

# THE CHRISTMAS SHOW AT PROCTOR'S

by Allen Mills

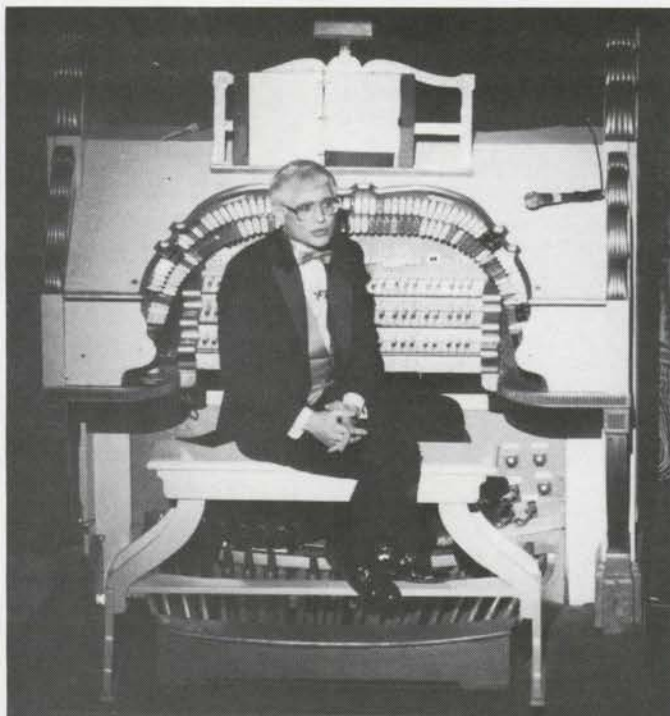
The idea for the Christmas Show came about very simply. You see, most of the organ shows at Proctor's Theatre have a central theme, and what better theme for December could I choose?

However, right from the start I wanted this to be a truly community event — not just the community of Schenectady, but of the entire tri-cities area (Albany, Schenectady and Troy) of eastern New York State. As I conceived it, this would be a show *for* the audience and a show *by* the audience; that is, lots of audience involvement as well as the participation by very fine local talent, almost all of which is volunteer.

In 1984, the first Christmas Show was designed around the memories and warmth of Christmases past. I called it "An Old-Fashioned Christmas," and it took off! The show was completely sold out, and we had to have a twenty-minute hold on the curtain because of the lines at the box office. We had to turn away nearly 200 people.

The show was basically an "overgrown" organ show as ATOS members would know one. The additional talent in this show was an appearance of the Off Broadway Babies, a precision dance team (all volunteers except the choreographer). The entire second half was a Carol-sing. I had many slides made, including the "Hallelujah Chorus" which the audience loved!

The show was a huge success and was immediately booked for two performances in 1985. I started "dreaming" of greater things and began to learn some very valuable lessons, the most important of which was to delegate authority! I had to find a director and a producer for the show because it was becoming much more of a production than I could handle from the console. Staging, lighting, more sound requirements, more and more local talent, researching slides for special effects, and scheduling rehearsals in the constantly busy theatre, were only a few of the assignments. And where do I find a horse? yes, a horse and an old



Creator Allen Mills at the console of "Goldie" at Proctor's Christmas Show.

sleigh — and who designs the costumes? — and who makes the sets? The care and feeding of "Goldie," the 3/18 Wurlitzer which is the accompaniment and feature of the whole show, is an ongoing responsibility carried out by volunteers Gus Pratt and Paul Mahoney of Hudson-Mohawk Chapter.

With all the interest and enthusiasm of the community and the help of many people, the show has grown by leaps and bounds. Something new is added each year — this year it is to be a finale that will take your breath away.

When I decide what will be presented and how I'd like it presented, I start early meetings with the key people involved, and a firm schedule is kept. We spent most of July

and all of August planning this year's show, and the list of contributing individuals now includes: producer, director, stage manager, technical director, lighting designer, scenic designer, sound designer, a stage crew of seven, projectionist, house manager, organ technicians, the Off Broadway Babies and their director, the ballet company and their director, a children's chorus and director, an adult chorus which I direct, a vocal quartet, a brass quintet, myself as solo vocalist — and don't forget the horse! A performing cast of about 175.

This is now called The Christmas Show, and is a firm tradition in spite of competition from all the other well-attended Christmas shows in the area. "Goldie" and Proctor's keep packing them in! We are the only theatre in the area that has a pipe organ accompanying shows all during the year.

Our show has been compared favorably to Radio City's famous Christmas Show, and will be seen by nearly 10,000 people this year! Imagine — all those people hearing and singing with a theatre organ! We'd love to have ATOS members come from wherever you are, but we must remind you that this show sells out early.

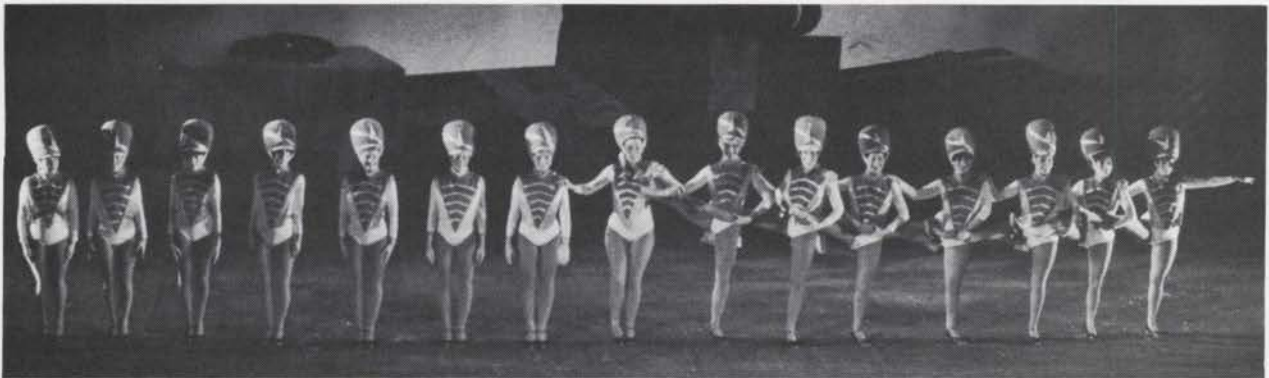




*Village square complete with horse and sleigh in 1987 Christmas Show.*



*"Winter Wonderland" with quartet and dancing snowman.*



*The Off Broadway Babies in precision dance to "Parade of The Wooden Soldiers" in 1987 Christmas Show.*

(Editor's note: We are impressed with what is being done in Schenectady, and would encourage chapters which may be contemplating similar productions to contact organist Mills for more information about the shows at Proctor's. His address is 32 North Ferry Street, Schenectady, NY 12305.)

*Lynn Dreifus Photos*