

Those poor tired organ pipes couldn't take it

A Hot Time in the Old Town

By E. J. Quinby

(On a visit to Key West)

WIDOW PRITCHARD had asked me to come over and see if I couldn't get her organ back in tune. It was a nice little 2m/3r Kilgen that I had helped install over twelve years before, and was her pride and joy. But when I sat down to try it out, some of the wierdest sounds came forth — incredible wheezes, snarls, off-key bleats. What in Sam Hill could be causing such results? I opened up the organ loft, and a strange spectacle met my eyes. Most of the tall slender pipes had wilted like stalks of celery kept too long off the ice. They lay all over the chests, they dripped and drooled over the edge of the chest. They gave evidence of having leaned on each other, and the others in turn had evidently become weary of supporting their neighbors and had decided to recline with the rest. No wonder this little organ sounded strange. The pipes were enjoying a Siesta—like 183 candles in an Arizona sun.

My problem was to awaken these slumbering pipes so gently as to avoid damaging them beyond repair. One by one, I lifted them from their collective collapse. Each one, in turn, I dunked into a bathtub full of the hottest water available to soften up the tin alloy of their structure. Then using mandrels fashioned from wardrobe poles, broomsticks, fishing rods, dowels and what-have-you, each well buttered, I managed to get each pipe back into a semblance of tubular shape. This had to be done carefully, coaxing the prod along so as to avoid fracturing the metal. Frequent redunking in the bathtub kept the metal as soft as possible, in fact some of the toughest distortions were corrected right in the bath, with water so hot as to nearly

scald my hands. Then, after getting the flattened pipes opened up, the next step was to get them straightened out without causing fractures. This I accomplished by again warming them up, and then rolling them on a carpeted floor. Next came the job of readjusting the distorted mouths, lips, cheeks and adjacent areas so that each pipe would speak properly. This was a tedious, meticulous task. Eventually I got each pipe in condition to perform at its assigned pitch, but not without going through various harmonics in the process. Lastly came regulating and tuning. As a matter of fact, the whole organ needed tuning, including the wooden pipes which had not elected to recline. Some of the stoppers had shrunk and needed padding.

No tuning fork was available. But Mrs. Crum, who teaches piano over on the other side of the island, had just had her Steinway piano tuned to A-440. So I called her up on the phone, and asked her to sound middle C on her instrument. Although a bit perplexed, she readily complied and I got my reference point established by remote control. Once I had the middle octave of the Diapason tuned, I had a good bearing from which to work through the rest of the job. Now that little Kilgen sounds as well as the day it came from the factory. Then I designed some proper pipe braces and ties, cut them out and installed them, so that the tall, soft metal pipes will not again be tempted to collapse and lie down during the next heat wave that descends on the tropical island of Key West. And the Widow Pritchard again makes merry music.

Message from The President

THE TIBIA, The Journal of the American Association of Theater Organ Enthusiasts, is now reaching a constantly increasing number of members and subscribers not only in the United States, but throughout the English-speaking world. The response and enthusiasm has been heart-warming and rewarding to those who devote time and effort on behalf of this, their hobby, which in most cases has been one of many years standing.

It is an unfortunate fact that among our readers, only a few are able to enjoy the rich pleasure of owning their own theater organ. The reasons for this are obvious — the large space requirements, the rapidly diminishing number of theater organs available for purchase (numbering only a few thousands to begin with), costs of removal, freight and objections from "you know who." Offsetting this situation we have among our members and subscribers a rapidly increasing number who own electronic organs.

As a result of appeals from many of these enthusiasts, who would be theater organ owners if circumstances permitted, the officers of A. T. O. E. have approved a proposal to include articles in THE TIBIA covering the field of electronic organs as an entertainment type instrument. The articles will deal with "pop" organ music playing techniques, some technical data, and so on, and will be

written to appeal to those who are at heart theater organ enthusiasts and who wish to follow the popular organ hobby through their own electronic instruments.

Substantiating this interest among organ enthusiasts are the growing number of really good recordings presently being issued by a variety of organists playing not only on Hammonds, but on the Conn, Wurlitzer, Baldwin and other makes. Many of these instruments have been made up especially for the recordings, others have been standard models.

The Theater Organ Hobby, as such, is one not only devoted to the actual instrument, but to the music it produces as well as the many unusual and appealing tonal combinations that it offers. It is along these lines that we find many interested electronic organ-owner enthusiasts. Their questions include, "How can I best set up Tibia and Vox combinations?", "Are actual percussion effects for electronic organs possible?", "How do I go about making a Wurlitzer Chrysoflott work with my Wurlitzer electronic?", and so forth.

We will attempt to provide this information for the benefit of those who are interested, and yet at the same time, we will not deviate from our primary purpose of being a Theater Organ Magazine. This is our main subject of interest and will continue to be so. Watch for the first of these articles in the near future. Your comments, constructive criticisms and requests are always welcome.

Richard C. Simonton