

Letters to the Editors

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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 Unless clearly marked "not for publication" letters may be published in whole or in part.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:

I would like to share an idea to increase public interest in theatre organs, both locally and nationally, May I suggest that each artist have a full knowledge of the *ranks and traps* of the organ whenever he does a show. He could then plan to intersperse his program with melodies that will include all of the ranks and traps which only theatre organs have. Too, the organ crews deserve to hear the full potential of their labors of love. I am sure that audiences, both old and new, will be amazed at the quality of the theatre organ when fully exposed to ALL of its sounds — it's a shame that many of these are seldom heard. It is my opinion that this type of program could be carried out on a national scale for the benefit of all.

Sincerely,
James P. Nibbe
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Editor:

Who ya gonna believe?

In the January/February, 1987, issue of THEATRE ORGAN, on page 6, under 5/223 Ruffatti in the Crystal Cathedral: "This is the seventh largest organ in America and the largest west of the Allegheny Mountains."

On page 25, under Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, 5/233 Ruffatti/Aeolian Skinner: "Fredrick Swann will be heard at the fifth largest pipe organ in the world . . ."

It seems to me that if an organ is the fifth largest in the world, it would also be the fifth largest organ in America, or if it were the seventh largest in America, it could not be the fifth largest in the world!

I would like to see an article in THEATRE ORGAN about the largest organs in the world, especially the largest theatre organs. Could you help me out?

Sincerely,
Frank Hoffman
Mason City, Iowa

(Would anyone like to submit an article on this subject? Ed.)

Dear Editor:

Those of us who entered the theatre organ field in the 1950s remember only a very small number of radio producers of theatre organ music. Among these few, not as many as can be counted on one hand have been able to continue their programs more than a few seasons.

So far as my memory and present information serve, only one such person has been on the air continuously for a quarter century. This individual is Don Robinson, who has produced his own organ program that span of time without interruption on radio station WLFH, Utica, New York. The steady and hard work such has entailed speaks of a devotion which can be claimed by only a very few people on either side of the footlights. Added to that is the good personal example he has set, for always he has shown himself business-like and courteous.

It seems to me that this man should be given some appropriate recognition by the National ATOS, preferably some award commensurate with the quality and quantity of such extraordinary contributions.

Meanwhile, here's a toast from one child of God to a remarkable person and professional for longstanding work which has brought only increasing credit to all the theatre organ field. Congratulations and three "Huzzahs!" to Mr. Robinson and long may he wave!

Billy Nalle
Wichita, Kansas

Dear Editor:

As a member of Los Angeles Chapter, I have recently moved to the Jacksonville, Florida, area. Because there is no chapter here, I've come to appreciate this bi-monthly magazine. I would appreciate hearing from members in this area.

I would also like to add my opinion regarding John Ledwon's article on young people's interest in theatre organ. I am 29 years old and love the theatre organ! I don't think the lack of interest in the organ is the younger generation's fault entirely, but rather four factors which limit the interest: Money, Time, Politics and Prejudice.

First, very few of us "youngsters" can afford such an expensive hobby. And not too many parents are willing to spend the money to buy an expensive organ and pay for lessons for a child who would want to make a profession as a concert artist. Fortunately, the ATOS, with members contributing the money, preserves this wonderful hobby.

Second, time is another commodity one may have difficulty using for this interest. In this world of make-things-happen-fast, it is easy to push organ interests aside in favor of other enjoyable interests that cost less and do

not require long-range planning.

My third point has to do with what I have observed when traveling through many states and visiting seven chapters, preserving without the promoting of theatre organs. Funds are raised to rebuild an organ, contracts to house the unit are signed with theatres and other public facilities, and then it just sits. The chance of getting in and having open console is bogged down because the building management has restricted access to the organ. I think chapters of ATOS need to be educated in business in the sense that income (contributions) are a result of marketing a product (the organ), reinvesting funds, establishing objectives, taking action and evaluating the results.

Prejudice is the area I want to hit the hardest. Although it is touchy, it is a hard fact that should be addressed from all angles. Many times I have felt that the older generation does not want new blood, they only want to remember the way it was. When was the last time you saw grandparents bring children to a concert to get them interested? Another type of prejudice I have experienced is the judging of a player by name only. I recently attended a benefit concert where some of the "greats" played, and frankly, at 70 or 80 very few artists have the same dexterity they did at 30, but they continue to slop through "Dizzy Fingers" and "Tico Tico" and the audience "Wows" because HE played for us. And what about the individual who works long hours on an organ, then is made to feel that it is a privilege, given only to the elite, to play it?

I would like to add a fifth consideration — education. I see our magazine and chapter gatherings fulfilling the history, current events and social aspects of theatre organ. What seems lacking is the education about the mechanics of the organ, and for performers, very little is shared. Only through apprenticeship can one learn how an organ works. Many of the technicians I have spent time with have only told me who not to listen to and how there is only one way to do it right.

When I became a member of ATOS, I was sent the magazine only, nothing to tell me what is available in terms of archived data and memorabilia or back issue articles. As for theatre organ style of playing, I again struggle to learn how it was done — listening to recordings and picking out parts has been my primary form of learning. It would be wonderful if one of the "greats" would be willing to publish an arrangement in our magazine from time to time.

As a problem such as the decreasing interest in theatre organ is identified, the first step is to search out the cause of the problem, establish objectives to resolve the problem and then take action to meet those objectives. My personal motto is: "What can I do to get results?" If everyone in ATOS asked himself the same question, the interest at all ages will increase, and I thank John Ledwon for identifying a problem about which all of us can do something.

Sincerely,
Christopher E. Secrest
1003 West Madison
Starke, Florida 32091

Dear Editor:

Last month another "history" of the movies was presented on national television, "Happy Birthday, Hollywood." In the past several years there have been at least a half-dozen such "histories" presented on TV, but not one of those shows acknowledged that background for the silent movies was played on *theatre organs*. The "Happy Birthday, Hollywood" program stated near its end that silent movie background was played "by a girl at a piano."

It's no wonder that, except for a handful of enthusiasts, theatre organ and its music is practically unknown today. I have the pleasure of associating with a group of thirty or more teenagers, and not ONE of them knew what a theatre organ was. Recently I took a group of these young people to a silent movie that was showing at a local theatre, and afterward we went to a pizza and pipes. The kids were amazed, and have talked about the organ, the movie and the beautiful theatre ever since. These kids were brought up in a small city and had not had the opportunity to see or hear a theatre organ.

If thousands of dollars can be raised to re-install organs for the enjoyment of a relatively few people, why can't ATOS raise the money to make a video tape of theatre organ history for presentation on national TV and as gifts to libraries and schools and local TV stations? This could introduce theatre organ to millions of viewers, and some of the costs could be covered by sale of the cassettes for home use.

Other organizations find the time and funds to present their interests and hobbies — many of them on PBS stations — so why can't ATOS?

Bob Longfield
Morro Bay, California □

Closing Chord

RAYMOND F. BOHR, JR.

Raymond F. Bohr, the last chief organist of Radio City Music Hall, New York, died May 15 after a long illness.

Bohr was born in Nyack, New York, on November 2, 1919. He started studying piano at age six, and although he never took a degree in music, he was fortunate to have had some excellent private instruction. Before WWII he studied with Robert Morse at St. John's Church in Greenwich Village, New York City. Bohr continued private lessons even after Dr. Friedel moved to St. Bartholomew's Church, and remained under his tutelage until Friedel died. Friedel was President of the Examining Board of the American Guild of Organists.

Fascinated with pipe organs since his boyhood, Bohr added a homemade pedalboard to the piano in his parent's living room. At age 14, he took a job with M.A. Clark and



Ray Bohr at the Radio City Music Hall Wurlitzer.

(Photo courtesy John Landon)

Sons, who built and maintained pipe organs. He obtained permission to practice at a local theatre where the police found him practicing away one morning at four o'clock, enraptured with the instrument. Having sung in the choir of Grace Episcopal Church in Nyack since he was six, he began sneaking into the church after hours to try playing some jazz piano pieces on the pipe organ. One day the choir master caught him red-handed, but, being impressed by the sounds the boy was producing from the organ, gave him the job of helping as relief organist for choir rehearsals. Bohr also convinced the manager of the Rockland Theatre near his home that the 2/7 Wurlitzer in the theatre needed restoration. Bohr did most of the work himself, and once his ability as a musician became evident, the theatre manager hired him as regular organist.

Bohr also held church organ posts in Haverstraw and Pearl River, New York, before going into the Army in WWII. The only time he touched an organ during the war years was when he played a memorial service at Iwo Jima for the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

After WWII Ray Bohr took a position as organ demonstrator for Wurlitzer while continuing his classical organ studies. He became associate organist at Radio City Music Hall in 1947, and at the same time retained his job demonstrating for Wurlitzer. He began playing the pipe organ in the Rainbow Room at the top of the RCA Building in Rockefeller Center. During those years, he also became organist for the television show, "Bride and Groom," a post he was to hold for a year. He continued as associate organist at the Music Hall until he was advanced to chief organist in 1973 after Dick Liebert retired. Bohr served longer as organist on the Radio City Music Hall staff than anyone other than Liebert. Liebert's last performance at the Music Hall was on May 9, 1972. After a leave of absence of several months, he notified the Music Hall that he would not be returning, whereupon Ray Bohr was appointed Chief Organist in

this coveted position which he held until the Music Hall closed and reorganized in 1979. Bohr's last performance was on April 25, 1979.

Bohr's career, however, did not end when the Music Hall closed to reorganize. Shortly thereafter he joined Ron Bishop as associate in the Northeast District representation of the Schantz Organ Company, a post he held until his death. Bohr is also remembered for a

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