

The Adelaide Regent Wurlitzer

by Bruce Ardley



Knight Barnett, best loved of Regent Adelaide organists.

The new Regent Theatre, Adelaide, South Australia, opened its doors to the public on June 29, 1928. It was one of four great theatres to bear this name in the major capital cities of Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide. It was the dream of successful Australian showman Frank Thring to create this chain of luxurious cinemas for Hoyts Theatres Ltd. for whom he was a director.

A visit to the Regent Adelaide was an experience in itself — it was by far the grandest, most exquisite theatre in that city. The moment you stepped through the arched entrance the appeal of the building with its atmosphere of refinement and elegance made a marked impression. Centrepiece of the Grand Lobby was a majestic marble stairway resplendent beneath a lofty, domed ceiling. Concealed lighting sent a radiant glow over the statuary and vases and illuminated

original frescoes positioned at either end of the foyer. A huge, marble eagle at the top of the stairs kept a silent watch over the incoming patrons. Gilded and elaborate Louis Quinze furniture gave the opulent touch to the foyers. As one entered the auditorium the first view was of lofty, latticed windows in the Spanish Moroccan style that decorated the side walls. The proscenium was a focal point with interesting shell patterns and above it the intricate grillework from which emanated the distinctly rich sounds of the Wurlitzer organ.

For the June 29 opening programme was MGM's *Flesh And The Devil* with Greta Garbo and John Gilbert. Famous Australian conductor Will Cade directed the musical offerings with the Regent Symphony Orchestra. The only thing missing on this special occasion was the organ, which did not arrive until some

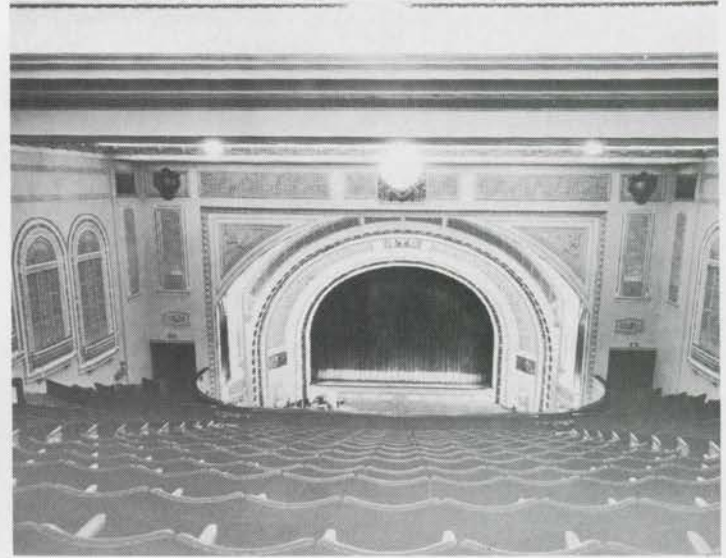
months later — and in a blaze of glory.

Opus 1895, a Model 260 Wurlitzer Special was unloaded at the docks onto six waiting trucks and carried in grand procession for six miles to the organ-builders. The crates holding the instrument bore the inscription: "The £25,000 Mighty Wurlitzer for the Regent Theatre." The console was soon placed on show in the theatre's foyer and created enormous interest. The organ was completely installed in eight days, and on September 22, 1928, a full house of 2300 heard the Mighty Wurlitzer at a matinee. American organist Ray deClemens, known as the Czar of Rhythm, presided at the console. The organ became an integral part of the Regent's daily presentations until 1967.

The 3/13 Wurlitzer was situated in two chambers high up behind the proscenium. The upright piano, originally placed in front of the stage, was moved into its own



Lobby area of Regent. Fresh flowers daily maintained until closure.



Regent auditorium in the 1960s.

small chamber at a later stage. No hoist was ever used for this organ. One had been dispatched, but was missing when the crates were opened (Apparently, during transit, some person from the USA though he had a better use for the hoist). It was a very happy marriage — the Regent auditorium and this Wurlitzer. There were no drapes to impede the sound and it poured forth — full and rich. It was one of my favorite instruments, and I can only describe the sound as gorgeous.

Other American organists to feature at the Regent before WWII were Stanley Wallace, Eddie Fitch, Wallace Kotter and Eddie Horton. Many great Australian organists appeared, also — Frank Roberts, Charles Tuckwell, Aubrey Whelan, Penn Hughes, Owen Holland and Stanfield Holiday. During wartime, until 1948, Irene Laphorne, Geoff Robertson and Tom King played. In 1949 a new era commenced when popular Sydney organist Knight Barnett took over the reins of this beautiful Wurlitzer for an engagement that was to last 18 years. Knight came with a wealth of experience in Sydney and suburban houses and in leading New Zealand theatres. He was a fine musician and knew what his audiences enjoyed. He teamed with radio announcer and singer Alec Regan and presented a half hourly weekly programme over the ABC network called Melody-Land. More than 1300 episodes were broadcast. Knight Barnett and the Regent Wurlitzer were household names.

Sadly, all good things come to an end, and a notice was placed — Au Revoir, Regent Theatre — on a night in 1967, to a packed house, the lights dimmed for the last time. This beautiful place was subsequently turned into a shopping area in the former stalls and a small cinema fitted into the circle area.



Wurlitzer Organ Selections
 Played by CHARLES TUCKWELL.
 (Week commencing 10/3/34.)

- 1—"Sons of the Brave" (Bidgood)
- 2—"Valse de Fleurs" (Tschakowsky)
- 3 (a)—"Morris Dance" (Edward German)
- (b)—"Torch Dance" (Edward German)
- 4—"I'll Sing the Songs of Araby" (F. Clay)
- 5—"Drifting Down the Shalimar" (Slow Post-trot)
 (From the picture, "My Weakness," which commences at the
 Regent Saturday next)

AT INTERVAL.

- 1—"Hold Me" (Little)
 (By request)
- 2—"Lonesome Little Doll" (Routejc)
- 3—"Parley-Moi' D'Amour" (Speak to Me of Love)

The Regent

Direction:
 General Theatres Corp
 of Australasia Ltd.
 Managing Directors:
 C. E. Munro,
 H. Stuart Doyle,
 Resident
 General Manager (S.A.):
 S. Makeham.
 Theatre Manager:
 A. Hogan.

FOR
 RESERVATIONS:
 TELEPHONE
 CENTRAL 8899.

Three De Luxe Sessions
 Daily—Commencing
 11 a.m., 2 p.m., 8 p.m.

1. FOX INTERNATIONAL NEWS
2. "TALE OF A SHIRT"
 —Terrytoon Cartoon
3. SCENES from "My Weakness" and
 "Big Executive" (com. next Sat.)
4. "FOLLOWING THE HORSES"
 —A Camera Thrill
5. The Regent takes pleasure
 in presenting—
 "THE GIRL IN 419"
 (A Paramount Picture)

THE CAST:
 Dr. Daniel French James Dunn
 Mary Dolan Gloria Stuart
 Dr. Martin Nichols David Manners
 Peter Lawton William Harrigan
 Nurse Irene Blaine Shirley Grey
 Slug Johnny Hines
 Sammy Jack LaRue
 Otto Hoffer Vince Barnett

The gong in the
 Main Foyer will
 sound three min-
 utes before the
 second half of
 the programme
 commences.

6. FOX AUSTRALIAN NEWS
7. The Regent has the honor
 to present—
 "AS HUSBANDS GO"
 (Fox Films Romantic Comedy)

THE CAST:

Charles Lingard	Warner Baxter
Lucile Lingard	Helen Vinson
Hippolitus Lomi	Warner Oland
Emmie Sykes	Catherine Doucet
Ronald Derbyshire	G. P. Huntley, Jr.
Jake Canon	Frank O'Connor
Peggy Sykes	Eleanor Lynn
Wilbur	Jay Ward

INTERVAL



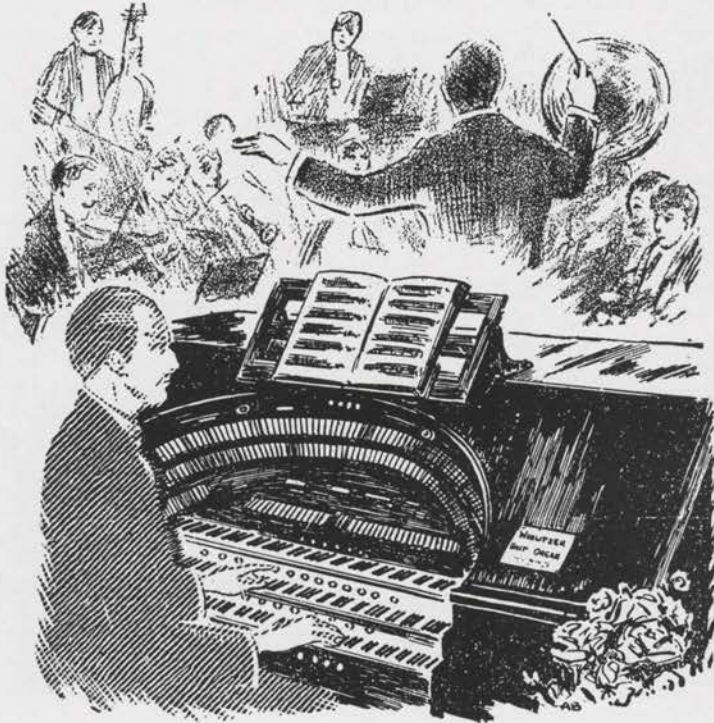
Wurlitzer Organ Session
 5KA—SUNDAY, 18th MARCH, 8.45 to 9.15 p.m.
 CHARLES TUCKWELL at the Wurlitzer,
 assisted by GEORGE BROCKBANK, the "Regent" Tenor

- 1—Organ: "Robbers' March" (from "Chu Chin Chow")
- 2—Vocal: "Where'er you Walk" (Handel)
 (By request)
- 3—Organ: "Legende" (Wienia-ki)
- 4—Vocal: "The Last Round Up"
- 5—Organ: "Stepping on the Ivories" (Novelty)
 (By request)
- 6—Vocal: "The Shadow Waltz" (H. Warren)
- 7—Organ: Selection from Gilbert and Sullivan Operas

The Regent

IN RUNDLE STREET.
 DIRECTION HOYTS THEATRES, LTD.
 MANAGING DIRECTORS G. F. GRIFFITH and F. W. THRING.

THE MUSIC OF A SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA!



OPENING TO-DAY AT THE MATINEE
OUR MIGHTY WURLITZER ORGAN!

UNQUESTIONABLY THE FINEST INSTRUMENT YET IMPORTED TO AUSTRALIA.

AT THE CONSOLE,
DE CLEMENS,
 CZAR OF RHYTHM.

The Wurlitzer now completes our units of Presentation, making the Regent the Most Modern Theatre in the Commonwealth.

Pictorial Programme includes—

<p>Musical Presentation "EASTERN NIGHTS," with the REGENT BALLET and PRESENTATION ORCHESTRA. Also, "A Lancashire Garden of Girls," a Kenneth Duffield Number.</p>	<p>During Love 'neath the Palms of Araby William Fox presents Tazil! with CHARLES FARRISCH and GRETA NISSCH</p>	<p>"CIRCUS ROOKIES," with DANE and ARTHUR! IS IT A LAUGH? Our reviewer who saw it hasn't a button left.</p>
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The Wurlitzer, however, was saved and installed in Memorial Hall, St. Peters College. Several years ago the hall was destroyed by fire, but the Wurlitzer miraculously survived. The console received some scorching but the pipe chambers were unscathed. Whilst the hall was in ruins, however, the chambers were broken into and a quantity of pipes and percussions were stolen. The hall has now been rebuilt and new openings made alongside the proscenium allowing the sound to escape into the auditorium, an improvement as the sound chutes had previously faced only on the stage areas. Top Australian organ craftsman George Stephens, whose headquarters are in Adelaide, has been in charge of the re-installation. The console is moveable and for concert presentation sits on the orchestra lift which brings it to stage level providing excellent sight lines. Somehow, the organ has retained much of the old Regency sound so loved by its many fans.



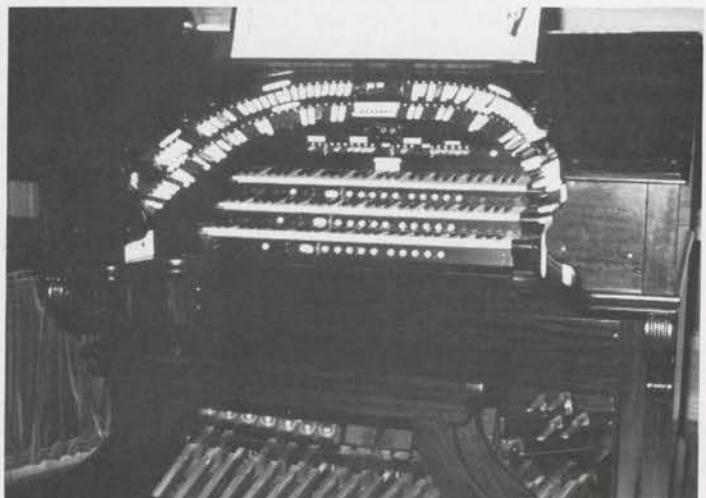
Frank Roberts at the Wurlitzer Organ.
 Regent Theatre Adelaide
 Photographed through S.K.A.

Photo by M. ...

Frank Roberts, first American organist to be featured at Adelaide Regent, 1931.



The re-built Memorial Hall with console on the orchestra lift.



3/15 former Regent Adelaide in Memorial Hall, St. Peters College.

(The author would like to thank John Thiele of Adelaide for providing information and pictures of the Adelaide Regent and its organists.)