

A TRIBUTE TO EDDIE ZOLLMAN

by Christine Pride

The other day I drove over to Eddie and Bertha Zollman's home in Seattle's University district. Eddie will celebrate his eightieth birthday December 29, and as I have admired his long career in music I wanted to hear more about his life.

He was born in Virginia but his family moved to Tacoma when he was still a baby. His father was a professor, church organist and choir-master and his mother played the piano. His father gave him lessons and he studied piano until the age of

12 or so. His father was playing a Kimball organ in the Methodist Church and Eddie would go with him to listen and learn, and he began to practice in the afternoons.

About age 15, he had the opportunity to play the 15-rank Wurlitzer at the Rialto Theatre in Tacoma. He said "that was what set me afire." He really wanted to play an instrument like that one, and the console was so beautiful, too. About this time Edward Benedict was his organ teacher and he studied piano with Coralee Flaskett.

While still in high school he got his first position playing for the "silents" at the Victory Theatre in Tacoma. He told me it was a 4/31 Möller which came from Seattle's Coliseum Theatre. His memory is fantastic! He played songs like "Whispering," and "The Russian Rag" was one of his favorites. He said "playing for the silent movies just came naturally" and he adapted easily to improvisation. Organists were paid about \$225 per week, and he received \$90 per week as a relief organist.

In 1914 a pipe organ was installed in the Liberty Theatre in Seattle (3/18 Wurlitzer) but it wasn't until 1920 that Eddie was able to hear it. He was greatly inspired hearing Albert Hay Malotte, the composer, play this instrument. He described Mr. Malotte as being very modest at his appearances. He played the most difficult music with what seemed little effort. Malotte was the most flawless performer one could imagine, whether

Eddie Zollman at the Aeolian organ in Rhodes department store, Seattle, in the late 1940's. (Zollman collection)





Eddie Zollman at the Bellevue Pizza & Pipes 3/14 Wurlitzer during a Puget Sound Chapter concert. (Ken Gallwey photo)



Eddie at the piano during a recent organ club concert. (Betty McFarlane photo)

classical or popular. During the many hours Eddie listened to him play he never heard him play a bad show. He also was impressed by Oliver Wallace, a natural at playing for "silents," but he took his bows with great exuberance.

Eddie's next job was operating a Photoplayer with pipes for a neighborhood theatre. Sometimes he would sit down and play himself; he felt he learned a lot watching the keyboard and, of course, listening. Then he had a position at the Grand Theatre in Centralia on a 2/6 Morton. That instrument, plus more, is now in

Zollman at Big Bob's Pipe Dream 4/39 Wurlitzer. The restaurant was located in Burien, Washington, but has closed. (Eddie Zollman, Jr. photo)



Tom and Fran Solberg's home in Olympia. He worked at the Grand for three years and enjoyed it very much.

One time (before ATOS) Eddie played a private concert at Seattle's Liberty Theatre for a special group of people that included Dick Simonton. He especially enjoyed playing there because the organ was installed over the proscenium arch.

Eddie bought his first tuxedo when he was 20, and then really became an entertainer. He played piano in vaudeville shows and created a three-piano act. Sometimes he would play for song slides, and he said people enjoyed them most at the late show.

Zollman married Bertha in 1926 and moved to Seattle where they raised four children, all of whom play piano and organ. Most well known is Eddie Zollman, Jr., who maintains the organ at the Organ Grinder in Denver. Eddie and Bertha have 27 grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Other theatres where he played were the Madrona Garden, Embassy (ten-rank Kimball), Columbia, Winter Garden and Arabian. In the 1940's Eddie made appearances on radio and played piano or led bands at the Trianon Ballroom, the Moore Hotel, the Olympic Hotel and the Showbox. At the Showbox he had a ten-piece band and some of the entertainers he worked with were Paul Whiteman, Jimmy Durante, Sophie Tucker, Ted Lewis, Sally Rand and Duke Ellington. In the early '50s Zollman had an hour-long show on television.

For three years he played the noon-hour concerts on an Aeolian in the Rhodes department store. I remember how I wanted to do that when I heard that magnificent instrument. Also, he appeared frequently at the


Roller Bowl and the Seattle Ice Arena.

He spent a year playing for burlesque at the old Rivoli Theatre, and he played on "Show Street" for the 1962 World's Fair in Seattle. Additionally, he spent five years playing concerts and for "silents" at the Granada Theatre for the Organ Loft Club, playing on a 4/32 Wurlitzer which came out of the Liberty Theatre, Portland.

Eddie Zollman's many students over the years have had the advantage of his teaching, and have absorbed his dedication to organ music. His arrangements are solid and excellent in technique. He has created artists, as he is one. After a lifetime of bringing music to us he still maintains a spirited enthusiasm.

For the inspiration and interest in music he has given so many, I take this opportunity to salute Edward Zollman, Sr., a great performer, as well as teacher and friend. □

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