



Pipes & Personalities

Looking to the Future

If our pipe organs are to continue to exist, a great deal depends on the support given now by those who enjoy pipe organ music, and also the interest of our coming generations. Today's activities of sports, traveling, computers and videos have made a great change in the activities of our faithful. We wonder what, if anything, is being done to assure that the pipe organ music we love to play and hear will be a heritage for the future?

One person doing her utmost, Thelma Barclay, formerly on the National ATOS Board and Chairman of the Puget Sound Chapter, is doing her very best to keep alive the interest in our organs. Striving to interest the younger people, to explain the intricate sounds and to keep organ music alive, she is making a mark in this direction. Saturdays, the Bellevue, Washington, Pizza and Pipes is filled to capacity with small children celebrating their birthdays, sometimes as many as 200 with their parents. Thelma patiently explains another world of music, and when they learn the various instrument sounds, and they take small band instruments provided for them, to play along and understand rhythm and they are in their own world with the "Muppet" on the walls dancing to the organ music. The bubble machine is something they can-



Mike Wells, pizza maker, teaches pizza-making the day they learned about the Mighty Wurlitzer.

not resist. This, combined with organ music, is a basic education that could be the means of attracting a coming generation. Thelma dons a clown costume to enter "their world" hoping that in time they will enter "our world."

In addition, invitations have been sent to the music departments of nearby schools and local young people's church groups, as well as to rest home residents who are bussed to Pizza and Pipes for a musical lunchtime. Birthdays are celebrated with a gift pizza and no one can resist being a "Star." Many of these same people come back during the dinner hours and especially on Sunday nights, when Andy Crow provides a great repertoire.

Young people today turn toward the keyboard, at least they learn the keyboard, which, in turn, may someday turn their sights with encouragement to the pipes. We see this when high school students make the Bellevue Pizza and Pipes their favorite lunch place, where Thelma plays at noontimes. Busses of school children have come from North Bend, Renton, and nearby Seattle areas.

Well qualified to explain the organ's part in the music world, Thelma Barclay played piano accompaniments in the silent movie days back in Galesville, Wisconsin. She has played locally in the Seattle area, doing weddings, gatherings, funerals and at the Seattle Plain Piper for 15 years or more, only recently retiring from organ sales. Now, Thelma sits at the big Bellevue Pizza and Pipes with the 3/16 Wurlitzer, a 10-ton musical instrument, that she sure knows how to handle. She does her utmost to interest people in the future of the "pipes" so that we may enjoy this medium before it becomes something "really lost."

Shown here are Kindergarten children from the Bellevue Sacred Heart School who visited recently and, in addition to learning about the organ, and enjoying it, they will remember it, because they were given the opportunity to learn how to make pizza for their group, with the instruction of Mike Wells, at the pizza-making table.

Thelma R. Smith



Children with small musical instruments learn of the organ, and play along.

Rex Koury Performs Organ Spectacular in Meredith Willson's Hometown

Mason City, Iowa, the hometown of Meredith Willson, was the site of an organ spectacular performed November 4, by Rex Koury at the Auditorium on the campus of the North Iowa Area Community College.

It was, perhaps, fitting for Mr. Koury to open his program with a rousing melody that carried within it a counter-melody of "It's You" from *The Music Man*, Meredith Willson's masterpiece musical.

Rex told his audience that it had been his pleasure to have worked with Meredith Willson on the radio program, "The Big Show." He related how Willson would regale his fellow workers with stories of his boyhood days in Mason City.

Rex held his audience enthralled with a medley of all the tunes from *The Music Man*, including the foot-stomping "Seventy-Six Trombones." A sing-along, two silent films, Laurel and Hardy in *Finishing Touch* and Harold Lloyd in *Never Weaken*, and a pleasing palette of old favorites rounded out a perfect evening of theatre organ sound.

The Auditorium organ, a Rodgers Trio, has its console speakers silenced, and sound pours into the auditorium from two Klipsch speakers high in the superstructure over the stage. The effect was such that the writer was asked by a patron, "Where are the organ pipes and the drums and 'stuff' — backstage somewhere?" It was a great sound!! And an evening to be long remembered!

The North Iowa Area Community College has made a commitment to present at least one theatre organ concert each year. It is believed that this is the only community/junior college in the country projecting such programming for the theatre organ.

Dr. Frank Hoffman



Thelma Barclay receives a bouquet from inspired youngster in appreciation.

Organist Jeff Weiler Performs for Historic Theatre Extravaganza

The historic Victory Theatre, standing regally at the corner of First and Main Streets in Dayton, Ohio, has experienced many changes since she was built in 1866. The grand lady has had six names (The Turner Opera House, Music Hall, Grand Opera House, Victoria Opera House, Victoria Theatre, and Victory Theatre), and four renovations following fires in 1869 and 1917, a flood in 1913, and threatening economic woes in the early 1970s. She has also welcomed many different actors and personalities onto her stage. From theatre to burlesque, from vaudeville to symphony orchestras, from dance to silent and Disney movies, scores of people hold countless memories of special moments within her walls.

In 1978, the theatre received a most special gift of a theatre organ. NCR Corporation donated its auditorium organ when that building was razed. Built by the Estey Organ Company of Brattleboro, Vermont, the organ was originally installed at the NCR Auditorium in 1922. Beginning in 1978, in 4,000 pieces, the organ was moved, stored, and rebuilt as a theatre organ in the Victory Theatre by 100 volunteers over a three-year period.

The Estey organ was the highlight of a special event on May 21, 1988, held by The Victory Theatre Association for the theatre's many supporters. Billed as an "Evening of Nostalgia," the program was a farewell party for the Victory Theatre prior to her 18-month closing for renovation. Featured was Chicago organist Jeff Weiler who accompanied the silent film *Tillie's Punctured Romance* at the organ. Weiler, who also conducted a rousing film sing-along and performed the 1866 "Turner Opera House March," has studied scoring with Lee Erwin and is pursuing a doctorate in Music. He has performed his own scores for many silent screenings across the United States.



Victory Theatre supporters talk to organist Jeff Weiler after his performance on "An Evening of Nostalgia."



The Victory Theatre as she looked before the current renovation project began in June 1988.

The Estey organ Weiler played has a 750-pound Mahogany console and lead pipes that range from a few inches in height to over 16 feet and 500 pounds. The pipes are air powered by a 20-horsepower blower. Technically the organ is a four-manual instrument with 14 ranks including strings, flutes, and reeds. Percussion instruments include xylophone, harp, cathedral chimes, and a toy counter.

The renovation the theatre is currently undergoing is immense. Reconstruction

of the stone facade, enlargements to the stagehouse and lobbies, the redesign of the backstage areas, and new seats total \$15 million. The organ again has been removed. The console and wooden pipes from the stage walls are in a warehouse, where the large lead pipes in the theatre's upper chambers have remained, but are sealed for protection. The renovation continues on schedule for a January 1990 re-opening.



Organist Jeff Weiler accompanies high school students in the "Turner Opera House March" during an "Evening of Nostalgia."

The Renaissance

The Renaissance Theatre in Mansfield, Ohio, opened its doors on a crisp Sunday in October, the patrons came pouring in to hear Bob Ralston, and they were treated to a varied program of light classics, religious, and Broadway tunes. His audience hadn't forgotten his years with Lawrence Welk. Would you believe that there were bubbles coming from human bubble machines? What fun to be a child again. There was also a good sing-along. We believe the sopranos were the strongest.

Bob surprised us by remembering that the first theatre organ he ever played was our Wurlitzer when Mr. Welk took him to the Joe Kearns' home. Always a small

world. He used our grand piano to perfection on several classics. His "Rhapsody in Blue" was very special.

We learned that Bob gets his exercise by running into the audience and gathering requests, and he did play excerpts of all of them in about fifteen minutes. Somewhere along the way, the classic "Sortie Toccata" by DuBois fit in with "How Great Thou Art" and "A Mighty Fortress." The end came too quickly, even with two encores. The audience didn't want to let him go.

This program was a good beginning to our '88-89 season. Hector Olivera, Chris Elliott, Father Miller and Gaylord Carter will follow for what we hope will be a great season.

Virginia White