

A SMALL TRIBUTE TO A FALLEN GIANT

Entering the theatre through the side doors, tall, attractive, and always nattily dressed, he would stride by the marble columns, through gilded salons, promenades and crystal-chandeliered grand foyers and lobbies, reconnoitering the waiting thousands who were restlessly anticipating the oncoming presentation under the grandiose proscenium. There the Mighty Wurlitzer was waiting for him. Here, four or five times a day, seven days a week for fourteen years, he would play their music on the Times Square Paramount Theatre Wurlitzer. With its extremely high, barrel-vaulted ceiling and extremely tall and shallow organ chambers, the sounds of the organ playing in this 4000-seat theatre caused the late Ben Hall to remark: "Hearing the Wurlitzer in the Times Square Paramount is like playing a theatre organ in the Sistine Chapel." In Detroit, in 1982, THEATRE ORGAN'S Geoffrey Paterson wrote: "He says all he has to say in less than eight bars, and when he opens up an organ in his broad, lazy rhythm, there is simply no sound like it." At all of the Wurlitzers this man played after the demise of this great movie palace, he tried his best to make them sound like the Times Square Paramount. There will never be another theatre like that, or its West Coast facsimile, the unforgettable San Francisco Fox, but for those of you who heard them, the sounds of their Mighty Wurlitzers will live forever. Play on, Don Baker, forever . . .

John Mecklenburg

Nalle Is On CD Now



Billy Nalle

The Other Side

There have been so many highly complimentary letters written about David Junchen's *Encyclopedia of the American Theatre Organ, Volume I*, that we thought our readers might appreciate an opposing viewpoint. We have replicated the following from the original, without editing, to show that we believe in fair play:

A Letter From:

SUBLIME ORGAN BUILDERS

Our Motto:

*"At Sublime Organ Builders,
Every Tone is a Nice Tone"*

October 12, 1985

Mr. David Junchen
Showcase Publications
Post Office Box 40165
Pasadena, CA 91104

Dear Mr. Junchen,

Your "Encyclopedia of the American Theatre Organ, Volume I" arrived here, and after scrutinizing it closely, we find it terribly disappointing.

For one thing, some of your statistics are appallingly incorrect. Anyone vaguely familiar with pipe organ history knows that Bennett Op. 876 (Liberty Theatre, Davenport, IA) had a 36-note Solo Ukelele, with low C missing, which was very frustrating to organists accustomed to the 37-note model.

For another, your attempt at "humor" to cover up your careless, shoddy research is disgusting. For example, to poke fun at the Frazee ad department's slogan "Favorably Known for Frazee Tone" is terribly rude; many people obviously *did* buy organs from them or they would not have been the industry giant that they were. Equally in poor taste is your implication regarding the Marr & Colton symphonic registrar names reflecting the quality of their organs. We have a Marr and Colton organ, and every single pipe speaks!

Furthermore, we resent your including so many small theatre organ builders such as N. Doerr, E.C. Malarkey, and Hutchings, while overlooking larger organ builders like us; in the past 27 years we have removed organs from over 34 theatres, and have carefully preserved them in an unheated building on the coast of Maine.

Regretfully Yours,

Peter Flunk, Sole Prop.
Sublime Organ Builders

Two major recording firms are re-releasing albums of Billy Nalle's organ music on CDs. One is from the "Pipe Organ Spectacular" combination package from *Readers Digest Records*. Artists in this package have varied since the first such offering of theatre organ albums in 1969, but the Nalle album has been retained in each new release, continuing to draw strong response. It has, as of 1989, been released four times. It was recorded on the DTOS/Senate and Plattsburgh/Strand Theatre Wurlitzers.

The second release, in some ways more significant, is "Big, Bold & Billy," from Project 3 Records of New York. It was recorded by the legendary Bert Whyte in 1971. The organ was the Wurlitzer from the former Brooklyn Paramount Theatre, now Long Island University. The album was the first to be made in four-channel sound, issued also in LP, and was the all-time best seller in theatre organ recordings through 1975. When the Project 3's new owners reviewed the company product, they unanimously decided to re-release this album, which has not been available since 1977, in CD under the title "Spectacular Theatre Organ."

We talked to Billy in Wichita and he said, "Apparently, my vinyl children never know when to retire, but stay in the theatre wings waiting to be summoned by the master of ceremonies. What a *happy* problem!"

When asked about his own "retirement," Billy replied that it simply means no concert schedules, frequent traveling, demanding obligations or deadlines. He has now been able to reorganize his home (including his office), and can devote more time to writing articles and coaching several hard-working musicians on piano as well as organ. In 1987, Billy helped to found Wichita's first parish of the Anglican Catholic Church, St. Joseph of Glastonbury, and is one of their three layreaders. He seems to be delighted to have more time now for friends and activities, both social and musical. Billy sounded almost inordinately proud of having "shed enough Crisco from his Mason-Dixon Line" to weigh what he did during his New York years (150), and he said that he feels "mean, lean, and light on the hoof."

From his home, Maison Riviere, which sits beside one of two rivers in midtown Wichita, Billy says that he feels like he lives in the country because of the lush setting and the city's largest park just across the river. His automotive pal, a hatchback Honda named "Mr. Pip," enables him to be in three places simultaneously, and Billy says that he, himself, feels like Mr. Pip — well voiced and well regulated. We say that he sounds like a man contented in his pursuit of happiness.



Gaylord Carter, age 84, at 4/27 Oakland Paramount Wurlitzer. Dr. Ed Mullins photo

“Flicker Fingers” Celebrates 84th

Gaylord Carter returned to the Oakland, California, Paramount Theatre 4/27 Wurlitzer on July 15. A mal-functioning of the organ's power supply occurred at the onset of his program making the left Solo chamber shutters inoperable and only the Tibia tremulants working in the Main. Carter apologized for the problem and continued the show with his delightful accompaniment of a Harold Lloyd comedy.

The organ maintenance crew, under the direction of Roger Inkpen, had the Wurlitzer back in perfect working order after the intermission. Carter then cued Buster Keaton's *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, with its exciting storm and flood sequences, to its happy conclusion.

Five days later, July 20, Carter made his fourth appearance on the Pat Sajak Television Show. This time they had a three-manual electronic organ with real bells for Carter to cue Sajak's "Silent." Carter revealed to the television audience that he will celebrate his 84th birthday on August 3. Happy Birthday, "Flicker Fingers," with many more to come.

Ed Mullins

JOURNAL PROBLEMS?

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Rodgers Pipe Organs International

Pictured above is the Rodgers three-manual Oxford 925/eight-rank pipe organ installed at Shinil Presbyterian Church, Seoul, Korea, at a special Evangelistic Service for over 3,000 attendees who completely filled the church. There are now six Rodgers pipe organs installed in Korea in addition to the scores of smaller Rodgers electronic church instruments.

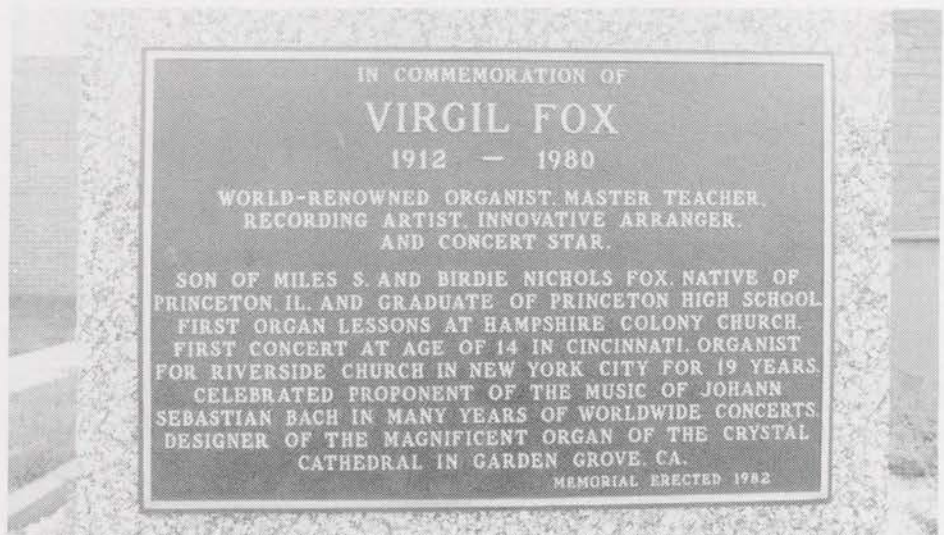
Rodgers is represented in Korea by Samick Musical Instruments Manufacturing Company, Ltd.

In addition to the Korea installations, Rodgers pipe instruments have been installed in Hong Kong, New Zealand, Australia, Italy, Norway, Japan, Spain, Scotland, England, Germany, and Holland. The export of pipe organs is a rapidly growing segment of Rodgers Instrument Corporation business and one that fits well with Rodgers' worldwide reputation for superior quality electronic church organs.

Look What I Found

In the early part of this summer, I had occasion to go to Princeton, Illinois, on business, and one of the stops I had to make was at City Hall. I parked in front, got out of my car and found myself facing this beautiful bronze plaque commemorating Virgil Fox. Not knowing much about Virgil Fox, I made an inquiry of one of our members, Selma Johnson, who found an old recording of Fox with some information on the cover. The fact that impressed me the most was that, since 1946, he had been the organist at Manhattan's Riverside Church which overlooks the Hudson River. The jacket notes stated that the "great Aeolian-Skinner Organ is considered one of the finest organs in the United States, not only for its size and almost inexhaustible resources, but for the sheer beauty of its sound." Mr. Fox frequently gave recitals there, and critics claim that this was the perfect combination of organ and organist.

Richard P. Withenbury



Virgil Fox Memorial Plaque outside of City Hall in Princeton, Illinois.

Richard Withenbury photo