

PIPES &

Personalities

Lee Erwin Plays the Beacon

On October 7, Lee Erwin, playing the Beacon Theatre's 19-rank Wurlitzer, will begin a 13-week series of silent films at the "Incredible Bit of Bagdad on Upper Broadway" in New York City.

The films for the series, selected by Stanley Feingold, reflect a balance between well-known silents, both American and European, and rarities not often seen by movie audiences anywhere — films by Garbo, Gish, Pickford, Swanson, Louise Brooks, Nazimova, Fairbanks, Valentino, Barrymore, W. C. Fields, Lon Chaney, Keaton, Langdon, Chaplin and Lloyd. Also to be shown are a new print of D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* and Rene Clair's *An Italian Straw Hat*, considered one of the best European comedies of the silent era.

Lee has been associated with the Beacon Theatre's Wurlitzer since it was restored by the New York Chapter ATOS, with Bon Smith as crew chief, in the early '60s. Lee was a member of the original restoration crew.

When restoration of the Wurlitzer was completed, Lee was commissioned by NYTOS to write an organ score for Gloria Swanson's legendary film, *Queen Kelly*. On May 8, 1967, with Swanson making a personal appearance, Lee played his new score for the first time to a sold-out house of enthusiastic moviegoers.

Since that eventful night, Lee Erwin has composed and recorded scores for more than 70 films. Many of those movies, with Erwin's music, are being shown all over the world.

During the past year, under the guidance of David Alpert and Charles Kalan of Beacon Enterprises, the theatre has been completely restored and redecorated following the original color scheme, so that the Beacon is once again the "Grand Movie Palace" that Roxy created.

Ben Hall wrote about the Beacon in a small booklet that was included in Lee Erwin's recording of the Beacon Wurlitzer, "The Sounds of Silents": "This incredible 'bit of Bagdad on Upper Broadway' was originally planned as Roxy's Midway Theatre, and has been called "The Baby Roxy" because the designer, Walter W. Ahlschlager, who was also the architect for the big Roxy, incorporated many simi-



Lee Erwin at the Beacon Theatre Wurlitzer.

lar features in both houses. The opulent color scheme of antique gold and rich reds, so dear to Roxy's heart, the gigantic lozenge-shaped dome and monumental chandelier, the lobby rotunda (with its own dome and chandelier) — all evoke the "Cathedral of the Motion Picture." Even the stage of the Beacon is like the Roxy's in that the backstage wall juts into a corner; both theatres were built with the auditorium at an angle inside the rectangular structure in order to fit in as many seats (2673 in the Beacon) as possible.

"The theatre opened as Warner Brothers' Beacon on Christmas Eve, 1929. The gleaming white and gold console of the Mighty Wurlitzer soared into view bearing the brilliant and eccentric Stuart Barrie with it; Ben Bernie acted as master of ceremonies, and his orchestra rose on the stage lift to perform some popular novelties. There were Vitaphone short subjects in place of 'live' acts, featuring Mme. Frances Alda, Bert Lahr and a dance number, "Wedding of the Painted Doll" (which may have been the Technicolor sequence from Warner Brother's *Broadway Melody* that same year). After a newsreel came the feature film, Lupe Velez and Rin-Tin-Tin in a dog of a picture called *Tiger Rose*.

Chris Elliott



"Since this somewhat inauspicious beginning, the Beacon has survived the onslaughts of Bank Night, CinemaScope and popcorn with all its glories intact. The orchestra pit, the console and stage lift still elevate; the giant cyclorama still hangs from the flies (illuminated by a semi-circular footlight trough at the rear of the stage); and the original Magnascope screen still hangs in the fly loft, along with the plush contour curtain which opened on the Beacon's first night. And best of all, the mighty Wurlitzer, restored to mint condition by members of the local chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society, still thunders, trills, coos and sobs better than ever."

TED R. CREECH

Chris Elliott Appointed Organist at Founder's Church

After his concert at the 1984 ATOS Convention in Indianapolis, Chris Elliott returned to a full schedule of music studies and church music work. He entered the difficult American Guild of Organists' Young Artists Competition and won second place in the competition sponsored by the Long Beach Chapter of AGO. He was presented in recital in April by this same group. Chris performed an entirely different classical concert on May 31 celebrating the 20th anniversary of the 3/82 Casavant organ at the First Baptist Church of Van Nuys, where he has been organist.

In late July, Chris began full time duties as organist for the Founder's Church of Religious Science in Los Angeles. This church is the home of the 4/31 Wurlitzer theatre pipe organ designed by Lyn Larsen and restored and installed by Ken Crome. Known as The John Brown Cook Memorial Organ, the instrument was donated by Marian Miner Cook, a member of Founder's Church. The organ will be featured

twice yearly in special Sunday afternoon concerts as well as in the weekly half hour concerts on Wednesday evenings from 7:00 to 7:30 prior to the Wednesday evening services.

"Music for a Quiet Evening" is the title of the latest album recorded by Ashley Miller. This easy listening album was recorded on the Sargent/Stark 4/18 Wurlitzer theatre organ and will be released sometime this winter in stereo LP and CD format.

Well-known selections include "Journey into Melody," "Our Waltz," "Darn That Dream," "Misty" and "Stranger on the Shore."

The Sargent/Stark Wurlitzer was originally installed in the Santa Monica Criterion Theatre. It is similar to the Wurlitzer 260; however, instead of the Oboe Horn and Quintadena, it has a Cor Anglais. This organ also has an Echo division of String, Tibia and Vox.

More information on "Music for a Quiet Evening," "Show Time," "Spectacular Sounds" and the first album cut at Radio City Music Hall can be had from Impro International, Inc., P.O. Box 1072, Elkhart, Indiana 46515, phone 219/679-4061.

Bobby Pagan Surprised on 80th Birthday

Veteran British theatre organist Bobby Pagan was scheduled for a concert at the Worthing Assembly Hall in England on April 28, sharing the program with Rob Calcaterra.

At the conclusion of his part of the program, Bobby stepped down from the console to acknowledge the applause of the audience. As he was taking his bows, the theme music of *This Is Your Life* was heard from the P.A. system, and Nigel Ogden appeared through the curtains

backstage carrying a large red book.

For the next half hour, Nigel read Bobby's life story out of the book while slides were shown of various theatres, organs and colleagues with which Bobby had been associated. After this there were recorded messages from Phil Kelsall, Ernest Broadbent, Robin Richmond, Douglas Reeve and George Blackmore, written messages from Dennis Norden and Reginald Dixon, and then onto the stage came Bobby's wife, three sons and wives, grandchildren, and organists Bill Davies, Ena Baga, Florence de Jong, Neville Meale, Louis Mordish and John Mann. The Sussex Theatre Organ Trust presented Pagan with a music center, with which he was very thrilled.

Written from the column, "Nigel Ogden Entertains," published in the July 1985 issue of Organ Player and Keyboard Review, a British magazine, and used by permission.

Sheet Music Magazine's Dave Kopp provides the following update on the Aeolian organ (1932 vintage) in the Westchester Center, White Plains, New York.

"On a trip to the Center in June of this year, NYTOS Chairman Tom Stehle, Bob Seeley, Bob Welch and myself found the organ to be about 50% playable. The organ is four manuals and approximately 80 ranks, with an Aeolian Duo-Art roll player (still intact). It's true, the organ is to come out by January 1986 to allow for building improvement and reseating. The Center wants to donate the organ, but has not found any takers."

There has been a lot of publicity on the impending fate of this beautiful instrument. It was even used briefly for the Westchester Apples (USBL), who unfortunately had to cut their season short when several star players were drafted by the NBA. "The organ sounded great as a basketball organ," says Dave, who normally



Bobby Pagan at the Worthing Wurlitzer.

(John Sharp photo)

plays a Hammond at Madison Square Garden for the New York Knicks. "When that high pressure fanfare division 'charged' the home team, the crowd went wild!"

Anyone knowing of a possible home for the Aeolian is encouraged to contact Dave at 201/694-0779 or 22 Clifford Drive, Wayne, New Jersey 07470. □

Bobby Pagan and Nigel Ogden at Pagan's birthday surprise party at Worthing.

(John Sharp photo)

L to R, Florence de Jong, Rob Calcaterra and Ena Baga at Worthing.

(John Sharp photo)

