

Questions and Answers on the Technical Side

by Lance Johnson



Do you have any questions?

Send them direct to:

QUIZMASTER
and Organbuilder
LANCE JOHNSON
Box 1228
Fargo, North Dakota 58102

ATOS member Ken Ladner passes on this tip: Wurlitzer swell shade ball bearings are still available from the Nice Bearing Company. Specify No. 602; cost is about \$2.50 each. (Check your local bearings dealer, but don't ask for closed precision bearings or you will spend about \$7.00 each instead! — Editor)

Q. Can you explain how Wurlitzer wired their couplers so there would be no back feed?

A. Your key contacts are divided so that each contact has a function. One contact could fire the relay primary but others must be used in order to have couplers. In other words, one contact per coupler of any kind. Others would be used for second touch, etc.

Q. Do I understand correctly that the valve increments on a Wurlitzer regulator are to be such that the small valve has 1/2" of play and the large valve 1" play? In other words, the regulator top must fall 1" before the large valve is to open?

A. The first valve is the cone which breaks the seal. The second is the small book valve which opens 1/2" farther down as the top falls. The

third valve, the large book valve, opens 1/2" later, so that it actually will not open until the top falls 1 1/2".

Q. I was interested in your answer to the question concerning chamber sizes (THEATRE ORGAN May/June '83) that the swell opening could occupy the full size of the listening room wall. I am sure you will agree that it would be unwise for most amateur enthusiasts to attempt revoicing of theatre-oriented pipes, so would not such an opening in a domestic environment make listening, with all but minimal registration, a dreadful, ear-splitting experience? An approach to this problem adopted in several instances here in England is to mount the swell shade assemblies on sub-frames within the chamber and allow only a restricted opening of about 1'x4' into the listening room, at a height of six or seven feet above floor level, with up to one opening for each swell shade frame. Such an approach means that listeners are not blown out of their seats in the listening room. Perhaps you would agree with me that some theatre organs, when reinstalled in domestic or even restaurant surroundings, produce a sound which can be just too coarse and loud for enjoyment. I appreciate that we cannot all have the luxury of extensive basements and living rooms with cathedral ceilings. But the artifice described above will help a lot toward establishing a reasonable listening level, even though the domestic sound is still deficient in the auditorium acoustic.

A. No two organ builders will agree as to the exact size of tone opening a given organ should have. I prefer to have a maximum opening, so that when the family is out of the house I can just cut loose and not worry about

offending anyone. This also allows the *maximum* differential between loud and soft, which I desire. When you are playing for guests you will naturally keep most of the shades closed to save their ears. I can well remember a few years ago when we had an ATOS jam session at my house with piano, accordion and what not, and I had to open the shades on the organ completely to compete! I have heard residence theatre organs with the small tone opening you have recommended and found them to be anemic and lackluster. To each his own, I guess. □

Closing Chord

Ann C. Reiling, widely known musician and ATOS member, was born in Kansas City, Kansas, in 1904 and began piano lessons at age five. There was a neighborhood nickelodeon at 13th and Quindaro in Kansas City, where little Annie watched, listened, and became acquainted with the lady who accompanied films on piano. The lady showed her the tricks of the trade on cueing the silent pictures. By 1915 she was relief pianist once or twice a week, and chose movie accompaniment as her career.

She studied piano with Wiktor Labunski and Esther Shaw Gibson, and organ at the Kansas City Conservatory of Music with such great Kansas City organists as Edna Scotten Billings and Powell Weaver. After her graduation from high school, she worked briefly for Jenkins Music Co. playing and selling sheet music.

Her first organ job was in 1928 at the New Center Theatre at 15th and Troost (now Truman Road) in Kansas City, Missouri, playing a two-manual Style D Wurlitzer accompanying *Wild Oats* with Colleen Moore. The job lasted one year.

In 1929 she became a radio organist, having her own "Little Organ Annie" program over KMBC, Kansas City's CBS outlet, playing a three-manual Robert-Morton. Miss Reiling also played solos and with ensembles over the Kansas City Star station WDAF and over WHB during the thirties.

Ann moved to Chicago in the 1940's and accompanied silents once again at the Nickelodeon in the Museum of



Miss Ann Reiling as she played a Baldwin organ, Meuhlbach Hotel, Kansas City, 1982.
(Ed Mullins photo)

Science and Industry. In 1947 she played the two-manual Moller organ in the Marine Dining Room of the Edgewater Beach Hotel. She later played the 3/11 Wurlitzer at the Trianon Ballroom in Chicago, frequently with Lawrence Welk's orchestra.

During her 18 years in Chicago Miss Reiling was associate organist at St. Vincent De Paul Church, where she was assistant to Dr. Arthur Becker, Dean of De Paul University Music School. In the 1950's she returned to Kansas City, where she was organist for the Kansas City Blues baseball team at Blues Stadium. Ann also played in the Drum Room of the Hotel President for six years.

While in Chicago she was organist at many of the supper clubs, including Math Iglar's German Restaurant where she played a Hammond. She left Chicago for the Missouri Ozarks in 1977, but returned to Kansas City in 1979.

In 1980 she resumed her silent film career providing the musical accompaniment for *The Art of the American Silents* film series at the Fine Arts Theatre in Mission, Kansas, a Kansas City suburb. The series was extremely popular and continued yearly up to the time of her death.

During the 1981 Labor Day weekend Ann not only accompanied several films on piano for the Society of Cinephiles' Cinecon 17 convention, but also played the organ interlude on a Wurlitzer electronic at the Midland Theatre, before Bob Vaughn cued the feature. As Vaughn



Miss Ann Reiling, "Little Organ Annie," when she played the three-manual Robert-Morton organ over KMBC, CBS outlet in Kansas City, Missouri in 1929.

remembers, "She was one of the best movie players."

Ann Reiling was also organist at the Marlborough United Methodist Church and the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. She died April 1, 1983, at Trinity Lutheran Hospital, Kansas City, after a brief illness. She was 79. Funeral services were held April 4 at the Cathedral. She is survived by three brothers: A. L. Reiling, Jr. and Gill Reiling of Kansas City, Kansas, and Robert Reiling of Chula Vista, California.

DR. EDWARD J. MULLINS

Luella Edwards Wickham, "The Sweetheart of the Console," died November 1 at the Loretto Geriatric Center in Syracuse, New York. She was 91.

Luella was born in Port Gibson, New York, and was only 14 when she performed her first church organ program. In 1911, the same year as her marriage, she subbed at the Savoy Theatre in Syracuse. She was graduated from the Eastman School of Music in 1920. After pit work with vaudeville, she returned to the theatre

organ playing guest engagements in several eastern cities and the Crescent, Eckel, Empire, Regent, Rivoli, Strand and Temple Theatres in Syracuse.

After those days, she had odd jobs to support her family until electronic organs came in and she worked for several dealers as a demonstrator. When the second era of theatre organ dawned, Luella became a part of it, playing concerts for clubs and ATOS chapters, including a benefit for the saving of the Syracuse RKO Keith's organ, now on the NYS Fairgrounds. In 1973, she went on a six-week nationwide road tour. One of her last recitals was for the Rochester Theater Organ Society's 10th anniversary program in 1974. She taught organ and piano to senior citizens into her eighties, until she broke her hip in 1975 and was forced to retire. A biography of Luella appeared in the October, 1973, **THEATRE ORGAN**.

Noted **THEATRE ORGAN** writer Stu Green has known Luella since the '20s, and the following is from a letter he wrote to the editor: "I first discovered Luella before starting my rather brief career as a theatre organ-

ist, sometime around 1925, when I went to the Rivoli Theatre to see *Metropolis*, the Fritz Lang futuristic masterpiece. The Rivoli was on the wrong side of the tracks, but it played off-beat movies. I was very impressed and after that went many times to the Rivoli to observe her picture cueing. She finally took notice of me and there started a friendship which continued intermittently (time out for WWII) until now. I soon determined that she was one of the best-schooled theatre organists in the Syracuse area, and it showed in her picture scoring. Her emphasis was always on musical values rather than showmanship, a characteristic which probably barred her from the 'big time' that depended on lots of 'flash.'

"After the war when the TO hobby started, I would receive letters from Syracuse friends telling me about a remarkable woman who was actively engaged as a salesperson/demonstrator in a Syracuse store which sold electronic organs. At the time, I didn't connect her with the Luella I knew because she had married and her name had changed from Edwards to Wickham. But we soon established communication, and over the years we have exchanged a minimum of two letters each year. Better yet, I was able to see her at several ATOS conventions. We had a great time talking about the past, about the late '20s when we both looked forward to an end to talking pictures followed by a revived normalcy (meaning silent movies). Alas, that dream never came about.

"Luella was most helpful to this fledgling silent movie accompanist in the late '20s. She had been playing for movies since about 1915, and her experience plus her excellent schooling made her a superior teacher in that field. She had little patience with the 'glamour boys' who played the spotlight solos with lots of 'flash' and much less musicianship. Our discussions centered around both registration and the appropriate choice of music for scenes. Once I heard her play 'Blue Skies' during a torrid desert drama complete with sheiks, bedouins and camels. I could hardly wait to question her about that choice! She looked at me, half smiling, with the patience of an experienced teacher, and explained that the first eight measures of 'Blue Skies' had been lifted from an ancient Arabian melody

which was quite appropriate for the scene shown. I learned much from Luella Edwards.

"Needless to say, I will miss the letter exchanges with Luella. I hope she is now enjoying her sojourn in that great Solo Chamber in the sky with so many colleagues who have gone before her. Hers was a most productive life."

LLOYD E. KLOS

C. Raymond Allan, 58, of Knysna, South Africa, died suddenly at his home on September 8. A memorial service was held a week later at the Knysna High School Hall, where the Wurlitzer theatre organ was installed which he and Eric Schröder owned. Raymond and Eric had returned to their home only a few days earlier after attending the San Francisco ATOS Convention and subsequently touring in many parts of the continental U.S. and Hawaii.

Raymond Allan was born in Cape Town in 1925 but spent most of his youth in Knysna. He is remembered by many in his home area for his strength of character when, at the age of 21, he returned to Knysna High School among all the younger boys and completed his high school work.

He then trained as a nurse at the Johannesburg General Hospital and did several special advanced nursing courses. For years he worked for the Chamber of Mines in Johannesburg.

Eight years ago, he and Eric came



C. Raymond Allan

to Knysna and brought with them their two theatre organs, one of which was later sold to a church in Johannesburg.

Raymond Allan and Eric Schröder had been close friends and business partners for 33 years, and were the co-owners of Shangri Lodge Boarding House in Knysna.



Luella (Edwards) Wickham doing what she loved to do most. The photo was made during a concert held in the Syracuse RKO Keith's Theatre, circa 1965. The instrument is the 3/11 Wurlitzer later moved to a permanent home at the New York State Fairgrounds.