

PIPES &

Personalities

Tony O'Brien's "Musical Fantasia" A Hit

Tony O'Brien, who has been exhilarating audiences for years with his dynamic versatility at the organ, recently presented "A Musical Fantasia" at Motor City's Redford Theatre. Tony, with his power of performance and imagination, has created an art of his own.

Augmenting the Redford's 3/10 Barton with synthesizers, visual displays and interpretive lighting, Tony's up-beat arrangements and excellent showmanship led his audience on a musical jaunt that was a highly enjoyable experience. The console was enshrouded in light and smoke as Tony opened with "What a Feeling," from *Flashdance*, and quickly established a rapport with his listeners. From Billy Joel to Duke Ellington, from Gershwin to Madonna, from opening number to final encore, the audience was in harmony with the artist, sharing his infectious joy.

On stage, backlighting revealed a foggy mountain, bare trees and a hint of doom, thus setting the scene for Moussorgsky's "Night on Bald Mountain." Beginning with a six-channel stereophonic thunderstorm sequence, forks of lightning interspersed the scene as Tony played a vivid rendition of this classic which will be long remembered by the concert crowd. Tony leaves no doubt that his first regard is the theatre pipe organ. His skillful use of synthesizers never overpowered the pipes. With the Redford's stage-size American flag as a backdrop, Tony's blend of synthesizers, rhythm unit and Barton pipes in his rendition of Neil Diamond's "America" was stunning in its intensity.

Whether it was the promise of synthesizers and visuals, or Tony's great enthusiasm in performance that drew one of the largest crowds to a Motor City concert, comments heard after the show proved it was a success. The many young people in attendance provided further evidence that there is interest among young people provided they can relate to the music. O'Brien says that his reasons for presenting this type of concert are twofold: "First, I want to reach the largest number of people of all ages, many of whom may never have been exposed to or drawn to theatre organ; and second, I want to *entertain* them with music they relate to and enjoy. My use of synthesizers and special effects provides the vehicle necessary to achieve both goals."

It is good to see a young theatre organist

challenge new horizons. Tony O'Brien's creativity and imagination persuaded our Grande Barton to share the stage with today's technology in speaking the music of all eras to all ages. Our theatre organs are in good hands.

MARGARET TAPLER

George Wright in Portland

The incomparable, the incorrigible, the incredible, the inimitable, the wonderful George Wright played a special concert for members of the Oregon chapter and their special guests, members of Puget Sound Chapter, at the Organ Grinder restaurant on November 16. The restaurant was closed to the general public for that Sunday afternoon so that tables could be removed and chairs arranged theatre-style. This was Mr. Wright's first appearance at the Organ Grinder in many years, and the capacity crowd of about 300 heard him announce from the console of the 44-rank Wurlitzer that his program would be essentially a repeat of his Oakland Paramount concert played the previous weekend. Because of the silent, all-attentive audience, Mr. Wright proceeded to weave effortlessly the most simplistically gorgeous textures, drawing from the many resources of this great instrument, which are usually lost in the shuffle of the Organ Grinder's daily pizza business.

The Oregon chapter is indebted to Mr. and Mrs. John Olsen who provided an underwriting grant for this event, and to Diane Whipple of the Puget Sound chapter who coordinated her chapter's activities to coincide with the George Wright concert.

DENNIS HEDBERG

COS Summer School, 1986

During the summer of 1986, the Cinema Organ Society of Great Britain held a four-day residential "school" — a unique event for theatre organists, conceived by COS Musical Advisor David Lowe and sponsored, in part, by the British Musicians' Union. Accommodations for this program were in the South

George Wright at the Portland Organ Grinder.



Tony O'Brien at the Redford Theatre.

Bank Polytechnic which houses the 4/23 Wurlitzer owned by the COS.

Around thirty players of all ages and abilities toured various organ installations and heard a wide range of speakers elaborate on many aspects of the theatre organ. Course leaders included some of England's leading organists, David Shepherd, Nigel Ogden, John Norris, Len Rawle, Simon Gledhill and John Barlow, as well as technicians John Abson and Dave Pawlyn. Harry Bramma, organist and choirmaster at nearby Southwark Cathedral, took the party on a classical organ "safari" which included a visit to Westminster Cathedral.

Because of David Lowe's exceedingly well-planned and coordinated programme of events, each speaker covered quite separate issues. David Shepherd gave a most illuminating discourse on how best to play smaller instruments (including visits to the 2/5 Compton at the Regent Street Cameo Theatre and the 2/8 Wurlitzer at the New Gallery Theatre), whilst Len Rawle's talk concentrated on how to approach a large Wurlitzer (using the COS's own 4/23 Wurlitzer at South Bank Poly). Or-

(Claude Neuffer photo)

ganist Nigel Ogden covered aspects of program choice and overall presentation from the console of the 3/12 Christie in the Granada Cinema, Walthamstow, whilst John Norris, principal of the Southern Music Training School, concentrated on musical interpretation and style. John Barlow, 1986 holder of the Ian Sutherland Young Organist Award, explained in depth the technicalities and problems of playing modern and rhythmical music. The Summer School also attended a concert which Barlow played at the Granada Walthamstow (with Bobby Pagan) in acceptance of his award.

The technical talk by John Abson and Dave Pawlyn included a tour of the South Bank Poly chambers; this was both impressive and educational, especially their explanation of the new Z-tronic solid-state relay system installed there. Simon Gledhill, undoubtedly one of the world's leading theatre organists, rounded off the Summer School with an explanation of some additional points regarding technique, registration and tricks-of-the-trade, ending with a wonderful performance of "Rose Marie," the whole selection having been transcribed from George Wright's arrangement and played by Simon with exquisite style which brought a tear to many an enthusiast's eye!

No one, however young or old, experienced or novice, was left out — even French-speaking Claude Monnier got on all right — and the obvious desire to learn and to enjoy was nowhere missing. Additionally, each evening was filled by less intensive organ visits. One evening was spent at Lee Valley Ice Centre (where David Lowe is organist and musical director) and another was spent at the Plough, Great Munden, which is a country pub boasting a 3/10 Compton where everyone had a chance to play the instrument, and the party ate and drank the hours away until closing time. The social side of life was not overlooked in any way, and people had a chance to play the organs at all visits. In fact, the whole Summer School was conducted in the spirit of theatre organists gaining pleasure and satisfaction from a few days in the company of fellow enthusiasts, sometimes drawn into serious matters of registration, style or arrangement, and sometimes simply enjoying a laugh or a meal with new friends, be they well-known concert performers or keen amateurs.

What is certain, however, is that organizing such an event may be a danger to one's health — if David Lowe had as much as suggested that there wouldn't be another Summer School, he would, no doubt, have been assailed by 30 very irate organ enthusiasts!

JOHN BARLOW

Jesse Crawford's Ninety-First Birthday Celebrated

The Jesse Crawford Theatre Organ Society, Ltd., held its first annual corporate dinner-meeting on December 18 at the Elks Club in Billings, Montana. The board of directors voted to apply for an ATOS charter on February 24, 1987, as that is the seventy-fourth anniversary

of Crawford's first position as organist at the Gem Theatre in Billings. The new chapter's area of operation will be Montana and Northern Wyoming; however, Crawford fans everywhere are invited to join.

The group commemorated the ninety-first anniversary of the birth of Jesse Crawford, who was born December 2, 1895, and toasted his memory. President Kay Kahill played "Happy Birthday" on a Hammond organ, and a birthday cake was served.

The club was chartered as a non-profit corporation by the State of Montana in 1986 with officers Nelson A. Cahill (Kay Kahill) as President, Steve Plaggemeyer as vice-president and Dr. Edward J. Mullins as secretary. Charter memberships will be open until December 2, 1987. Write: Jesse Crawford Theatre Organ Society, Babcock Theatre Building, Box 8, Billings, Montana 59101, or phone Kay Kahill at 406/259-6111.

KAY KAHILL

Letters to the Editors

Opinions expressed in this column are those of the correspondents, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors or the policies of ATOS or THEATRE ORGAN.

Letters concerning all aspects of the theatre organ hobby are welcome. Unless clearly marked "not for publication" letters may be published in whole or in part.

Address: Editor, THEATRE ORGAN
4633 SE Brookside Drive #58
Milwaukie, Oregon 97222

Dear Editor:

Enclosed is a picture of Bob Leys, who was house organist in the Capitol Theatre in Aberdeen, Scotland, and who rescued the 3/7 Astoria Aberdeen Compton some years ago and installed it in Powys Academy. Bob recently spent several weeks visiting in the United States, and one of his stops was at Bruce Williams' home in Flemington, New Jersey, where this shot was taken.

Jim Donald
Colonia, New Jersey

Dear Editor:

Bravo! Dan Bellomy's story, "There Is Only One Billy Nalle" (July/August 1986), was the best profile I have ever read in this remarkable journal.

I had the opportunity to talk with Billy Nalle in August of 1986 during an interview for *The Minnesota Daily* newspaper (University of Minnesota), and I found him to be a generous, well-rounded and delightful personality both at and away from the console.

Musically, Billy's style of playing sets him apart from the rest of the pack, which is one of the reasons why I became a fan and devout admirer of this truly gifted artist.

Again, bravo to Dan for a job well done, and to the editors, keep up the good work!

Sincerely,
Kim Crisler
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Dear Editor:

I have been a member of ATOS for over 25 years. This is my first time to write the editor.

I missed Lloyd Klos' "Nuggets from the Golden Days," and I hope you do not intend to drop it. This man has meant so much to theatre organ through the years, and this organization was founded because of nostalgia for good theatre organs and the organists who played them. I've done my share and enjoyed every minute of it.

I attended the Richmond Convention and



Joe Dorsey of Garden State (left), Bob Leys from Aberdeen, Scotland, and Bruce Williams, owner of the 3/10 Wurlitzer. (James C. Donald photo)