

PIPES & Personalities

Wurlitzer Console a Movie Prop

Author on theatrical arts Tony Thomas (his current book ties in with MGM-UA's *That's Dancing*) is a long time fan of film music, especially that of the "golden age" masters. His current TV program, extolling the dramatic music of film composer Max Steiner (*Gone with the Wind*, *King Kong*), shown on PBS stations, was shot with the console of the Simonton Wurlitzer as a background. His half hour program, *Film Music and Max Steiner*, was most informative and we only wish we'd heard a few mighty chords on the Wurlitzer. Perhaps next time.

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Tom Wibbels performed a concert and accompanied a Charley Chase silent movie at the 3/14 Möller in the Capitol Theatre, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, on November 8. The theatre owner Gordon Madison and his wife, Marlene, from Santa Monica, California, were on hand for the concert.

Bob Eyer, Tom Wibbels, Mark Cooley and Gordon Madison pose for the camera after Tom's program at the Capitol Theatre.



On November 10 Tom performed to a capacity audience at the Roberson Center for the Arts and Sciences in Binghamton, New York. The 3/17 Link organ which was installed at Roberson in 1968 was the first theatre pipe organ to be installed in a cultural center.

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George Wright had to cancel several concert engagements because of a freak accident which resulted in a broken bone in his right foot. George told us that he was out walking his dog one morning when the dog took off after a cat. The dog's leash got wrapped around George's ankles and he lost his balance and fell. The broken ankle bone in his right foot caused a painful retreat to his residence.

The break resulted in a plaster cast nearly to his knee. Among the concerts cancelled were his annual one at the Paramount Theatre in Oakland, California, and one in Florida for Terry Charles. Lyn Larsen substituted for him at Oakland.

Wurlitzer Organ to be Dedicated in Ohio

According to a publicity release, a long-awaited dream will come true Friday, May 17, 1985, at 8 p.m. when the Renaissance Theatre in Mansfield, Ohio, holds the formal dedication of one of its prized possessions — the Wurlitzer organ formerly owned by actor Joe Kearns. Lyn Larsen, one of the world's best known recital organists, will be featured at the dedica-

tion. Larsen is no stranger to this instrument, having played it numerous times and for recording early in his career.

The famed three-manual instrument was originally built for Warner Brothers Vitaphone Company and installed in the Sunset Boulevard movie studio in 1929. From this location the instrument was moved to storage for Radio Station KNX, a CBS unit. In 1955, the organ was purchased by Joe Kearns, the late Hollywood character actor, who actually built a home around the instrument. While it was installed in his home the 3/18 organ, Style 260 Special, was enlarged to 26 ranks. After Kearns' death, the residence was leased by the late Robert Carson, who founded a recording firm (Malar Records) and produced a large number of record albums featuring the organ. When Carson died, the residence ownership changed hands and the instrument was offered for sale. A legal tangle over ownership of the Wurlitzer resulted which was finally resolved and the organ was then purchased by Russ Nelson, a wealthy Santa Ana contractor. He in turn sold it to Ron Walls, a well-known organ enthusiast and pizza parlor owner. Because of subsequent business reversals, Walls lost ownership and the organ was purchased by The Renaissance Theatre, Inc.

The restoration has been handled by one of America's foremost technical authorities on theatre organs, Mr. Ken Crome. Ken assisted the Renaissance in locating this magnificent organ and will be in Mansfield during the spring to install the instrument.

The restoration of the Renaissance Theatre which will house the Wurlitzer is a great source of pride for the citizens of Mansfield. It has sparked a cooperation in the community from all strata of society and from a broad cross section of industry and business. A \$1.6 million campaign was launched recently, and the goal was surpassed.

The dedication concert May 17 is a part of a series of gala events planned to reopen the theatre this spring after being closed for extensive renovation and restoration during January and February. On July 14 Dennis James, resident organist at the Ohio Theatre in Columbus, Ohio, will be featured accompanying the silent film *Thief of Bagdad*, starring Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.



Don Thompson celebrates his 51st birthday at Ye Olde Pizza Joynt.

Don Thompson Changes Emphasis

In addition to his regular five-nights-a-week at Ye Olde Pizza Joynt, Don Thompson has formed an artist management company, according to a recent letter. He currently is representing Tom Hazleton, John Seng, Jim Roseveare, Jerry Nagano, Clark Wilson, Jim Riggs, Jack Gustafson and David Kelsey.

Don's firm, Pipe Organ Presentations Ltd., is also producing and marketing organ recordings, as well as sponsoring organ-accented cruises. His first cruise will be on the Mississippi Queen in April; the second a cruise around the Hawaiian Islands in October.

Pipes on TV

The Jack Lemmon-Walter Mathau remake of the Hecht-MacArthur newspaper classic, *The Front Page*, has a 1929 theatre organ sing-along sequence involving longshots of a theatre audience and closeups of a horse-shoe console as the girl organist accompanies the bouncing ball through a vocal rendition of "Button Up Your Overcoat." Real pipe sound, too. The movie is currently being seen on late night TV.

In the same time slot, as well as on weekends, is *Hollywood, the Greatest Story Ever Told*, a documentary dealing with "tinseltown." It has a few bright moments with Gaylord Carter accompanying a silent movie on a four-manual Wurlitzer. Carter also presided at the Wilshire-Ebell Theatre

Barton in Los Angeles for the re-release of the silent classic, *Wings*, an event which merited coverage on southern California TV news.

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While vacationing in Florida, organist Rob Calcaterra stopped by to give Walter Draughon's 3/15 Wurlitzer a once-over. Rob delighted those present with over 90 minutes of non-stop selections, ranging from "Sweet Georgia Brown" to the "Tocatta" from *Symphony No. 5* by Widor. Fortunate enough to be in attendance for this impromptu concert were organ owner Draughon, Steve Brittain, Ada and Bud Fisher, Duane Smith, F. Thomas Poe, Peter Slampyak, Jack Wert and David Outland. Rob returned to his concert schedule in mid-February.

Ashley Miller Selects New Agent

Impro International, Inc., exclusive agent of theatre organist Tom Wibbels, announced in a recent news release that they now also represent Ashley Miller.

"Ashley is no stranger to theatre organ buffs. For seven years he was featured organist at New York's Radio City Music Hall and has performed as both organist and pianist with many leading orchestras. He has played world wide on pipe and electronic organs and has been featured artist at National ATOS Conventions and in Australia. He is a member of the ATOS Board of Directors and was 'Organist of the Year' in 1983.



Rob Calcaterra at Walter Draughon's 3/15 Wurlitzer.

"Known for his popular organ stylings, Ashley's arrangements have been published in folios such as *Oklahoma, Lerner and Loewe Album, Theatre Organ Greats* and *Sheet Music Magazine*. He has over a dozen recordings to his credit, perhaps the most famous are the two Columbia albums made on the Radio City Music Hall organ. He has just completed a week-long session in Los Angeles with Film Technology Company, Inc., for a new recording of love ballads, a Miller specialty, performed on the Sargent/Stark 4/18 Wurlitzer studio organ. As yet untitled, the recording is scheduled for release to the public in late summer or early fall.

"In 1976, Ashley performed the dedicatory concert on the newly-restored 3/16 Möller organ at the Trenton (New Jersey) War Memorial Auditorium; in 1981 he dedicated the largest theatre organ in Canada which was rebuilt and installed in the Church of the Redeemer, Kingston, Ontario." □

Ashley Miller

