



Jesse Crawford at the Empire Theatre Wurlitzer in London, 1933.

(Photo courtesy John Landon)

June 13, 1933. Courtesy of *The Manchester Evening News*. Supplied by John Potter

Newspaper article from 1933, sent by John Potter of England.

JESSE CRAWFORD IN ENGLAND

by Dr. John W. Landon

In 1933, with the Great Depression at its worst, Jesse Crawford, together with other New York Paramount employees, was asked to take a cut in salary. Crawford bridled at this suggestion. He knew he was an "attraction" and that part of the audience at the Paramount, for any given performance, was there to hear him play the organ. He, therefore, refused to take a cut in pay, resigned in a huff and departed on a hastily arranged tour of English theatres, the London Empire and the Paramounts at Manchester, Newcastle and Leeds. Helen, meanwhile, signed a separate contract with the New York Paramount and continued to play there alone.

Jesse arrived in England aboard the ocean liner Olympic on April 8, 1933. He went imme-

America Praises Our Women Musicians

MR. JESSE CRAWFORD, the world's most famous organist who plays at the Paramount Theatre, Manchester, this week, is puzzled.

"I heard a concert of you B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra recently," he told the *Manchester Evening News* to-day, "and I was surprised, and delighted, too, to see at least 20 women members of the orchestra."

"Why is this? One never sees women in big American orchestras, except perhaps as harpists."

"But in your orchestra there were women players among the first violins." "We have brilliant women musicians in the United States, but there is a prejudice against them playing in big orchestras. Some managers are prejudiced about the appearance of women on the platform."

"I have always disagreed with looking upon the organ as a substitute for an orchestra. I have always been interested in the individuality that one finds in the Wurlitzer," added Mr. Crawford.

AS NOTHING ELSE CAN

"I look upon the organ as an individual creation that can produce the musical colour that nothing else can." Mr. Crawford has an organ at the



Mr. JESSE CRAWFORD

Paramount in New York which is worth 90,000 dollars. He has been playing in cinemas since he was 16, and he is recognized as the greatest cinema organist in the world.

England Surprises a World-Famous Film Organist

WE ARE DIGNIFIED, BUT LIKE JAZZ

DESCRIBED as the world's most famous cinema organist, Mr. Jesse Crawford is going to make it "hot" for Manchester.

To-day, on the occasion of his first visit to England from America, when he began a week's engagement at the Paramount Theatre, Manchester, he told an *Evening Chronicle* reporter that clean,

rhythmic jazz will be the feature of his concerts.

"England has provided me with two surprises," he said. "One is that English cinema-goers attach more importance to the organ interlude than they do in the States, and are much more demonstrative in their appreciation."

"The other is that although serious music has been greatly appreciated, most interest has been shown in rhythmic jazz selections."

ENGLISH DIGNITY

"English people are more dignified than Americans, and I confidently expected that their serious-minded outlook would be reflected in their taste in music. Yet all along it has been the jazz that has got most appreciation."

Mr. Crawford is expecting a "big hand" in Manchester. When he appeared in London he heard of parties making the journey from Manchester to hear him play, and his postbag included many letters from Lancashire enthusiasts asking him to make the journey North.

Special extension of this permit had to be obtained from the Ministry of Labour to enable him to do so, but he is hoping that next year he can bring his wife with him to give duets.

He told the *Evening Chronicle* that the organ at the Paramount Theatre was built to his own specification and is the biggest of its kind in England.

He ought to know all about it, for he was working on it until nearly midnight last night, and then put in another three hours this morning, just to make sure that the "combination of tone colours" was correct.

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diately to London via train and was met at Waterloo Station by Major Wright, manager of the Wurlitzer Company in Great Britain, Harold and Mrs. Ramsey (a Texas girl, born in Dallas), Reginald Foort and Sandy MacPherson. Ramsey, Foort and MacPherson represented perhaps the best-known theatre organists in England at the time.

Crawford appeared in London at the Empire Theatre in Leicester Square on Friday, April 14, 1933, and remained there for a full month. The Empire, a beautiful theatre, was the flagship of the MGM company in England. Designed by architect Thomas Lamb, it seated 3500 and cost over three million, pre-Depression American dollars. The organ was the first 4/20 Wurlitzer to be installed outside of the United States; it was on a lift which included a turntable. Crawford liked this organ and, in addition to his personal appearance there, made several recordings on the HMV label and broadcast once for the BBC.

Crawford's broadcast was the first occasion on which the Empire Wurlitzer was ever heard on radio. It was a 15-minute show, aired at 10:20 p.m. on Monday, April 24, in the midst of prime broadcast time. Selections heard on this show included "Trees," "Lullaby of the Leaves," "Try a Little Tenderness," "Her Name is Mary" and a segment of Crawford's own transcription of Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." The broadcast was well-received, and Reginald Foort was quoted in the local press as saying that Crawford used "exquisite phrasing which was such that one could . . . almost hear him making the organ speak the actual words . . ." Odd-

ly enough, as far as it is known, the Empire organ was never broadcast thereafter during the 1930s.²

Just a few days after his BBC broadcast, Crawford recorded the first of what are his rarest, and probably his best, recordings. April 30, 1933, found him again at the console of the Empire Wurlitzer when HMV engineers arrived to record the organ. Crawford, who was accustomed to doing all of his recording and broadcasting in the New York Paramount Studios on the ninth floor of the Paramount Building in Times Square, was uncomfortable when the HMV engineers hooked up one small microphone to record the Empire organ. In fact, he protested. Victor Record engineers in this country had told him that large theatres simply swallowed up the sound. None of his Victor Records had been made in a theatre proper — all were recorded in studio settings. The HMV engineers assured him that one microphone would be adequate. The results bore them out. Sound recording in England was clearly more advanced than in America. The first of these records revealed this, and Crawford was extremely pleased.

All told, Crawford recorded eight sides (of 10", 78rpm discs) for HMV. On six sides, Jack Plant, a popular British singer of the day, was featured on the vocal choruses. The first discs recorded were:

- HMV 4434 A Broken Rosary
My Love Song
 - HMV 4435 My Wishing Song
The Old Spinning-Wheel
- (the above were recorded on April 30, 1933)

On May 28, Crawford returned to the Empire to record four more sides:

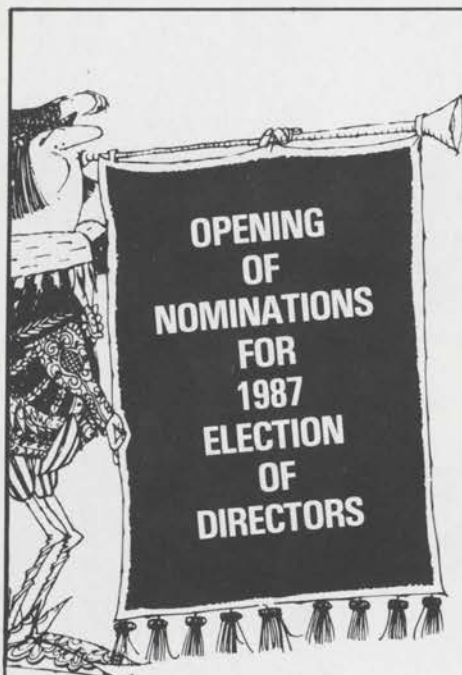
- B 4460 Drifting Down the Shalimar
Hold Me
- B 4461 Friends Once More United
In the Valley of the Moon³

Only one of these four discs reached the American market, "A Broken Rosary/My Love Song." The others have been heard by few Americans, except for some advanced collectors.

Crawford considered these to be his finest Victor records since they were made in the theatre itself. The sound was rich, full and lush, just as he likes it. He resolved that when he got home he would insist on recording in the Paramount Theatre. Alas, it was not to be. Crawford recorded no more material for Victor, and, although he did sign a contract with the new Decca firm, all of those discs were cut in the Paramount Studios. Although he was in the Paramount Building, on his way to the studio for broadcasting and recording, on many occasions, he never once set foot in the theatre again — the theatre where he had reached the apex of his career!

FOOTNOTES

1. John W. Landon, *Jesse Crawford, Poet of the Organ: Wizard of the Mighty Wurlitzer*, Vestal, New York: The Vestal Press, 1974, p. 106.
2. Letter from Donald L. Hickling, Northampton, England, March 11, 1986.
3. Recording dates were supplied by Mr. Ernie Bayly, editor of the British publication, *The Talking Machine Review*. □



**NOTE!
DEADLINE
MARCH 1, 1987**

It is time to nominate candidates for the National ATOS Board of Directors for the three-year term from July 1987 through June 1990. All regular ATOS members are eligible for nomination and may nominate themselves or be nominated by other members, in which case written consent of the nominee is mandatory and must be received before the nominee's name can be placed on the ballot.

A nominee need have no special talent or experience in pipe organ technology or musicianship. However, in addition to the benefits enjoyed by Directors, one of which is the reimbursement of certain meeting-related expenses, there are also certain responsibilities. Along with a willingness to participate in the administrative affairs of the society, it is most important that the Board members faithfully attend both Board and Committee meetings.

The Board usually meets only once a year during Convention, so attendance of all Directors is necessary if the decisions and actions of the Board are to be truly responsive to the membership. In addition, Directors serve on one or more committees providing valuable input to the Board. The chairmen of these committees are responsible for submitting a written report of their activities and recommendations prior to the annual Board meeting.

Procedure to be observed in the nomination process is as follows:

1. Each nominee shall furnish a small black and white photo, together with a statement, **not to exceed 100 words**, including personal data, work and theatre organ experience, and a short platform statement.
2. All candidates must have their resumes and photos mailed to the ATOS Secretary, 423 North Stafford Avenue, Richmond, Virginia 23220, **no later than March 1, 1987**.
3. Your ballot and the resumes of candidates will be included in the March/April THEATRE ORGAN. By voting for the candidate of your choice, you are demonstrating your interest in and support of ATOS objectives.

If you have any questions, write or call Russell Joseph, Chairman, Nominating Committee, 18 Fenchurch Drive, Bella Vista, Arkansas 72714, or phone 501/855-1002. □