

Closing Chord

A. Derrick Marsh, 62, died suddenly in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in February only two days after returning from his native England with his wife, Betty. He leaves three daughters and several grandchildren.

Derrick maintained a lifelong interest in theatre organ. He was a BBC engineer for years until opening his DEROY Sound Service business in 1948 making professional recordings. He later had his own pressing plant as well. He was a member of the Association of Professional Recording Studios (English).

Mr. Marsh is best known by American theatre organ fans as the producer of 99 volumes of *Cinema Organ Encores* — a series of theatre pipe organ 12" LP recordings, many vintage, of English, American, Canadian, Australian, Hawaiian and South African organs. In several instances, his are the only commercial records of certain organs and organists, making them unique and irreplaceable.

STANLEY C. GARNISS

Alvah I. Winslow of Foxboro, Massachusetts, a lifetime member of Eastern Massachusetts Chapter ATOS, died unexpectedly at his home on Memorial Day, May 30. The "Old Pro," as he was affectionately called, had been both president and treasurer of the chapter — always willing to help until recent health problems restricted his activities. He was 75, born December 18, 1907. Al was the husband of the late Virginia (Tarr) Winslow and is survived by five sons, two daughters, a brother and 15 grandchildren. He was graduated from Brown University in 1930 with a Bachelor's Degree in Engineering. He taught economics at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, and was a mechanical engineer for Raytheon in Wayland, Massachusetts, for 16 years, retiring in 1972.

Winslow was a fine theatre organist, playing the silents for the Fay Theatre chain in the Providence, Rhode Island area, and was a church organist at several locations in his home area. He also was featured organist until recently for public concerts at

the Hammond Museum, Magnolia, Massachusetts, during the Summer Series. Another genuine member of the "old school" of theatre organists has left our ranks and he will be missed by many.

Adele S. Thiele passed away suddenly on June 3, 1983, in St. Luke's Hospital in Pasadena. She was stricken the day before with a heart attack which led to irreversible brain damage. Survivors include her husband Mel, daughter Susann Tyler of La Jolla and son Gary of Duarte, California.

Adele played for the Golden State Theatre chain in Oakland and San Francisco at various theatres during the late '20s and early '30s. In later years after she and her family had



Adele S. Thiele.

(Photo by Bob Hill)

moved to Southern California, she did engagements for various social, religious, and fraternal organizations. Her husband joined her in putting on short silent movies throughout the San Gabriel Valley in Southern California. She was a longtime member of ATOS and later LATOS in Los Angeles, as well as of various other small clubs.

After the Philadelphia ATOS convention at Cherry Hill Inn, she was part of a group of 200 that toured England visiting the many theatre pipe organs.

MEL THIELE
Arcadia, California

Charles William (Bill) Roberts passed away June 3 in Tulsa. Bill was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota,

September 29, 1918. He was owner of Roberts Piano Company in Tulsa, which was started 50 years ago by his father. He and his father serviced theatre organs in the Tulsa area.

This man gave and gave. He gave of his knowledge, which was great. He gave of his time when help was needed. He gave of himself and never asked anything in return. In fact, he always acted a little embarrassed when help was offered him. He didn't want to impose.

Somehow I had always thought of Bill Roberts as being indestructible — that he would *always* "be there" when we needed him — because he always was. Oh, he'd tell you what you'd planned wouldn't work, and then that he would show you how to make it work but that *he* wasn't going to do it — and then he'd proceed to do it anyway. It took some real doing to pass Bill's inspection, and I have a feeling that he'd just as soon do it himself as to settle for anything less than perfect.

I was one of the fortunate ones, I guess, because at one time I did meet his quality control criteria. When Bill, Phil Judkins and I undertook, some twenty years ago, the restoration of the 2/9 Wurlitzer then installed in Tulsa's Downtown Orpheum Theatre, Bill agreed to provide his expertise if we'd provide the materials, and if we'd shut it down and do it right. I'll never forget my first day at "The Store" — re-leathering primary pouches. "Re-leathering is easy, Dorothy, but you've got to work faster," Bill said. That first day I finished *four!* But after I caught on I went faster, and they all passed Bill's inspection. When we finally got around to the relay, we discovered it was a mess! "If I'd known it was this bad, I'd never have started the project in the first place," he fussed. But he thought about it, and tried one thing and another, and in the end it worked. (We did get the organ finished, by the way, and enjoyed it for several years before the theatre was demolished. The organ went to Texas.)

I remember another day at The Store, when I was still working on that interminable pile of primary pouches, and Bill was working on a piano. Something about the veneer wasn't quite right, and he tried to patch-glue it rather than take it all off and do it over. I told him he would never be satisfied with a halfway job

— and sure enough, next time I was there, I found he'd taken it all apart and done it right.

And of course, in recent years, any time anything needed doing with any of the various pipe organs in our area, Bill was always there, with his plans (usually drawn on the back of old piano advertisements), his screwdrivers and his soldering iron. I don't think there was anything about pipe organs — especially theatre pipe organs — that Bill didn't know. But if he didn't know, he'd figure it out.

Lee and I had occasion to drive past 21st and Harvard the day Bill died. I had not seen "where The Store had been" since he closed it the first of this year. What a strange and empty feeling came over me! Roberts Piano Store was gone — and now, so was Bill.

What has struck me more than anything is that Bill ran out of time — a familiar refrain you hear over and over again, but now especially meaningful. All the things he was "going to do" — he is no longer here to do. This has made me feel a tremendous urgency in my own life — not so much to "do things" but to "be" the person I really want to be. Fortunately, our chapter is gloriously free of petty grievances, or even big grievances, and how wonderful that is! But there are areas in my own life that need improvement, and Bill's death has made me realize that I, too, am "running out of time." I don't have "time" for angers, jealousies, pettiness — all the things that can be such big stumbling blocks in a person's life.

Yes, Bill will be missed. It was said that he was needed to work on some other pipe organs. I am sure that when he saw the trumpets at the gates of heaven he proceeded to tell Saint Peter that they would never work that way, they were wired all wrong — and that by now he is joyfully employed in showing them how to do it right! And for Bill, that's heaven, for sure!

DOROTHY SMITH
Sooner State Chapter

William W. Watts, San Francisco Bay Area theatre organist, passed away June 17, 1983. At the time of his death he was in retirement, but was always willing and able to put his talents to work whenever a console would shine its tempting stoprail in his direction.

A theatre organist for over 60



Bill Watts doing what he loved most.

years, Bill got his start in 1919 when, at the ripe old age of 11, he had his first job at the Los Angeles Star Theatre. As he said, ". . . The organist (at the theatre) let me play a little and I just kept on going."

Going on, he did. He played in the Los Angeles neighborhood theatres as well as houses in Long Beach. In a recent San Jose *Mercury News* interview, Bill stated, ". . . When I was 8, 9, 10 years old, I used to go downtown every spare moment I had and listen to the great organists; Jesse Crawford, Milton Charles . . . they gave me lessons without even knowing it . . ."

At a point just before the demise of silent films, he was playing the very Wurlitzer his boyhood idol Crawford had presided over — the early installation at the Million Dollar Theatre in Los Angeles. How he loved that organ! When one would engage Bill in a conversation, it was not long before he would liven things with his anecdotes about the Million Dollar days. He was the last silent film organist playing the ancient Robert-Morton in the downtown California Theatre.

During the Depression he played piano in dance bands, including two years in a Roosevelt Administration WPA dance band in Long Beach. Weathering the Depression and a stint in the World War II Army, Bill gained a following playing in Southland clubs.

In 1956, he and his wife, Dee, moved to the San Jose area and he continued his career with teaching, electronic organ demos, and concerts

for area organ clubs. In 1968, he was the first staff organist at the first Capn's Galley in Santa Clara with its R-20 Wurlitzer. Putting his years of theatre music back to work, it was at this time THEATRE ORGAN ran a good feature on Bill and the Wurlitzer (October 1968). A couple of years later he was to preside at the former Oakland Paramount 4/20 organ as installed at Ken's Melody Inn, Los Altos. On this instrument on March 21, 1971, he played a program for Nor-Cal ATOS, with a silent film accompaniment well remembered. He was also featured in a mini-story on the Melody Inn in THEATRE ORGAN, June 1971.

Eventually, interests in the Los Altos establishment opened the Thundermug Pizza in San Jose. Here Bill was in his element playing a fine-sounding 3/13 Wurlitzer. His career slowed in 1974 with a major illness, but he could still be heard occasionally at the Thundermug organ. He never ceased to amaze his followers and audience with his uncanny ability to pull an all-but-forgotten melody from the depths of his memory — and play it flawlessly. In the course of an evening one would never hear a tune repeated unless requested, and always from memory!

His last public performance was for the Santa Cruz (California) Historical Society in a December 1982 silent film revival. He had played the theatre organs in Salinas, California, as recently as two weeks before his passing. Bill will be sorely missed by his many friends made in his long career with the theatre organ.

In addition to his wife, Bill leaves three children, as well as step-children. □

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