

About Our Authors

FRANK HARE: Hailing from Leeds, a city of over half a million inhabitants in Yorkshire, England, Frank Hare considers himself a "natural" theatre organ enthusiast, as he has the honor of sharing the same birth date as the great Robert Hope-Jones himself, February 9—though, let us hasten to add, not the same year! Now in his early thirties, Frank was attracted to the theatre organ as a youngster in 1932, after hearing the original Wurlitzer at the Tower Ballroom, Blackpool. As a schoolboy he used to note and tune in to the many evening organ broadcasts then relayed by the different B.B.C. regions, as well as compiling scrapbooks and making models. A special treat to which he looked forward was a visit to the glittering Paramount Theatre in Leeds, before it became "another Odeon," where one could always hear an ace organist presenting the mighty Wurlitzer. His pocket money was saved to buy, not sweets, but organ records, of which he now has a collection of some 1,150.

Upon leaving school he became a clerk in a Leeds City office, where, having failed to pass for military service, he remained throughout the war years and is to this day. Always interested in making his own music, he learned to play the cinema organ in 1947 at a Leeds cinema, and gave frequent Sunday openings until the end of 1949, when he was appointed Northern Representative of the Robinson Cleaver Theatre Organ Club and joint Editor of *Theatre Organ Review*. He became sole Editor at the end of 1955. Frank spends two evenings a week helping a friend to build a unit organ, and as they are working from "scratch" it is proving to be a rather slow job. The rest of his spare time is taken up chiefly by Club and "Review" work, but there is nothing he enjoys better, except perhaps, having a private session at a console.

GEORGE WALTON: ("JUDD")—His first taste of theatre organ, back in 1929, was the premiere broadcast of the Minneapolis State Theatre with Eddie Dunstedter at the console which Judd picked up on his home-made crystal set from WCCO. From then on he set aside one day each week to visit one of the theatres in the twin cities—the State, Rialto, Lyric, Strand, Garrick, Minnesota. On his very first date, Judd entertained his girl friend with Crawford records. The result was a complete success. She was charmed by the music, even more by Judd's enthusiasm and to this day Judd and his lovely wife, Verle, have shared their love of organ music as one. Those were memorable years and your Editor recalls with nostalgia our frequent get-togethers in Winona and Minneapolis—visiting organs, searching for records, and listening to them. We were avid record collectors then, as now. Judd was there when the 4m/2r Wurlitzer was installed and opened at the Minnesota Theatre; ditto for the Kimball in the Auditorium. Back in those days Judd was spending 50 cents a week for organ lessons, practicing on a 2m/7r tracker-action Barchhoff, later a 3m/7r Wurlitzer at the MacPhail School of Music in Minneapolis.

After a stint with the armed services on the West Coast, the Waltons settled in Vallejo near San Francisco and in 1943 formed a partnership with Bob Jacobus in an organ maintenance and installation avocation. Among the organs figuring prominently in Judd's life is the famous 2m/8r Wurlitzer known throughout the area as "Myrtle" and owned by Joe Chadbourne, a former theatre organist. Judd has been most helpful in helping to keep the great Wurlitzer in the Fox, S.F. in playable condition.

Judd has been associated with the Solano County Farm Bureau for the past ten years and was recently appointed Regional Secretary. When time permits he works on his own home project—a 2m/11r Wurlitzer. Judd and Verle have two lovely daughters, Janis, 17, who sings professionally with Phil King's band at the Travis Air Force Base, and Loralie, 12. Also a son, Larry, 19, with the Air Force at Phoenix, Arizona. A visit to the Walton home is an experience in good fun and your Editor has promised them a visit when he gets that organ a-workin'.

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The Relay

Misuse of Tremulants

The first issue of "Tibia" has just reached me. The standard of production and layout is excellent, but may I make a plea for more "close-up" photographs of consoles and sound chamber interiors?

Alexander Turner's article on Hope-Jones is of great interest to me as before leaving England for India in 1953 I lived for the previous three years in Eastham, which is only about a mile and a half from Hooton Grange where Hope-Jones was born. The house is set in rural surroundings just over half-way between Chester and Birkenhead and only a few yards off the main road, one of the busiest in the country carrying an enormous volume of traffic to the docks of Birkenhead and also to Liverpool via the Mersey Tunnel. The house itself is now occupied by a small engineering and automobile concern.

Shortly before I left Eastham I began to make various enquiries with a view to finding out more about Hope-Jones and received one promising clue which gave every indication of leading to some of his papers. Unfortunately, my departure for India was very hurried and I was unable to follow up this line but I hope to do so at some later date.

According to page 7 (Vol. 1, No. 1) of the article the works moved from Battersea to Norwich. Is Battersea a misprint for Birkenhead? I have not so far come across any reference to Hope-Jones having a factory in Battersea—this is a district in South West London. In passing, I was born and lived in the adjoining district of Wandsworth for over twenty years.

Turning to the article on "The Theatre Organ and its Tonal Design" (Vol. 1, No. 1) I really must protest at the statements on page 11—"At this point it must be clearly understood that these diverse elements are perfectly capable of blending into a homogeneous whole. . . . The tonal glue which makes them cohere is the free use of the tremulant. . . . In theatre organ playing, the normal use of the tremulants is to keep them on all the time. . . ." This use, or misuse, of the tremulants has done more to discredit the theatre organ than possibly any other feature of the instrument. I agree that even with a large instrument it is difficult to get an effective "build-up" by virtue of the widely contrasted tone colors constituting the basic units, but I cannot cede the point that the tremulants are the media through which this can be accomplished. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the use of tremulants is one of the chief factors contributing to the differences between theatre organ playing in the United States and in Great Britain. Oh, yes, we had our "slap-on-the-trem-and-keep-them-on" fraternity but our more enlightened organists, led by Quentin Maclean, realized that a tone colour without tremulant is a completely different tone colour with the tremulant and many are the subtle effects that can be produced by judicious use of this much maligned device.

To my mind there are few more objectionable sounds than a theatre organ "full organ" with all the tremulants flapping and the contention that tremulants induce that "shimmer" which is a characteristic of the orchestra, by virtue of no two instrumentalists playing exactly in tune, is one to which I cannot subscribe. The degree of "out-of-tuneness" between orchestral players is very minute, more minute than that imparted to a number of ranks of pipes by tremulants. Further, no pipe organ is ever strictly in tune, even immediately after being tuned, and the minute beats between the various ranks of a "full organ" combination are best left undisturbed by tremulants if their object is supposed to impart orchestral "shimmer."

This matter is bound up with the art of registration and the tremulant stop-keys should be as much a part of a registration scheme as the stop-keys controlling pipework. In too many instances tremulants are slapped on as soon as, or even before, the blower is switched on and remain so until it is switched off. Musical sounds cannot be described adequately in words and I can only refer to the recordings of Quentin Maclean which so admirably demonstrate the resources of the theatre organ, and in particular the use of tremulants.

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THE THEATRE ORGAN IN BRITAIN

... Frank Hare

I WOULD, first of all, like to extend my sincere greetings to all of you. It is heartening to know that at least an organization such as yours has been founded in the land of the Mighty Wurlitzer, and I wish it every success.

THE TIBIA is, of course, primarily concerned with news of the United States, where there are more theatre organs than in the rest of the world put together, but as few of you have had the opportunity to visit Great Britain, it is possible that some details of the type of theatre organ installed there might be of interest. It is my intention to describe the individual characteristics and peculiarities of British-built organs, whose makers will be unknown to you, but I propose to discuss the matter generally.

Organs were introduced to cinemas in Britain prior to the 1914-1918 war, though they were very different from the amazing Wurlitzer-Hope Jones Unit Orchestras which had by then appeared in the United States. Hope-Jones had built church organs in England with electric action and movable consoles with stop tablets as early as 1886, but builders were slow to adopt his modern ideas, and invariably the early cinema organs were of "straight" order, with pneumatic action and drawstop consoles. As time went by some enterprising firms perfected pneumatic stopkeys—Conacher (of Huddersfield) and Fitton & Haley (of Staningley, Leeds) used nothing else—and Jardine (of Manchester) were pioneers in the adequate provision of pneumatically operated tonal percussions and traps, and by the beginning of the twenties several firms had turned to electric action and tilting tablets. Scores of church organ builders up and down the country made organs for cinemas in their time, and the number installed must have run into many hundreds, though we shall never know exactly as the majority have by now been removed.

In 1923, John Compton made history by building a remarkable 4-manual extension organ for the Shepherd's Bush Pavilion, London, and this really started the era of the modern cinema organ. In January 1925, the first Wurlitzer was opened at Walsall, Staffordshire, and three months later one appeared in London. Several British builders immediately turned their attention to the new idea, and thenceforth unit organs became the standard instrument for cinemas.

I estimate that by 1939 around 480 unit organs had been installed in cinemas in the British Isles, all but about 40 of them in England itself. Exact numbers are hard to quote, as the records of the two leading British builders were destroyed or seriously damaged by enemy action during the war, and the following figures must be taken as approximate. Comptons head the list at 260, Wurlitzers come next with 100 imported organs, and Christies are third with 80. The balance is made up of instruments by the smaller builders, each with less than ten organs to their credit—Conacher, Jardine, Hilsdon, Spurden Rutt, Fitton & Haley, and Ingram. (The numbers would be increased if one took into account the "straight" cinema organs by some of these builders, but here we are only considering their unit work). There were a few organs imported from the Continent; Standaart and Dekkar from Holland, and a solitary Barbieri from Italy, and finally we must not forget to mention Reginald Foort's famous Möller (now the B.B.C. Theatre Organ) which arrived from the United States in 1939.

Of the 480 organs mentioned, several, including the B.B.C.'s superb Compton, were destroyed by bombing in the war, and quite a number of others have been sold since, some following damage by flooding, and so on. But even



The author at the console of one of the Comptons in England. This make of organ holds the same distinction in Britain as the Wurlitzer does in the U.S.

taking into account those instruments which are being allowed to rot away through lack of servicing, it seems probable that today there still remain more playable organs in Britain than in the United States, which isn't bad going, considering the vast number installed there!

The Relay

(from page 3)

"Spotty Journalism"

There was no "featured" organ solo opening night at the Fox Theatre in San Francisco, opening night, June 28, 1929. . . . There were other featured organists (soloists) at the theatre before George Wright, namely: Henry LeBell, and Floyd Wright (teacher of George Wright). . . . George Wright makes no mention of his having studied with Floyd Wright, a top S.F. organist who was soloist at the Granada at the age of 21. Floyd Wright traveled to Sacramento many times to give lessons to George on the Grant Union High School organ and George later made his home with Mr. and Mrs. Wright receiving daily instructions from Floyd, the real innovator and genius of theatre organ playing and a superlative musician. Floyd Wright lives in San Francisco and can verify all these statements.

Mrs. Evelyn Biati
Mill Valley, Cal.

(An organ solo was on the program on opening night but not executed for reasons best unmentioned, but the solo did go on later during the opening week. There were no other organists "featured" at the Fox, prior to George Wright, in the true sense of the word. They did play for sings (if that is to be construed as a "feature,") but only George was actually featured on the organ by himself, as a regular feature, with no sings. It's a fine line to draw if one wishes to be technical. We know not why Mr. Wright chose not to mention Floyd Wright and, obviously, this is a matter that must be left to his discretion. J.W.)