

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 □

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