



# BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF THEATRE ORGANISTS

by Dr. John W. Landon

## CADMAN, CHARLES WAKEFIELD

Opened the Möller pipe organ in the Shrine Civic Auditorium in Los Angeles, California, in 1926. Composer of the song, "At Dawning," which was copyrighted in 1906.

## CAHAN, IRVING N.

Organist at the Karlton Theatre, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1924, and publicity chairman of the Philadelphia Theatre Organ Society in 1925.

## CALCATERRA, ROB

Robert Gene Calcattera, Jr., was born January 22, 1956, in Joliet, Illinois. He showed an interest in music very early and began taking organ lessons at the age of seven. By age ten he was giving organ lessons, and two years later became organist of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Rochdale, Illinois.

Through his public school years he was deeply involved in musical events in the school and community. In his sophomore year he joined in the efforts to restore the Barton organ in the Rialto Theatre in Joliet, and a year later he began playing organ intermissions there on Saturdays.

Calcattera studied organ under Dr. Oswald Ragatz at Indiana University. Not content to develop only one side of his musical personality, he also undertook the study of classical piano, violin, and voice. His studies at the university also gave him opportunity to expand his efforts in arranging and composing.

Irving Cahan



Opportunity knocked for Calcattera in 1981 when he was selected to be organist for "The Christmas Spectacular" at Radio City Music Hall in New York. Shortly thereafter he was hired for the fiftieth anniversary show at the Music Hall. While at Radio City, Rob played for various functions including the premiere of *Annie* and *Night of 100 Stars*.

In 1982 Calcattera wrote the Grande Finale for the "Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade" which Peter Nero conducted while 1400 instrumentalists played it live on the street for television. Other choral and orchestral works arranged by Calcattera have premiered at Carnegie Hall and Avery Fisher Hall.

Calcattera has made several European concert tours in addition to his frequent appearances in this country. His proficiency in seven languages has been helpful to him on his foreign tours, and he has worked during the summers as a tour guide. He continues his work composing and arranging, and is presently working on a mass, an opera, a ballet, and a Broadway musical comedy.

Rob Calcattera has been the recipient of many honors and is listed in *Outstanding Young Men of America*. He also received the "Best Organist Award" in the 1980 Liberate Entertainer Contest in the state of Indiana.

## CALDWELL, JACK

It was early spring of 1920 when Lee Wolfe arrived in Dallas, Texas, from California to open a Smith-Seeburg Photo-Play and Theatre Pipe Organ Outlet in a building next door to the Western Union main office on Main Street at Pearl. Around the corner on Commerce Street was a Harrison-Smith Auto Supply Company. A shipment of a new electric soldering iron, which had just been placed on the market, had arrived. Wolfe and his organ mechanic were finishing the installation of a theatre pipe organ in the display area. They had ordered one of the new soldering irons to be delivered at once. A young teenager working during summer vacation was sent to make the delivery — that young man was Jack Caldwell.

There being no air-conditioning, the front entrance to the organ store was wide open. As Jack passed by the Western Union Building, he heard for the first time in his life the indescribable voice of the theatre pipe organ. Jack gave the mechanic the soldering iron and

turned to leave when the mechanic said to him, "Hey, boy — wait a minute — hold this chord for me. I want to make an adjustment to the tremolo." As that sound developed, Jack just sat frozen at the console. "Wow, this is it — this is for me!" he said. He never returned to the Harrison-Smith Auto Supply Company.

Caldwell studied under George Perfect, known as the "Dean of Theatre Organists" in Dallas at that time. He progressed so well in his studies that he began to fill-in occasionally for Perfect at the console of the 2/4 Hilgreen-Lane organ in the Ronile Theatre in North Dallas (the theatre was named after the owner's daughter, Elinor, spelled backwards). Eventually, he landed his first full-time job playing relief shift and late show on the Model 235 Wurlitzer at the Hope Theatre on Elm Street in Dallas. In the meantime, the Hippodrome Theatre had been opened on the opposite end of Elm Street. Well-known organist Dwight Brown opened the Hippodrome, and Caldwell received his first promotion when he moved there as Brown's assistant. He remained there for about one year until Brown was moved to the Palace Theatre in Dallas, and Caldwell moved with him.

In 1925 the celebrated organist C. Sharpe Minor opened an engagement at the Palace Theatre in Dallas for a four-week period. One evening Caldwell remained in the theatre after Minor's concert and was mimicking the great maestro's technique on the organ. He was doing quite well when suddenly an usher tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Mr. Caldwell, Mr. Minor wishes to see you at the back of the theatre."

"Good Lord, I've really torn it this time. I'm fired!" he said out loud as he stumbled to the back of the theatre. The result was, however, that Mr. Minor offered him a position in New York City. He went with Caldwell to ask permission of Caldwell's parents. C. Sharpe Minor had entered into an agreement with the Link Organ Company to design and build a Link-C. Sharpe Minor organ. Caldwell's first assignment was to meet Minor at the Astor

Rob Calcattera



Hotel in New York City. He left Dallas by train, stopping off in St. Louis and Chicago on the way. He met Minor in New York City and from there they went to the Link Factory in Binghamton, New York, to check out the voicing of the first organ. This first Link-C. Sharpe Minor pipe organ was shipped to Elmira, New York. Caldwell met Mr. Minor in Elmira to play the opening concert. Each played organ solos and a slide presentation followed by a piano/organ duet with Mr. Minor at the piano. Caldwell continued his work with Minor for about two years, playing throughout Pennsylvania and New York. During this period, 16 of the Link-C. Sharpe Minor Specials were installed, and Caldwell would remain behind after each opening concert to break-in a local organist to take over the organ.

During a break when he was home in Dallas on vacation, he received a telegram from Pat McGee, manager of the Criterion (a Publix Theatre) in Oklahoma City, offering him the job of head organist on the 235 Wurlitzer. He notified Mr. Minor and went to Oklahoma City to take the position. In 1927 Caldwell broadcast over radio station WKY directly from the Criterion Theatre. He also broadcast over station KFJF.

Caldwell was among those who studied with famous organist Pietro Yon, who later became organist of the Vatican in Rome.

In 1929 Caldwell left the Criterion and moved to the Jefferson Theatre in Beaumont, Texas. After a short term there, he followed the well-known organist, Wade Hamilton, into the Ritz Theatre in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he was later succeeded by organists Milton Slosser and Bob Mack. Caldwell also broadcast from this theatre over radio station KVOO. The organ at the Ritz was a Robert-Morton.

Caldwell then went on to the Arcadia Theatre in East Dallas, Texas, to play the four-manual Reuter there. He was assisted by organist Raymond Willis. They played a great many piano and organ duets while they were together. Willis went on to become a fine surgeon. Caldwell returned to the Criterion Theatre and radio station WKY in Oklahoma City, but theatre organs were, by this time, being heard in fewer theatres, and he returned home to Dallas in 1935. About this time the Hammond organ was introduced in the Dallas area by Howard Beasley of the Whittle Music Company. Soon Caldwell was playing Hammond organ in the Tower Theatre in Oklahoma City. He did twelve-minute solos between shows as well as some radio broadcasting and playing the the Black Hotel and the Ormond Dinner Club. In 1937 Caldwell went to the Dallas Athletic Club to replace organist Dwight Brown who had become seriously ill. Caldwell entertained there on the Hammond

organ and organized his first band, Jack Caldwell and His Orchestra. He played organ during the noon lunch period and the band played for dinner-dancing during the evening. Caldwell married Genevieve Burros on August 2, 1939. He appeared at the Dallas Athletic Club and the Dallas Athletic Club Country Club for almost forty years.

Jack Caldwell died on January 21, 1977, in Dallas, Texas.

#### **CALLIES, THOMAS**

Organist of the Deluxe Theatre in Los Angeles, California, in 1925.

#### **CAMPBELL, HARRY**

Theatre organist in the Washington, D.C., area in the mid-1920s. Played at the Palace Theatre in Washington, D.C., in 1927. Was on the staff at Radio City Music Hall from 1942 to 1950.

#### **CAMPBELL, THEODORE**

Theatre organist in the Chicago area in the early to mid-twenties. Remembered for his appearance at the Prairie Theatre in 1924.

#### **CANE, MRS.**

Organist of the Harding Theatre in Chicago, Illinois, in 1924.

#### **CANILO, LARRY**

Organist of the Grand Lake Theatre in Oakland, California, in 1927.

#### **CANTILL, HARRY**

Relief organist at Radio City Music Hall in the 1940s.

#### **CARLEY, CANDI**

Candi Carley has been blind since birth, yet she has attained recognition and fame as an organist. From age two until she was five she spent many hours listening to 78 rpm recordings, and from them she learned many songs still in her repertoire. By the age of six she was picking out melodies on the piano with one finger. A year later she had mastered the use of both hands. She first experienced an organ about this time when she climbed onto the bench of a Hammond organ in the home of friends.

In 1961 in Los Angeles, Orange County and Long Beach Professional Organists held benefit concerts to raise money to buy an organ for Candi, and later that year surprised her with her very own Hammond B-3. Even though she acquired a large Rodgers organ 12 years later, she still has her Hammond.

Between the ages of 10 to 14 she received no formal musical training. In 1968 the Braille group gave her a classical piano scholarship and she began to study with Nella Bettinger. Later she studied organ with Richard Purvis and theory and arranging with Gordon Kibbee.

Having heard a song, Candi can usually play it and can easily transpose into any key. She was able to play most of the song requests which she received at the Great American Wind Machine pizza parlor where she was



Jack Caldwell

one of the staff organists for a period of seven years.

For a period of time, Candi went to Long Beach Veterans' Hospital one night each month to play for the patients. She navigates all consoles with professional aplomb through use of Braille dymo-labels which do not interfere with anyone else playing the instrument. For concert appearances, the labels are removed at the end of her program.

Candi has played a number of concerts for the Los Angeles Theatre Organ Society and

Candi Carley



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has played for a number of organ clubs throughout California and Nevada. She performed at the 1979 ATOS National Convention and has traveled to Australia to play organ concerts there. One interesting assignment was an eight-day trip on the Mississippi Queen entertaining passengers, assisted by Don Thompson.

Candi Carley has recorded several albums and cassettes with more in the offing. She has been on television many times and keeps a busy schedule of personal appearances.

#### CARLISLE, J.B.

Organist of the Melba Theatre in Dallas, Texas, in the 1920s where he cued silent pictures. He played other theatres in the Dallas area and was also an accomplished accordionist and ventriloquist. He performed on his accordion for the year-long Texas Centennial Celebration held at the State Fairgrounds in Dallas in 1936. For many years the town of Gainesville, Texas, operated a highly successful community circus with the usual animals and performers. The entire personnel of the circus was made up of local citizens and businessmen. Carlisle joined the Lone Star Gas Company in the 1940s as an appliance salesman. Throughout his stay in Gainesville, he played the steam calliope for the circus parades and performances.

In the 1940s Carlisle opened his own insurance agency and retired from it in 1955. Beginning that same year he demonstrated organs for the Goodman Piano And Organ Company in Dallas.

Carlisle died May 18, 1982.

#### CARNES, MARY

Organist of the Home Theatre in Alexandria, Virginia, in 1926.

#### CARNEY, AL

Well-known theatre organist, radio broadcasting organist and recording artist in the Chicago area in the 1920s and early 1930s, he was associated for many years with radio stations WCFL and WHT in Chicago.

The Chicago Federation of Labor established radio station WCFL in 1926. The original studio was at 826 South Wabash Avenue in the Brunswick Building. The studio boasted a 2/10 Barton organ. Al Carney was organist from the start and continued with station WCFL when they moved to the entire twentieth floor of the Furniture Mart at 666 Lakeshore Drive. The Barton was moved to the new studio. Organist Eddy Hanson was associated with this organ for many years and is, perhaps, better remembered than Carney in relation to it. In 1927 and 1928, Carney was broadcasting from radio station WHT located in the Wrigley Building in Chicago. Because of his experience in broadcasting from many pipe organs, he drew up the specifications for the kind of organ he wanted for radio broadcasting. The organ itself was built by the Page Organ Company of Lima, Ohio. It was a four-manual instrument which was quite unique in that it had the new Pageophone to imitate the Vibraphone, pizzicato

touch on the Accompaniment and Solo manuals and double touch on the Great, Accompaniment and Pedal. The console was finished in bright gold and rose with beautiful wood carving, although it was built to be heard and not seen. Carney broadcast as part of the air team of "Al and Pat." On Sundays the Page Company broadcast its "Page Organ Hour," using well-known organists in the Chicago area. As one periodical of the time indicated: "As the signing off draws near, the goodnight salutation from WHT steals softly over the air as a lullaby — 'WHT at the Wrigley Building, Chicago, with Al and Pat and the Page organ are bidding you goodnight in their own original way, so no matter where you are, or how you are when you hear 'Home, Sweet Home,' chimes, and taps, you'll know it is WHT bidding goodnight — goodnight.'"

Carney recorded two 78 rpm recordings of theatre pipe organ music on the WHT organ for the Melotone Company about 1928. He was on the staff of radio station WCFL in Chicago at the time of his death, January 13, 1931.

#### CARSON, PAUL

The son of a Methodist minister in Illinois, Paul Carson first played in public when he was five years old. The organist was absent one Sunday and Paul substituted, playing "Nearer My God, to Thee" and "Jesus, Lover of My Soul." His career as an organist was assured. His parents saw to it that he began lessons when he was seven, and he later directed choirs and played for church services. After military service as an ambulance driver in WWI, Carson majored in music at Northwestern University. Study in England and France followed, one of his teachers being the noted Edwin H. Lemare.

From 1928 to 1929, Carson was organist of the Glendale Theatre in Glendale, California, where he was active in the Los Angeles Theatre Organ Club. He entered the new medium of radio in 1922, and in 1931 began a program for Richfield Oil. The name of the broadcast was borrowed from lines by James Russell Lowell: "The musing organist, beginning doubtfully and far away, lets first his fingers wander as they list, and builds a bridge from dreamland for his lay." Thus the *Bridge to Dreamland* series was born.

In 1932 Carleton E. Morse's "One Man's Family," the first radio serial to originate in San Francisco, came on the air, and Carson served as organist continuously until May 1951. For nine years "Destiny Waltz" was the theme until Carson composed "Patricia," which was used for 18 years. Carson was finally succeeded on this broadcast by Sybil Chism and, later, by Martha Greene.

"I Love A Mystery" came on the air in 1939 with Carson playing Sibelius' "Valse Trieste" as the theme. The broadcast was carried at different times by the NBC Red and Blue networks and by CBS.

Following his radio and recording days (he recorded nearly 50 LPs on the NBC studio pipe organ in Hollywood in the late 1950s, most of them released on the Alma label),



Al Carney

Paul Carson retired to Mexico where he died several years ago. Carson is a member of the ATOS Hall of Fame.

#### CARTER, C. ROY

Theatre organist and teacher in the 1920s in the Los Angeles, California, area. Carter billed himself as "Mexico City's Premier Organist," but it is not known where he may have played in Mexico City. In 1927 he was at the Highland Theatre in Los Angeles.

Carter authored a brief book entitled *A Theatre Organist's Secrets*, which told how to create various kinds of special effects at the theatre organ keyboard. The book was reprinted by *Console* magazine some years ago. □

Paul Carson

