

PIPES &

Personalities

Five Western movie palaces are featuring their Wurlitzer organs as part of regular or periodic programs. Four of the instruments have recently been renovated. The five theatres are:

Denver's Paramount. The 2000-seat house, built in 1930, re-opened in January 1985 after lengthy restoration. 4/20 twin-console Wurlitzer. For information, call 303/534-8336.

Salt Lake City's Capitol. Built in 1913, this plush 1900-seater is owned by Salt Lake County. The 2/11 Wurlitzer was restored in 1983. Home for ballet, opera, and two dance troupes, an organ pop series and silent film showings are planned. For information, call 801/535-7905.

Oakland's Grand Lake. A 970-seater, built in 1926, it is twinned, but the 3/13 Wurlitzer, installed in 1983, is heard in the main auditorium. The organ is used before both performances each Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Silent films with organ accompaniment are scheduled occasionally. Information can be had by calling 415/452-3556.

Oakland's Paramount. Built in 1931, the 3000-seater has an Art Deco motif. The 4/27 Wurlitzer, installed in 1981, is used for concerts and before films of the Explorama Travel Series. A "Paramount Organ Pops" series is scheduled each year. Two-hour guided tours are available on first and third Saturdays of the month. Call 415/465-6400 for information.

San Francisco's Castro. Built in 1922, the 1550-seat auditorium contains a 4/26 Wurlitzer which is played nightly and during intermissions of double features. Classic films are run as part of a series. For information, call 415/621-6120.

One of the great female theatre organists is Ann Leaf. But did you know that the Mighty Mite of the Mighty Wurlitzer has a sister who was also a theatre organist? Esther Leaf DuBoff, three years older than her famous sister, lives in Omaha and was recently the subject of an interview in the local paper.

She says that she knew she'd be a theatre organist at the age of nine, and at 12, landed her first job in Omaha's Parlor Theatre, followed by stints at the Strand, Musse, Alhambra and Rialto. In 1921, following her marriage, she went to Los Angeles and played the Paramount while sister Ann was at Grauman's Million Dollar. She was Ann's replacement at the New York Paramount when

the latter went on vacation.

In recent years, Esther served as Temple Israel organist in Omaha until 1978 when two fingers were broken in a car accident. She's regained complete use of them, however, and has had a long concert series at the Joslyn Art Museum.

Christmas In Omaha

ATOS President Jack Moelmann had a busy schedule performing during the month of December. At "Sentimental Journey," a dinner dance benefit for Omaha's History Museum at the Western Heritage Museum on December 7, Jack entertained the 350 patrons with music of the Christmas season on a Conn three-manual theatre organ furnished by a local music store. The setting for this event was the beautiful 1931 Art Deco Union Station, home of the museum. The entertainment also included the Strategic Air Command Brass Band Quintet and the Sonny Firmature dance band.

Jack returned to Union Station on Sunday evening, December 8, for the public tree lighting ceremony during "Christmas at Union Station." The museum's 37-foot blue spruce was decorated with hundreds of lights and more than 4000 ornaments. More than 2300 in attendance enjoyed Jack's organ stylings and joined in singing carols.

At the invitation of Bruce Hangen, musical director and conductor of the Omaha Symphony, Jack performed with the Omaha Symphony and Chorus for three Christmas concerts on December 20-22 at the Orpheum Theatre on the 3/13 Wurlitzer. Jack played at the beginning and end of the concert and while Bruce Hangen narrated a Christmas story.

TOM JEFFERY

As if she isn't busy enough with teaching, concerts and arranging music, Rosa Rio has embarked on yet another project. Last August, two principals of Video Yesteryears approached her to provide musical background for over 190 silent films. She played many of them in their original runs, so now she has come full-circle. She uses a Hammond B-3000, and the classics include those of Chaney, Chaplin, Keaton, Fairbanks, Gish and some directed by De Mille. A good share of the pictures pre-date 1928, and will now be available for home cassette use.

The organization bought a \$50,000 video synchronization machine which regulates the speed of the film to bring it up to date. The sound accompaniment is in stereo, with lines feeding directly from organ to equipment.

The *Wall Street Journal* provides timely reading for business people, and others interested in finance and industry. Occasionally, it can be of interest to theatre and theatre organ buffs. Not long ago an item appeared relative to the Grand Lake Theatre in Oakland, California. "The movie starts at 7 p.m.," said the



Jack Moelmann entertains at "Sentimental Journey" in Omaha. (Blanche Masek photo)

lead paragraph, "But crowds tend to come early. Patrons don't want to miss the Mighty Wurlitzer, booming out turn-of-the-century favorites."

The article went on to mention the near-capacity crowds, the cheers for the organ music, munching of the fresh popcorn and occasional 50-cent matinees. Allen Michaan, the Grand Lake's 32-year-old-owner, has spent money liberally to revitalize the house, once threatened with the wrecking ball, and thereby realized the results of the Twenties' slogan: "Pretty Playhouses Please Patrons, Pay Profits." He firmly believes the public prefers viewing movies in ornate theatres, rather than in "multiplex cracker boxes."

Now one of the seven theatres in Michaan's Renaissance Rialto Theatres, the Grand Lake is the largest movie palace left in northern California. He spent \$1 million on it for items such as a 70mm projection system with six-track stereo, replacement of 8000 lights in the auditorium plus another 3000 on the 55-foot flashing sign atop the roof, and installation of a second screen upstairs. The revenue of the house has increased eight-fold in two years.

Add still another theatre organ enthusiast who is writing scores for silent films and accompanying them for audiences: Mike Ohman. An instructor at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, Ohman has been a theatre organ and silent movie buff since he first heard the master, Gaylord Carter. Ohman's initial public performance was in the early '70s when he accompanied *The Winning of Barbara Worth* at Salt Lake City's Capitol Theatre. Since then, the recipient of a Master's degree in organ performance at BYU has done frequent work with the theatre pipe organ. He's a regular at the Telluride Film Festival in Colorado, the high point being in 1981 when he accompanied Abel Gance's four-hour showing of *Napoleon*.