



Chaumonde Porterfield and Pete Sweeney at the console of the College of the Sequoias organ.



CALIFORNIA COLLEGE OFFERS COURSE ON THEATRE ORGAN

by Pete Sweeney
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When President Crookshanks of the College of the Sequoias called me to his office at the beginning of the Spring 1981 semester, it was not without some trepidation that I went. No problem, I soon found out. He wanted me to investigate the offer of a large hybrid theatre pipe organ for our new theatre.

Was I hearing right? For more than my 28 years as an English teacher, I have been bending ears and pulling lapels in an effort to communicate the unique role that the theatre organist has played in the history of American music. And now someone was responding. Could this be the sign I had been waiting for to organize a course featuring the theatre organ? It was. And this is the story.

Over the years Marguerite Moore

of Porterville (see THEATRE ORGAN, March/April 1982) had put together in her home a large instrument, but because of failing health decided to donate it to an appropriate institution. College of the Sequoias could not fulfill her wishes for its installation. Consequently, with the organ seed planted, Dr. Crookshanks asked me to look into the possibility of the school purchasing an electronic instrument that might serve the same purposes as the pipe organ: to entertain the community with top-flight artists and to teach interested persons in the school district the technique and literature of the theatre organ.

I wasted no time getting bids, and by December 1981 we dedicated our new instrument, a three-manual Allen Theatre Organ, model 965, with 14

100-watt amplifiers and 28 large speaker cabinets weighing over a ton! What a powerhouse! (And what a price tag, too — over \$50,000 invested to date.) Dwight Beacham played the dedication concert. The audience response was so great that we asked Tom Hazleton to play in February. Once again, a wonderful, exciting reaction. Next, for variety we called on Gaylord Carter, who did his famous Flicker Fingers Show for us in May. Another exuberant reception.

With such community support of the organ, I proposed to the curriculum committee the new music course. The proposal was accepted, and Chaumonde Porterfield, an effervescent organist and music teacher with all the necessary academic credentials, was hired. I was relieved of some

of my English teaching duties to supervise the program and help with individual instruction when needed.

Although somewhat unwieldy, the organ is completely portable. For concerts, over 2000 pounds of speakers are rolled out along with the console, all of which is kept in the basement for teaching purposes. To raise the organ, there is a large stage elevator which we also use for the opening and closing numbers of most artists. A choir shell is used to properly direct the sound from the speakers.

We are now into the last part of the Fall semester and all members of the new organ class have indicated that they will sign up for the Spring session. Of course, we have to play it by ear (so to speak) in planning ahead because there is no precedent for this kind of class. And lest the hours of lonely practice tend to dampen the student's enthusiasm, guest organists — pop and classical — are invited to play from time to time, offering stimulation and motivation.

Personally, I'm in seventh heaven. This instrument is at my disposal most weekends and many evenings. In fact, I played a public sing-along and accompanied two silent movies in September. I may not be Gaylord Carter, but we all had a good time, nevertheless.

One final point. I'm interested in knowing how many other colleges offer an accredited music course taught on a theatre organ. Are we unique? □

TEACHING THEATRE/CLASSICAL/LITURGICAL ORGAN IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by Chaumonde Porterfield

While seated one day at the organ trying to find the famous "Lost Chord" which always seems to escape to some unforeseen position of finger disarray, the telephone rang. It was a call that was going to change my life, as well as present a challenge and inspiration.

A very excited voice asked me to join the faculty at our community College of the Sequoias in Visalia, California. I could not believe my ears, for this was my alma mater calling me to come and join the staff. I had read in our local paper that the college had recently purchased a three-manual Allen Model 965 Digital Computer Organ for the newly-constructed theatre on the campus. I was quite impressed that a rural, agricultural town of 47,000 would consider such a thing. Having been born in Visalia, I was under the impression as a child that in order to have access to

the latest invention, one would have to go to the larger cities of San Francisco or Los Angeles.

After graduation from COS I majored in music at San Francisco State University, studying piano and voice. There I was exposed to bigger and better organs. I had been playing as a church organist since the age of ten. My spare time in San Francisco was largely spent traveling from one organ concert to another. Although my study in music was considered serious, and I was known as a "purist" student, I didn't mind crossing over the bridge, so to speak, to hear the mighty theatre organs. I thought it strange that so many people were either classical supporters of the arts or labeled popular fans, never to pursue both at the same time.

After living in several locales I moved back to Visalia to become a private music teacher in organ, piano and voice. I also taught music in the elementary schools for a while, and returned to church music work as an organist and choir director. It was with this background that I accepted the post at the college.

I don't believe a course just like this has been taught before. It is titled "A Study of Organ Technique and Repertoire." True, there are many courses under the same heading, but not handling liturgical music (for church organists), classical (music majors transferring to four-year colleges) and theatre music (for home/career enthusiasts), all being taught at the same time.

The class is limited to 12 people in a session so that I can monitor the progress of each student, as each has an individual repertoire to suit his needs and level of achievement. The class meets as a whole on Monday and Friday of each week, and on the middle days of the week splits into groups of

Individual instruction on the Allen organ at the College of the Sequoias, with console at audience level and screen lowered. Speaker units on casters are seen on either side of the screen.

