brilliant floodlight going in the balcony several times was distracting enough, but then to have the utter audacity to march right onstage and start shooting closeups of the organist and the audience, floodlight and all, while he was playing — it was just unforgivable. The *least* someone could have done would have been to tell us it was going to happen, as they told Kay. But knowing that it is going to happen “sometime” does not compensate for the discomfort of the audience or the anxiety of the performer.

There is nothing wrong with publicizing theatre organ. In fact, there is all too little of it. But do we have to ruin our concerts because we’re so hungry for publicity? I think not. There was no reason why the shooting could not have been done during a break called for the purpose, or before or after the concert. But what happened that morning was just plain insulting to the professionalism of the artist, and to the enjoyment of the paying audience. Whoever allowed it to happen owes the conventioners and the organist an apology.

Dan Semer

Calvary Baptist Church is an eccentric modern edifice of glass and steel clearly visible from my 47th-floor hotel room as a brilliant orange box. The green pews and enormous mirrored wall facing down at them were stark and uncomfortable. Despite Pastor John Peoples’ sermon on the symbolism behind it all, it was discomforting to look up and see the entire audience reflected back at you. Watching. Good for the guilty and the paranoid.

The organ is a 3/14 Wurlitzer late of the Heinz family in Pittsburgh. A new straight-rail ebony console has been added, sitting in the choir alcove beneath the chambers. Installed

Slave console at the Fox.

(CN)



behind the mirrored wall and speaking around the ends of it, the organ gives a pronounced stereo effect. It is bright, almost harsh, and is rendered thinner by the shallow tremos. In good tune and regulation, with an extremely loud Harp, it can barely be heard from the console. Add to this an absence of console lights and bad alcove illumination and the organist is at a fair disadvantage.

Dan Semer is a Californian whose musical education includes organ study with Richard Purvis and Bill Thomson. His saccharine persona almost implores us to like him and his music; he was certainly trying hard enough. The white suit, orange ruffled shirt and sequined bow tie and heels didn't help matters.

His relaxed, precise approach is orchestral and selectively so, showing off the organ's resources with variety, subtlety, humor and originality. He augments, diminishes, modulates and alternates rhythms and moods so much beneath such fussy registrations that it becomes almost too cute, too precious.

Playing entirely from memory, his program included a lengthy "Begin the Beguine" in bolero rhythm (not, I hasten to add, interweaving any of Ravel's melody as he would have liked us to believe) which later changed to a broad dance band arrangement. Elmer Bernstein's "Hawaii" was all dreamy Tibia and Harp. "On the Trail" was a well-crafted piece of description.

His cleverness reached its nadir with a "crocheted" arrangement of "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina" and "What I Did for Love," a suggestive pairing if ever there was one. It was interesting but musically pointless, as seductive and fraudulent as Evita herself.

Moving to the grand piano which was in desperate need of a good tuning, Semer presented Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," preposterously over-embellished with Liberace-like chromatics. The Chopin fantasy, dedicated to Liberace, was much the same. Both composers had better taste. Semer's piano technique was fine, but his body-English was funnier than it was impressive. The histrionics were straight out of the Las Vegas School of Music.

The "Donna Diana Overture" was his final piece, unknown "presto" program music by Emil Nicolaus

von Rezniček which was a technical showpiece, as exciting as it was empty. The requisite encore, "Tea for Two," introduced with a moody verse, was a new set of theatrical variations each trying to outdo the last.

Leaving Semer's concert I felt that there was a lot of talent and imagination up there, hidden under a veneer of affectation. He presented more originality than some, but there was no soul behind it. The constant name-dropping tipped me off (he is apparently on a first-name basis with Liberace) — we were supposed to think that we were hearing more than we were.

And I'm sorry, but if I see one more theatre organist in a sequined jacket with glittery heels and a frilly shirt I'm going to be sick. There comes a point where that kind of costume is just plain vulgar.



Dan Semer at the Wurlitzer, Calvary Baptist Church. (CN)



Lunch at Calvary Baptist, cooked and served by the ladies of the church. (CN)



Dan Semer offers piano solos while repairs are made on the organ. (RF)

Harry Koenig takes a turn at the piano, Calvary Baptist Church. (RF)



Calvary Baptist Church concert, showing overhead mirrors. (CN)





at the Banquet . . .







Winners receiving their miniature consoles after the drawing following the banquet.



Del Castillo receives congratulations from Lowell Ayars on being selected as Honorary Member for 1982. (CN)



John Robson, president of the Kingston Theatre Organ Society, receives their chapter charter from ATOS President Lois Segur. (CN)



David Lau, chairman of the Motor City Chapter, making announcements before the concert. (RF)



Jo Williams, who played for silent movies at the Senate, Tuxedo and Crystal Theatres in Detroit. (Ray Van Steenkiste photo)

Interior of the Michigan Theatre. David Lau at the console making announcements. (RF)



Friday, July 9: Charlie Balogh

The next morning we boarded buses at 8/15 — a most uncivilized hour after banquet night (take note, Nor-Cal) — and headed for the Michigan Theatre in Ann Arbor. Unlike the 1974 convention which featured a day in AA, only one concert was planned on the 3/13 Barton.

Charlie Balogh, longtime organist and musical director at Roaring Twenties Pizza in Grand Rapids, brought the console up with a pair of bouncy and percussive eye-openers, "Great Day" and "Come Follow the Band." His own "Vignette" was fun but formula — you could have put "Nola" under it.

Balogh soon introduced a drummer onstage — Tim Francic if I heard right — and off they hopped with Les Brown's old band theme, "Leapfrog." The organ lent itself well to the big band style. In good regulation, it is a hefty organ and like the Redford is immediate and clear.

Balogh's arrangements were the usual — usually someone else's "standard" arrangement — of such favorites as "Night Train," "Melancholy Serenade," "Original Boogie-Woogie," "One O'Clock Jump" and lots more. But the best item on the program was Charlie's own arrangement of "I Got Rhythm," a piece which has been done to death. I didn't think anyone could possibly come up with another variation, but there were many here — all in the same rhythm, mind you, but variations nevertheless.

In fact, that's what the entire concert sounded like. Jazz, blues, swing — call it what you will. Endless right hand variations on various themes, over moving pedal lines and staccato left-hand chords. Organ and drummer were together with inexorable persistence until the end of the concert. One can get heartily sick of drums after a while. By the time the neckties came off and the drummer started to moan — signifying that he was getting into it, I guess — you could close your eyes and swear you'd heard the same thing ten minutes before. They really didn't start *feeling* the music till the "Bumble Boogie" encore, but by then it was too late.

The concert was fun, different and entertaining. But it was a one-gimmick show. To those who like that kind of thing the combination was quite satisfying. The comparison with



Michigan Theatre, Ann Arbor, July 9. (CN)



Charlie Balogh at the Barton, Michigan Theatre. (CN)



Tim Francic on drums, Michigan Theatre. (CN)

Volunteer modeling T-shirts and tote bags sold to raise funds for the restoration of the Michigan Theatre. (RF)



the Billy Nalle/Art Mosca album *Swinging Pipe Organ* made 25 years ago is unavoidable: there was more music in forty minutes of album than in well over an hour of concert.

Jerry Nagano

The theatre of the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, designed by the same architect as the Punch and Judy, is an early-American confection boasting a French Provincial Rodgers 340 on a Barton four-poster lift. The speakers are housed where the pipe chambers would ordinarily be, with a pair of echo speakers in the back corners of the balcony. Up there the organ sounded dreadful — the bass was way out of balance, and the reeds sounded like a cross between comb-and-tissue-paper and high-pressure Bronx cheers.

Jerry Nagano was introduced by Father Mirrer in a thick Ukranian accent as “a product of Japan, assembled in the U.S.” His entrance was classic Ginger Rogers: one expected a quick buck-and-wing as he swept down the staircase of the stage set.

Nagano’s playing was saturated with George Wright fillers and phrases from beginning to end. But unlike Wright he showed little restraint and less refinement. He was so busy trying to impress us with lightning-fast stop changes (by hand, of course), riffs and trimmings, that the music got left behind. The novelty numbers in particular were played at top speed with lots of holes and questionable phrasing; this is not musicianship, this is exhibitionism.

The best item in the program was a tenderly rendered “How to Handle a Woman,” though the baritone registration was suffering severe nasal congestion. The “Million Dollar Baby,” on the other hand, came across as a sultry streetwalker. And one does not expect to hear Bull’s “Rondo in G” in the midst of a selection from *Brigadoon!* Highland fling rhythm or not, the juxtaposition is ludicrous.

Though his arrangements showed imagination and exuberance they often displayed little grasp of the composer’s intent. The Jolson standard “My Mammy,” for instance, should not bump and grind — unless mammy was a stripper. Nor should “Ain’t Misbehavin’” be slithery and low-down. It is a lonely lover’s declar-



Recording crew hard at work, Henry Ford Museum Theatre, July 9. (RF)



Front of the Henry Ford Museum Theatre. (RF)



Interior of the Henry Ford Museum Theatre, with conventioners waiting for Jerry. (RF)



Jerry Nagano at the console of the Rodgers, Henry Ford Museum Theatre, July 9. (CN)

William and Margie Bartlow, and Fred and Mrs. Pillsbury at the Henry Ford Museum. (RF)





Kim Nagano inspecting some of the early musical instruments in the Henry Ford Museum. (CN)



Ray Van Steenkiste, Dorothy Messer and Dorothy Van Steenkiste at Calvary Baptist. (RF)



L to R: Laurie Grimshaw, Motor City; Eric Wicks, Australia; Orinda Mathews (née Gottfried), Erie, Pennsylvania; Robert "Joe" Luckey, Erie, Pennsylvania. (RF)



Aloha Chapter well represented. (RF)



Ty Woodward and Independence Hall at the Henry Ford Museum. (RF)

ation of faithfulness — the hint of "Makin' Whoopee" Nagano threw in was totally out of context. On the other hand, though I don't ordinarily like Mozart, his orchestration of the first movement of "Eine kleine Nachtmusik" was an interesting indication of Nagano's capabilities.

When are today's precocious young organists going to stop showing off all the time? That Nagano's performance was superficial and gimmicky is a shame. His talent and technique are undeniable and he has the potential to be a fine organist. But he showed little understanding of the music he was playing, and precious little respect for some of it.

And I am still puzzled as to why he would have the brass to stand there and tell us that composer E. T. Paull is "the world's worst writer" (of music? Of stage directions?), would cite a few examples, and then would sit down and play "Napoleon's Last Charge" from beginning to end. If he was being smart as he appeared to be, it was in poor taste; if he believed what he was saying, why did he bother with Paull at all?

Dennis James and "Robin Hood"

Murphy's Law was hard at work Friday night before we even left the hotel. There is no point in belaboring the fact that most buses were held up and therefore most conventioners got to the Fox Theatre after the show



Rex Koury, Preston Kaufmann, Bob Gilbert, Tom B'hend, Bob McGillivray and Geoff Paterson at the cocktail party. (RF)



L to R: Rex Koury, Bob Dilworth, Mary Ann Dilworth, Tommy Landrum. (RF)

L to R: Don Thompson, Ron Buhlmann, Kim Nagano, Joe Luckey, Russ Shaner, Jerry Nagano. (RF)

Allen Miller, Richard Sklenar, Bob McGillivray, Tim Needler, Alden Stockebrand, Gib Petzke and Ken Gordon. (RF)



had begun. Something or someone somewhere along the line caused a whacking great foul-up and left a lot of people visibly, and audibly, upset. It was one of those things that happens, and was apologized for with great embarrassment the next day.

The occasion was the re-premiere of *Robin Hood*, the 1922 Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. epic, presented jointly by Motor City Theatre Organ Society and Downtown Theatre Enthusiasts as a public performance. Dennis James was at the console of the Mighty and Carl Daehler conducted the 36-piece Ann Arbor Chamber Orchestra.

The score was adapted and arranged by Dennis James from Victor Schertzinger's sixty-year-old original. James kept the best known themes such as "Robin Hood March," "Little John's Theme," and "Just an Old Love Song," adding DeKoven's "O Promise Me" from his operetta score. By rearranging the more lengthy "repeat to cue" sections for variety, adding "a couple of things from Korngold," interweaving organ and orchestra melody lines, and filling in variable cue sections with solo organ parts, James produced a score as magnificent as the images on the screen. There were two or three disconcerting places where furioso music was playing against dramatic tension or tender moments on the screen, but it was mostly an accurate, sometimes subtle, match.

Conductor Daehler had studied the film and score for a month and the work paid off. It had never played a film in public before but though there were some rocky periods before intermission, the orchestra in the second half was together and perfectly cued. Its rich full sound was dynamic and expressive; when augmented by the

organ (which had been tuned up a half-tone for the occasion), the power and emotion was of another world.

The balance and richness differed upstairs and down. Blending was smooth and full in the balcony but downstairs the orchestra — amplified through speakers aimed straight out — was immediate while the sound of the organ cascaded from the heavens. Either was ethereal.

The presentation, while spectacular, was not quite authentic as in most houses the organ and orchestra alternated instead of playing together. The travellers apparently wouldn't close far enough to mask the screen properly, there were a couple of lighting snags, and the film was running faster than it should have been, making the chase scenes in particular look ridiculous. And the balcony was again hot and close.

But it didn't matter. The reported 2378 persons in the audience were laughing, shouting, gasping and hissing along with the action, obviously having a great time.

Said to have been the largest set ever constructed in Hollywood — larger in scale than even the Babylon set for *Intolerance* — the castle in which a lot of the film's action took place was breathtaking. The tale was set against the Crusades; adventure and chivalry during the power struggle of Prince John and his brother King Richard the Lion-Hearted. Full of spectacular matte shots, heraldic tournaments and extravagant costumes, the film broke box office records across the country and received the 1922 Photoplay Medal of Honor, equivalent to today's Academy Award. The clarity of the restored 35mm print was remarkable.

As the pit rose to stage level with orchestra and organ thundering forth



Dennis James at the console of the 4/36 Wurlitzer in the Detroit Fox, after the show on Friday, July 9. (CN)



George Wever (Central Indiana), Rex Koury, Lois Segur and Floyd Mumm at the cocktail party, July 4. (RF)

the final chords of "O Promise Me," the audience rose as one in a justly deserved ovation. This was, quite simply, a show with class.

For those of us who missed the overture, organist James repeated it as an organ solo after the theatre cleared of the public. Lowell Ayars also repeated his part, a vocal rendering of the love theme, "Just an Old Love Song." It was a gracious gesture.

Though I'm sure the onslaught of several hundred people after the film began caught them unawares, the confusion and disturbance to those in the theatre could have been reduced considerably if the ushers had known

The Detroit Fox Theatre, c. 1982. The Marquee has been rebuilt and the vertical sign is long gone. (RF)



Conventioners arriving (late!) for *Robin Hood* at the Detroit Fox. (CN)





Gary Reseigh and family, Redford Theatre, July 10. (CN)



Marge and Jerry Muethel and Father Miller have a little serious discussion before the buffet dinner. (CN)

where the sections and rows were. Reports from several people seem to indicate that most didn't have a clue. Their valiant efforts in the face of the unexpected are to be commended, however.

In fairness, it should also be noted that many of those who were seated late were crabbing and complaining even after they were seated, with no thought of those other paying customers around them trying to listen to the music.

Saturday, July 10: Gary Reseigh

The final official concert of the convention, Gary Reseigh at the Redford, could have been dispensed with. After the Fox spectacular it was too little too late, and though it might have been a pleasant, relaxed denouement to an ultimately successful convention the offensive disposition of the organist took care of that idea.

Reseigh is a staff organist with Charlie Balogh in Grand Rapids. He brought the console up with a pleasant "Honeysuckle Rose," proceeded through "Thou Swell," "Serenade in Blue," "Kalamazoo" and a host of other forties numbers which are popular where he works. Reseigh swings and sways with ease, plays with quiet assurance and fitting registrations (he plays tremols like some play keys) and accurately conveys the mood. For all that, he had no surprises and was very average overall. His best selection was his last, the overture to *The Barber of Seville*, which he orchestrated with taste and selectivity; the images of Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd were vivid.

But when he opened his mouth you would think he was doing us all a favor by showing up. Without a tie, not to mention the tux he had no time to order even though he'd known about the concert for two months, he sat there and told us he hadn't bothered to rehearse on that organ 'cause he'd been playing it since he was a kid. Who is kidding whom?

He was boorish toward the stage people about the microphone that was hooked up at the last minute, and his general attitude was unbelievably insolent. To top it all off, he was so hung up on the fact that he was a father and that the wife and kid were right there that he brought them up to "meet" us.

The point, to be blunt, is that when

you are being paid to play the organ, shut up and play. Though few of the concerts lasted the theoretical ninety minutes, Reseigh was actually playing for only fifty minutes. MCTOS should get a partial refund.

The rudeness of the man in the balcony who at one point yelled "Less talk and more music . . ." is not to be excused either, much as one may have shared the sentiment. It is an indication of the decline in the general quality of ATOS audiences at conventions. But that is another article.

John Steele

Following a quiet afternoon back at the hotel, buses loaded at 4:30 for the afterglow: Meadowbrook Hall in Rochester, dinner and a concert by John Steele.

A sprawling monument to the industrial pioneers built by the widow of automaker John Dodge, the hall cost four million dollars in the late twenties. Filled with priceless antiques, it was donated to the state in 1957 along with the 1400-acre estate and two million dollars cash to found Oakland University. The 100-room mansion is now a showplace of craftsmanship and furnishings open for public tours and used as a conference and cultural center.

Though advertised as the "Afterglow," it was better described by a participant as the "After-blow." An orderly and serene chicken Kiev buffet dinner in a huge blue marquee erected on the back lawn was rudely interrupted around coffee and dessert by a sudden storm of such fury it threatened to bring down the canvas roof on top of us. As a few of us were getting drenched holding down tent poles, orderly heads thankfully prevailed over what could have been disastrous panic and people slowly beat a hasty, wet retreat into the mansion.

Loading up at the buffet.



38

(CN)

Friendly conversation in a delightful setting — the tent on the lawn at Meadowbrook Hall — before disaster! (CN)





Pole-holding duty after the storm struck, Meadowbrook Hall. (CN)



Virginia Cheshire, Nor-Cal, ready for anything. (CN)

By the time the place was empty — some ignored the danger to finish their dessert — the storm had passed. Mother Nature really had it in for *one* of us!

Coffee and dessert were set up inside the building, and people were soon wandering about the rooms balancing either or both, oblivious to the destruction that dropping one or the other could wreak on those treasures of inconceivable value. People were shaken and understandably on edge. The heat and humidity added impatience to the mood.

The Meadowbrook Hall organ is a 1919 three-manual Aeolian residence,

organ installed in main and antiphonal chambers. The latter was effectively useless because it was upstairs where temperature shifts had put it impossibly out of tune. Sound egress from the main chamber in the basement was hindered by air ducts between the shutters and the main floor screens. Few pistons worked, and the ornately carved console was so far from the chamber in an alcove that the organist could barely hear.

Aeolians by nature are slow acting and softly voiced, and this one had all the sonic impact of a sneeze in a hurricane. Its loudest stops were the Harp and Chimes. That Steele — as in “nerves of . . .” — played at all was an admirable display of perseverance and composure. With few places to sit, people were wandering all over, talking and eating. It wasn’t just from the heat that the perspiration was running off his forehead.

His program was picked for the organ: “Dambusters March,” “In a Monastery Garden,” “Roses of Picardy,” “Midnight Bells.” Reginald Foort’s “To Victory,” a stirring piece of wartime inspiration, called out for something to play it on. Steele knows the musical value of verses, as he showed in a tearful rendering of “When You’re Away, Dear.” And if he ever records Coates’ “London Again” suite on a decent organ, I’d love a copy. What I could make out over the babble of the crowd showed he understood exactly what he was playing.

As for his registrations, well, when one is confronted with what amounts to twelve ranks of Dulcianas duplexed to three manuals, there’s not much one can do.

It was a tribute to John’s professionalism that his page turner was



A place to sit down at Meadowbrook Hall was hard to find, and hearing the organ even more difficult. (CN)

Ashley Miller. It’s only too bad that so few could properly hear, and fewer could appreciate, what was going on. As a demonstration of what these old residence installations were like it was an education, and worth it. Unfortunately, they could have put some Archer Gibson rolls on the Duo-Art player and it would have been just the same to most.

Holding the tent because of the storm.

(CN)

John Steele plays at Meadowbrook Hall under very difficult conditions. Ashley Miller turns the pages. (CN)

