

A PERSONAL IMPRESSION

by Rodney Bambrick

In one of my more sententious moments it once occurred to me that decisions determine the quality of one's life. And for me, two of the happiest decisions I made a few years ago were first, to join the American Theatre Organ Society, and second, to attend their Annual Convention in 1979. That year it was held in Los Angeles and included two marvellous concerts with that great patriarch of the American theatre organ scene — George Wright.

This year the Convention took place in San Francisco and I was again the sole Irish representative present. Now even without an organ of any kind, San Francisco is a wonderful place to be — it's my favorite American city. But for the theatre organ fan it would be hard to beat, for in and around the city are no less than six in-theatre installations and all six

were included in the Convention program. Of these, two are outstanding. The Oakland Paramount is an impressive example of the exuberant, brash Art Deco style of the 1920's, recently restored at considerable cost to its pristine prime. It houses a superb 4/27 Wurlitzer which pours out that rich, all enveloping, sensuous sound that only a big Wurlitzer in a big theatre can produce. Of the three concerts given here by Lyn Larsen, Bill Thomson and Jim Roseveare, I particularly enjoyed Lyn Larsen's — clean, precise playing with well varied registration, combined for a few numbers with an excellent solo trumpeter.

The other outstanding in-theatre installation in San Francisco is the Castro — a delightful theatre in mock-classical style which still regularly features its 4/26 Wurlitzer for between-film interludes. The organ itself was probably the best we heard — beautifully voiced, well balanced and with enough guts to sound well when played straight. At the Castro we enjoyed what I would rate as the best concert of the convention given by Walt Strony — a young organist who combines a formidable technique with excellent taste. His well planned program concluded with a stunning transcription of the "1812 Overture."

Another memorable evening was spent watching a hilarious Harold Lloyd silent movie adeptly accompanied by Bob Vaughn, himself a veteran of the silent movie era. That was at the small neighborhood Avenue Theatre where silent films with organ accompaniment are still featured once a

week. The organ is a 3/20 Wurlitzer.

Of the three other theatres visited, Cinema 21 contained much the smallest organ we heard — a 2/6 Robert-Morton. Its limitations, however, were completely belied by Larry Vanucci who gave an admirable demonstration of what can be done with six ranks carefully and imaginatively used.

In addition to the in-theatre installations visits were also made to three pizza parlors all housing immaculately maintained Wurlitzers. I especially liked Jonas Nordwall's program at Redwood City — good arrangements neatly played which well displayed the resources of the 4/23 organ.

The only disappointing features of an otherwise well-planned and thoroughly enjoyable convention were minor things. I think everyone agreed that the Banquet fare was singularly uninspired and certainly not worth the \$25 charged. (Many a school canteen could have produced a better meal.) Then at one of the two seminars I attended, a young lady whose self-assurance knew no bounds demonstrated the incredible art of talking for 60 minutes without actually saying anything. However, she looked nice. And, finally, for the record, I must admit that one (just one) of the pizza parlor players, bashed away with such appalling lack of taste and sensitivity that I could hardly believe it. Especially when he had the effrontery to refer to Debussy's "Clair de lune" as "that old standby" — and then proceeded to strangle it! Horrible!

All in all, however, this year's convention (it's the fourth I've attended) was a delight and I must pay tribute to the members of the ATOS Nor-Cal Chapter who had obviously done so much preparatory work to ensure that everything ran smoothly.

In closing may I urge COS members in Britain to join our sister organization across the Atlantic. Its magazine in itself makes membership worthwhile, and its annual conventions are a sheer delight for any organ enthusiast. I am certain that like me you will not regret your decision.

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Have an
Aloha Christmas



in
Hawaii! Enjoy the
Robert Morton
(Hawaii ATOS Chapter)