

1986 ATOS Young Organist Competition

The second annual Young Organist Competition brought forth entries from 11 talented young artists. Their names and qualifications were known only to ATOS President Jack Moelmann, who duplicated the tapes for the judges, and to Lois Segur, Chairman of the Competition Committee. The tapes were numbered in sequence as they arrived, and the judges knew only the age of the contestant and the size of the pipe organ used.

The entrants this year were Richard Purvis, Tom Hazleton, Dennis James, Gwen O'Connor and Grant Whitcomb. Only Richard Purvis was identified at the outset; the names of the other four were announced after the final grading.

The entrants and their sponsoring chapters were:

Junior Division (ages 13 - 15)

Christopher M. Halon, 14, Puget Sound
Neil H. Johnston II, 15,
Southwest Michigan
Frank E. Perko III, 15, Pikes Peak
Jason A. Poteet, 15, Sierra

Intermediate Division (ages 16 - 18)

John J. Cook, 16, Eastern Massachusetts
Terry Cunningham, 16, Valley of the Sun
Colleen Feldpausch, 16, Motor City
Neal T. Marple, 16, Cedar Rapids Area

Senior Division (ages 19 - 21)

Dwight M. Thomas, 21, Central Indiana
Donald M. Walker, 20, Joliet Area
Laura VanEyck, 19, San Diego

Dwight M. Thomas was the competition winner, as well as placing first in the Senior Division. He will be presented in a cameo performance at the Richmond Convention. Colleen Feldpausch was the winner in the Intermediate Division and Neil H. Johnston II won in the Junior Division. Each received an award of \$300 as division winner, and Dwight Thomas received an additional \$200 as competition winner. We offer our congratulations to the winners and our thanks to all who participated.

We appreciate the generosity of the judges, who so willingly gave of their time for this very important project. We hope their constructive comments will be helpful to these young people as they continue their musical careers.

LOIS SEGUR, *Chairman*
Young Organist Competition □

PIPES & Personalities

SAVOY THEATRE, NORTHAMPTON, RE-INSTALLS COMPTON FOR REGULAR USE

An exciting moment in theatre organ history came on May 4, 1986, when Ronald Curtis brought up the Compton organ at the Savoy Northampton, England, for its inauguration. It was 50 years to the day after the theatre first opened.

Early in 1985 the theatre management made known its desire to have a Compton organ installed once again, in time for the anniversary program. In 1936, the Savoy opened with a 3/7 Compton with Melotone. That organ was removed in 1960.

ABC Cinema set about locating an instrument and an extensive search led to Mark Burgess, who owned the organ from the ABC Ritz Cleethorpes, as well as choice parts of several other organs. Mark agreed to lend the organ to the Savoy for a period of four years; one year being taken up with the installation.

A crew from the savoy, led by Kenneth Porter, Manager, and Ken Worley, Chief Projectionist, handled the task of transporting the organ to the theatre from its storage place 65 miles away. Following removal of the original Compton from the Savoy the pipe chambers were converted to dressing rooms, so it was necessary to reconvert them for installing the new organ. The original lift was still in place and in working order; it was only necessary to modify it to comply with current safety regulations.

David Pawlyn was employed to restore and install the organ. He has removed, installed or renovated many of Britain's remaining cinema organs, among them the ex-Trocadero Wurlitzer in the South Bank Polytechnic in London. The Savoy's new Compton is a 3/10 instrument, with the two string ranks played together. The ranks are: Flute, Diapason, Tibia, two Strings, Trumpet, Krumet, Oboe, Tromba and Vox Humana, together with Xylophone, Glockenspiel, Vibraphone, Tubular Bells and Toy Counter. One of the famous British "jelly mold surrounds" highlights the console.

The organ inauguration program began with newsreels of May 4, 1936, and featured Ronald Curtis in concert and accompanying a short silent film, with Michael Wooldridge also playing some concert numbers on the Compton. Other stars on the program were

singer Nigel Stephenson and mime Ellen Blueth. Tony Moss, well known in cinema organ circles, was master of ceremonies. The show closed with a duet featuring Ron Curtis on the organ and Michael Wooldridge at the grand piano.

There was a very unexpected and rewarding happening after the formal inaugural program. In the theatre after it emptied, a regular cinema audience of some 800 took their seats and Michael Wooldridge brought up the organ and played them in. All the heads of the ABC group who stayed for this event were staggered to find a young audience, average age 18, silent, attentive and open-mouthed at the dazzling display put on by Michael. When he took the organ down 20 minutes later, he did so to a standing ovation far surpassing that of the regular organ goes at the preceding program. This would seem to indicate that, when playing for a young audience with no prior knowledge of a theatre organ, it is possible to hold their attention and more with a virtuoso performance.

OUT-OF-SIGHT SILENTS

In front of the cameras on the set of a new Woody Allen film, to be released this fall, all went as planned for organist Lee Erwin. But, later he literally found himself behind-the-scenes of two other movies and facing major obstacles.

Woody Allen's penchant for authenticity, down to minute details, included having new eyeglasses made for Lee set in 1940-type frames to complete his period wardrobe. So, of course a vintage Hammond organ was provided for him to play during the filming of this sequence at the Astoria Studios in Queens, New York.

Having played 68 silent film programs, nine concerts, seven TV and radio shows, besides recording tracks for two films, two ballet performances and doing two recording sessions with orchestra at RCA, Lee Erwin had experienced his share of the usual problems facing the professional organist. Soon, he was to encounter two unusual ones.

Scheduled to accompany two showings of *King of Kings* at Calvary Church in New York City, where the console of the organ does not permit the organist a front view of the screen, Lee had a TV monitor set up to allow him to synchronize his music score to the action on the screen. This method of viewing usually presents no problems for the performer — except when the monitor fails — which it did at Calvary Church five minutes before show-time. With a dead monitor and the back of the screen facing the console, Lee truly was behind the scenes. However, following the dim images leaking through the screen and reading the backwards sub-titles, the show went on.

The next challenge for Lee came in the form of having to record a music track without seeing the film at all! The D. W. Griffith opus, *Orphans of The Storm*, scheduled for a run at the Regency Theatre in New York, arrived without the music track it was supposed

to have. To beat a deadline, the Baldwin Organ Company made available an instrument in their showroom for a late night recording session. With no possibility of a 35mm projector for the recording session, Lee had to screen the movie elsewhere to make sure that his music cue-sheet was timed exactly like the print to be used. Since he had played the film dozens of times in past years, it was not too difficult to imagine the action going on as he stared at the stopwatch in front of him. The recording was delivered to the theatre the next morning and was played along with the movie for its entire run, every note of the music right in sync with the action on the screen.

MARLIN SWING

The first full season of organ concerts at the Renaissance Theatre in Mansfield, Ohio, since the organ was installed in 1985, was a great success. In September David Weingartner played several classical pieces, something new for Renaissance audiences. Hector Olivera was the next guest, and in December Bill Taber, resident organist for the Akron Civic Theatre, performed the first Christmas Organ Concert. In January, the theatre welcomed Rex Koury. By this time, the Wurlitzer's piano had been installed, and Rex used it to play "Rhapsody in Blue." In April, Ron Rhode performed a variety of numbers including "Could I Have This Dance?"

The second season will feature artists who have played this Wurlitzer before it came to the Renaissance. Gaylord Carter will appear on September 13; although this will be his first appearance at the Renaissance, he is quite familiar with the organ from the days when he played for the *Amos 'n Andy* radio show. Donna Parker, who played this organ when it was known as the "Carson" Wurlitzer, will be heard on November 9. Dennis James, from the Ohio Theatre in Columbus, will provide

Rex Koury at the Renaissance Wurlitzer in Mansfield, Ohio.



live organ music for *Son of the Sheik*, starring Rudolph Valentino, on February 14. Tom Hazleton will perform on March 13, and the season will close with Walt Strony on May 9.

VIRGINIA WHITE

DOES THE SHOE FIT?

A London Chapter member mentioned something which should be of interest to visiting American organists doing concert tours in Britain.

Britain is a relatively small country, with a huge, efficient network of railways. The trains depart every few minutes and travel at 80 to 125 miles per hour, which means that one can travel to any part of the country in a relatively short time.

He says that American organists tend to play the same program in a number of cities, not realizing that their fans are following them around the country and are hearing a repeat of what they've heard only a few days before. Nevertheless, American organists are held in high esteem by the British.

WILLIAM G. HALE

A PSYCHIC PUZZLE

Some 50 years ago, it seems, a mystery woman ran down the center aisle of the Avon Theatre, Utica, New York, and shot the organist dead. Gossip of the time had it that the organist was cheating on his wife, and she took the traditional way out of the situation. From that time to the theatre's demolition in 1947, the building was deemed haunted. Night porters at the Avon testified that the organ would rise from the pit at midnight and play music, without the assistance of human hands. The theatre auditorium would be filled with this sinister music until someone entered. Then it stopped. During the last few years of its existence, the theatre had difficulty employing staff, so well known did the psychic happenings become.

Contributed by Robert Goodwin, from the book *Phantoms of The Theater*, by Raymond Lamont Brown, 1977. Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers.

A MEMORABLE THEATRE ORGAN EXPERIENCE: A VISITOR'S IMPRESSION

A truly memorable theatre organ experience is a fairly rare phenomenon in the 1980s because its success relies on four independent pillars: artist, organ, venue and program — and, to a lesser extent, staging. At most of our concerts at least one of these pillars leans a bit. However, when each of these factors is outstanding in its own right and the whole brought together with professional staging, the result can be awesome indeed.

Yet this is just what happened on an ordinary Sunday afternoon in May up at the top

of New York state in Buffalo. The occasion was one of the periodic organ concerts at Shea's Buffalo Theater, the huge rococo palace beautifully restored into an active performing arts center that is one of the bright jewels in the crown of the city's downtown core revitalization.

The artist was a young man very well known in the theatre organ world who has mastered one of the most difficult balancing acts on the concert stage: he plays with authority; he talks with humility. Ron Rhode showed a spellbound audience of some 2000 what can happen when a well-trained, imaginative musician gets in four hours of practice night after night on a large well-maintained organ before a receptive Arizona pizza parlor audience. What emerges is a very accomplished, yet unstuffy, artist. If such be the case, long live the pizza parlors.

Ron's program was well selected and arranged for variety and dramatic effect, with a marked absence of overworked war-horses, yet included nothing too obscure for comfort. There was near-contemporary music (from *La Cage aux Folles*), opera (*La Traviata*), Berlin, Gershwin, operetta (*The Fortune Teller*), light classics (Grieg and Delibes) and the best rousing organ performance of Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance No. 1* we have heard since the coronation of Edward VII (this is a very ancient reviewer). He very thoughtfully omitted "Memory" (*Cats*), "Somewhere My Love," "Edelweis" and "Blue Spanish Eyes" (sigh). The arrangements showed commendable originality (but for a touch of Wright in "Of Thee I Sing") and were played with great style. Only once did the gremlins get in with an unplanned single note of Brass Trumpet — but only experienced eagle-ears would notice it, so smoothly was the offending single tab out of 282 located and zapped with neither batted eyelash nor missed beat.

The organ was Wurlitzer's showpiece large-theatre instrument, now thoroughly restored in high style — sounding great and sporting a very attractively refurbished mahogany console. The somewhat-less-than-full house left room for just enough natural reverberation to enrich the glorious wrap-around Tibias, Strings and Tubas.

And the theatre! From the vast lobbies and sweeping grand staircases to the soaring dome above the proscenium, the audience became part of the elegant majesty of the Viennese royal palace. Even with the lights dimmed for the performance, there was an imposing grandeur to the royal blue glow cast over the organ screens behind the muted amber sparkle of the mini-chandeliers.

Without taking anything away from the likewise impressive Grand Reopening program by Lyn Larsen two years ago, it must be noted that the organ no longer shows signs of hasty night-before-the-concert preparation, the staging has acquired a practiced polish and the renovated theatre now relaxes under a comfortable lived-in patina.

The staging of Ron Rhode's concert was so smooth, in fact, that one was scarcely aware of it — surely the goal of every concert organizer. From the computerized Ticketron re-

served seating to the camera and recorder control (all politely but firmly confiscated for the duration), it was one classy act. Of particular interest was the centralized control (from a NASA-like electronic console under the balcony) of PA system, house lights and spot-lighting. Four inter-fading fixed spotlights at the front of the balcony followed the artist. In place of any folksy welcome from an on-stage host, we heard the briefest of formal announcements from an invisible speaker and the music began. How nice.

The warmly responsive audience was certainly not restricted to organ buffs. There were plenty of brown and blond heads among the silver and pink, and even some family groups (Gee, Dad, it's a Wurlitzer!). The artist called for house lighting to introduce a bus-load of 40 fans who had made a 400-mile two-day trip from Kingston, Canada, and he played their national anthem.

All in all, this was a most memorable event which deserves to be proclaimed throughout the organ world as a model to which other concert venues might well aspire.

FRANK W. PRATT

Jeff Weiler, theatre organist from the Chicago area, provided the accompaniment to the classic Cecil B. DeMille film, *King of Kings*, on March 22 at the North Iowa Community Auditorium in Mason City, Iowa. The program was well-received by an appreciative audience, many of whom had never experienced a silent film presentation, let alone one with live organ accompaniment. This was Jeff's second appearance in the North Iowa Community Auditorium. Five years ago he played a dedicatory theatre organ program on the Rodgers organ which had been donated by Dr. and Mrs. Frank Hoffman. At that time he accompanied another film classic, *The Phantom of the Opera*, starring Lon Chaney.

FRANK HOFFMAN

COS/EPOCH COMPETITION 1986

The finals of the annual COS/EPOCH Young Theatre Organist of the Year Competition for 1986 were held on April 13 at Gunton Hall in Norfolk, England. (For those not familiar with it, EPOCH stands for Electronic and Pipe Organ Convention and Holiday.) Well-known British organists William Davies, Ena Baga and Len Rawle were the judges, with Rawle as chairman.

In the pipe organ competition Rachael Ward, 15, of Nuneaton, Werks, was the winner. She received £100 in cash, plus £50 toward further theatre organ training on the Wurlitzer at the South Bank Polytechnic in London.

Peter Holt, 13, from Wetherby, West Yorkshire, placed second and won £50. In third place was David Last, 17, from Ipswich, who won £25. In addition, all three received a selection of Cinema Organ Society tapes, an LP and a year's membership in the COS.



Winners in the COS/EPOCH Competition, L to R: Peter Holt, David Last, Rachael Ward, Chairman Len Rawle, Michelle Gosling, Budgie Groom and Julie Shipp.

The judges remarked on the overall standard of the entrants, which was higher than at some previous competitions both at Gunton Hall and elsewhere.

In the electronic organ competition for the Yamaha Trophy, first place was won for the second time by Michelle Gosling of Kings Lynn. Julie Shipp of Great Horkesley took second place for the third year running, and Budgie Groom of Little Strand, London, placed third.

DAVID LOWE

SOUND FAMILIAR?

In a comment to me at a recent meeting, following a discussion of concert ticket prices, a new member said, "I did not realize the goal of the club was to accumulate a large treasury. If it is, I don't think I am interested." Because other new members might hold a similar view, I thought it desirable to address the issue.

The ATOS was founded for the purpose of preservation, restoration, use and furtherance of the theatre pipe organ — certainly a fine and worthy cause. To accomplish this, it takes money. The Young Organist Competition is part of the Society's plan to further interest in theatre pipe organ. Money is needed to sponsor such a cause. These young artists are tomorrow's professionals, and without them the cause will die. It takes money.

The twin-console Wurlitzer at the Paramount would have been scrapped by now if the ATOS in years past had not spent money to keep the organ playing. It is now one of the nation's most desirable concert locations because a concert performed by Father James Miller and myself raised the funds to purchase and later donate a Post Horn rank to the theatre. It took money.

A grant was recently given to Pikes Peak Chapter so that they could continue the installation of the 3/17 Wurlitzer in Mount Saint Francis Convent. When completed, this organ will be a highlight of our Regional Convention. Following the convention, it will be available for use by both Pikes Peak and Rocky Mountain Chapters. It took money.

We are soon to see covers installed to protect the consoles of the Paramount's Wurlitzer, so that these consoles will not be

damaged by dust, grime and careless people. It takes money.

We are by no means a wealthy chapter and we have no intent of becoming so. The board over the past several years has been dedicated to maintaining the local dues. National ATOS has the same dedication. However, if the theatre organ is ever to become recognized and admired for its true musical place, then we cannot undersell it for concerts and other public events. When we set ticket prices, which at \$8.00 is still considerably lower than other public events, it is not for the purpose of becoming wealthy, but to further our original goals to restore, maintain, use and enjoy the beauty of the mighty pipe organ.

PATTI SIMON, President
Rocky Mountain Chapter

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN MECHANICAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS?

For those theatre organ fans intrigued by music makers controlled by cylinders, rolls, discs and folding cards, there is an organization devoted to their interests and enjoyment. Known as the Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors' Association (AMICA), the association is made up of 16 chapters covering the U.S. and reaching into Canada. There are also several affiliated societies covering England, the Netherlands, Germany and Australia.

AMICA publishes *The AMICA News Bulletin* nine times a year. The sample copy we received is very attractive in format, well printed and contains 20 pages of the same size as in THEATRE ORGAN. There are reports of chapter activities, articles of general interest, technical articles, biographies of artists, and classified advertisements.

Regular membership dues are \$22 per year; overseas (surface mail) and Canada — \$28; overseas air mail — \$48. There is a new member initiation fee of \$5.00.

More information about AMICA can be obtained from the Membership Secretary, Will Wild, P.O. Box 172, Columbia, South Carolina 29202 (telephone 803/758-8846). □