

# Chapter Activities

## Los Angeles Chapter — The Gaylord Carter Caper

On an evening in early June, Gaylord Carter, prominent West Coast organist, drew a capacity crowd of over 300 at Lorin Whitney's recording studio in Glendale. This was the third in the regularly scheduled concerts under the aegis of the Los Angeles Chapter of A.T.O.E.

After a rousing opening with *Knightsbridge March* by Eric Coates, Gaylord casually turned to his audience and informed them that this was *not* going to be a cut-and-dried organ recital, but more of an informal get-together, which, indeed, it was. To abuse a cliché, he is virtually a "one-man-show"; his obvious mastery of the instrument, faultless technique and vast repertoire all add up to exciting listening. Good musical taste, combined with a sense of humor, both whimsical and broad, are much in evidence when he is at the console.

As an example, he asked his listeners to join him in a reminiscent mood, while he meandered back through the years, playing typical silent movie "mood" music. For this he extemporized a movie plot — the setting, the frozen fastnesses of the North Pole — complete with an Eskimo couple in love, a pair of "bad guys," who were up to some vague mischief, as well as a couple of frisky polar bears, which appeared from time to time as the "comedy relief." The music was rendered with "dead-pan" seriousness, but Gaylord's running commentary was a hilarious and smartly-timed bit of lampoonery at the silent flickers. The recurrence of the "love motif" was climaxed by a long, sobbing tibia glissando, which broke off in mid-air, and in that quivering pause, Gaylord announced quietly: "This used to kill 'em!" The audience ate it up.

Continuing in this vein of "night-blooming nostalgia" — to quote one of our departed organists — Erwin Yeo, by name — he then prevailed upon the crowd to indulge in some community singing with those venerable chestnuts such as *I Want a Girl*, *Down by the Old Mill Stream* and so on, using those time-honored tricks of stopping in the middle of a phrase and suddenly changing keys. He proved the younger generation really missed something by not being around when the theatre organist was a featured attraction at the movie houses. How many of you remember those dear old "Following the Bouncing Ball" specialties?

The evening had its semi-serious side also, with many ballads,



AT THE CARTER CONCERT

L. to r.: Gordon Kibbee, Gaylord Carter, M. Pierre Cochereau

THE TIBIA — Spring, 1958



Joe Kearns, vice president of the Los Angeles Chapter, gets into the act with Gaylord, who is seated at the Lorin Whitney console.

which used all of the limitless resources of Lorin Whitney's splendid twenty-four rank Robert Morton in tibias, voxes, harp celestes and vibraphones. On the novelty side was a highly involved conception of *Dancing Tambourine*, played at almost unbelievable tempo, with piano couplers and full advantage of the "toy counter." Included, too, were several original compositions — a hauntingly beautiful serenade and a tinkly bit of nonsense called *The Dance of the Doodlebug*.

The high-light of the occasion came when Gaylord offered a tongue-in-check rendition of *William Tell Overture*, with the able-bodied assistance of Mr. Dee Fisher, who, on cue, banged a tremendous pair of brass cymbals, followed by a freshly-watered bird whistle, during the "peaceful passages." It must be said that Mr. Fisher's performance can only be described as a *tour de force*.<sup>\*</sup> The delicate nuances he managed to create from the bird whistle were entirely fitting and his energetic crashing of the cymbals left nothing to be desired — except a few aspirins and new amplifiers on several hearing-aids.

Another bit of drollery was a "soap opera" saga, told with appropriate song titles concerning courtship, marriage, the baby arriving, the first quarrel — which demanded the smashing of a prop vase — finally, the settling of differences and the happy ending. All in all, it was quite a romp.

Toward the end of the evening, Gaylord decided the high-jinks were over and it was time to show his audience that underneath his lighter side there was much sterner stuff, whereupon he thundered forth with the *Toccata* movement from Widor's *Fifth Symphony* — however, not before he had made a few modest remarks, which sounded something like an apology, to one of the guests present. This guest was none other than M. Pierre Cochereau, world-renowned French organist, who, along with his wife, appeared to be enjoying himself enormously. Mr. Richard Simonton, National President of A.T.O.E., was their host and had introduced them beforehand to the crowd.

Yes, it was truly a "fun" evening and for those who were not able to be there, we hope to have a repeat performance in the near future. Judging from the applause and repeated encores it is obvious that Gaylord added many more admirers to his already enviable and justifiably long list — Joe Kearns.

<sup>\*</sup> We'd love to change that to "tour de farce," but we didn't hear the show. (The Publisher.)

# Thumbnail Sketch On Gaylord Carter . . . *Joe Kearns*

WHILE STILL IN HIS TEENS and attending the Lincoln High School in Los Angeles, Mr. Carter launched his professional musical career with only a modest little splash. His first assignment was playing for silent pictures at a neighborhood house, waggishly called "The Sunshine Theatre." Possibly his home-work suffered, because this stint required his evenings as well as Saturday and Sunday matinees. The instrument upon which young Carter vented his enthusiasm and burgeoning talents was a four-rank Robert Morton. His salary was commensurate with the size of the organ — sixteen dollars a week! According to Gaylord, he earned every penny of it — what with a different movie nearly every night and "Slide Specialities," "Community Sings," and short concerts on week-ends.

Yet all of this early experience served him in good stead and was excellent grist to his mill when he eventually moved on to larger theaters, more impressive installations, and, of course, better pay!

In those days there was an insatiable demand for movie organists, for many a "pit pianist," turned "organist" could hold down a fairly respectable job, if he could wiggle his left leg in fair proximity to the right pedal notes and fake his way (not too annoyingly) through a picture; but not so Gaylord! Being a tireless perfectionist, with a solid technical background and musical sensitivity, he rapidly developed into one

of the candidates for the upper echelon. In a remarkably short time his name was up on the theatre marquees, along with the featured attractions and movie stars.

Among some of the West Coast theatres — to name only a few where Gaylord held forth — are the Paramount Theatres, both in Los Angeles and Seattle, the United Artists and Criterion in L. A. and Warner Brothers and the Egyptian in Hollywood.

When sound disrupted the pattern of things, he was swift to make the change over to radio and for many years was spotlighting in his own nightly organ programs over station KHJ.

Undoubtedly there are many who still recall the organ signature for the "Amos 'n' Andy" show, with its majestic opening run on full organ and then the plaintive wail of tibias and voxes, and wondered who the organist was. It was none other than Gaylord.

Also the advent of television was an easy "segue." For several seasons he was featured soloist for the Wurlitzer Electronic Organ, as well as being a "one-man-band" for the popular "Pinky Lee" show.

At the present writing, Gaylord, along with a group of other dedicated organists, is on an extensive tour of Europe, where he is visiting cathedrals, concert halls and theatres. When he returns, we hope to give you an interesting account of his European organ trek.

## Northern California Chapter

Activity of the Northern California Chapter of the A.T.O.E. can best be described as enthusiastic group-participation. Following the organization meeting of February 7, 1957, the first meeting and concert was held at Urban Brait's "615 Club" in Benicia on February 25th, with Dave Quinlan featured at the late-model Style D.

On April 27, 1957, we met in the Fox-Oakland Theatre, where the beautiful 3m-14r Wurlitzer was demonstrated by theatre and radio organist, Floyd Wright.

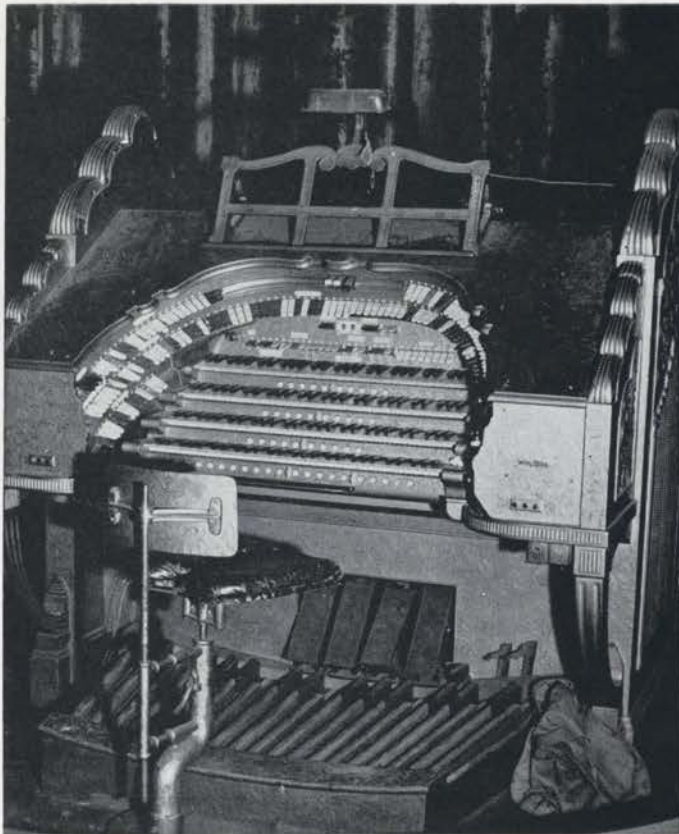
Meeting number three was an outstanding success with Gaylord Carter, of Amos and Andy fame, (also, see preceding report) as the guest artist. The meeting, held at the Paramount Theatre, Oakland on June 22, 1957, was called for nine in the morning, with members and guests being invited to take turns warming up the Wurlitzer 4m-20r Publix No 1. This instrument has been damaged by rain on three separate occasions, but due to the tenacity and skill of Tiny James, Judd Walton, and Bob Jacobus, it is now in excellent condition.

Thanks must be given at this time to Dick Stenger, who with Tiny James, stayed up all night preceding the concert, going over the organ with minute care. Following the "jam-session," announcements were made by President Bud Abel, who then introduced our guest artists, Gaylord Carter. Mr. Carter entertained us for two hours, playing all the way from Bach to Boogie, with a running commentary which held the attention of all present. This man is a truly great technician. This concert was surely one of the highlights of this, our first year.

Our fourth meeting was held in San Francisco on Saturday, August 10th at the plush cocktail lounge, known as "The Lost Week-End," with Larry Vanucci, the regular



W. "Tiny" James



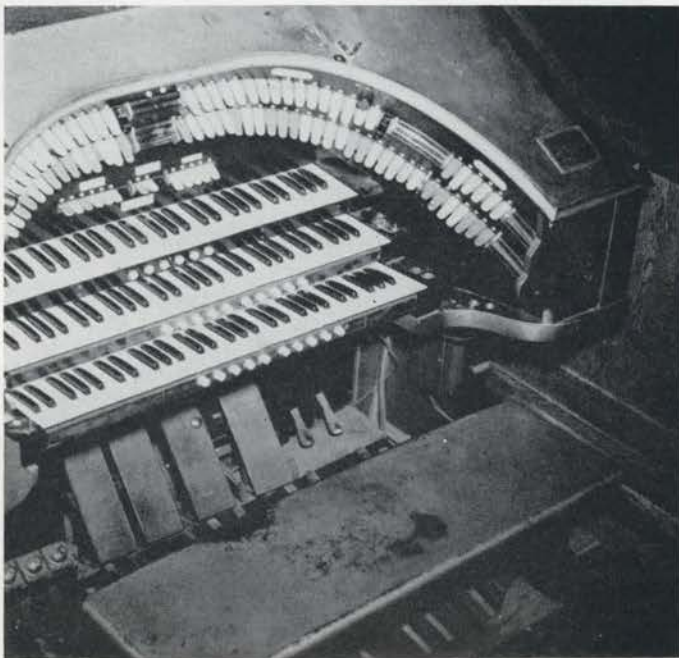
Above, Dave Schutt at Console. Left 4m-20r  
Publix No. 1 at Paramount Theatre, Oakland.

organist, as the star performer. This club boasts a 2m-10r Wurlitzer (216 Special), which has been removed recently from the Senator Theatre in Oakland. In excess of fifty members and guests were invited to play the Mighty Wurlitzer before Mr. Vanucci began his concert. Among those I noticed at the console, were Robert Vaughn, Dave Schutt, Wilfred "Woody" Woodward, and Fred Clapp.

Larry Vanucci gave a creditable performance, after which we were invited to inspect the chambers. We are deeply indebted to Mr. George Barnes, owner, for permitting the Chapter to use both the organ and the Club.

On September 1, 1957, a meeting was held at Joe Chadbourne's famous Studio Barn near Fairfield, California. This is the home of the celebrated 2-manual Mighty Wurlitzer known affectionately as "Myrtle." (THE TIBIA, Vol. II No. 2). She boasts a Musette, French Horn, and English Horn, in addition to the standard 6-set 2-manual Wurlitzer. Our object at this time was to introduce Dr. Mel Doner, then Editor of The Tibia, and his most charming wife to our Northern California members and their friends. Mr. Chadbourne is very generous with Myrtle, and since there was no guest artist, and no

*(Continued on page 17)*



Above, Larry Vanucci in Chamber. Left, the console of Grand Lake 235, Oakland.

## NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER

(continued from page 7)

Wurlitzer with piano. Members who so desired were allowed to tape the proceedings. Among those who played this organ were Fred Clapp, maintenance engineer at the Grand Lake Theatre, Dave Schutt of Oakland (a recent owner of a 3-manual Robert Morton), Dave Quinlan from the "615 Club" in Benicia, Bob Vaughn of San Francisco, Don Anderson, now appearing at the Orpheum Theatre, Larry Vanucci from "The Lost Week-End," and many others.

Special credit must be given to Fred Clapp and Dave Schutt for getting this organ in good condition for this event. Also, our thanks to Jack Lucy, manager of the Fox Grand Lake Theatre, for his wholehearted cooperation. We've had outstanding co-operation from Fox-West Coast Theatres, from Division Manager to Theatre Manager to stagehands. All have gone out of their way to be of assistance in these meetings.

We are now eagerly awaiting our January meeting to be held at the Fox El Capitan Theatre in San Francisco. We anticipate an opportunity to try our individual arrangements on this late model 235 Wurlitzer.

—W. "Tiny" James



Larry Vanucci at Console

## THE RELAY

(continued from page 17)

and dramatic effect he can cull from limited resources, and with our smaller organs over here this came to be regarded as an important qualification for any organist aspiring to reach the top.

I could go rambling on, but I must resist the temptation to do so. May I close by wishing you every success in the future, both for the A.T.O.E. and for THE TIBIA. Keep up the good work!

DONALD S. INKSTER  
11, Rosebery Avenue,  
New Malden,  
Surrey,  
England

### Liberty Theatre, Seattle Washington

TO THE EDITOR:

As head of the Organ Department at Pacific Lutheran, and an enthusiastic owner of an 18-set home pipe-organ (and still growing), I was most interested when the owners of the Liberty Theatre in Seattle offered us the marvelous Hope-Jones organ. It is a long story, and perhaps might be of interest to your readers. Briefly, however, the highlights of the story are that about a dozen of my organ students and I removed the organ intact and complete from the theatre, which has since been torn down, and stored it at the college warehouse for a year. This was last year when I had to be in New York for a doctor of music degree. Now we are in the process of installing it in our field house on campus, which is an absolutely ideal situation, even better than the original theatre setup. We have almost completely restored it, including the re-leathering of literally thousands of pneumatics. We are going to restore the organ in mint condition, and even the 32 ft. diaphone is in place. We expect our campus to become a mecca for theatre organ enthusiasts, and perhaps the day will come when we do some fine high-fidelity recording on this historic instrument, which must have

been one of the last of the original Hope-Jones. All the experts tell me that this organ was the gem of them all, even though it only ran to about 27 sets, and as we get it playing, rank by rank, we are in the process of discovering how true this is.

(Mr. Fritts promises a complete story of this famous organ for THE TIBIA. Ed.)

R. BYARD FRITTS,  
Pacific Lutheran College,  
Parkland, Washington

### Anglicised Wurlitzers, Tremulants, and Hope-Jones

TO THE EDITOR:

Vol. 1, No. 4 of THE TIBIA reached me only a few days before I left Bombay for England and whilst the very provocative article "Exploring England — and its Organs" by J. J. Critser and G. Edgar Gress invited — in fact, demanded — a reply my imminent departure prevented me from producing one. Maybe this was all to the good as when I arrived in England a month later Vol. 2, No. 1 awaited me containing an article by no less an authority than Quentin Maclean which effectively disposes of the "Anglicised Wurlitzer" myth.

I also, was told by Harold Ramsay that the Trocadero Wurlitzer was known in the States as "Publix No. 1" but subsequent correspondence with the late Major Wright of Wurlitzer revealed a different story. Unfortunately, I cannot give chapter and verse at the moment as this information is somewhere in 22 packing cases en route to Nigeria (my next assignment) from Bombay. However, these will eventually reach me and I will write again on this point.

In 1937/8 Bernstein (now Granada) Theatres installed six non-stock Wurlitzers, all with the same specification, in Granadas at North Cheam, Surrey; Clapham Junction, London, S.W.; Greenford, Middlesex; Harrow, Middlesex; Welling, Kent, and Slough, Bucks. These have the following eight units: Diaphonic diapason,