



*A last look at the Koons Cycle Shop . . .*

# The Joe Koons Motorcycle Shop Wurlitzer/Welte

*by Ralph Beaudry  
Photos by Zimfoto*

On May 14 this year the world famous 3/34 Joe Koons Wurlitzer/Welte played its last concert on Anaheim Street in Long Beach, California. Veteran theatre organist Lloyd del Castillo, 96 years young and still going strong, was at the console and his more than two-hour performance thrilled the 300 people who packed the shop for their last chance to hear the mighty instrument in its first home!

Although Joe Koons was born in Ohio, his family moved to a ranch near Santa Ana when he was but six-months old. As he grew up, Joe became fascinated with motorcycles and in 1931 opened his first shop in the family barn! Ida Mae, who everyone knows as "Spud," came into his life and, sharing his enthusiasm for the two-wheelers, they were married in 1942. Of course, they spent their honeymoon on a motorcycle trip!

In 1944 Joe moved his business to Long Beach and five years later found the ideal location at 1350 E. Anaheim where for the past 40 years motorcycles were sold and serviced.

Joe's fascination with organs took hold in 1956 when he bought a tiny Ham-

mond spinet. Within three months that had been traded in for a full-size Hammond. It wasn't long before Joe added chimes, a rhythm unit and even a rank of pipes to the electronic!

By then he was well hooked, so, to celebrate his 25th wedding anniversary in 1967, he went out and bought a complete pipe organ to install, not in his home, but in the motorcycle shop. It was the ten-rank Welte which had played in the lounge of Santa Monica's Del Mar Club.

Chamber construction began; more organ parts were bought; the console was enlarged, and in September 1969, "Gaylord Carter played and like the organ VERY MUCH!" (Joe wrote in his log book).

The official opening concert took place on December 13, 1969 — 200 attended to hear nine organists play! You might say this started the Saturday night jam sessions; however, at first they were very informal. People just dropped in after the shop closed for the weekend and stayed to play and listen — often until two o'clock Sunday morning!

Throughout 1970 ranks were added until the organ totaled 18, and a new console was needed. Joe found what he wanted — a three-manual style 260 Wurlitzer console from the Elmwood Theatre in Buffalo, New York. It was installed (along with a Wurlitzer piano) in 1971. In 1972 Joe had to build a third chamber to house the additional ranks he wanted — eventually the organ totaled 34.

In the first ten years Joe had become a collector of organs — almost every make of organ passed through his hands, and he kept the ranks and parts he liked and sold the rest.

Five recordings were made on the organ during the 70s. John Scot made an album of light classics, then Don Thompson recorded his "Date With Don." Gene Roberson "Rides the Mighty Wurlitzer," del Castillo's "Salute to America" and Ramona Gerhard's "Request Time" followed. Ramon's jacket notes best describe the atmosphere of the Saturday night jam sessions: "Presiding over the session is host Joe Koons, sitting in his armchair directly in front of the console, surrounded by friends and



"Spud" Koons



Chapter President Donn Linton presents videos of past concerts at Koons Cycle Shop to "Spud" Koons.

fans and a dozen motorcycles strewn around on the benches in various states of repair. The sounds are magnificent and the ambience is love — love for the noblest of instruments, the theatre pipe organ."

One of the record reviews published in THEATRE ORGAN proclaimed "Joe KOONS has assembled a well-balanced instrument from a heterogenous collection of parts and pipework." Joe suffered his first stroke in 1972, but was able to continue to improve his organ and enjoy its music until his death on January 28, 1978.

What would happen? Those who knew "Spud" best didn't doubt for a minute. Of course she would continue the wonderful Saturday night jam sessions and, for the past few years, she had a Sunday concert series, too! For the eleven years

after Joe's death thousands continued their trek to Long Beach to enjoy the Koons organ — until this year when "Spud" regretfully had to make the decision to close the motorcycle shop and try to find a new home for the beloved organ.

The property sold immediately (another mini-mall will replace the familiar shop building), and a new home for the organ has been found nearby in the former Long Beach Masonic Lodge (which is now operated privately under the name Pacific Coast Club). The Club has an auditorium large enough to install the organ and to seat several hundred people. Volunteer helpers removed the organ and have transported it to its new home.

On July 22 the Los Angeles Theatre Organ Society hosted a "Tribute to Spud Koons" at the Malin and Lenore Dollinger home in Palos Verdes Estates.



Organist Lloyd del Castillo and Mrs. L. Munson, chairperson of the farewell concert at Koons Motorcycle Shop.

### *Final concert at Koons Cycle Shop - Long Beach, California.*





Above: Shirley Obert (left) and Jason Pfeiffer; at right Tony Wilson. The three guest artists at Dollinger Wurlitzer honoring "Spud" Koons.

"Spud" was presented with a set of videotapes (made by LATOS member Bob Pasalich) of many of the concerts and jam sessions at the motorcycle shop over the last five years.

Over 150 of "Spud" and Joe's friends attended (many more wanted to be there but limited capacity had to restrict the crowd). Entertainment was provided by organists Tony Wilson, Jason Pfeiffer and Shirley Obert at the Dollinger's 4/37 Wurlitzer. In 1988 "Spud" was named an Honorary Lifetime Member of LATOS.



*The Koons organ is silent for now but we know that sometime in the future the 20-year tradition of jam sessions will resume . . . thanks to "Spud's" determination to continue bringing organ music and happiness to everyone who wants to enjoy the Joe Koons theatre organ!*

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