

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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number of outstanding recordings of theatre pipe organ music which were made at the Paramount Theatre in Times Square, New York City, and the organs at Radio City Music Hall.

A scholarship in Ray Bohr's name has been established at the Juilliard School of Music, and contributions to this Scholarship Fund may be mailed to: The Juilliard School of Music, 144 West 66th Street, New York, New York 10023.

DR. JOHN W. LANDON



Joseph Seal

(John Sharp photo)

## JOSEPH SEAL

Joseph Seal died on February 6. He was one of the most popular and best-known theatre organists in Britain. He began his career at the Rialto Cinema, Blackburn Lancashire, the county where he was born in Darwen. He then played the Regal Altrincham, Cheshire Compton, and later the Lonsdale Cinema Carlisle, a famous 2/9 Christie, where he began to broadcast for the BBC. His signature tune was "D'ye Ken John Peel," a Cumbrian tune which will always be associated with him.

Union Circuit took over the Lonsdale in 1935 and chose John to open their spectacular and prestigious Ritz Cinema in Belfast, Northern Ireland, with its superb 4/11 and Melotone Compton. So successful were he and the organ, that Seal remained there for 15 years, sometimes broadcasting twice or more a week. In 1937, Union was taken over by ABC, and in 1951 ABC brought Seal to London to become Musical Director in charge of organs and organists for this vast circuit. He played little after that and his offices were at the Regal Kingston in London.

John Seal's recording career spanned the 78s, 45s and LPs, and all were issued on major labels such as Decca and Pye and sold millions over the years. Over 20 LPs were made on the Regal's marvelous 3/12 Wurlitzer, and even after the organ was moved to the Music Museum at Brentford, he continued to record it. He became Controller of live entertainment at ABC and Variety booking manager, organizing one-night stands at major ABC houses throughout the U.K. In the early 1950s he got

ABC to purchase three E-type Hammonds, had special surrounds built for them and acquired trucks to transport them so it was possible to tour cinemas that had no organs or where the pipe organ was in poor condition. His playing was always immaculate, and his registration clean right till the end. He played thousands of broadcasts in his time. A true great!

IAN DALGLIESH

## PEARL HAUER

Pearl Hauer, organist, pianist and teacher, died on April 24 in Warrenton, Virginia. She was 90.

Born in Mohawk, Tennessee, she moved to the Washington, D.C., area as a teenager and studied music education at Catholic University. During the silent film era, Mrs. Hauer played organ and piano in Washington theatres, including the Chevy Chase, Home, Rialto and York. She played piano at the Hay Adams Hotel, and during the late thirties had a program on WRC on which she played requests for musical selections.

She retired in 1962, and gave piano and organ lessons. A resident of Falls Church, Virginia, and a member of the D.C. Federation of Musicians, Mrs. Hauer is survived by a son, three grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

LLOYD E. KLOS

## SIR GEORGE THALBEN-BALL

Sir George Thalben-Ball, the "Doyen" of British concert organists, passed away on January 18 at the age of 90. He was organist at the Temple Church in London for 60 years. In 1927 he recorded a 78 record that was to make history as the first million-selling organ record; it was with Master Ernest Lough singing

"Oh, For The Wings of A Dove," by Mendelssohn. Of Cornish descent, he was born in New South Wales, Australia, as his parents were there at the time, he told me. Nobody was more British than Sir George. He studied under no less than four Knights of the organ, became a professor at the Royal College of Music and was heard on thousands of BBC broadcasts. He also produced an enormous amount of 78 records. For many years he was a musical advisor to the BBC and became a leading adjudicator of festivals and colleges,



Sir George Thalben-Ball

an arranger and composer of organ music and trumpet fanfares for great occasions. He was given the C.B.E. in 1967, and in 1982 was Knighted by Her Majesty. He was a household word in the U.K. as far as classical organ was concerned, but he told me that he had tried his hand at various theatre organs "for a lark" and admired the genius of John Compton whose organs he sometimes endorsed in advertising.

IAN DALGLIESH □

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