

blanket of sound.

This is not just another pizza organ record, either, though Don Thompson has built his reputation over the years for being a first-class entertainer at the Organ Grinder in Toronto. Don's playing is just right on this album — uptempo when it should be and lots of feeling when it's ballad time. And there is none of the gratuitous gimmickry he uses on a regular night at the restaurant. One might wish that his tempi would be more stable at times, and there are a lot of occasions where his harmonic progressions are, well, jarring — like jumping off the porch instead of going down the steps. But overall, Don has obviously approached this album with more than his usual degree of commercial enthusiasm.

The whole thing was recorded in one long afternoon session, with no combination pistons. Because of this, his playing tends to sound rushed in places. Rather than sacrifice registration for continuity, Don decided to splice — something many have done in the past — enabling him to re-register from section to section but necessitating much repetition and stop-and-go playing. The editing is for the most part clean, but there are several startling cuts. His combinations are almost exactly what the music calls for at any given moment. Sometimes they aren't as subtle as he would have liked, but in trying to overcome dead notes scattered throughout the organ he has done a fine job. All of which is to say that the playing and editing might not be perfect, but the sound itself more than makes up for these deficiencies.

One interesting note is that the room ambience has been carried through the crossovers between cuts, giving the impression of one long recording session. The idea works well.

The album comprises four medleys and four solos, leading off with some Jerome Kern favorites: "Who?", "You Are Love" and "I Won't Dance." This is followed by a lush "April in Paris," and side one finishes with eleven Memories of Romberg played in twelve minutes, nineteen seconds. It is a big organ intermission tour-de-force.

A medley from Richard Rodgers' *Babes in Arms* begins side two with a rising-out-of-the-pit intro that should have started side one. This writer's



Don Thompson.

favorite Thompson medley ("Where or When," "The Lady is a Tramp," "My Funny Valentine" and "Johnny One Note"), it is a nod to the Dixon style and lacks only a piano to make it the romp it can be. Kern appears again in a lovely salute to "Bill," followed by a medley from Franz Lehár's *Merry Widow*. Don gives the Intermezzo from *Cavalleria Rusticana* the introspection it warrants, and finishes with that lovely musical question, "How Are Things in Gloc-ca Morra?", ending quietly as in a dream.

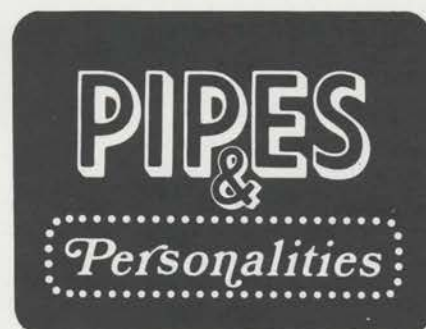
One wonderful thing about Don's arrangements is that he more often than not includes the verses to the tunes, adding that extra bit of warmth that makes the chorus fresh, though you've heard it hundreds of times before. He also keeps those glorious Fox Tibias and Voxes going for all they're worth. In fact, for an organist who is known as one with a British sound, his registrations here are as thick and American as you could wish.

The splendid double jacket is worth comment. On the cover is a stunning color close-up of the console, and on the back an equally stunning color shot of the auditorium taken from the dome. Five more black-and-whites adorn the inside, including a seldom-seen close-up of the lobby Möller console. Toronto organ buff Larry Partridge has written concise and informative notes on the theatre and its organs. It was Larry's idea that Don record this album, being an aficionado of the Fox theatres and

their organs.

The Downtown Theatre Enthusiasts, who maintain the organ in its commendable condition, did not think that it was in shape for recording at the time of taping (Spring 1982). Indeed, the organ shows a need for some regulation and dead notes were a problem, but by and large they were not obvious on this recording, and the organ sounds mighty good to these ears.

This, then, is an album to buy for the sound. The BIG sound. □



### Nalle Discs Break Classical Barrier

Persistence on the part of a listener paid off in June when Duncan Pirnie, host of the "Around New York" program on WQXR, played a selection from Billy Nalle's NY/LIU album, "Big, Bold & Billy" during the program. Pirnie asked for audience reaction to the selection, and, as a result, opened or closed his program during the following weeks with selections from that album.

The remarkable thing about this is that WQXR, New York, is perhaps the "queen mother" of all classical music stations, and had never before played any theatre organ recording. But listener response was so great (over 300 calls and letters during the second week of July alone) that Pirnie requested copies of all available Nalle recordings, along with career and instrument information so that he could answer listeners' questions. Pirnie subsequently wrote to the Wichita Theatre Organ board of directors complimenting it on such fine recordings and urging that more be released of Nalle's music.

Further contributing to public awareness of the theatre organ, its artists and its music, is the broadcasting of the concerts of the Wichita Theatre Organ Wurlitzer Pops Series



over FM station KSOE, Wichita, two weeks after the live performance. These broadcasts, also, have produced great audience enthusiasm.

Billy Nalle's May 21 concert, which closed the eleventh season of the Wurlitzer Pops, had an audience of nearly 1800 persons in the Exhibition Hall of Century II. Over 600 of those, five times more than at any previous concert, bought tickets at the door just before the concert. The concert drew listeners from California, Colorado, Florida, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Texas and West Virginia, in addition to residents of Wichita. The "Surprise" for the second half was percussionist J. C. Combs, who joined Nalle in playing music for dancing. The scheduled one-hour dance program stretched to one-and-a-half hours.

### New Landon Book Out Soon

Dr. John W. Landon's latest book, *Behold the Mighty Wurlitzer: The History of the Theatre Pipe Organ*, will soon be available in bookstores, according to information received from the publishers, Greenwood Press.

Landon, who has been organist at the Paramount Theatre in Anderson, Indiana, for 28 years, has written the first history of the theatre pipe organ. He traces its transformation from church organ to a theatrical instrument which replaced the piano for accompanying silent films. He discusses its emergence as a solo instrument. The book also includes a history of the companies that built theatre organs and biographical sketches of some of the leading theatre organists.

John Landon's earlier work, *Jesse Crawford, Poet of the Organ*, is now out of print, but the printer's "flats" for the book have been donated to ATOS.

### Organ Literature Foundation Offers New Catalog

Catalog "R" of The Organ Literature Foundation has recently been issued. This new edition lists 512 books, of which 50 are new items; of the 233 theatre organ records in the catalog, 51 are newly listed. Of 60 band organ records listed, 21 are new, and there are 244 new classical records out of 1265 listed.

The new catalog is available for \$1.00 (or four international reply cou-

pons for sea mail, eight coupons airmail), which is refundable on the first order received. Write to: The Organ Literature Foundation, 45 Norfolk Rd., Braintree, Massachusetts 02184.

\* \* \*

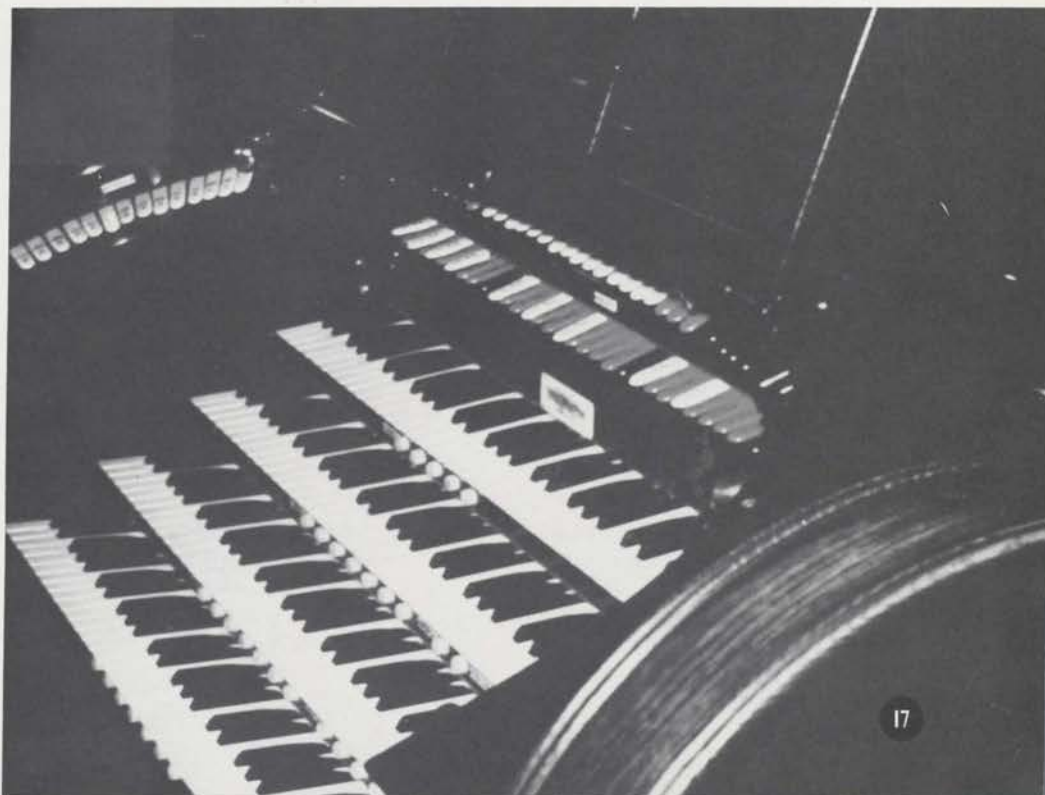
Bob Oberlander, the guiding hand behind Pipe Organ Concerts, Ltd., in Bethesda, Maryland, sends us an update on the installation there. What was the Bethesda Theatre has been renamed the "Bethesda Cinema 'N' Drafthouse," following a \$250,000 renovation job. The place will show current movies, seven nights a week. Bob says the 2/10 Wurlitzer is expected to be used more often. "They let us jackhammer a pit in the front of the auditorium, enabling us to install a hydraulic console lift which had been donated to us."

\* \* \*

From organist Bill Floyd in Richmond, Virginia, comes both good and bad news. "On May 15, the Byrd Theatre went out of business. They showed the feature film at 12:30 p.m., closed the house, reopened at 5 p.m. for an Eddie Weaver concert (drawing about 400 at \$3.50 per), closed a second time, then opened for a final showing of the feature film at 7:30.

Although the Pilcher Organ Company of Louisville, Kentucky, installed a few pipe organs in theatres, few if any had horseshoe consoles. This rare photo shows such a console. Originally installed by Pilcher in the Church Street Methodist Church, Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1930, the four-manual console controlled 55 ranks of pipes. Photo was taken in 1964-65, before organ was removed. Photo and information supplied by Dr. John W. Landon.

(Randall S. Dyer photo)



That was the end of the Byrd as such."

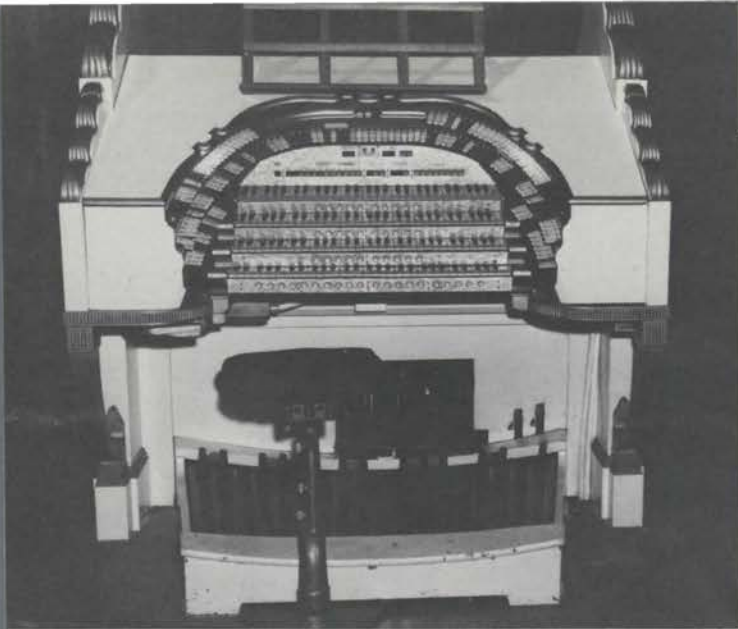
The good news is that work on the Wurlitzer being installed in the Virginia Center for the Performing Arts is progressing with no annoying deadlines. A summer schedule has been followed with the hope that the instrument will be ready for programs by the late fall. Bill has suggested to management a showing of *Robin Hood*, using the organ with full orchestra.

\* \* \*

Word has arrived from a group in Dayton, Ohio, the Victory Theatre Organ Committee, which tells about a theatre which may be the oldest in the country to have a pipe organ. The Victory Theatre was built in 1864 and was initially named Turner's Opera House. It was later renamed the Music Hall, and in 1918 became the Victory. It is downtown Dayton's last standing theatre.

The organ, a 4/44 Estey, was originally installed in the National Cash Register Co. Auditorium. It was removed when NCR razed the building. Unfortunately, the Victory Theatre's chambers could not house the complete organ. The instrument has had some substitutions such as Wurlitzer ranks and a solid-state relay and com-





Main console, Denver Paramount Wurlitzer (4/20, 1930, Opus 2122).



Console of the Austin concert organ (4/120, 1922, Opus 1073), Macky Auditorium, University of Colorado.

bination action. According to the organ committee, the hybrid is used quite often for concerts and a summer movie series. It will undergo some enlargements and improvements in the future.

\* \* \*

Theatre organist Doc Bebko is not a man to turn his back on classical organ playing. On May 26, Doc walked across the street from his home and performed on a \$160,000 Möller which was installed, part baroque and part expression, in 1980. The occasion was the annual Allegheny Central High School band concert in the First Presbyterian Church in Olean, New York. The program included selections from *The Student Prince*, "The King of Turf March," "Ballet Egyptian," three popular numbers, and as a finale, "Torch Procession." Donations were earmarked for the church music fund.

\* \* \*

Still another theatre, one of the few remaining atmospheric houses in the country, the 2974-seat RKO Keith's in Flushing, New York, could be the object of the wrecking ball. Listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and one preservationist groups would like to save, the theatre, according to a developer, would be razed and succeeded by a "six-plex." Depending on whom one hears, the triplexed RKO is "in excellent condition" or "is in terrible condition."

ATOS member Charles Fletcher of Logan, Utah, has fond memories of

the place. "I went to Keith's countless times, from the day it opened with live vaudeville. After the era of stage acts, it became solely a movie house, but the 3/15 Wurlitzer was heard into the fifties. For many years, the soloist was Bernie Cowham, a bald, convivial man who had the astounding ability to incite the audience to sing. He was extremely popular and I'm positive that he kept the organ going years after it normally would have been shut down. The instrument is now at the School of the Ozarks in Pt. Lookout, Missouri.

"The RKO was a beautiful atmospheric, with a gorgeous lobby containing a running fountain. Oddly, the organ console was on a lift, but the orchestra was not."

### One Film, One Organist — Two Organs, Two Nights

Two major organ restoration/repair projects will receive a real boost from two benefit classic silent film showings set for early December in the Denver area.

The film is *Wings*, a World War I aviation drama which was the winner of the first Academy Award (1928) and was one of the last of the great silent films. *Wings* thrust into the limelight a relatively unknown aspiring actor by the name of Gary Cooper.

The organist for both showings will be Ed Benoit, skilled silent film accompanist, house organist for Denver's historic Paramount Theatre, and staff organist for the Denver Organ Grinder restaurant. At home at both classical and theatre organ consoles, Benoit has also served as a

church organist and recitalist.

The first showing is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. on Sunday, December 4, at Denver's Paramount Theatre. The Paramount is home for one of the last two surviving twin-console Wurlitzers (Opus 2122, 4/20, 1930) in America. Considered by many to be one of the finest original installation theatre organs, the Paramount Wurlitzer has received much loving care at the hands of members of the Rocky Mountain Chapter. The instrument is scheduled for expansion (including installation of a new English Post Horn). Proceeds from the benefit will support this work, as well as the renovation that is necessary because of the organ's age.

The second showing, which will really challenge the organist's skills, is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. on Monday, December 5, at Macky Auditorium on the University of Colorado campus at Boulder. Benoit will accompany *Wings* by tackling the great Austin concert organ (Opus 1073, 4/120, 1922). The Austin, a member of a vanishing breed of large concert pipe organs, is one of the finest of its type in the Rocky Mountain region. Originally constructed as a typical concert organ of orchestral persuasion characteristic of the 1920's, the instrument received a new, more flexible console and substantial pipe replacement and revoicing to enhance its ability to perform the classical organ literature (an unfortunate loss in this reworking was a six-rank "floating" string division). The instrument's classical inclinations notwithstanding, the Austin retains much of its original flavor which



evokes the strong theatre organ influence of that era. For example, the organ incorporates four Celestes, 23 Reeds (including a Tuba Magna purportedly operating on 28" of wind), a two-rank string section, Chimes and a Harp. The film accompaniment capacity of this instrument has been tested only one other time in recent memory, making the benefit performance a very special event. Like its cousin at the Paramount, the Austin is of an age where much attention to its inner workings is needed, and the benefit will support this very necessary work.

The two showings of *Wings* are jointly sponsored by the Historic Paramount Theatre and the Organ Department, College of Music, University of Colorado. Further information regarding ticket prices, reservations and the like can be had by calling the Paramount at 303/534-8336, or by writing to Organ Benefits, 6292 Arapahoe Avenue, #2, Boulder, Colorado 80303.

### Don Baker's 80th

The era of the great movie palaces found many greats and near-greats presiding over the consoles of the mighty theatre pipe organs installed therein. One of the brightest and shiniest stars of all was Don Baker. Though the sun set on the golden age of the theatre organ, Don Baker's star never set, glowing brightly through all the years. On February 26, 1983, Don reached a milestone, his 80th birthday. He chose to celebrate this occasion by presenting a memorable con-

Don's niece, Sandra, from Ottawa, Ontario, and wife, Anne. (Photo by John Sharp, Toledo)



Shirley Jenks (left) and Social Chairman Dr. Joan O'Piela supervising Don's cutting of his birthday cake. (John Sharp photo, Toledo)

cert at the Detroit Theater Organ Club on the 4/34 Wurlitzer.

Don has been a favorite of the DTOC ever since the club was founded in 1961. He was one of the club's first artists and was quickly awarded honorary membership. Since then, he has been a regular on the concert schedule and remains a favorite of the DTOC audiences. His birthday party brought out a large crowd of enthusiastic members and guests who were treated to a program of music which spanned his sixty-plus-year career. Each selection was performed in the Baker styling, which included ample evidence of his deep love for his music and the organ.

Any good birthday party requires the singing of "Happy Birthday," and this party was no exception. With Gus Borman at the console, the audience surprised Don with its lusty version. A beautiful cake awaited Don in the lobby, along with a money tree, a gift from the DTOC membership. Don met many new friends and greeted old ones while surrounded by his family. It was a celebration befitting any friend who is 80 years young.

The Detroit Theater Organ Club is proud to have shared such an important event with Don Baker. He has already been booked for a similar celebration on his 90th birthday.

DON JENKS

\* \* \*

The Chicago Theatre will celebrate its 62nd birthday on October 26, reports Richard J. Sklenar, president of The Chicago Theatre Trust, Inc. The City of Chicago has been negotiating with Plitt Theatres, Inc., to swap the

Chicago and the adjacent landmark Page Bros. Building for the plot next to the theatre which is of similar size and shape and which now houses Walgreen's Drug Store and the Trailways Bus Terminal. The city was forced into action when Plitt Theatres filed suit for a demolition permit four days before the Chicago was named a City Landmark last January. Once the city owns the property it will consider selling it to a developer at a write-down, a procedure similar to other developments in the North Loop. The Chicago Theatre Trust has proposed restoring the building and operating it as a nonprofit entertainment center featuring live acts with occasional film shows. The City Club of Chicago has proposed a movie museum with the theatre used full time for films. The Chicago Theatre

Smiling Don Baker during his "Happy Birthday" serenade. (John Sharp photo, Toledo)





Trust development proposal, which was prepared in part by theatre historian/consultant Joseph DuciBella, includes refurbishing the 4/29 Wurlitzer with a new, larger console with solid-state relay and combination action for portability in an expanded orchestra pit. The latest information about the Chicago Theatre project is available in *Intermission*, newsletter of The Chicago Theatre Trust, by writing to 3051 North Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois 60657.

\* \* \*

Hall of Fame member Edna Sellers journeyed from her suburban home to trendy "New Town" in Chicago for a dinner party to celebrate her 84th birthday on August 23. Still sharp and spry, Mrs. Sellers was the hit of the evening regaling all with tales of Chicago theatre organ in its heyday. She also proposed a toast to one of her biggest fans, George Wright, who celebrated his birthday on August 28. Among those joining the birthday celebration were Peter Miller, former managing director of the Chicago Theatre; Alden Stockebrand, the tall fellow known for his coordination of the bus transportation at the 1969 and 1977 Chicago conventions (and who will "wagon-master" the buses in 1984 in Indianapolis); and Barbara Sellers, organist daughter of Edna and Preston Sellers. Between college work, Barbara has been able to squeeze in an engagement at the Morton House Restaurant on her Hammond X-66 and will play the 3/10 Barton in the Genesee Theatre, Waukegan, Illinois, on October 22. Many of her fans are looking forward to a concert by her at the 1985 Chicago convention. □

Two weeks before her 84th birthday, Edna Sellers plays one last chord on the Oriental Theatre Wurlitzer prior to the start of its removal. Edna and Preston were featured at the Oriental in the '30s.

(Tony Kester photo)



## DINNY'S COLYUM

as  
transcribed  
by  
Del Castillo



Somebody is always atellin you How To do somethin or How To make somethin, how to make bully base soup or how to make a foldin stepladder and things like that there, so I guess I got a rite to take a crack at How To Make and Play a Organ. We got a feller out here who had a motor-sickle shop and was a organ buff so he bilt a organ in his motorsickle shop and after he died a couple years back his wife kept on givin free organ concerts every Satiday nite so if a guy who repairs motor sickles can bild a pipe organ why I guess I can throw in my two sense worth.

The first thing you have to do is get two or three keybords. That means for every keybord you have to have 36 white keys and 25 black keys. The black keys they have to stand up higher than the white keys so as you can tell the differents on account the black keys is for the sharps and the flats and you have to be careful your fingers dont slide off of them. Also, sometimes they isnt enough room for your fingers to get in between them and you have to not get too fat so your fingers get stuck in between them. Well, that is the first step and the next step is you have to saw a lot of lengths of wood to make thirteen peddle keys for the feet. Dont just make twelve keys because that would only take you to B and you have to have a octave which is the distance from C to C, like the words to America The Beautiful. Only the song says From C To Shinin C, which dont really make much sense for a peddle where you can hardly see them and you have to kind of feel your way around except that a lot of organ players I know just pump there left foot around any old place.

Well, your troubles have just started because now you have to bild a

peace of furniture they call a Key Desk which is like a desk to put the keybords and the stops on, only sometimes they call it a Console which I could make a crack about, like maybe you have to be Consoled only I guess I wont. The purpose of the Console is that you have to have some way for the music you make on it to get up to the pipes so you can hear it. For that you have to have a long snake or anyways it looks like a long snake that goes all the way to where the pipes is set up in what they call the Chambers, and the snake has thousands of wires for every key and for every stop that you are goin to have to conneck up. But first you have to build the rooms they call the chambers only first you have to build big boxes that you pump the air into and then you have to have little valves under each pipe so you shut the air on or off to blow the pipes. Oh and yes I almost forgot, you have to put a set of Venetian Blinds in the front of the chamber box so you can open and shut them to make the sound softer or louder. Well I guess that's about all except that you have little buttons you can press that make different sets of stops to give different sounds, and sometimes you have a extra peddle that will bring on the stops one by one startin with the soft ones and endin with the loud ones.

So now you bild a seat to sit on that straddles over where the peddle keys are and as soon as you set on it you're in business. They is only seven white keys before they start over again five times from the bottom to the top and you mite think they would go A B C D E F G and that is all with no H but insted startin over again, but you would be rong. Instead they start with C and go C D E F G A B. I dont know why they do that. Now all you have to remember is that C is just to the left of where the two black keys is and if you are smart enuff you can figure the rest out for yourself. You are suppose to keep your rite hand on the Upper keybord to play the tune with and your left hand on the Lower keybord to play the Cords, and of course you have to put your left foot down on the Peddles to play the Base with. Well, I guess that is about all you need to know. You see they really isnt much to it once you get the hang of it. □

**Theatre Organ Want Ads  
GET RESULTS**