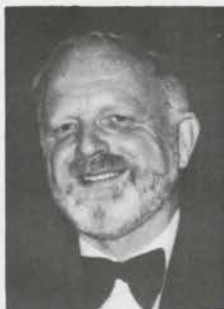


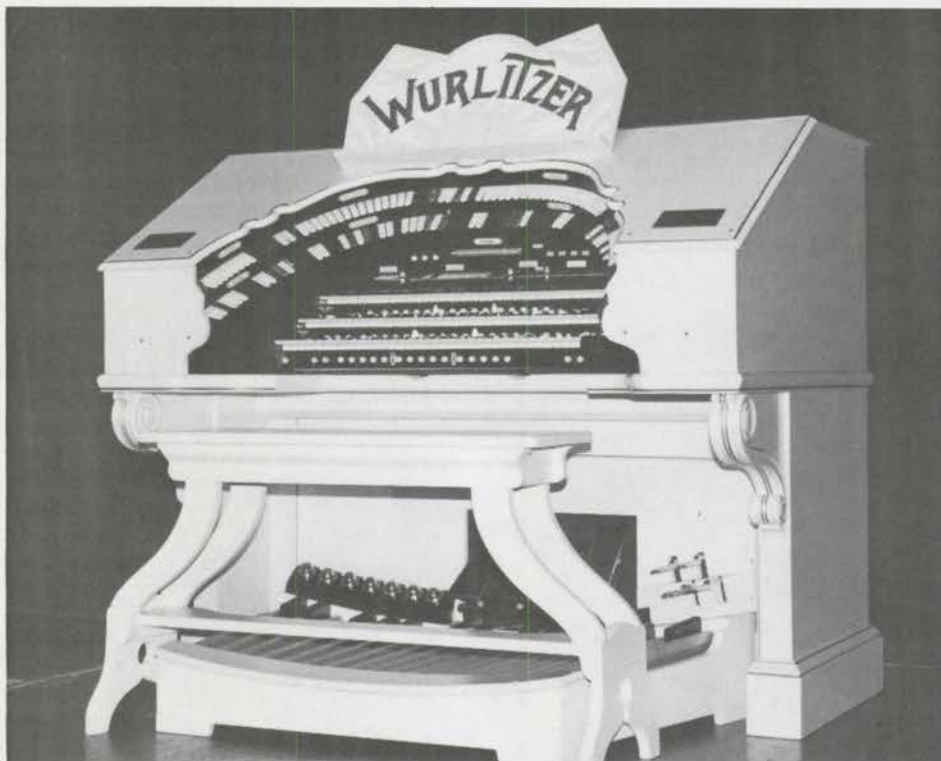
THEATRE ORGAN NEWS FROM AUSTRALIA

by Bruce Ardley

"Pipedreams" was the title given to the official opening of the Wurlitzer pipe organ at the Orion Centre, Camsville, Sydney, on October 1, an exciting event attended by the Mayor and dignitaries of the Municipal Council. The Centre building is owned by the Council and was the Orion Cinema, an Art Deco house of the early 1930s.



Art Deco Exterior of the Orion Theatre.



Orion Centre Wurlitzer console at stage level.

The Wurlitzer, a Style 260 of 15 ranks and three manuals, was dispatched to Australia on December 15, 1927, bearing the Opus 1813. The destination was Union Theatres' Capitol Sydney, a new big, atmospheric-style house. At the grand opening was Ted Hendel and the Orchestra and American Fred Scholl presiding at the Organ. Fred presented music ranging from *Rigoletto* to the "Indian Love Call."

The Wurlitzer was then the largest theatre organ installed in Sydney — the only other of comparable size in Australia was the earlier 3/15 Wurlitzer in the Capital Theatre Melbourne. The organ served as part of the Theatre's daily presentations until the 1950s when television disastrously affected attendances and it was given the "chop." After that it was used publicly on the odd special occasion; otherwise, it sat silently in the pit. In the early 1960s the recently formed Theatre Organ Society of New South Wales commenced to maintain it.

In 1972 the Sydney City Council, owners of the Capitol Theatre Building, offered to sell the Wurlitzer to T.O.S.A. T.O.S.A. purchased the instrument but had no home in which to install it. During 1983 it was learned that the Canterbury Municipal Council, owners of the Orion Centre, planned to fully refurbish this old Cinema as a Community Centre. Negotiations were successfully completed with the Council and arrangements were made to build two understage chambers for the pipework. It was decided to add two ranks — an English Horn and a String Celeste — bringing the total number of ranks to seventeen.

Rather than try to restore the original relay, a Devtronix system was installed. This has provided increased facilities for the artists.

The installation proceeded at a steady rate, and restoration of the parts was done to the highest of standards. The opening date was scheduled and, as the days flew by, it was realised that professional assistance was needed to have the instrument ready in time. John Parker, a New Zealand organbuilder, was engaged to work full-time to bring the organ to concert standards. Despite the concentrated effort, it was "touch and go" whether the deadline would be met. The official opening date had by now been well publicised and there was no possibility of change. A few weeks prior to the opening, several members of the T.O.S.A., under John Parker's direction, worked around the clock to ensure that the organ was ready.

The great day arrived and for the Saturday night opening, who more appropriate to present the Wurlitzer to the

public again than Co-Patron of T.O.S.A. New South Wales, Ian Davies. Ian, by now a veteran of the Australian theatre organ scene, had played the closing concert on this instrument when it was at the Capital. Ian commenced his musical career prior to the second world war and until the mid 1950s had held a number of residencies at Melbourne cinemas — particularly the Hoyts chain. Ian brought up the impressive white and gold console on the lift which is located in front of centre stage. The enthusiastic, capacity audience responded well to Ian's breezy and melodic opening selections. Melbourne organists Tony Fenelon and John Atwell then commenced the rest of the event consisting of solos and duets with a large Kawai Grand Piano on stage to use with the organ.

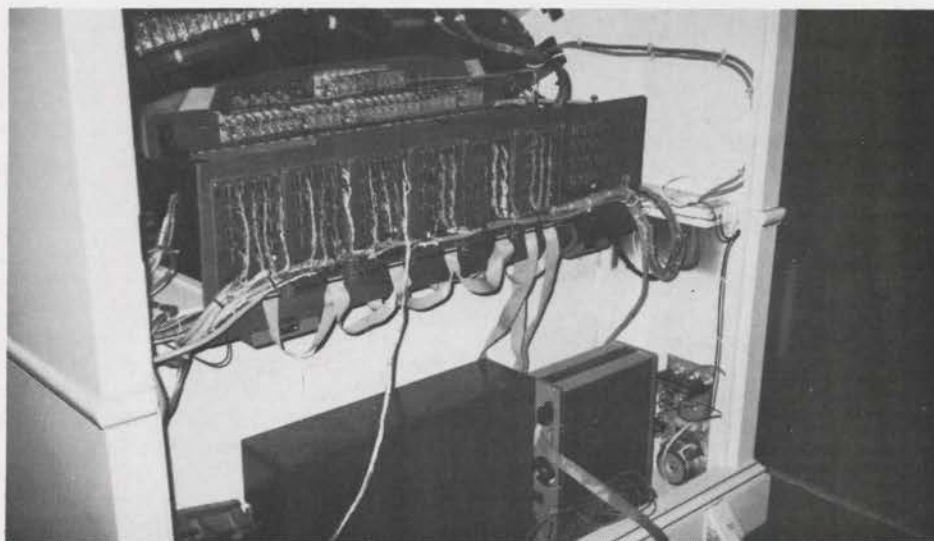
Because of the interest in the event it was decided at concert-planning stage to carry the event onto the following day and present two more leading artists on the Sunday afternoon. Another feast was at hand, this time with young Sydney organist Margaret Hall and Neil Jensen, resident organist of the Orpheum Picture Palace, Cremorne Sydney.

Altogether it was a wonderful weekend of music presented by the five organists. The Orion Centre is a great new venue for the lovers of theatre organ and, as the Mayor of Canterbury said in the opening speech, "The Wurlitzer is the Orions Jewel in the Crown." This was, indeed, true.

November and we in Australia again had the pleasure of a national tour by Dennis James and singer Thom Gall. Dennis can always be relied upon to provide us with something different musically. We were not disappointed. I attended the Melbourne concert which took place at the Moorabbin Town Hall with its 4/21 Wurlitzer. Both artists were in top form and, judging from the applause, the audience loved the performance. Reports received from the other States where they performed indicated the same enthusiastic audience response. Dennis had the honour of being the first overseas organist to be featured at the Orion Centre Wurlitzer. He praised this organ. We look forward to the next visit of these two gentlemen.

In Perth, Western Australia, organ-builder John Parker will be spending time bringing their 3/10 Compton to top concert form. This is the venue of the 1989 T.O.S.A. National convention. The privately owned ex-Metro Theatre Perth Wurlitzer is also being used and a few interesting additions are being made to this instrument.

Presently the only major organ renovation here is occurring in Melbourne. This is the three-manual Compton of presently 10 ranks which is planned to be finished as a 13-rank instrument. My next contribution will feature news of the National Convention.



A state-of-the-art console interior — the Orion Centre organ.

Letters To The Editor *continued from page 7.*

Dear Editor:

My hat's off to Dan Story for his letter which appeared in the July/August issue of THEATRE ORGAN.

I agree wholeheartedly with Dan that jam sessions should be a time for EVERYONE to play — especially THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER PLAYED THAT PARTICULAR ORGAN. Good or bad, it can be a very moving experience for someone to sit at the console of a good pipe organ. Many people have only played on small electronics. Those people will develop greater appreciation for both the instruments and the artists after playing a real pipe organ. Enthusiastic members are members who stay in ATOS and help get new members!

At the Los Angeles convention, I ran the jam session. About 35 people played the Orpheum organ in a three-hour time period. There were no professionals. Everyone had a good time; there was a lot of good talent and a lot of new talent.

It seems the ATOS board is always asking for ways to increase membership and develop new talent. How do you ever expect to find new talent if new talent never gets to be heard?

Here are some suggestions for the ATOS — from the local chapters all the way up to the national convention.

1. Let people play the organs. Too often organs are locked up except for concerts. "It's our baby. Someone might break it." I say BULL! More organs have probably rotted away from lack of use than have ever worn out from being played. Not to mention the all too common "dead note" (a result of contacts corroding where as regular playing would keep them wiped clean.)

2. Have real jam sessions so you can find new talent and keep the interest of the members. So someone is a bad organist. At a jam session, they will only be bad for one song, then someone else will play. Who knows, they might become good. Plus, playing a real pipe organ be-

fore an audience might just be the inspiration that person needs.

3. There is a "Young Organist Concert" at the national convention. What about the old people? At a convention, have a few jam sessions that pick the 5 to 10 of the "best of the unknown artists" for a special "Amateur Night". Why should young organists be the only unknown talent to get recognition?

4. Play the organs at every available opportunity. If the organ is in a theatre, why not let the best of the local talent do intermission music? If more people hear the organs, more people might join ATOS. 99% of the population doesn't know the difference between a theatre organ and a shopping mall-so-called thing being sold as an organ. It's no wonder the word ORGAN makes so many people want to throw up — they never heard a real one!

5. CAMEO Sessions are still fine — just don't misrepresent them as JAM sessions.

I must complain about one more aspect of the conventions which has disappointed me at every convention (no, I'm not going to mention that there are too many classical concerts, even though there are). Why is there no display area for all of the different organ parts suppliers? All we ever see is Allen and Devtronix. A convention should be a place for EVERYONE to display their wares, pass out catalogs and (\$\$\$ yes \$\$\$) take orders! All other types of conventions have dealer show rooms. With organ parts often difficult to locate, a show room must be considered essential towards keeping the organ business going. And maybe, just maybe, more organs would be better maintained if people knew where to get the right parts and could discuss their problems with the vendors.

Hoping for a better ATOS,
Patrick Lajko
Seattle, Washington