

BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF THEATRE ORGANISTS

by Dr. John W. Landon

BROWN, DWIGHT

Brown was born in Dallas, Texas. He attended Forest Avenue High School in that city, and began his musical career as leading trumpeter in the school band. He soon switched to piano under the tutelage of Elizabeth Gay Jones and Julius Ilbert Jahn and progressed to the organ under Pietro Yon, later organist of the Vatican. He credited C. Sharpe Minor as the best of his teachers as far as the theatre organ was concerned.

He played the Hippodrome in Dallas, became organist at the 4/20 Wurlitzer in the Dallas Palace in August of 1925, and opened the 3/10 Barton in the Texas Theatre in Dallas in 1927. He opened the four-manual Wurlitzer in the Paramount Theatre, Toledo, Ohio, in 1929, and went on to a stint at Shea's Buffalo Theatre, Buffalo, New York, in 1929. He also played engagements in Houston and San Antonio, and at the Fox Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia. He returned in 1932 to the Palace Theatre in Dallas and was there for a time but relinquished the organist position to Joe Proctor, who remained there until the organ feature was discontinued. In 1935 he was selling Hammond organs in the Dallas area and he opened the first electronic organ in the Dallas Athletic Club. In 1942 he returned to the Palace Theatre in Dallas when organ inter-

missions were begun again. He played a number of years for the State Fair of Texas, and did radio and night club work from the late 1930s until the 1960s. He remained in the Dallas area until his death, December 9, 1965.

BROWN, GRACE TAYLOR

Organist of the Society Theatre in Seattle, Washington, in 1927.

BROWN, JEANNE

Broadcast over Radio Station WOWO, Fort Wayne, Indiana, from the Embassy Theatre (4/15 Page).

BROWN, JOHN DAVID

Born in 1952 in Long Beach, California, Brown began organ study during his high school years. He was graduated with an Associate of Arts degree in Liberal Arts from Golden West College. During his college years he studied classical organ with Dr. Justin Colyer and Warren Peterkin.

Brown was employed in the Retail Home Organ Sales Division of the Gould Music Company. In addition to his employment and schooling, he found time to study theatre organ with Edna Scanlan, who helped prepare him for the 1972 Scholarship Competition sponsored by the Orange County Professional Organists Guild. Brown won first place and received a scholarship to help further his musical education. He majored in music and was graduated with honors from Golden West College in 1974.

Following graduation Brown taught at the Hammond Organ Studios of Orange County and served as organist for a chain of Wurlitzer-equipped pizza parlors in Southern California. He continued his own organ studies under the tutelage of Gene Roberson and Bill Thomson. He was hired as musical director for the Bird Cage Theatre at Knott's Berry Farm, where his assignments included playing the calliope.

After a stint as organist at a pizza parlor in Indiana, Brown returned to California where he teaches privately and appears as a free-lance concert organist.

BROWN, MRS. JOY

Organist of the Wurlitzer Style 210 Special in the Liberty Theatre, Bellingham, Washington. This organ was repossessed by Wurlitzer

in June of 1924. Brown also played the Robert-Morton organ at the American Theatre and opened the new Mt. Baker Theatre, April 29, 1927, playing the Wurlitzer Style 215. The opening show was *Slide, Kelly, Slide* featuring William Haines. Mrs. Brown later worked at the Stark Piano Company which was Bellingham's major music and record store, where she was employed for many years.

BROWN, MAE

Organist of the Kedzie Theatre in Chicago, Illinois, in 1928.

BROWN, OLLA RAE

Student organist in the Eastman School of Music in March of 1924.

BROWN, WEST

Well-known organist in the Seattle, Washington, area in the mid-1920s. Played the Blue Mouse Theatre in Tacoma, Washington, in 1925 and 1926. In 1926 Brown moved to the Embassy Theatre in Seattle and from there he moved to the Paramount Theatre, Seattle, in early 1927. In late 1927 he became organist of the Columbia Theatre, Seattle.

BROWN, WILLIAM DeWITT

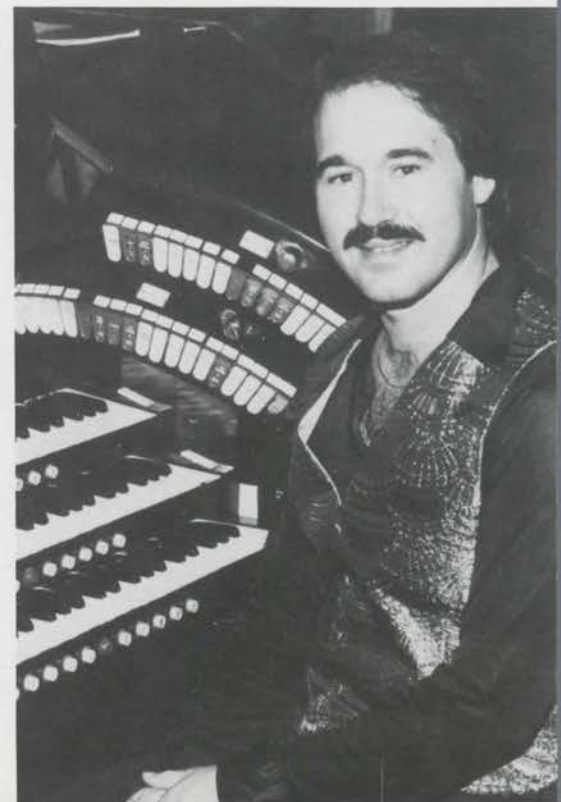
Organist of Cleveland's Palace Theatre in 1927. Later he moved to Allen and Loew's Stillman Theatre, Cleveland. Brown broadcast over various Cleveland radio stations in 1929.

BRUBACHER, RAY

Ray Brubacher was born in Washington, D.C., in 1940. He began piano lessons at the age of nine and switched to organ at age 16. He studied classic organ with Dr. Louis A. Potter, F.A.G.O., and with Conrad Bernier at Catholic University of America.

Highlights of Brubacher's professional ca-

John David Brown



Dwight Brown

(Fred Garrett photo)

reer include serving as organist for the American Film Institute at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, concertizing on the organ in the George Washington Masonic Memorial, Alexandria, Virginia, performing at the 1972 National Convention of the American Theatre Organ Society, scoring and playing 14 full-length silent films for educational television, serving as senior staff organist and teacher for Keyboard Centers in Wheaton, Maryland, and serving as associate organist at St. Matthew's Catholic Cathedral in Washington, D.C.

In addition to his other duties and activities, Ray Brubacher has found time to tour and play concerts here and there across the country and to participate actively in the American Theatre Organ Society, both on a national and local chapter level. He served as Associate Editor of THEATRE ORGAN and is a past chairman of the Potomac Valley Chapter of ATOS.

Brubacher has broadcast his own program of pipe organ music, was actively involved in helping to restore the Wurlitzer organ in the Tivoli Theatre, Frederick, Maryland, and made a recording on that organ entitled, "Who Is Ray Brubacher and What's He Doing With Those Pipes?"

BRUGGERT, WILSON G.

Organist of the Windermere, Yale, Elmira and New Broadway theatres in Cleveland, Ohio.

BUELL, EDNA

Organist of the Colonial Theatre in Columbus, Ohio, in 1923.

BUHRMAN, BERT

At ten years of age Buhrman began playing the pipe organ at St. John's Episcopal Church in Springfield, Missouri. He was a student of Glen Stanback, who was the organist at St. John's as well as organist of the Electric Theatre. In the early 1930s, Buhrman attended Kansas City Junior College and he played the organ over Radio Station WOQ, owned by the Unity School of Christianity. His broadcasts originated in the Wurlitzer Building on Grand Avenue in Kansas City from either the 2/5 or 3/10 Wurlitzer organs there. In 1933 Buhrman had a program over Station WHB in Kansas City using piano and organ. The organ was a 3/5 Wicks instrument from the Jenkins Music Company.

Buhrman attended the University of Kansas at Lawrence from 1934 to 1936 and he played organ and piano programs over Radio Station WREN. The programs were broadcast from the Reuter Organ factory in Lawrence which had a small studio organ. He was graduated from the University of Kansas with an A.B. degree in Music. After his graduation, he returned to Kansas City and joined the newly opened Radio Station KCMO as musical director. He played organs in the Newman and Main Street theatres in Kansas City (both have since been renamed), accompanying slides for sing-alongs, playing for vaudeville acts and giving organ presentations. From 1936 to 1940 he was doing eight

shows on radio and five daily shows in the theatre. In 1940, he moved to New York City and took the position of staff organist with CBS, a position he held until the end of 1962. He also broadcast over NBC, ABC and the Mutual Radio network. This was done by arranging schedules so that artists could appear on a variety of programs and networks. Some of the radio programs with which he was affiliated were *Sherlock Holmes*, *Bulldog Drummond*, and *Joyce Jordan, Girl Interne*. Television programs included *Strike It Rich*, and *The Big Payoff*. For 15 years he played the organ on *The Guiding Light*, on both radio and television.

During the time that he lived in Ridgefield, Connecticut, Buhrman played the organ at St. Mary's Church for a period of three years. An opportunity came to return to his home state of Missouri to the School of the Ozarks at Point Lookout, Missouri. Buhrman decided to leave the pressures of big city life and accept the job. In February 1963, Buhrman moved to Missouri. His duties on the campus included overseeing the installation of a 2300-pipe Skinner pipe organ in Williams Chapel. A 3/15 Wurlitzer from RKO Keith's Theatre in Flushing, New York, was purchased and installed in a theatre in the Nettie Jones Learning Center on the campus, where theatre organ concerts are presented and silent films accompanied. The theatre organ series has been highly successful, repeatedly filling the 1000-seat auditorium.

BULLIS, CARLTON

Organist at B. F. Keith's Hippodrome Theatre in Cleveland, Ohio, in the 1920s. Director of the Cleveland Theatre Organist's Club in 1923.

BUNNELL, HARRY

Bunnell began playing piano and organ in theatres in southern Michigan when he was 17 years old. He spent a year and a half at the Majestic Theatre in Homer, in 1928 and 1929, after which he went to the Coliseum Theatre at Bronson, for a year. He spent four months at the Rex Theatre in Jackson, did a stint at the Garden Theatre in Marshall, and played for five months at the Bohn Theatre in Albion. From 1934 to 1936 he was organist at the First Baptist Church in Battle Creek. Moving to Detroit in 1936, he became organist at the First Church of Christ, Scientist, and organist and choir director at the Scottish Rite Cathedral. He was staff organist at Radio Station WJBK in 1945 and 1946, and was pianist in the Cass Theatre Orchestra at various times in the 1940s. □

Correction to the biography of Ray Bohr in the January/February 1986 issue: The last show under the Radio City Music Hall, Inc. management was April 25, 1979. Ray Bohr was organist there for 32 years, from 1947 to 1979.

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