

# PIPES &

## Personalities

### "Wind Machine" Gone

"The Great American Wind Machine," that last Los Angeles bastion of pizza and pipes, is no more. Owner Mike Ohman lost his lease. Opened in the late '60s with a 2/10 Wurlitzer from a Beverly Hills theatre, the place came to life when Ohman purchased the business and re-installed the organ, had a three-manual console built for it and expanded it to become a 3/17. The place on Reseda Boulevard was the scene of many open concerts, organ club meetings and ATOS convention concerts. Many prominent organists presented concerts there, among them George Wright. The final public concert was played by Dan Bellomy a few weeks before closing. The spot was also a showcase for such talented players as Candi Carley, Tony Wilson, Dan Bellomy and even bossman Ohman. They built reputations while entertaining diners.

Mike and Sherri Ohman hosted a small party for friends on Sunday evening, April 3, during which those who had long admired the finely-honed organ were encouraged to try their luck at the console. Some did. A few were quite good. Others were — well — adequate.

At 9:00 the next morning a crew of carefully selected volunteers started removal procedures. Next day there was enough ready to start trucking the parts to storage. Ohman has not yet located another building suitable for an organ-equipped pizzeria. Meanwhile, "Windy," as he calls the instrument, will be expanded. Next time it sounds forth, it will sport 24 ranks of pipes.

### New Theatre Organ Situation In Kansas City

A major new theatre organ situation is being planned for the former Loew's Midland Theatre in Kansas City, Missouri, now known officially under new management as The Mid-

land Center for the Performing Arts. This theatre was a landmark development in the career of theatre architect Thomas Lamb. In the same architectural style Lamb not long afterward was to design in more elaborate terms the San Francisco Fox Theatre.

The Midland Center now seats 2800. When completed in 1927 it accommodated 3700. Larger seats with greater seat spacing account for the difference. The decor of the house is virtually unimpaired and the needed refurbishment is well advanced.

Various major presentations, local and national, now are "on the boards" on a regular basis, and once a theatre pipe organ is installed the Center will be able to offer even more variety in its musical productions. There will be future news about the organ and its installation. (The original organ was a Morton of four manuals and twenty ranks, a twin to that presently in the Ohio Theatre, Columbus, Ohio.)

The group organized as Kansas City Theatre Pipe Organ, Inc., has been formed to locate, install and maintain the coming instrument in the Midland Center. This group will own the organ and control its usage. The corporation members are Robert Maes, Marvin Faulwell and David Weaver. The organ installation will be part of the total project of the highly successful Theatre League of Kansas City to bring the entire building back to its original beauty.

### Waikiki Theatre No. 3 Saved; To Lose Fish Pond!

Frank Loney, who replaced the late John DeMello at the console of the 4/16 Robert-Morton at the Waikiki Theatre No. 3 in Honolulu, Hawaii, gave up the position in 1982. Robert Alder now plays Friday and Saturday nights before the feature and during intermission. The house was scheduled for demolition, but has been saved from the wrecker's ball. Loney reported that the theatre will undergo extensive refurbishing. The front doors will be moved back to the top of the stairs, enlarging the lobby to twice its present size. The candy counter will be relocated to the side. The forecourt will be roofed over and the fish pond removed. The interior will be recarpeted. This house is the flagship of the Consolidated Theatres chain in Hawaii. The future of the organ is uncertain.



Robert Alder at the 4/16 Robert-Morton, Waikiki Theatre No. 3, Honolulu. (Ed Mullins photo)

In the meantime, Bob Alder is doing his best to keep the instrument in playable condition. He is service representative for the Allen Organ Company in Hawaii, and is also Entertainment Officer for the Naura Pacific Line on cruises to Micronesia, Australia, the Central Pacific and the Western Pacific. When he is at sea, Loney fills in for him. Bob has also been accompanying silent film classics on his Allen organ at the Academy Theatre of the Honolulu Academy of Arts. He sends a friendly "Aloha" to our readers and invites them to attend his concerts on Fridays or Saturdays if they are in Hawaii.

ED MULLINS

### Fire Destroys Compton In Scotland

James Donald of Garden State Chapter reports the death by arson of the 3/8 Compton in the Powis Academy, Aberdeen, Scotland, this past December.

The organ was originally installed in 1934 in Aberdeen's Astoria Theatre. Billed as the "Compton Illuminated Organ — the first of its kind in Britain," it was played regularly by such well-known organists as George Blackmore through the late 1950's.

The theatre was demolished in 1967, but the organ was saved by organist/carillonneur Bob Leys. Leys, who was Music Master of Powis

Academy at the time, was at first only interested in salvaging the vibraphone. After seeing the organ, though, he decided that it belonged in his school's auditorium. The organ was stored at the school until the school district allocated funds to buy the instrument.

Thanks to much volunteer work by Academy students and staff, installation was complete in nine months, over a year ahead of schedule. George Blackmore played the re-dedication concert on March 7, 1969, and he pronounced the organ in better shape than when he played it in its original home. More recently, Bob Leys played the Compton for his own radio program. He also recorded it for BBC Glasgow.

In early December, 1982, youths broke into the Auditorium and set fire to it. The entire structure, including the organ, burned down. Leys regrets the loss, not only of the Compton, but of a board that the 200 student volunteers had signed at the time of installation. □



## BOOK REVIEW

**THE OAKLAND PARAMOUNT** — text by Susannah Harris Stone, photographs by Roger Minick. Hardbound, 96 pages, 72 color plates, 12 B&W, 8" x 8½", \$12.95 postpaid. Lancaster-Miller Publishers, P.O. Box 3056, Berkeley, California 94703.

In his preface to *The Oakland Paramount*, Peter Botto says, "You have to see the Paramount in person to fully appreciate it. But if a visit is out of the question, we hope this book will convey the Paramount's magic to you." This book does exactly that. It is a personal odyssey through fifty years of the fortunes and misfortunes of one of America's great movie palaces, complete with a Cinderella finale.

The history of architect Timothy

Pflueger's Oakland Paramount parallels, in a way, the history of our time. From its optimistically grandiose opening in December 1931, to its equally spectacular reopening in September 1973, the story of this theatre mirrors America's social and economic past. The first phase of the Paramount's life only lasted six months, and then it was closed for nearly a year before reopening with no stage show or orchestra, just movies. During the war years it served an additional role as a resting place for servicemen who were unable to find hotel rooms. In 1953, the Paramount introduced Cinema-Scope to Oakland and, during the remainder of its life as a movie house, the management responded to the challenge created by television with talent shows, prize nights, and cooperative advertising campaigns. However, the theatre lost, and on September 15, 1970, the last paid-attendance movie was shown, the title an appropriate *Let It Be*. The theatre was purchased by the Oakland Symphony in 1972, and here its Cinderella story begins.

Jack Bethards and Peter Botto took charge of the seemingly impossible task of restoring the theatre to its original condition, and Susannah Stone's account of this alone has all the elements of a fairy tale. First, the building had to be stripped down and cleaned by blowing out the accumulated dirt from the top down. Then it had to be scrubbed from the bottom up. The Art Deco carpeting was recreated by the original weaver; the seats were made slightly larger and more comfortable but were covered with a high-pile mohair that matched the original. The main stage curtain and valance were duplicated by a San Francisco couple who appliquéd the original patterns of silver and gold lamé onto nearly a mile of velour. Every surface in the building was either painted, papered, refinished or recovered.

The new function of the Paramount necessitated some minor changes in its design, notably the addition of a box office on the 21st Street side of the theatre, two bars in the general lounges and the shifting of the two intermediate aisles in the auditorium to accommodate the wider seats. The backstage changes, the added electrical service and the replacement of the marquee letters in the style of the originals were finally completed and on

September 22, 1973, the Paramount held its second grand opening.

Of interest to theatre organ lovers is a section about the Mighty Wurlitzer which made its debut in November of 1981. The major part of this organ (Opus 1123) came from the Capitol Theatre in Detroit and was donated by J. B. Nethercutt. This was augmented by another substantial donation of Wurlitzer parts by Preston M. (Sandy) Fleet. To bring this organ up to date a new digital solid-state relay and switch system was installed. The photographs which accompany this section include views of the grillwork, the console, the percussions and the Solo chamber.

The final chapter of the book, "Keep It Glowing," is a fascinating narrative of the day-to-day operation of the Oakland Paramount. It is probably fair to say that only a few of those who attend an event in this theatre are aware of the extensive maintenance and preparation involved in each production. Ms. Stone describes a ballet rehearsal and the detailed preparation for a traveling Broadway show by taking the reader through the step-by-step procedures leading up to the lowering of the house lights and the raising of the curtain — an exciting experience.

The most outstanding feature of this book, however, is its excellent selection of photographs. Black and white pictures show the reader how it was, and vividly accurate color reproductions reveal how it is now. For those of us who have attended this theatre in person, this is a book we must have. And for those who have not been there, this is a book *they* must own. Susannah Harris Stone and Roger Minick are to be commended for creating, between the covers of such a small volume, the image of such vastness and opulence that is the Oakland Paramount. If you like happy endings, this is a Cinderella story to be cherished.

PAUL J. QUARINO □

THEATRE ORGAN

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