

# THEATRE ORGAN NEWS FROM AUSTRALIA

by Bruce Ardley



Since my last contribution, we have had the pleasure and enjoyment of the company and music of two American organists. Candi Carley was engaged to play two concerts at the Hayden Orpheum Theatre at Cremoren, Sydney. The first concert was certainly not without problems as the recently installed 3/12 Wurlitzer was not behaving well. The second concert a week later was a different story. Organ builder John Parker and the

very talented theatre organ enthusiast Bob Glidden worked long and hard to ensure that Candi's second concert would not be plagued with "Bugs." The organ behaved and sounded magnificent.

Our second artist was the exuberant Father James Miller who had endeared himself as a firm favourite following his previous one. Apart from extra pipe organ concerts quite a number were performed on electronics. Irrespective of the size of instrument he always provides top entertainment value. Two of the theatre organs used were the recently opened 3/15 Wurlitzer in the Village Twin (Ex Dendy) Brighton Cinema and the 3/10 Compton in Perth. He certainly gave the Wurlitzer at Brighton a good workout, and I doubt if there was one pipe or percussion that was not called upon to perform somewhere in the concert.

During Father Jim's stay in Perth he was featured on national television playing the Compton. He also received excellent press coverage with a written article and a photograph of him seated at the console. The Compton organ will be the main instrument used in the 1989 Annual Australian TOSA Convention.

The following will give the reader a brief history of the Compton to now: The organ was installed in 1933 for the opening of the new super cinema at Worthing, Sussex UK, called the Plaza. Thomas Dando presided at the very ornate Art Deco illuminated console which rose from the pit in glorious technicolor with ever-changing colour combinations to suit the musical mood, (a forerunner of today's Disco lighting). The full-time playing life of the organ at the Plaza was about twenty years. By the early 1950s television was claiming cinema patrons at a staggering rate. No need to tell you that the console spent most of the next several years at the base of the pit. In 1970 the growing Western Australian division of TOSA were successful in acquiring this fine organ. Because of a number of difficulties when the organ had arrived in Australia, it passed into private ownership.

Subsequently, TOSA were successful in re-acquiring the Compton and have after considerable refurbishment, installed the instrument in the John Leckie Pavilion in suburban Perth. The side panels of the console are now timber. The original glass illuminations were so badly damaged with certain parts missing that the idea of having Australia's only illuminated console was abandoned. In the halcyon days of the 1930s one and possibly two consoles in the theatres in Sydney, New South Wales suburbs had these fancy illuminations. Following Father Miller's concert it was felt that experimentation with the swell shutters would improve the way in which the sound reached the audience. Being horizontal instead of vertical, they have been reversed with the shutters opening towards the ceiling. Reports are that the sound has been greatly enhanced.



A cheery Father James Miller at the 3/10 Compton in the John Leckie Pavilion, Perth Western Australia.

One of the "Greats" of the British theatre organ scene, Douglas Reeve, is to be the featured artist at the 1989 National TOSA Convention to be held in Perth. Resident organist for many years at the Dome Brighton, England, he is well and favourably known for his superb musicianship and unsurpassed use of the theatre organ percussions.

We believe that Australia has so much to offer the overseas visitor and Convention Centre Perth is a beautiful city located on the Swan River. Weatherwise, the timing of the Convention in March is ideal. Again an enormous amount of preparation and planning has gone into making sure that every person has a great time. All correspondence to do with the Convention which takes place from March 24-27 should be directed to:

The Convention Secretary  
TOSA (WA)  
P.O. Box 343  
MORLEY 6062  
Western Australia Telephone 09 2766668

In South Australia the TOSA Division can feel very pleased with themselves. Some years back they negotiated the purchase of the Star Theatre in the Adelaide suburb Goodwood. Renaming the building the Capri, the hopes were to install their very own theatre organ. All of the plans have come to be, and in June of this year they issued the report that they owned the property outright. Times were not always easy for the dedicated group as they had large financial commitments to meet and they had to derive income from operating the cinema on a fully commercial basis. In doing this, they had to pit themselves against the big and very powerful commercial cinema circuits. They were very fortunate in being able to exhibit the blockbuster *Crocodile Dundee* for a very long season to excellent houses. The word around Adelaide was the show at the Capri was value for money. Where else could you go to enjoy a good movie, an organ that rose from the pit all spotlighted and in a genuine old time theatre? Financially, this film provided a great boost for the group, hence their feeling of pride. Congratulations to the South Australian division.

As a final reminder, don't forget our 1989 Convention and by writing to the Convention Secretary at the address as given earlier all brochures containing Method of Registration and accommodation will be sent to you. See you soon.