



ALABAMA Diamond Jubilee

by Grace McGinnis and Madeline LiVolsi

Birmingham, Alabama, calls itself "The Magic City," and Alabama Chapter members surely reinforced that concept during the wonderful weekend of October 14-16. From the opening cocktail hour in the Holiday Inn to the final strains of the Sunday night concert, this was an escape to a world of magical, mellifluous merriment. Convention Chairman Gary Jones and his committee managed to combine the ingredients of three things we love - organs, music and people - to create an unforgettable experience for each of us.

First, the organs.

The star, of course, was the 4/21 Wurlitzer Publix #1 in the Alabama Theatre, an organ which can play itself (which some of us find to be pretty close to magic). Other featured instruments were a 3/6 Kimball studio broadcast organ, a Holtkamp classical instrument, a once-upon-a-time theatre 3/13 Kimball, a 2/24 E.M. Skinner, a 4/41 residence custom organ, and a 4/60 Moller. The basic ingredients in our formula are here.

Second, the music.

From the song with the longest title, "Reaching for Someone And Finding Nobody There," to an innovative treatment of the childhood classic, "Three Blind Mice," to Lemmen's "Fanfare," there was music of every genre to include in the magic potion.

And then . . . the people.

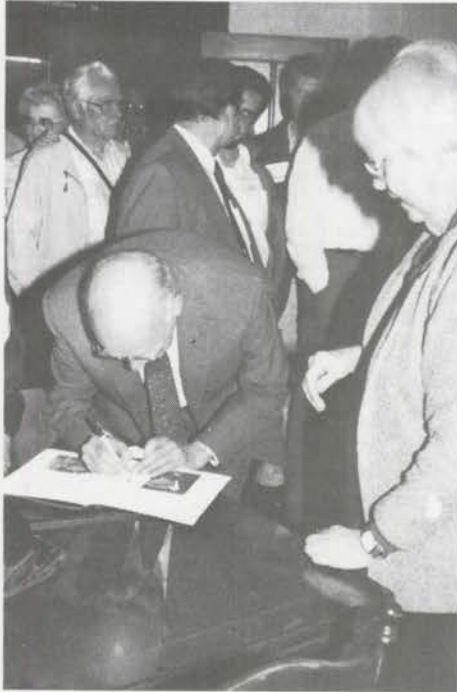
We came from all corners of the country, by bus, plane and car to meet in the Heart of Dixie and add our part to the mystical mixture. Alabama supplied the hosts and hostesses, artists, chauffeurs, technicians, and all the behind-the-scenes workers who melded with the conventioners to complete the list of ingredients.

*And how does all this
combine to create a
story-book weekend?*

Let's take a look.



*Jim Riggs signing autographs.
At Right: Alabama Chapter members John Troullias and Tom Cronier at Relay House.*



Lee Erwin autographs program for "Archie" Archibald.

At Right: Tom Helms, Lee Erwin and Paul Quarino at Woodlawn Methodist Church.



Bryan Black and Dr. H.E. Tibbs at Southside Baptist.



Dottie and Harold Malcolm at the Relay House.



Paul Quarino at Woodlawn Methodist Church.

Leaving Southside Baptist Church.



Freeman Andress and Buddy Boyd outside Southside Baptist.

An early evening cocktail party set the scene for us to meet and greet old friends. Alabama chapter members, who wore red tabards so we could find them easily, were readily available to answer questions and help us find the proper exits and entrances. And when it was time to board the busses for the Alabama Theatre, there was our old friend, Alden Stockebrand, directing and dispatching. It would truly be difficult to imagine any convention now without this impressive gentleman to guide the riders to the right busses and the busses to the right places.

Convention Chairman Gary Jones welcomed the ATOS to Birmingham and to the Alabama Theatre, and then introduced Jim Riggs whose rousing opener let us know that we were in "Dixie." The balance of his recital was composed of a nice variety of songs, mostly from the twenties and thirties, all played with style and class. A particular delight was the "Meter Maid March." Late-nighters got to stay after the concert for a jam session, always an invigorating experience.

Saturday morning we had time for a pleasant breakfast before departing for Southside Baptist Church where Lee Erwin and the 3/6 Kimball were ready to share with us the nostalgia of Lee's days at radio station WAPI. "Stardust" and a medley from *Fantastiks* stand out as unusually inspiring.

The 3/62 Holtkamp in Southside Baptist's sanctuary was played for us by Samford University professor Dr. H.E. Tibbs and his student, Bryan Black. Bryan played Bach's "Toccatina and Fugue in D Minor" and the familiar Christmas tune, "What Child Is This?" Dr. Tibb's contribution was the Widor "Toccatina." Some wished that this program might have been longer.

However, the next stop was at The Relay House (most appropriate for organ buffs) on the seventeenth floor of the Birmingham Bank for Savings and Loan building. Excellent food and a fantastic view made it quite evident why the committee had selected this restaurant.

The afternoon entertainment was at Woodlawn United Methodist Church where Paul Quarino told us he was going to try to take the 2/13 Kimball back to its halcyon days in the Grand Theatre in Norristown, Pennsylvania. The "little-organ-that-could" responded in true theatre style to the "Elks Club Medleys" from its era as well as to a capricious romp with the "Three Blind Mice."

Avondale Methodist Church was the evening venue, and Tom Hazleton the artist at the 2/24 E.M. Skinner. His program included three Bach selections, Lemmen's "Fanfare" and an elegant rendition of Gershwin's "But Not For Me."

The Midnight Merry-makers were transported back to the Alabama for a



Gary Jones, Pat Seitz and Lee Erwin.

second jam session. Lee Erwin opened the event with the Buster Keaton classic, *The General*. Lee had been staff organist at the Alabama in 1929, and this weekend's reunion with two organs was quite a treat for both the organist and his audiences.

A Sunday morning program was planned for 75 fortunate early registrants. This group went to the home of Dr. Eugene Blackstone to hear his 4/41 custom organ and to participate in open console. Others attended local church services or slept late and enjoyed brunch at the Holiday Inn.

We returned to the Alabama for a Sunday afternoon concert by Tom Helms. Tom's choice of selections ranged from a buoyant "Put On A Happy Face" to a lusty "Birmingham Bertha" and a vibrant "Finlandia." We all got into the act with a sing-along of great old songs, and then laughed our way through Harold Lloyd's goofy antics in *Hot Water*. The final strains of "Stars Fell On Alabama" echoed through the auditorium as the console disappeared.

Dinner was served on the stage of the theatre, a sumptuous array of seafood and salads that defied description. This was a most pleasant time which provided an unusual chance for us to visit and reflect on the events of the weekend.

The closing concert, Ty Woodward's classical program at St. Paul's 4/60 Moller, included Ives' "Variations on America," a number which must be seen to be believed as one passage requires the organist to hold on to the bench while playing the melody in the pedal. Fun!

Organs, music and people! That's

what it's all about. And there are some people who were so outstanding that we would like to include them as the "secret ingredient" in this recipe for magic moments: Larry Donaldson, the crew chief who maintains the Alabama Wurlitzer; Cecil Whitmire, who spearheaded the drive to purchase the Alabama Theatre; Freeman Andress, Buddy Boyd and Pat Seitz whose tireless efforts and on-the-spot assistance made everyone's world a little brighter; chauffeurs Elaine Saunders, Marty Veasey, John Troulias, Gary Gill, and Pat Seitz were always where they were needed when they were needed. Michael Blue produced the design and drawings for the program, and Howard Best was responsible for the Woodlawn, Avondale and Blackstone organs being presented at the convention. Jerry Eason handled all the travel arrangements for the chapter. The convention committee: Louise Harless, Sadie Mc Clure, Linda Smith, Pat Seitz, Tom Cronier, Betty Johnson, Marty Veasey, Freeman Andress, Joy Black, Thurman Robertson, Larry Donaldson, Linda Whitmire, Jerry Eason and Gert Yester, and the leavening for all the planning and production, Gary Jones, who taught us all the true meaning of the term "Southern Hospitality."

Alabama Chapter represents the best of all that ATOS means to all of us, and we wish them continued success with their Alabama Theatre and Mighty Wurlitzer.

(We wish to thank the following for contributing pictures for this coverage: Gene Ward, Madeline LiVolsi, Sonia Carlson, Earl Strausser, and Claire Lawrence.)



Larry Donaldson mans the computer that records the Alabama Wurlitzer.



Buddy Boyd (left) and Dick Willson on stage at the Alabama.



Pat Seitz and Cecil Whitmire at the Saturday Jam Session.



After Friday Jam Session Gary Jones, Sonia Carlson, Tom Cronier.



Claire Lawrence from Ohio, and Lee Erwin at the Alabama.



Paul Quarino, Janice and Jim Riggs at the Alabama Theatre.



Above: Tim Needler and Gib Petzke relax at Alabama Jam Session.

At Right: Texans Dave Fielder and Joe Butler at the Alabama Theatre.



At Right: Tom Helms at the console of the Alabama Wurlitzer.





Chicago area group at breakfast.



Dr. Eugene Blackstone at the console of his home organ.



Betty Donaldson, Madeline LiVolsi, Bill Donaldson, Ardis Johnson and Len Clarke.



Ty Woodward at the Moller in St. Paul's.



Alabama chapter members Elaine Saunders and Jimmye Rockett find a quiet corner to eat their dinner at the theatre.



Making use of the Alabama Theatre stage apron for an improvised dining table for "early supper."



Alabama chapter members Vince and Gert Yester, Sunday dinner on stage at the theatre.