



BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF THEATRE ORGANISTS

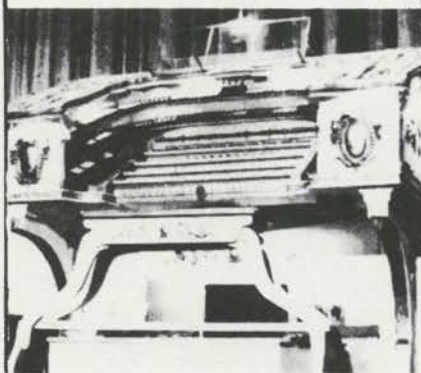
by Dr. John W. Landon

The history of the theatre pipe organ is more than just the history of the companies that manufactured them. It is also the history of people, especially the artists who played the instruments. This issue begins an extensive list of all theatre organists about whom we have biographical information. It will be pictorial whenever possible, including photographs of organists when available. Information is drawn from many sources, but chiefly from the files of Dr. John W. Landon who has assembled close to 3000 biographical sketches, most of which, because of space limitations, will *not* appear in his new book, *Behold the Mighty Wurlitzer: The History of the Theatre Pipe Organ*.

Although the author has exercised the greatest of care in handling the biographical data presented here, errors may occur. These, called to our attention, will be corrected in succeeding issues of this Dictionary. Persons having biographical information about theatre organists may submit

HOLIDAY GREETINGS

from
Members of J.A.T.O.E.
and
The Rialto Theatre, Joliet, Ill.



the same to Dr. John W. Landon, 809 Celia Lane, Lexington, Kentucky 40504.

AARONS, ALEX

Played the Earle Theatre in Washington, D.C. in 1926 and 1927.

ABEL, EARL

Born Chicago, Illinois, May 26, 1899. His parents were Ada B. Inden and John T. Abel. He attended Lane Technical High School and the University of Chicago. Served as solo organist at the California Theatre in Los Angeles; the Tivoli in San Francisco; the Majestic in Tulsa, Oklahoma; the Auditorium Theatre in Berwyn, Illinois; the Belmont Theatre in Chicago; the Congress Theatre in Chicago; and the Texas Theatre in San Antonio, Texas. Organist Cornelius Maffie followed Abel at the Paramount Theatre in Los Angeles and Abel took organist Leo Weber's place at the Texas Theatre. The Texas Theatre was part of the Publix chain and featured a 3/15 Wurlitzer. He also played such theatres as the Southtown Theatre in Chicago, the Brooklyn Paramount, the Majestic and Aztec Theatres in San Antonio, and the RKO Theatre in Boston (Wurlitzer). He was one of several organists credited with originating organ sing-alongs. He was heard over San Antonio radio station KABC in 1931.

Earl Abel retired from theatre organ work as organists were being replaced in the mid-thirties and went into the restaurant business. He passed away February 9, 1973 in San Antonio, Texas.

ABRAMS, VIOLA

Played the Metropolitan Theatre in Washington, D.C. in 1928.

ADAMS, ESTHER

Recorded some religious selections on the organ in the studio of NBC,

Hollywood, California for the Sacred label (78 rpm).

ADAMS, FRANK STUART

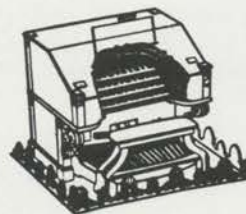
In 1925 *Jacobs Orchestra Monthly* said the following about this organist, "one of the great players in our notable family (of organists) is the tall Mr. Frank Stuart Adams, humorist, scholar, musician, psychologist. His playing is scholarly. The seven day grind rarely damages his accuracy or his apparent freshness to the job. Mr. Adams is an academic organist and he prefers the finest genuine organ he can get. He was first in the Rialto, New York City, then he left the Wurlitzer there and went to the Austin in the Rivoli. The Wurlitzer followed there, too. In the Rialto, this sober academic organist saw Mr. Minor in his Original Organ Novelty, scratched his left ear with his right hand, and by the third attempt so far beat Mr. Minor on the Novelty game that a Broadway audience gave him more applause for his efforts that it had given Mr. Minor. Novelties are distasteful to him as to every schooled musician. His whole training works in favor of creditable scholarly photoplaying with true psychological interpretation of every screened mood.

"Mr. Adams is a humorist deep down under the surface. The public cannot get it at all, but the musician never misses the typical Adams stroke, whether it be wit, humor, or irony — and he uses all three. He could start a theatre school and be the whole faculty himself. If the picture is good, the visitor will be highly paid

Season's Greetings

to all our

A.T.O.S. FRIENDS



The Rochester
Theater Organ Society

Dedicated to preserving the sound
of the "King of Instruments"

for his trip to hear and observe Mr. Adams at the Rivoli at 50th Street on Broadway. If the picture is poor, send up a prayer for Mr. Adams, too, for he is having a miserable time."

ADAMS, MRS. FRANK STUART
(Maiden name Anne E. Frank)

In 1925 played Loew's State Theatre, New York City, then moved to the American Theatre in New York City where she was playing in 1927, and in 1928 on to Loew's 83rd Street Theatre in New York City.

ADAMS, R. LLOYD

Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, October 17, 1896, Adams studied piano and organ with local instructors. In 1914 he took his first theatre job as pianist with the orchestra in the Best Theatre in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 1917 he moved to the Palace Theatre in the same city where a Kilgen pipe organ had just been installed. He played the concert-style instrument in addition to continuing as a pianist with the theatre orchestra. At the same time he served as organist of the Scott Street Methodist Church in Little Rock.

In 1918 Adams moved to Phoenix, Arizona, where he took the job of organist and pianist with the orchestra in the Strand Theatre (Robert-Morton organ). On June 22, 1921, he moved farther west to become pianist in the Belvedere Theatre orchestra, in Pomona, California. When the management later installed a Robert-Morton organ, Adams became the organist. Five years later Adams moved to the California Theatre in the same city, as pianist. A Wurlitzer theatre organ was installed and he became the organist. When sound films arrived, the orchestra was discontinued but Adams remained as organist.

In 1933 the Pomona Fox Theatre was built and the Wurlitzer was moved to it from the California Theatre. Adams continued as organist of the Fox through World War II until April 1946. When Kay Kyser and his band played the Fox Theatre in the early forties, Kyser remarked that Adams must be the last full time theatre organist on the Pacific Coast.

After leaving the Fox (because the organ needed major repair and the management considered it too costly) Adams played occasional theatre presentations and became organist of the Trinity Methodist Church in Pomo-

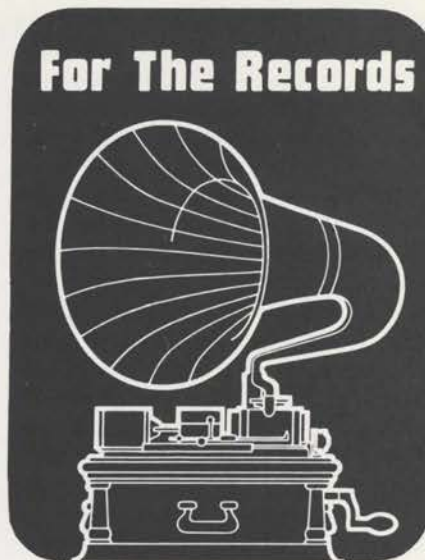
na, a post he was to hold for 21 years.

During his years as organist of the Fox, Pomona, Adams played the Wurlitzer at the Los Angeles County Fair, the largest county fair in the United States. He also served, at the same time, as official accompanist for the acts appearing on the stage in front of the grandstand.

Adams has had a career as a composer and arranger as well as performer. In 1945 he arranged music for the *Merry Widow* by Franz Lehár, presented at the Los Angeles Philharmonic Auditorium starring Jan Kiepura. In 1950 he composed and arranged music for *Guachoma*, a pageant which celebrated the Mormon trek to Utah. The pageant featured the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. In 1952 Adams won first place in a nationwide competition sponsored by the W. W. Kimball Company for his song "In June," subsequently published by Carl Fischer. In 1955 he composed and arranged music for the Santa Barbara Fiesta and for the California State Fair at Sacramento, where such stars as Jeanette MacDonald, Gordon McCrea and Margaret Whiting were featured. In addition, he arranged the song, "Summer Time," from *Porgy and Bess* for solo, chorus and 45-piece orchestra conducted by Paul Whiteman.

From 1957 to 1958 Adams served as president of the Musicians Club of Pomona Valley. At present he is pianist for the Lions, Rotary and Optimist Clubs in Pomona. For 22 years he served as pianist with the Host Lions Club Band made up of professional musicians. This band played for 18 international Lions Club conventions. Adams was made an honorary member of Rotary in 1978 and received the Paul Harris Fellow Award in 1979 in recognition of his 47 years of service as pianist for the Pomona Rotary Club.

Dr. John W. Landon is Professor of Social Work, University of Kentucky, Pastor of a Community Church in Indiana and has been organist of the Paramount Theatre, Anderson, Indiana (3/7 Page) since 1955. He authored the book, Jesse Crawford, Poet of the Organ; Wizard of the Mighty Wurlitzer, published by Vestal Press in 1974. His latest book, Behold the Mighty Wurlitzer: The History of the Theatre Pipe Organ, has just been published. □



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.

CHRISTMAS! Don Thompson playing the Ye Olde Pizza Joynt Wurlitzer. Available on cassette only at \$7.50 postpaid from Pipe Organ Presentations, 3678 Arcadian Way, Castro Valley, California 94546.

This is Don Thompson's first release (note it's a cassette) played on the grand daddy of all pizza organs, the Wurlitzer in Carsten Henningsen's "Ye Olde Pizza Joynt" in Hayward/San Lorenzo, California. There has been some promotional misrepresentation about the origin of this organ, so let's try to clear it up. It started life as a 2/9 Wurlitzer in the Fresno State Theatre. After the usual hiatus and neglect caused by "talkies" it was removed and installed in the residence of Bob Kates in the '50s. Bob, a church organist, cut two outstanding pop records on it played in theatre style ("Pipe Dreams" was one). Both are no longer available, regrettably, because they were brilliantly executed.

Then Carsten Henningsen got the bright idea of presenting "pipes and pizza." The 2/9 was available and the Pizza Joynt opened in Hayward/San