

Henningsens' 30th Year

by Dr. Edward J. Mullins

Carsten Henningsen, who conceived the idea of a theatre organ in a pizzeria, celebrates thirty years in business on November 29, 1988. Henningsen was born and raised in Minden, Nevada. His wife, Joyce, was born in Great Falls, Montana. They met when they were students at Montana State University in Bozeman. They fell in love with the theatre organ and with each other when they heard the 2/7 Wurlitzer in the Ellen Theatre in Bozeman, played by Ed Pegram. In 1955, Carsten obtained his B.S. in Industrial Engineering, a profession he pursued for the next three years.

On November 29, 1958, Carsten opened Ye Olde Pizza Joynt on Mission Boulevard in Hayward, California, in the East Bay area south of Oakland. Fred Finn and his wife played banjo and piano there (years later they would become nationally known on their television program, "Mickey Finn's").

In the late fifties, stereophonic high fidelity swept America like a tidal wave. Riding the crest of this wave was George Wright with his numerous theatre organ recordings on the Hi-Fi label. Wright played the 4/36 Wurlitzer during the thirtieth anniversary celebration at San Francisco's Fox Theatre June 28, 1959, to a full house. His midnight organ concerts at the Fox in the early sixties proved enormously popular. Seeing the line of concert-goers winding around the block, the Henningsens knew that pipes and pizza would be a winning combination.

The Henningsens, theatre organ enthusiasts from their Bozeman courtship days, attended these concerts that packed the house. A friend, Bob Denny, had installed a 3/11 Robert-Morton the-



Sign on door attests to 30 years in business - November 29, 1988. Ed Mullins Photo

atre organ in his home which they went to see. Carsten decided to install a theatre organ in the pizzeria and asked Denny to look for a suitable organ.

In 1960 the present Ye Olde Pizza Joynt was built to Henningsen's specifications at 19510 Hesperian Boulevard in Hayward. It took Bob Denny one year to find a two-manual, nine-rank, Style 210 Wurlitzer, Opus 1835, originally installed in the State Theatre in Fresno, California, in 1928. It had passed through several ownerships and was in the home of Babe

March in Vallejo, California, when purchased in 1962. They began dismantling the organ at 8:00 a.m. and by 8:00 a.m. the following morning the task was completed and the instrument returned to the warehouse.

The organ installation was completed by Bob Denny and was premiered July 25, 1962, by Dave Quinlan. They used to call the pizza orders from the kitchen over the banjo and piano music. While this method had worked, it was no match for the Mighty Wurlitzer. Quinlan told Henningsen, "We've got to do something about this!" Being from Nevada, Carsten solved the problem by making a copy of a Keno lighted numbers board and numbering the pizza orders.

In 1963 Ye Old Pizza Joynt acquired the present Style 235 three-manual console to replace the two-decker. It was originally installed in San Francisco's Warfield Theatre in 1925, Opus 984. It was first played in November, 1963, when it was temporarily situated under the Sleigh Bells. Both consoles were playing for a while until the two-manual console was sold to Warren Blankenship of Monterey, California.

Tonal Resources

Ranks:

Tibia Clausa
Concert Flute
Violin
Violin Celeste
Horn Diapason

Gamba
Gamba Celeste

Vox Humana
English Post Horn
Kinura
Brass Trumpet
Brass Saxophone
Tuba

Percussions:

Bongo Drums
Chimes
Chrysoglott
Glockenspiel
Liberty Chimes
(Celeste Gongs)
Marimba/Wood Harp
Saucer Bells
(Kilgen from a theatre in Ellensburg, WA)
Sleigh Bells
Xylophone
"Go-Go" bells
Roll Cymbal
Slapstick
Tympani
Toy Counter
Chinese Temple Gong

5'8" Knabe grand piano with Ampico "A" roll player.

5-stop French Celeste Accordion played by pine "fingers".

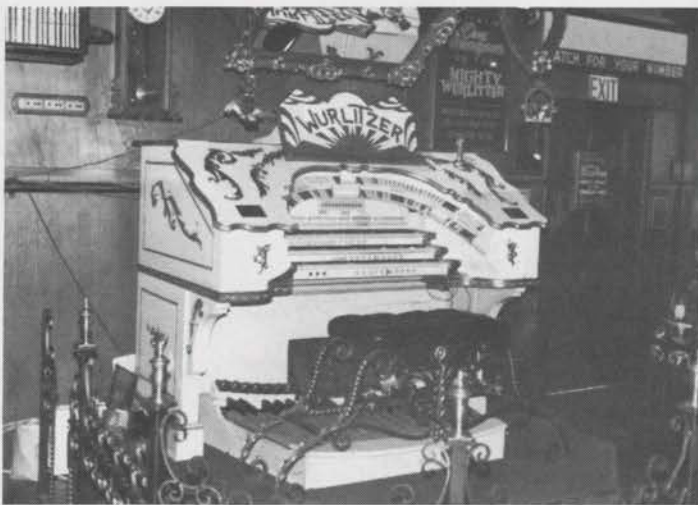
43-note red and gold brass Calliope sits atop a coin-operated Cremona upright grand piano, plays ten different pieces on roll.

A real 18-wheeler, Diesel, semi-truck horn.

Exact copy of a Santa Fe steam engine whistle.



Joyce and Carsten Henningsen at Ye Olde Pizza Joynt. Back bar originally in San Francisco's Union House Bar before Prohibition. Ed Mullins Photo



3/13 Wurlitzer console; overhead mirror enables patrons to see organ key-boards.
Ed Mullins Photo



Knabe grand piano; French Celeste Accordion mounted on the wall between piano and console. Baskets beneath piano contain tambourines, maraccas, etc. used for audience participation.
Ed Mullins Photo

Four more ranks were added to the original nine making it thirteen ranks at present. There are no plans to add more ranks. There are other interesting diversions in the restaurant. The latest eye-catcher is the "Pizzacato Fire Flies" designed by Joyce Henningsen. These are little lighted fire flies that are wired to the pizzicato relay and light up when that stop is used.

Dave Quinlan played there from July 25, 1962, until October 12, 1963. He was followed by Bill Langford who stayed on the bench for eighteen years. Don Thompson is the present organist; he started playing there in May 1983.

In the thirty years since the opening of Ye Olde Pizza Joynt the idea of pizze-

rias equipped with theatre pipe organ has spread across American and into foreign countries. Many have come and gone. Some were in the wrong location. Some were too large; the Pizza Joynt is about the size of a neighborhood tavern which gives it an ambience. Some places still operating do not have quality control of the product, despite having excellent organ music. In many pizzerias the organist plays too loudly. Many pizzas are over-priced. The list could go on. The grand-daddy of them all still flourishes.

When I asked Carsten the secret of his success, Henningsen said, "It's like an automobile; everything has to function. If you have a 500-horsepower

engine with a burned-out clutch, you don't go anywhere. All functions have to operate. You have to have quality control and your employees have to be civil to the customers." In my opinion, Ye Olde Pizza Joynt serves the best pizza in California.

ATOS has acquired many new members who heard a theatre organ for the first time in a pizzeria. Carsten Henningsen deserves the admiration and gratitude of every theatre organ enthusiast for what he has done to perpetuate theatre organ and to bring it closer to the public. In his own particular way he has helped to bring about the renaissance of the instrument in America and throughout the world.



Dave Quinlan, World's First Pizzeria Organist, at original 2/9 Wurlitzer console in 1962. Henningsen Collection



Coin-operated Cremona upright player-piano plays ten different pieces. 43-note red and gold brass Calliope located on top is played from organ console.
Ed Mullins Photo