

**GOLD DUST:** Organists on radio: 5/26 R.C. HYDE, WRVA, Richmond ... 6/26 MORRILL MOORE, WHB, Kansas City ... 7/26 EDWIN SEDER, WAHG, Richmond Hill, NY; ROBERT BEADIES, WRVA, Richmond; ERWIN SWINDELL, WHQ, Des Moines; HAROLD SCHWAB, WBZ, Springfield; ARTHUR SCOTT BROOK, WPG, Atlantic City; Dr. SHELDON, WSB, Atlanta; RALPH WALDO EMERSON, WLS, Chicago; OTTO F. BECK, WRC, Washington; DON BAKER, WOR, Newark ... 8/26 EUGENE PERAZZO, WKRC, Cincinnati; HARRIS SHAW, WBS, Springfield ... 9/26 ARTHUR KAYS, WCCO, Minneapolis-St. Paul; LAWSON REID, KTHS, Hot Springs ... 11/26 STEPHEN BOISCLAIR, WGY, Schenectady; Capt. MILTON HOWELL RALEY, WBZ, Springfield; TOM GEIERSON, Riviera Theatre, Rochester, NY ... 1/27 WINCENT PERCY, WTAM, Cleveland; HOWARD THATCHER, WBAL, Baltimore ... 2/27 FIRMIN SWINNEN, WPG, Atlantic City ... 4/27 BIRGER PETERSON, WBZ, Springfield ... 5/27 BEATRICE RYAN, WHAM, Rochester ... 10/27 FLOYD WALTER, WGY, Schenectady; ADRIAN SALESSES, WBZ.

With radio getting a foothold in the twenties, organ music was a big factor. See you next time!

*Jason & The Old Prospector*

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May 15, 1988

# CLOSING CHORDS

## REBA M. AYARS

Reba M. Ayars, wife of internationally known organist Lowell Ayars, passed into eternal life on January 15 after a valiant fight against cancer.

She attended many ATOS National Conventions with her husband and was well known as hostess to the many groups which visited the 2/8 Wurlitzer installed in their home.

In addition to her husband, she is survived by a sister and two nephews.

*Martin Wiegand*

## GEORGE L. KIRCHMYER

George L. Kirchmyer, organist and teacher of piano and voice, in Buffalo, New York, died on December 18. He was 94.

A graduate of Canisus High School and Chicago's Sherwood Music School, he played organs in Buffalo's downtown theatres: Shea's Buffalo, Fox Great Lakes and Shea's Hippodrome. He accompanied silent movies, vaudeville and musical comedy shows.

With the coming of talking pictures, Kirchmyer became organist in churches, taught, performed on radio, and played organ at one of Buffalo's first roller-skating rinks.

Burial was in Cheektowaga, New York. He is survived by his wife, a daughter, a son, two grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

*Lloyd Klos*

## PHILIP C. UNDERWOOD

Mention in *USA TODAY* seems to stamp the passing of Philip C. Underwood as a newsworthy event for theatre organ buffs. Phil was a member of the Ohio Valley chapter, and among his contributions to the chapter was soldering thousands of wires and connections in the 3/29 Wurlitzer in Emery Theatre.

Born in Muncie, Indiana, he had come to Cincinnati in 1934 and worked at radio stations WASI and WLW until moving into TV in 1946 on WLWT. For organ buffs, Phil was best known for handling the studio engineering on WLS's famous *Moon River* show. After retirement he worked for the Cincinnati Natural History Museum, helping to assemble their planetarium.

In Cincinnati's catastrophic 1937 flood, Phil, after taking the station off the air, was the last person to leave the WLW studios as oil fires on flood waters near the building came closer and closer. The

building held both the Crosley radio factory and WLW studios.

The Ohio Valley chapter has staged re-creations of *Moon River* almost biennially since the installation of the Emery organ. Many "behind the scenes" stories have been told about *Moon River*, and one of these involved Phil since he was "at the controls" when it happened. During one show the announcer began reading the poem "The Shooting of Dan McGrew." Phil quickly sensed this was a thoroughly inappropriate poem for a show made up of organ music, vocal solos, and love poems. Phil debated to himself whether to cut the announcer off in mid-poem and possibly save his job, or let him talk on in the hope he knew what he was doing. He finally chose the latter.

It must be remembered *Moon River* was a special favorite of Powell Crosley, Jr., owner of WLW, who had first suggested the midnight program. Anything other than soft poems was considered a capital crime.

The next morning the announcer and Phil were summoned to the office of the station manager who, in a rage, demanded to know why the announcer would read such a poem. His defense was that it had been requested by the Duchess of Luxembourg. It must be remembered that WLW operated after midnight on 500,000 watts — the only U.S. station ever allowed this power. So reaching Europe was no problem; actually routine.

With his job hanging by a slender thread and the manager terming the story a very unlikely one, the announcer took from his pocket the letter. It indeed was from the Duchess of Luxembourg and she truly wanted to hear "The Shooting of Dan McGrew." Obviously the announcer and Phil were "off the hook," but it clearly indicated to management how far the station's signal was reaching.

Phil died December 26, 1987, after a long illness. It was the genius of such "pros" as Phil Underwood that made possible the complete rebuilding of the former RKO Albee Wurlitzer, the installation of it in Emery Theatre, and its maintenance.

Phil's wife Blanche is secretary of Ohio Valley Chapter and worked with Phil every Saturday morning on organ reconstruction and installation. She remains a member of the organ crew.

*Hubert S. Shearin*