

Letters To The Editor

Dear Editor:

In a letter printed in July/August '88, Mr. Bob Shafter is only half right. One sentence I agree with reads, "for far too long we have had to put up with bad timing, lousy phrasing, and butchered melody lines from our performers." Why, I ask, is this occurring?

His statement that "our builders have been giving us unregulated, screechy, squawking instruments" should have been clarified. Which builders? professional builders or chapter organbuilders? For one thing, there are VERY few professional organbuilders who can properly rebuild and tonally finish a theatre organ, and most of these are on the West Coast. As for chapter organbuilders, I doubt that we could count them all. Dennis Heberg said it one time, "There are more bad organs out there than good ones." I'm not saying that all ATOS organs are bad, but there are very few good ones.

Then too, a lot of times the organs that are rebuilt by the professionals are left in care of the local chapter people only to screw them up by getting them out of regulation, moving trem settings, burning out the solid-state relay systems, etc. Most of these problems could be solved if only ATOS crews would get proper help from the right people and stop listening to the nickel-and-dime advice from incompetent, so-called organbuilders.

If ATOS is to have GOOD organs, then the local chapters had better take a good look at who is doing their repair/rebuild work. They should look to a good professional and then keep their hands off once the work is done. It's time we started putting the blame where it belongs and not on ALL performers! If you don't have a good organ, a good performer cannot do his best. Maybe that's why we have such "bad timing, lousy phrasing, and butchered melody lines."

Sincerely,
Robert N. Cowley
Springfield, Ohio

Dear Editor:

Martin and I would like to say a big "Thank you" to the Oregon chapter for a very happy convention and a very good hotel whose staff went out of their way to look after us. Being an old conventioneer, I enjoy meeting up with old friends and making new ones as that is what ATOS is all about — good fellowship in our mutual love of the theatre organ.

Dennis Hedberg must be congratulated on getting the organs in good shape. Organ crews are often forgotten behind the scenes, and patrons don't know what snags may have developed in the pre-

paration of these concerts.

Martin learned a lot and plans to return to Detroit next year. He has many ideas for our YOY, and we are looking forward to seeing a number of you at our Spring Safari. I was particularly pleased the younger generation had a corner in this convention as that is how we will be assured of a future for the theatre organ. Thank you, Portland, once again. It was a long journey, but well worth the trip.

We would also like to thank ATOS members Dick Taylor and Ed Stout for arranging for us to visit the San Francisco Castro Theatre, and Jim Roseveare for the Oakland Paramount. What a thrill Martin had playing those instruments. Appreciation, too, for the generous advice given Martin by Richard Purvis at the Castro. That, and the chance to visit the Berkeley Auditorium, came about through the kindness of Bob and Beth Gilbert. We even got a chance for Martin to stick his big toe in the Pacific Ocean. To all our friends, "Thank you for a happy holiday!"

Edith Rawle & Martin Harris
London, England

Dear Editor:

I was unable to attend the convention in Portland, but did manage to get to the concert given by Andy Crow at the Paramount Theatre in Seattle. His handling of that fine Wurlitzer organ was first rate, with good registration, counter melodies, a varied program and, above all, he played "mit feelink!" All that in spite of the fact that he had to contend with backstage noises from a crew setting up the Wayne Newton Show that was slated for that evening. That is part of "Show Biz," I suppose.

Sincerely,
Reginald Stone
Victoria, British Columbia

Dear ATOS members,

Oaks Park Association would like to express their extreme gratitude for your generous donation toward our Wurlitzer restoration. We want to thank Dennis Hedberg for setting the wheels in motion for the donation and for introducing us to Loren and Karen Minear. These two people have become "regulars" at the Oaks, not only for their talent and professional ability, but also for their friendship and obvious interest in the restoration of this important historic instrument.

Dean Lemire played a beautiful concert, and the ATOS volunteers did a one hundred percent job of cleaning up, enabling the rink to open for business at its regular time.

Your gift not only restores seventy

plus years of music and memories, but also insures another century of future family traditions.

Sincerely,
Mary Beth Wilson
Oaks Amusement Park
Portland, Oregon

Dear Editor:

We would like to take this opportunity to clarify the erroneous information in the article on the Arlington Theatre Robert-Morton in the September/October issue of THEATRE ORGAN. The story was obviously written well before the fact, and that some things did not go as planned will not likely come as a surprise.

We must emphasize that we cannot take any responsibility for the final product that was presented to the public on October 1. The organ was not operational at the time allotted for the tonal work, and as a result, neither of us has set foot in the building.

As a point of interest, the Wonder Mortons were named for the Loew's Wonder Theatres in which they were located. The title has nothing to do with their size or power as the article implies.

Thank you for allowing us this opportunity.

Sincerely,
Clark Wilson & Jerry Nagano
San Jose, California

Editor's note: There were so many responses to the letter from Mr. Don Story in the July/August issue that we have opted to print excerpts rather than each complete letter. We trust this will give our readers an overall picture of how people reacted.)

Dear Editor:

First, I would agree with Mr. Story on some points. It is certainly true that some conventions have crammed too many events into a schedule with too many organs that shouldn't have been featured and organists who were not convention calibre, but I feel this has been the exception lately and not the rule.

Second, the length of national conventions is set at five days with a possible sixth for an afterglow or some such event. This is to allow for a sane pace and yet enable conventioners to see and hear what's available in the area. No one is mandated to attend every event, yet the input I receive is that a majority prefer to have their time filled with what they traveled thousands of miles to see and hear — good organists on good organs.

Our policy in regard to classical organs is that no convention should schedule

(continued on page 52)

Letters To The Editor

(continued from page 6)

more than one event of a classical nature, and this is certainly a gray area for discussion. Most, however, do seem to enjoy this type of program at a convention.

Hotel accommodations are a problem in that we have, as an organization, some definite requirements that necessitate our being located in a central area with enough rooms to accommodate at least 800 people. We have been able to negotiate some very attractive room rates with large, major hotel chains because we can guarantee them a large block of rooms for five or six nights.

I do agree with Mr. Story about jam sessions. Too often they get boring because of the calibre of organists who get up and play. Sometimes it is refreshing to hear a competent player, and I do not care whether this breath of fresh talented air happens to be someone who is being presented at that particular convention. While some jam sessions have been held in pizza parlors (sometimes lots of fun to have food and beer!), two recent conventions held jam session in theatres, and I refer to the Byrd in Richmond and the Orpheum in Los Angeles.

I must add that I thank Mr. Story for his comments and suggestions. We will continue to work hard to make conventions edifying and enjoyable for everyone, and hope that we can keep our mistakes to a minimum.

Sincerely,

Tim Needler

Indianapolis, Indiana

Dear Editor:

I would like to comment on Mr. Story's complaint about classical organs at ATOS conventions. As I study the programs when the organs were actually used in the theatres, classical music was played extensively. We, in ATOS, have been privileged to hear some very remarkable work by talented performers doing marvelous orchestral transcriptions and the like, certainly not to be heard at an AGO convention.

Recall, for example, the programs of the late Edwin H. Lemare and the late, great Virgil Fox. These gentlemen played to the public which, perhaps, accounted for the attendance figures. If our fine artists could give us a little more of the type of music heard on the theatre organ in its heyday, we could appeal to a larger audience and thereby grow. Rest assured, Mr. Story, the AGO will handle the academic, and we will play to the masses.

Sincerely,

Harry Heth

Dear Editor:

While I agree that some of Mr. Story's points are well taken, I feel that the ATOS

has made tremendous progress in the past six years as far as convention planning is concerned. In 1972 a handbook was published which set forth guidelines for host chapters. This handbook was revised in 1987, and now covers every aspect of convention planning. It was a great help when planning our recent convention in Los Angeles.

In discussing convention artists, every ATOSer should know that the artists receive a fee for playing and anyone from out of town gets air fare, a hotel room, registration and banquet at the convention. Like it or not, this encourages the use of local artists to keep the total cost of the convention down.

About jam sessions, it seems to me that Portland handled them in a near-perfect way — non-scheduled organists were first up, followed by ATOS members who wished to play; only when everyone had been heard, were convention artists given the bench. Personally, I was delighted to be able to enjoy a beer and food while listening to the jam sessions, and you can't do that in most theatres!

I'm glad Mr. Story wrote, as his questions and comments needed to be aired. I do believe, however, that we are producing better conventions than in the past and Convention Planning Coordinator Tim Needler deserves a big "Thank you" from all of us.

Sincerely,

Ralph Beaudry

Dear Editor:

One area in which I agree with Mr. Story is his stand on "X-number of artists." It is an insult and a complete waste of money to travel hundreds of miles to hear a marginally able "player" just because he or she may tend to be a local favorite. The same must also apply to the organs. It is equally an insult to place a fine concert artist on a tired old windbag simply because it is original and marginally playable.

I disagree with Mr. Story on classical organs. Frankly, I always look forward to the classical events, especially if the instrument is above average or of historical interest.

Jam sessions the worst? Hardly. How can anyone call Tom Hazleton on pipes and Dan Bellomy on an ancient Hammond a "worst convention weakness?"

Opinions expressed in this column are those of the correspondents, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors or the policies of ATOS or THEATRE ORGAN. 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 S.E. Brookside Drive, #58
Milwaukie, Oregon 97222
Phone: 503/654-5823

No amount of concert planning can allow two truly professional artists to "go at it" in such a manner as those two did.

And as for regionals, Mr. Story may have forgotten that one of the finest was held in the state of his own "hick cow town." No fool can complain about the length of these events, and it allows conclaves in areas that could not handle a major convention.

Sincerely,

Tom DeLay

Fresno, California

Dear Editor:

I agree that the society holds itself out to be *theatre organ*. That does not suggest classical or heavy music. That is for AGO. Theatre music is show tunes and happy music. Some do not appreciate heavy music, but can get goosebumps hearing wonderful toe-tapping light music. If ATOS doesn't play it, who will?

Sincerely,

Harry Anderson

Minneapolis, Minnesota

**Keep in
touch with
the British
Theatre
Organ
Scene!**



Subscribe to *The Journal of the Cinema Organ Society*, a quarterly publication featuring photos; history, stoplists, biographies and technical articles . . . Plus monthly newsletters of the latest theatre organ news, events, and record reviews.

Send \$20.00 (U.S.) or 9.50 pounds sterling for membership in *The Cinema Organ Society*. Includes a subscription to the *Journal* and 12 monthly newsletters.

General Secretary:

John Smallwood

40 Lumley Road

Horley,

Surrey RH 6, 7JL, England