

Reminiscing*

By Floyd Roberts

Don't we all?

TO THOSE OF YOU who remember the tremendous popularity of the Pipe Organ and its perfect accompaniment to the silent moving-picture maybe this article will take you back to thirty or forty years ago when each theatre ad would box out a portion to print something like "Special Music Score, Jerrie McKinley at the Organ." Or perhaps it was Henry B. Murtagh at the organ, and if you WERE lucky, Jesse Crawford. But whoever the organist, you never forgot the theme of the picture. If it was "East Lynne" and Ann Harding was the star, then the reason you saw strong women and big men, tears rolling down their cheeks, was that the Organist played *Then You'll Remember Me* all through the picture, especially when the sad parts came on. Or say you saw Wallace Beery, Richard Arlen, and Louise Brooks in "Beggars of Life" then you were haunted for days by its theme *Side by Side*. Maybe it was Pola Negri and this time it was in her latest "Loves of an Actress." Then it was a Chopin *Nocturne* which wove its spell over and over around you. And if the picture starred Mae Busch, Eugene O'Brien, and the lovable child star Ben Alexander in "Frisolous Sal" then you knew that part of its charm was from the Organist's way of playing the old song *My Gal Sal*. And in the cowboy pictures with Ken Maynard, the *Light Cavalry Overture* sure set your spine tingling, and you were on the edge of your seat and the organist hoped he would stay on his horse as the villain almost got the girl. But you never forgot those days of pipe organ.

AND IF YOU were an organist (and where have all of the thousands gone?) then you will recall how you closed the

* Written for "The Pariscope."

out of the way, lay the pneumatic in your left palm, finished side down, and apply glue to the bare side and to the leather on the back. Then wrap the leather around, making it overlap in back. Lay the whole thing aside to dry, and do another one. Later, trim off the excess leather, punch out a new gasket (the punchings from the large piece around the hole are just right for the small piece at the back end) and glue it on, put back the bumper piece, and wiggle the leather around to break up the hardened glue in the hinge.

One important point to watch is that no glue must get on the leather or drip on to the inside surfaces. If this happens the leather will be stretched too much at one place and the pneumatic won't last long.

With all the pneumatics completed, glue them back in place, being very careful to line them up with the guide lines in the chest. When they're dry, test each one by holding your finger over its channel and trying to pull it open, to see if it leaks.

Next, go to work on the top boards. Take off all the pallets and clean the expansion chambers thoroughly. Scrape off the old pallet leather and replace it with felt-and-leather material sold by organ supply houses for the purpose. This step is important, and will save no end of trouble with partial ciphers due to hardened, out-of-shape pallet leathers. Replace the pallets and lubricate their guides with graphite. Then replace the whole top board, with the chest on its side so the pneumatics drop open and the pallet wires fit under the bumpers properly. Adjust each pallet wire by bending it slightly, until there is a little free play in

swell shutters in front of the organ pipes, and softly played a vox humana solo accompanied by a soft flute or the tibia clausa, and you made the audience feel what you saw happening on the huge screen in front of you. And within easy reach was your cue-sheet which you had carefully gone over and memorized, and along with it the music you were going to need, the Dramatic Andantes and Agitados, the Hurries, the Galops, the Misteriosos, and the latest song hit.

BUT HOW MANY of you can remember today after all these years of the too noisy blatant sound movie accompaniment (canned actually) the time you had to imitate a real train, and because you were sitting at the console of your mighty Wurlitzer or your powerful Robert Morton, you knew that all you needed to make the audience hear that train was to use the Bass Drum on the pedal, playing it with your foot, and using one hand on one of the keyboards (and you might have anywhere from two to five of these) and adding the Snare Drum, well, just by the speed you moved your hands and feet the train sped along or ground to a stop. Or if the picture called for an airplane scene (and they were being shown real often lately) all you needed to add to the Snare Drum was an 8-foot Tuba, but be sure and shut off the Tremolo. The action of the picture changed so swiftly, now the scene was a prize-fight and you needed a gong, well you would never use a chime by itself, that was only for a Cathedral Scene, but a chord struck in a precise sharp manner and you must remember to keep the Swell Box wide open. And oddly enough to imitate a Hand-Organ you needed at least six stops on at one time, but you did not use your feet. And to imitate a telegraph key or a typewriter that was about the easiest of all, all you required was the Chinese Wood Block from the trap division of your organ. And the piano, that was easy, the heroine could play any love song to the hero, all you had to do was hit the stop tablet marked piano and if your organ was expensive and the theatre where you played the finest, you might even have a Steinway Grand piano concealed behind the organ grille. Your fingers, the organ keys, and electricity did the rest.

Those were the days!

its closed position and everything works freely.

The bottom boards, containing the magnets and primaries, must also be thoroughly cleaned, with a soft brush and the vacuum cleaner. Take off all the magnet caps and thoroughly clean them out, clean off the magnet itself and polish the armature. Test the magnets and replace all dead ones, and those of less than normal resistance.

Unscrew the board covering the primary valves and with a twist drill or hand chuck, twist out the valves and wires, keeping them in order. Brush them off and brush out the spaces they fit into. Remove and re-leather the primary pneumatics, following the same procedure outlined above with the exception that since these are square, not book pneumatics, there is no hinge and the leather overlaps about half the length of one side. Needless to add, the leather used on these small pneumatics must be the thinnest obtainable.

Replace the primaries, screw in the valves adjusting them as you go, and replace the cover board with the valve wires all in their holes. Then screw the bottom boards back on the chest, turn it upright and temporarily feed it wind from the vacuum cleaner, which ought to be good for 8- to 10-in. pressure. With a test wire, operate each note to see that everything is working perfectly, with no leaky valves, no dead notes and no ciphers. You've just finished one chest. Now you can start on the others. After that comes the relay, percussions and traps, tremulants, shutters, and pipes—but the chests will keep you going until the next issue.

(To be continued)