

## Closing Chord

**Chester F. Kingsbury**, noted radio organist, and the first organist of the Rahway (New Jersey) Theatre, died a few months ago in Westfield, New Jersey. He was 75.

Born in Elizabeth, New Jersey, he took the advice of a doctor, who recommended his taking piano and or-

gan study to strengthen an injured hand. He worked his way through Columbia University, friends secured auditions for him at CBS and NBC, and he clicked from the start.

Among the shows for which he provided musical backgrounds were: "American School of the Air," "Hilltop House," "Mary Noble, Backstage Wife," "The Second Mrs. Burton" and "True Detective Mysteries." He was a member of Local 802, A.F.M. of New York City. □



### Letters to the Editors

Opinions expressed in this column are those of the correspondents, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors or the policies of ATOS or THEATRE ORGAN.

Letters concerning all aspects of the theatre organ hobby are welcome. Unless clearly marked "not for publication" letters may be published in whole or in part.

Address:  
Editor, THEATRE ORGAN  
3448 Cowper Court  
Palo Alto, CA 94306

Dear Sir:

I've attended four ATOS conventions, my wife three, and we've enjoyed them all.

However, the last one, in Indianapolis, ended on a slightly jarring note, for me at least, and perhaps others as well. This occurred at the last concert when Bob Ralston, toward the end of the program, preceded a number of patriotic pieces with "I'm an American, aren't you?"

We certainly were *not all* Americans there, and I am very pleased to say that we others have always been very warmly welcomed to ATOS gatherings.

For instance, at Fort Wayne, one of your hosts was delighted when he noticed I had come from Canada and went out of his way to try to locate Buddy Nolan for me.

When, at the annual banquet, attendees are asked to stand, according to where they come from, I have always noted an abundance of members from Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, even India once, as well as Canada.

I believe this was Bob Ralston's

first performance for ATOS. Perhaps he was not aware the membership is not restricted to "Americans." I would like to think his remarks were made merely due to a thoughtless slip of the tongue.

On a pleasanter note, I wish to endorse President Rex Koury's remarks, in his excellent note which accompanied my membership renewal application, wherein he states "It has been said attending the national convention is the ultimate in vacation conventions." Ever since our first, in Los Angeles in 1979, we find it a fascinating way to learn about *one* particular city (and area) at a time. To this end, my wife and I always book an extra three or four days at the same hotel, so that we can further study any facets of the city not sufficiently covered during the convention.

In fact, I am just now starting to edit and splice the short super-8 movie film I made of the 1984 Convention *and* Indianapolis. What an atrium that hotel has!

Sincerely,  
Arnold Foster  
Regina, Sask., Canada

Dear Mr. Gilbert:

I certainly enjoy reading THEATRE ORGAN. Each time I read an issue I am amazed at the huge number of very young people who are interested in theatre organs, and organists who either played them or the new breed who are on the concert trail. I am indeed impressed by the number of new organs being installed and the number of theatres that are being renovated. My one regret is that in the not too distant past theatres were junking the organs and no one raised an objection. In fact, I know of several organs that were torn out of the chambers and put out for the trash man and the reason given was to increase the seating capacity and rearrange the sound systems. And we all sat by and let it happen.

For some time I tried to figure out just why we allowed this vandalism to continue and the answer was obvious. The organist in the silent movie was a non-person. The organ was something that filled the empty silence. It was only in the big city houses that the organist was given any notice, and the one who got all the attention rarely accompanied any of the films. I know for I was, as a kid, one of those unknowns.

I was precisely 13 when I crawled on the organ bench to play "the supper show." It was a small house operated by the Commerford chain. The organ was a two-manual United States of four ranks, but with a mind-boggling toy counter. I recall the organist saying to me as she was about to leave for her dinner break, "Don't be so nervous, the only time anyone notices the organ is when you stop playing." I later learned that this was good advice, for I did some bad playing and no one complained.

My family later moved to Philadelphia and I was quick to flaunt my previous experience to unsuspecting managers. I now felt I was a professional. I guess my strong point was that I could read almost anything at sight and I had a natural flair for accompanying the films. By the time I was 15 I was doing full summer vacation spots for numerous chains in the Philadelphia area. I was smart enough to take lessons. My greatest teacher was Rollo Maitland. When sound films became established I was already in college, and I guess I was bored with the whole business. I went on and finished my Ph.D. and recent-



ly retired from college teaching. There was no glamour in being a theatre organist; it was just hard, tiring work, and I can assure there was no applause, except for the solo organist. Every now and then I accompany a film and I am flattered by the applause of the audience; what a contrast to the old days!

Well, I still have fond memories of

those days and I still have quite a library of theatre organ music and even loads of the complimentary popular tunes that the publishers sent us, to say nothing of the cue sheets.

Again thanks for a wonderful organization and magazine.

Sincerely yours,  
Harry F. Bolich

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania □



The "Phantom" (Tom Helms) appears once again at the Alabama Theatre!  
(Billy C. Evans photo)



## CHAPTER NOTES

Edited by Grace E. McGinnis

### ALABAMA Birmingham

205/979-8132 or 205/785-4864

The fall months were really busy for us with concerts, programs, shows and whatever else came along. In October we held our Fall Presentation of *The Phantom of the Opera* with Tom Helms at the console of the Wurlitzer. As always, this classic performance was very well attended, and all of our members had fun doing it. The next day we held a "Meet the NEW Mighty Wurlitzer" concert, again with Tom Helms, to show off the new Post Horn rank that has been added to our Big Bertha. Once again, the crowds came out, and many attended both performances.

We try to do something different each year for our Fall Presentation, but the public demands *The Phantom* for Halloween. It has almost become a ritual, with the same people coming each time and talking about last year's show while eagerly awaiting the next show. Our presentation starts off with 30 minutes of pre-recorded funeral music, ending with "Come, Sweet Death." A sinister, black coffin is carried down the aisle by six black-robed and hooded pallbearers led by another black-robed and hooded figure carrying a brass candelabra. The procession slowly carries the coffin to the front of the orchestra pit, places it in state before the audience and then silently exits the auditorium.

The theatre has gone totally dark by this time, except for a black light which the audience cannot see. The Phantom, (Tom Helms) suddenly cracks the lid on the coffin and an eerie glow emanates from the fluorescent green paint that is inside the coffin and struck by the black light. Tom then leaps out, runs to the console (which has mysteriously appeared by itself) and plays Bach's "Tocatta and Fugue." The audience goes wild, and we love it!

On October 28, Tom presented a concert on our beautiful Wurlitzer with her new Post Horn. The sound was unbelievable! Tom Helms does such an excellent job playing our Wurlitzer that it is hard to believe that he does not play it all the time. The afternoon show was complete with sing-along slides and an audience that seemed to have a wonderful time.

Our November program featured the famous Bob Van Camp from the Fox Theatre in Atlanta. The beautiful Alabama was once again alive with

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