

REGIONAL AFTERGLOW FEATURES HOME ORGAN TOUR

by Steven A. McCormick
Photos by the author

Ask the average theatre organ enthusiast about instruments in Denver, Colorado, and you're likely to hear about some of the area's fine public installations. And why not? Certainly, the Organ Grinder restaurant is one of the world's premier pizza palaces, and the Denver Paramount houses what has been proclaimed by listener and artist alike as the country's preeminent Publix One.

But there's another side of the organ hobby which most people traveling through the Mile High City never see. The metropolitan Denver area has one of the finest collections of home installations to be found anywhere. Taken as a group, the region's residence installations have so diverse, and of such quality, that they could not be kept hidden from the view of ATOS members attending the Rocky Mountain Chapter's upcoming Regional Convention. Through their generous hospitality, five local owners of residence installations have consented to open their homes for an Afterglow event to be held Monday, October 13, 1986, immediately following the Regional Convention.

As space limitations prevent Afterglow attendees from hearing all of the five instruments, four tours, each featuring three different organs, have been announced, and registrants will have the difficult task of selecting only one of the four offered tours. To aid in the selection process, a brief description of each of the five organs, and the home that houses it, follows.

The southwest Denver home of Priscilla Arthur is no stranger to theatre pipe organs. Back in 1978, Priscilla's husband, Bill, installed a 2/5 Marr & Colton in an addition to the home's family room. While sweet of tone, the Marr & Colton proved to be less than desirable from the organist's standpoint, as it had neither second touch nor combination pistons. A bigger and better organ was definitely called for, so in 1982, the Marr & Colton was sold, and Bill purchased the 2/10 Wurlitzer from the second Denver Orpheum Theatre. As installed in the theatre, the organ had been a combination of the Wurlitzer from the first Denver Orpheum, augmented with selected ranks, purportedly from the Wurlitzer in the first San Francisco Orpheum.

Purchased from local organ dealer Ivan Morel and Associates, the Wurlitzer had been in storage since it was removed from the theatre in the late '60s. A full restoration, including complete chest releathering, was warranted. With help from Priscilla and local chapter members, Bill began the laborious task of rebuilding chests, and installing them in two new chambers built on the back of the house. In March 1984 Bill passed away, leaving the organ about 40% complete.

Deciding that the finished organ would be a fitting memorial to her late husband, Priscilla courageously pursued its completion. She enlisted the help of Pikes Peak Chapter members Martin Meier and John and Bob Grunow. Working primarily on weekends and

holidays, they lovingly completed what Bill had started. A series of dedication concerts featuring Bruce Belshaw, Joel Kremer and Patti Simon were held in March 1986.

As installed in the house, the organ speaks into the living room and loft areas from the two chambers. The white and gold console occupies a prominent position in the living room. A surprisingly lush ensemble sound is the product of tonal finishing by Ed Zollman. It is anticipated that the winner of this year's Young Organist Competition will be featured at the Arthur residence Wurlitzer.

The only installation to be featured on all of the tours is the suburban Englewood residence of Dr. Bruce and Sally Belshaw. Their beautiful home, designed and built specifically to accommodate the organ, must rate among the finest residence installations to be found anywhere.

The story of this installation begins in 1959 when Bruce, then serving his internship, purchased and removed the 3/15 Wurlitzer from the Nortown Theatre in Chicago. From 1959 until 1964 the organ remained in storage in the Chicago area. In 1964 it was shipped to Denver, and again placed in storage while a fitting house was designed and built. By late 1969, chambers in the new house were ready to receive the results of the restoration and installation process.

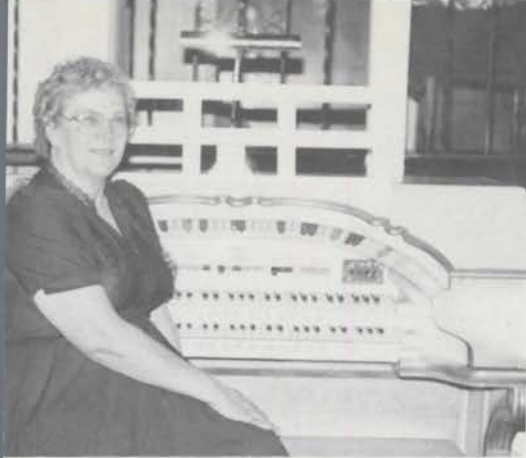
Over the next decade, Bruce, with help from his son Don, reworked every detail of the organ. In the process, another seven ranks of carefully selected pipes were added. The console's inner workings were redesigned to provide easier access for maintenance. All work was supervised and inspected by master craftsman John Christina, who insisted that the Belshaws adhere to the highest level of workmanship. Today, every aspect of the instrument reflects the attention to detail which was exercised during the restoration process.

Situated in two chambers, the organ speaks through an elaborate grille into the spacious living area. The intricately carved gold console ascends from the basement on a lift. Popular local artist Dick Hull played the organ in its new environment for the first time in February 1980.

Ornate gold console of the Belshaw Wurlitzer.

Joel Kremer and his four-manual console, originally from Moody Bible Institute.





Priscilla Arthur seated at the console of the 2/10 Wurlitzer in her home.

Artist for this venue will be the owner, Dr. Belshaw. Bruce, a student of the late Dick Hull, has a delightful style which we believe you will find most enjoyable.

East and south of Denver, nestled at the foot of a rolling ridge of pine-covered hills lies the booming bedroom community of Parker. If you were to travel east from Parker up into the pine ridge, past ranchettes and small horse farms, you would eventually find your way to the lovely country home of Joel and Jerri Kremer. In this house's generously-sized music room, the theatre organ occupies a place of honor, flanked on one side by an upright piano and on the other by a Baldwin Grand.

The organ installed is the result of a collecting spree which started in 1947 when Joel purchased a 2/4 Robert-Morton, less console, from Fred Meunier, the legendary local Wurlitzer dealer. More than 20 years later, after several changes of address, the much expanded instrument came to rest at its present location. Along the way, bits and pieces were collected from such fine organs as those installed in the Trail Theatre (Colorado Springs), the Isis Theatre and the City Auditorium (Denver). Now standing at 28 ranks, this organ contains virtually every rank of pipes one would expect to find in a great theatre instrument, including both an English Horn and a Post Horn, together with a sampling of classi-

cal voices as well. The four-manual console, originally from Moody Bible Institute, has been rebuilt to accommodate a horseshoe stop rail.

In addition to being the proud owner, Joel Kremer is a veteran musician with years of public performances at the Denver Paramount Theatre to his credit. Who, then, would be better suited to present the many features of this magnificent instrument? Joel's toe-tapping renditions of the great music from the '20s and '30s will certainly be one of the high points of the Afterglow activities.

Fred Riser may not be the original organ enthusiast, but he must come close. Fred's involvement with the hobby dates back to as early as 1929, when he began collecting organs and organ parts. A greenhouse operator by trade, Fred's operation encompasses several acres. With spare land available, a building, separate from the residence, was a logical way to house the ever-growing collection. This building, affectionately referred to by some as "Riser's Barn," is the location of Fred's current effort, an ever-growing composite organ controlled by two consoles.

As originally planned, the building on the Fred and Evelyn Riser property was to have housed a 2/7 Wurlitzer in one end and a much larger instrument, of 30 ranks or more, in the other. An unfortunate fire in 1982, however, changed that plan. A four-manual Barton console, which was to have controlled the larger instrument, was nearly destroyed, and many other parts suffered either fire or water damage. The 2/7 Wurlitzer, however, came through the blaze with only minor damage. After reconstructing much of the building's interior, it was decided to abandon plans for two instruments and concentrate on enlarging the existing Wurlitzer.

Under the capable direction of Ed Zollman of Colorado Pipe Organ Service, the instrument grew from seven to 12 ranks. At that point, the two-manual console, originally from the Rialto Theatre, Denver, could not accommodate further expansion. A search for a larger console ended when Fred made

arrangements with the owners of the Mesa, Arizona, Organ Stop pizza parlor to obtain the three-manual console originally from the Denver Theatre. Currently, the organ stands at 22 ranks, with an eventual goal of 31 ranks.

John Lauter, popular artist from the Motor City Chapter, will be presented at the Riser instrument.

High tech may not seem like a phrase that applies to theatre organs, but in the suburban Aurora home of Dee and Charlotte Williams, the computer and traditional Wurlitzer technology combine into one of the most interesting instruments in the area. You see, this Wurlitzer features the first commercial installation of the Devtronix/Wilcox computer-controlled relay system in this country.

But that's getting ahead of the story. Let's go back to 1978 when Dee, who had been shopping for an organ for some time, located a 2/7 Style E Wurlitzer, Opus 1300, originally from the Boulevard Theatre in Jackson Heights, New York. The organ was removed from storage, transported to Colorado, and the tedious job of restoration and installation began. As is often the case with home organs, the Wurlitzer grew during the installation process. In the chamber, seven ranks made way for ten, and then an eventual 13. The console expanded from two manuals and a single stop rail to three manuals, nearly 200 stop tabs on two stop rails and 60 combination pistons. Clearly, such an expansion program was way beyond the capabilities of the organ's original switch stack and relays.

Dee began exhaustive research into the solid-state relay systems on the market, settling on the Wilcox system which was then fresh off the drawing board. Much more than a mere relay, the microcomputer-based system features among other "goodies," full record and playback facilities, a transposer, adequate memory to store several sets of combination piston setups, and virtually unlimited capacity to accommodate future expansion of the instrument.

Installed in a single chamber, the organ speaks into the living room via shutters situ-

One of the two consoles which control the Fred Riser residence organ. This one was from the Denver Theatre.

Dee Williams on the bench of his computer-controlled Wurlitzer.



ated high in the peak of the cathedral ceiling. Below the shutters, a glass wall allows full inspection of the immaculately laid out chamber. While it is possible, via the computer's playback facilities, for visitors to enjoy hours of entertainment by such luminaries as Hector Olivera and Donna Parker, the convention committee has opted to present a real live artist in the person of Melissa Ambrose, from the Detroit area. Melissa, you may remember,

was the first runner-up in the 1985 Young Organist Competition.

As space within the homes is restricted, the number of seats for each tour is strictly limited, and will be available on a first come, first served basis. To avoid possible disappointment, convention registrants are urged to forward their reservation requests at the earliest possible date. □

feel the periods of silence in their music is as important as, or more important than, the notes they play!

Tempo

Tempo refers to the speed at which you perform your selection. Some composers and arrangers indicate a metronome tempo (number of beats per minute). As most students can't tolerate practicing with the relentless tick of the metronome, they choose to use an automatic rhythm unit instead. This works equally as well and is often easier on the nerves! But rhythm units have no compassion either, and will not wait while you falter for any little reason. Although many selections sound better without automatic rhythm, it is excellent discipline to practice with it to check the steadiness of your tempos. There are some commonly used musical terms referring to tempo: Adagio, largo and lento = slow; moderato or andante = moderate speed; and allegro, vivace or presto = fast. Accelerando means to speed up and ritard means to slow down. "A tempo" indicates to return to your original tempo. Remember the pros love to dazzle us with their dexterity at fast tempos. But, you must remember to always practice slowly and steadily, and gradually work up your tempo to a comfortable level for *you*.

Articulation or Touch

We all have been taught that the organ is a very legato, smooth instrument. We practice finger substitution exercises and heel-toe pedal technique by the hour to develop that smooth, lush sound. But remember, sometimes a different touch might be better. For example, most marches are played with a marcato or detached touch wherein the notes are distinctly separated, but not necessarily short. A polka or novelty number might be played with a staccato or short, almost plucked, touch. Develop at least three distinct touches to have at your command in your hands and feet, and you will be prepared for any occasion. Always imagine how the orchestral instrument you are imitating would perform a passage and try to imitate that touch and sound.

Expression is a very individualistic area. There is no right or wrong. If you were to listen to five of your favorite organists interpret the same selection, you would hear five different interpretations. Who is to say which one is "correct" or even "best"? You will enjoy the one that matches your ideas of how it should sound. So why not spend some time analyzing your own playing, perhaps through taping yourself and listening critically as you play it back? After you have listened and corrected the obvious weak spots in note and timing, turn to interpretations and expression. Is there any life, feeling, soul and message to the listener? And as a final test, try to sing along as you listen to yourself. Did you give yourself time to breathe?

Remember, all the flamboyant arrangements and dazzling techniques will not please you or your audience half as much as a beautifully interpreted arrangement with your *unique* expression clearly displayed and refined. □

KEYBOARD TECHNIQUES



by Cheryl Seppala



EXPRESSION

When studying the organ, students must learn and memorize many patterns and formulas, such as those we have recently explored relating to rhythms and chords. There are definite procedures to follow in these areas. Even theatre organ styles, such as block chords, open harmony and chromatic glissandos, follow a particular structure or fingering pattern. But when the pupil turns to the subject of expression, there are really no rules or standards to follow. The pupil must not only learn to use the swell pedals smoothly, but to analyze phrasing, dynamics, tempos, and touches as well. All this, when it's hard enough just to hit the correct notes with the proper timing!

Let's divide this subject of expression into four important areas: dynamics and the use of the swell pedals, phrasing, tempos, and articulation. We will also include the necessary musical terms pertaining to these subjects.

Dynamics and the use of the Swell Pedal(s)

There are some very frequently used terms and abbreviations relating to the volume recommended for a particular selection or passage, *p* = piano = soft, *f* = forte = loud and *m* = mezzo = moderately (preceding a "p" or "f"). Crescendo or $\text{<math>\text{}</math>$ indicates to gradually get louder, while diminuendo or $\text{<math>\text{}</math>$ indicates to soften gradually. With these vague terms as relative guidelines, the arranger helps the player to interpret the mood of the piece through the selection of an appropriate level of volume. Operating the expression pedal with our right foot is usually the last of our four limbs we coordinate, after we can play both hands and the pedals with

our left foot. It would seem to be the easiest assignment, simply get louder or softer at your discretion. It is easy, but beware of a common pitfall. Do not keep time by "pumping" the expression pedal up and down. This has a sickening effect for the listener. Except when a strong accent is desirable by a quick jerk of the pedal, a gradual movement is much more effective. If you are fortunate enough to be playing a pipe or electronic organ with divided expression, make sure you know exactly which stops are controlled by which pedal, so you may use them individually to best advantage.

Phrasing

Much can be learned in this area simply by studying the words of a song and observing the punctuation in your music. Occasionally you may find a popular organ arrangement where phrasing is indicated by long curved lines extending over the phrase. Most often, however, phrasing is left to the player. Just as you could not imagine listening to a singer perform a selection without breathing, you should not perform at the organ without letting your music breathe by lifting your fingers at the ends of the musical sentences or phrases. Often the accompaniment is carried through while the melody is phrased. If more dramatic punctuation is required, both hands and pedals lift simultaneously. Some people are blessed with the innate ability to phrase their music beautifully, while others must study and mark phrasing on their music with the aid of a teacher or by listening to a pro. Either way, it is an essential element in developing a professional sound. Many musicians