

## Questions and Answers on the Technical Side

by Lance Johnson



### Do you have any questions?

Send them direct to:

**QUIZMASTER**  
and Organbuilder

**LANCE JOHNSON**

Box 1228

Fargo, North Dakota 58102

**Q.** We have a 3/8 Robert-Morton with a small toy counter in our local theatre, which our ATOS chapter maintains. Some of our reeds look like someone worked on them with a pipe wrench. Is it possible to recurve the reeds with a reed curving tool and a burnishing iron? Also, is there available a schematic diagram of the circuit for this organ?

**A.** You had best leave any reed voicing to a professional. Contact organ builders in your own area for help. If an amateur from your group were to tackle this type of work, the reeds would probably come out looking like a pipe wrench were used again. I know of no schematic diagrams for the Robert-Morton organ. If you can relate a specific problem, I will try to help you solve it.

**Q.** I am installing a Wurlitzer theatre organ in a residence where I would like to locate all the regulators, except those for the bass, roughly 25 to 30 feet from the chests. I would like to install the tremulants near the chests in the chamber. Is this possible and have you ever heard of this being done? Won't this reduce noise and vibration throughout the house?

**A.** Your regulators will not function properly if placed over four feet from the chests. The additional friction in the wind trunk resulting from the longer distance between chest and regulator will slow down the response of the wind surge needed when the organ is played. Even worse, you will encounter great turbulence in the trunk with trem turned off.

Why do you want to place your trem in the chamber when you have already decided that the noise would be reduced by having the regulators away from the chambers? Certainly your greatest source of noise will be the trem. Why not move them away from the chambers? Remember if you do, you cannot install them with the original 2½" diameter conductor, but must increase it to 3" because of the increase in trem conductor length. If you have a height problem, you can mount your regulators to one side of the chests so that the chests can be placed as close as 18" to the floor.

**Q.** I maintain the Hinners organ in our church, and I have a problem that is getting worse. With regard to the four-rank ventil chest, when the Oboe stop is off, air leaks out through the ventil action and causes some Oboe pipes to play while the organist is playing other ranks. If I open the ventil more, more air leaks out but the Oboe then quits playing. Any advice will be appreciated.

**A.** High pressure air is leaking across the stop channels, most likely because of bad gaskets. This would be especially true if the Hinners gasket material is cork or blotting paper. These gaskets are known for a short life, because they cannot take up the slack with seasonal expansion and

contraction of the chest members. If it is possible, you had better remove all the pipes, disconnect the wind and cables, and turn the chest over to replace gaskets. I would suggest using horsehide packing leather for best results. You will need some arch punches to make new holes for exhaust channels, which should be done before gluing the new gaskets to the chest. Watch for stripped screws as you disassemble.

**Q.** We have a tremulant problem with our Wurlitzer. The large regulator (34" x 36") simply will not tremulant like the others, as it has a very shallow beat. It is wound with 15 feet of 2½" conductor and the regulator is not weighted. I have not added any weight to the regulator because I heard you say that weights are not correct for obtaining good heavy tremulants.

**A.** If you are referring to my Detroit seminar on tremulants, I believe you may have misunderstood. Any regulator larger than 20" x 30" will need some weight to get it to bounce in resonance. I would suggest starting with 20 pounds and trying it. If this doesn't give you enough beat, then you should increase the diameter of your trem conductor. Adding more weight will take your regulator out of tune and decrease its ability to regulate quickly. I have been able to get 20" x 30" regulators to beat to the point where the action almost stops and all by not using weights. Then, when the trem is off the regulator can do its job and maintain an even and responsive regulation. □

---

## Closing Chord

---

**Lenore Feibel**, widow of Fred Feibel, New York Paramount and radio organist, died on December 4.

When the Feibels moved to Vero Beach, Florida, in the early sixties Fred continued as a church organist and choir director. Lenore helped found the local chapter of the American Association of University Women, and served as its president for a period. One of the couple's projects was the raising of thousands of dollars for a nearby college. Fred performed a yearly concert and Lenore



handled tickets.

Mrs. Feibel is survived by a daughter, Janet, and grandchildren.

\* \* \*

South Florida Chapter member **Ralph A. Anderson, Jr.**, passed away on December 11, 1982. An architect and a fine organist, Anderson, 59, served as program chairman of South Florida Chapter, routinely hosted the board meetings at his home and could be counted on to tune various organs in the area before concerts. He also served as correspondent to THE-ATRE ORGAN.

Born in Austin, Minnesota, he was reared in Lyle and studied architectural engineering at the University of Minnesota. He moved to the Miami area shortly after World War II and worked as an architect for various firms.

Anderson lived and worked in a commercial building in Coral Gables so he wouldn't disturb neighbors with his organ practicing on evenings and weekends. Though he said, "I'm an architect, not a musician," he played exceptionally well and was in demand as an entertainer at parties.

In addition to his three-manual Rodgers which sported a knotty pine console, Anderson owned a Steinway grand piano signed by Paderewski. When the piano was refinished some years ago, the spot with the signature was left untouched.

Besides doing organ installations for Rodgers, Anderson designed classical installations of pipes for various churches in the Miami area.

\* \* \*

**Irma Glen** first came to the nationwide attention of radio listeners through her network solo broadcasts and background music originating from WENR, the NBC Chicago studios, in the mid-'30s where she was a staffer with 23 shows a week, including some in which she had dramatic parts. Her nighttime half-hour "Lovable Music" radiocast series was unique in that the sponsor, instead of being a soap or breakfast food maker, was an individual. The announcer said the organ music was "brought to you by an unnamed sponsor." Many years later she revealed that the sponsor was a wealthy woman who simply believed that Irma's music deserved nationwide exposure. Irma was with NBC Chicago for 12 years, from 1934

to 1946. At age 17 she had her own orchestra which played engagements in Buenos Aires and Europe. Upon return to the U.S. she played the Orpheum and Pantages circuits. She was playing and scoring films in Chicago theatres when WENR "discovered" her.

Irma Glen was well-schooled in music but she had always nurtured strong religious beliefs. Early in her career she decided to pursue religious studies and use her musical ability to support her religious feelings. Back to school. She became a minister entitled to put "Doctor" before her name. In the Silver Anniversary Class of the Institute of Religious Science she met a man who shared her enthusiasm for the ministry. She married Charles R. Sloan and together they preached in behalf of the Church of Religious Science. It was a lasting love. They found great satisfaction in appearing together at religious events. Charles, although not an ordained minister, often preached the sermon while Irma provided music at the keyboards and usually added a few inspirational words. Irma made a few recordings in that vein. Her only tape of purely "pops" was made during the '60s on Dick Simonton's 4/36 Wurlitzer. She planned to release it as a record but it was never done, although all who heard the tape encouraged her. The playing was solid theatre organ with



Irma Glen.



Irma at the WENR Wurlitzer.



Irma Glen and Everett Mitchell on the "Air Junior" program, WENR Chicago.



imaginative arrangements and colorful registration.

She is described on one of her record jackets as an "organist-composer, author, lecturer, TV personality and nature lover." She went all-out for the ecology efforts which started late in the '60s. She released a recording with her originals played on an Allen plus her own voiced pleas: "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their planet." Tunes included such titles as "Every Day is Earth Day," "Ecology's Song" and "Soul-Soaring." Yet she was never pushy in promoting her beliefs. She used her sometimes bubbly, always positive personality to do the convincing. She had no bad words for anyone. She did very little concert work outside of her church connections, but always liked to give home installations a workout.

She was in her mid-'70s when cancer struck. There were several operations and then she suffered a stroke. She died on December 15 last at the Sloan residence in San Marcos, California. A memorial service in the Los Angeles area was planned for early 1983.

\* \* \*

It is with the deepest regret that we have to report the passing of our most distinguished member, **George Harrison**, just at the turn of the year, after a long and bravely endured illness at the age of 77.

Well known in theatre organ circles on both sides of the Atlantic for many years, and especially active in his home area in Southeast Essex, George was founding chairman of the London and South of England Chapter through its formative three years, also operating as treasurer at the same time. This arduous and much-valued contribution to building the success of our chapter included the organization of the outstanding 25th Silver Anniversary Convention in the UK in 1980.

George's exceptionally wide personal contributions ranged from the installation and support of two Compton theatre organs in Roman Catholic churches in conjunction with the incumbency of good friend Father Gerard Kerr, through their frequent visits to the USA to participate in successive conventions, to his marvelous cooking of delicious



George Harrison.

mange gateaux for chapter meetings and club nights.

But for all of this, perhaps George's most endearing characteristic was his disarming but resolute personality.

All-in-all therefore, it was a privilege to know George and to share his devout love of the theatre organ.

NORMAN BARFIELD

\* \* \*

**Carleton James**, who with Paul H. Forster, were the two leading lights of the great theatre organ era in Syracuse, New York, died in January. He was 83.

His first theatre job was at the age of 14, when he played piano in a Schenectady, New York, theatre. Next came jobs in Oneida, Brooklyn, and again in Schenectady, before settling down in Syracuse. An earthquake occurred during his stint at the Strand. In 1925 he went into Keith's Theatre, where his long engagement was



Carleton James at the organ he loved most; B. F. Keith's 3/11 Wurlitzer in Syracuse.

(Tom Anderson photo)

marked by a noontime robbery. He also performed on radio, being featured on WFBL, Syracuse.

James rubbed shoulders with many notables of entertainment: Jimmy Van Heusen, Victor Herbert, Sonja Henie, Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll, Irene Rich and Gordon MacRae, among others. Holding numerous positions as a church organist in Syracuse, he was also a factor in saving the Keith's Theatre Wurlitzer, doing several programs before and after its relocation on the State Fairgrounds. One of the last programs he performed was for the Rochester Theatre Organ Society in November 1974 when the club observed its tenth anniversary. His biography appeared in the December 1972 THEATRE ORGAN.

LLOYD E. KLOS

\* \* \*

Long-time organ buff **Bill Oberg** died at his home in West Memphis, Arkansas, at the age of 35. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him. (THEATRE ORGAN, Aug./Sept. '80, page 64.) Bill was a mathematics teacher in several of the junior high schools of Tennessee and lastly in West Memphis, Arkansas. He was a great inspiration to all his students. Bill's great love was refurbishing pipe organs. He was the official service man for several of the organs in Memphis. Nearly every weekend he was working on a church organ within a fifty-mile radius, or had a crew down at the Orpheum Theatre in Memphis, or over at Ellis Auditorium restoring the classical 5/115 Kimball. Bill was a theatre pipe organ buff who realized a dream, his own organ. He collected pipes and all the necessary parts to make a 3/12 Wurlitzer organ for his home. He converted his two-car garage into chambers, which sounded into the living room, a resounding tribute to Bill's inspiration — and perspiration.

He was an active member of the Memphis Chapter of the AGO, and invited the members to his home annually to have at least one meeting of theatre pipe organ. Everyone who has heard his organ says that it is one of the best home installations they have seen, and the voicing is superb.

Bill Oberg was a quiet man, a true gentleman, with a positive outlook on everything about him. He encouraged everyone and always saw the bright



side. We all liked him for his friendly manner and cheerfulness. Memorials may be sent to the Memphis Chapter of the American Guild of Organists.

ROGER P. ELSER, *Secretary*  
Fayette County Home Organist Club

\* \* \*



Eddie May.

**Edward C. May**, "Mr. Music of Miami Beach," and once a leading theatre organist, died in Miami on January 18. He was 82.

Born in Rochester, New York, he toured with a sawdust show as a tap dancer while in high school. He studied at the Eastman School of Music under Harold Gleason, and then opened area pipe organs for Wurlitzer. Study in New York was followed by a stint as consultant for the Kohl Organ Co., opening instruments in churches and theatres. He toured the eastern states in 1921, and in 1924 joined Schine Theatres, performing throughout the state.

This led him to residency in Rochester, where he played several Schine houses, eventually managing the Riviera while serving as organist. In 1936 he helped organize the Rochester Community Choir, which grew to 1500 members before he left for Maysville, Kentucky, in 1938, and a succession of playing and managing assignments in theatres in Ohio, Virginia, Pennsylvania and California.

In 1944, he went into the Roney Plaza Hotel in Miami Beach and stayed in Miami for the remainder of his career, teaching, playing, recording, and initiating a two-organ act with daughter Carol which played the posh hotels and clubs.

Besides his daughter, Mr. May is survived by several grandchildren. His biography appeared in the Summer 1966 issue of THEATRE ORGAN.

LLOYD E. KLOS □



## CHAPTER NOTES

Edited by Grace E. McGinnis

### ALABAMA Birmingham

205/979-8132 or 205/785-4864

What an exciting year Alabama Chapter has had with "Big Bertha," the Wurlitzer at the Alabama Theatre. The old cliché, "something for everyone," had real meaning in Birmingham, from a highly successful and entertaining concert by Walt Strony (who really let his hair down while accompanying an old Rudolph Valentino silent film, *The Eagle*) to the pleasant experiences of those who like to work on the organ itself. Our programs were many and varied, and all of them pleasurable. Cyndi Landers, Dewey Barker, Jay Mitchell, Barry Norris, Bob Reid, Rick McGee, Walt Winn and Mark Landers provided a super team of artists who love the theatre organ and truly show it when they touch the keyboards and pedals. There are also the members who offer their favorite selections during open console and who make you realize how much talent we have right here at home. It is a pleasure to sit back in the comfortable theatre seats and listen to members Sam Troutman, Bea Fee, Gary Jones, Bob Rabun, Larry McCormick, Miller Peterson and Cecil Whitmire and to share their enjoyment as they play.

At our December meeting we held the election of our 1983 officers, and we are looking forward to an enjoyable and successful future which will come through planning and cooperation. The plan is to mix the old with the new, redefining and recreating the old into something new, yet not losing the essence of its heritage.

The Alabama Theatre will be a part of a \$125 million project, a plan to link Loveman's Department Store with three other historic buildings, the Alabama Theatre, J.J. Newberry Company and the Burger Phillips

building, with three new high-rises. The theatre will remain much as it is, but the sound and lighting systems will be improved to service live productions. During a Christmas parade in downtown Birmingham, theatre organ music played by Cecil Whitmire was piped through loudspeakers from Third Avenue to Nineteenth and Twentieth Streets making a first for Christmas music from the Alabama Theatre.

From the members who keep the organ in its best condition comes a happy report that five of the thirteen regulators involved in the organ have been re-leathered. This speaks well of the original leather, as the organ was first put into service in December of 1927. Through the efforts of Larry Donaldson, Ola Fee, Bob Rabun, Freeman Andress, Gary Jones, Sam Troutman and John Hiam, the last three of the five that were re-covered were done in time for our annual meeting in December.

We meet the second Sunday of the month at 2 p.m. Y'all come!

RAY KENERDINE

CENTRAL FLORIDA  
THEATRE  
ORGAN  
SOCIETY



Tampa

813/685-8707 or 813/863-2264

Our Christmas party and meeting was held at the residence of John and Flo Hobbs. After the meeting we were entertained by Everett Bassett, who played a nice selection of standards as well as some fine Christmas music. Open console on the Hobbs'