

# FARGO THEATRE

## Now Operated by Red River Chapter

by Sonia Carlson

On June 1, Cinema Entertainment Corporation of St. Cloud, Minnesota, assumed the lease of the Fargo Theatre, Fargo, North Dakota, from the Plitt movie chain. CEC operates other theatres in Fargo, but decided to build a six-plex near a major shopping center and close the downtown theatre.

In May, Rick Solarski, a local CEC manager and a member of the Red River Chapter, had suggested to the corporation that the Fargo Theatre be kept open, turning the lease over to the chapter, because of our extensive projects and successful programs there. We were overwhelmed by the idea.

A financial and legal study was made to see if our chapter could take on such a gigantic task as running a theatre. A membership meeting was held June 4, at which time the reports were presented and the vote was unanimous to accept the offer by CEC. All furnishings and equipment were donated to us, including the original 2/7 Style E Wurlitzer. The building itself is privately owned, and as a result of our efforts and those of architect Steve Johnson, is on the National Register of Historic Places. CEC will pay 25 percent of the (seven-year) lease the first year of the agreement, and donate some funds toward the repair of the air conditioning system.

The chapter decided to form a non-profit corporation, known as The Fargo Theatre Management Corporation, and selected a six-member board of directors. They are: Lance Johnson as president, Ted Larson as director of development, Dr. Bill Armstrong as treasurer, Pat Kelly as secretary, Neil Kovash as maintenance manager, and Sonia Carlson as director-at-large. The board then hired Dave Knudtson to manage the

theatre. Dave is a past chapter chairman, an organist, a projectionist, and has an extensive background in television producing and directing.

Over the past nine years we have put on 17 silent movie nights, restored seven of the eight dressing rooms, spent countless hours working on the original Wurlitzer and on our 3/9 Wurlitzer with piano, the stage equipment, curtains, screens and other related projects. Now we were faced with caring for the entire building. The decision was made to reopen as quickly as possible — July 1. This meant concentrated cleaning and repair in only a few weeks. A list of jobs was made and members were asked to pick the tasks they could do. We found our membership increasing. The concession area was dismantled and cleaned, closets and storerooms emptied and painted, restrooms scrubbed, light circuits traced and fixtures relamped, the auditorium floor painted, the manager's office painted and the lobby carpet shampooed, to

name the major things accomplished before reopening. A "Grand Opening" is being planned for fall.

We are working closely with our chapter attorney, Ms. Pat Gulsvig, and accountant, Keith Ollie, to get all the legal and financial items set up properly. Architect Steve Johnson has been studying the work of Jack Liebenberg, who designed the interior of the theatre in 1936, when it went from classical styling to Moderne. The theatre originally opened its doors March 15, 1926. Steve has found original photos and drawings of the theatre, and discovered that Mr. Liebenberg is living in Minneapolis, and Steve plans to visit him there. For long-range planning, we want to restore the auditorium as faithfully as possible to its 1936 style. The lobby and mezzanine will also get attention. The organ will be removed from the chambers in order to replaster and paint, then the instrument will be reinstalled in a more serviceable arrangement and enlarged. Before any-

The Fargo Theatre, operated by the Red River Chapter. Console on the left is that of the 2/7 Style E Wurlitzer donated to the chapter with the theatre furnishings. Center console is that of the chapter's 3/9 Wurlitzer.

(D. Zielinski photo)



thing major takes place inside, the building must be re-roofed and one of the air conditioning systems replaced. We will soon get practice in applying for grants and trying for other sources of funds to do all these projects. Already we have received many donations in the form of labor and supplies.

On July 1 our opening movie was *Dr. Zhivago*. The theatre is being operated as a specialty house, with a wide variety of films: second-run contemporary movies, major foreign films, vintage musicals, children's matinees, etc., and several silent movie nights a year. Open seven days a week, the admission is \$2.50 for adults, and \$1.50 for senior citizens and children. Organ music is provided before the weekend movies.

A brochure is being printed now to interest businesses in renting our facilities, to acquaint area schools with programs aimed at students, and to offer tours of the building. At the end of September, the North Dakota Chapter of the American Institute of Architects held their annual convention in Fargo. One of their meetings took place at the theatre, where Steve Johnson tied in the theme of the convention, "Downtown Again," with the work of Jack Liebenberg and the planned restoration of the theatre.

Public awareness and support has been good thus far, because of extensive newspaper and television coverage. We look forward to continued support and a bright future for the Fargo Theatre. □



Jonas Nordwall.

(Claude Neuffer photo)

## For The Records



*Manufacturers, distributors or individuals sponsoring or merchandising theatre pipe organ records are encouraged to send pressings to the Record Reviewer, Box 3564, Granada Hills, California 91344. Be sure to include purchasing information (post-paid price, ordering address,) if applicable, and a black and white photo of the artist which need not be returned.*

**BITS, BYTES AND PIPES.** Jonas Nordwall playing the 4/44 composite Wurlitzer in Portland's Organ Grinder Restaurant. No. JN-108. \$12.00 (\$17.50 in UK) postpaid from Dennis Hedberg, 1303 SW 16th Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97201.

We have kept an eye (and ears) on Jonas Nordwall since he was about 16 when he played a session on a Rodgers organ for a group of ATOSers at a Portland-based conclave back in the '60s. He was a remarkable musician then and the years have only sharpened his musical acumen and ability. His music has never let us down.

Before going into the content, a word about the recording method. This is a digital recording, which to some will mean only that it costs more. To others, pulse code modulation recording means a frequency range nearly flat from 0 to well over 20,000 Hertz, a dynamic range to 90 decibels and distortion measuring in the bottom hundredths of one percent. Sounds just about perfect, doesn't it? And well it may be — if you also have digital playback facilities.

ties. We don't.

On our set (and those of two audio-minded neighbors) the music sounded fine but not different from records made in the conventional way. Also, there was one negative aspect; that 90 db dynamic range was too much for all three of the sets used to test it. On very loud passages there was distortion and a very nervous stylus which sounded very much like over-modulation. The releasers anticipated this and assured us it wasn't so in the jacket notes, suggesting increased stylus pressure. It worked but in our experience increased stylus pressure has also increased record wear. So much for the current state of the art. Now to the selections.

Jonas' "Jealousy" (sic) is often reminiscent of the 1950's George Wright recording but it's the first version we've heard which we feel could be classed as a successor to that arrangement and performance.

"Bailey Gatzert March" (1902) is descriptive of a Columbia River steamboat according to the jacket notes. Like so many of its genre, the "description" is all in the accompanying notes; it's a typical newsreel march given a slambang performance by Jonas, with lots of Glockenspiel and traps.

"Pomp and Circumstance No. 4" is not the over-ripe "Land of Hope and Glory" but another in the series of five coronation marches written by Elgar. It is far more majestic than the more familiar "No. 1," especially when Jonas brings the four 32' and fourteen 16 footers to the pedals. A real spine tingler!

"Eye of the Tiger" tries to make the theatre organ register rock music. The hard-driving automatic traps help, but whether a 44-rank organ is a proper vehicle for rock is something the listener will have to decide.

From rock to operetta demonstrates the range of Jonas Nordwall's versatility. His "Indian Love Call" draws on just the right organ voices to make it a precious moment from a long ago show (*Rose Marie*), one which couldn't fail to delight its chief exponent, the late vocalist Nelson Eddy decked out as the ultimate "Mountie."

Side 2 opens with a mostly bur-nished brass-registered "New York, New York" the first time through. Then it's big organ combinations