

# Letters To The Editor

Dear Editor:

John Ledwon is right to face squarely the problems afflicting the Theatre Organ world right now (President's Message, July/August 1989). His words reflect a situation which has its exact parallel here in Britain.

In my view the reasons are fairly simple to define. First, there are far too many separate organ societies. Here in the UK in a land area much less than the US, we have three major societies, the Cinema Organ Society (COS), The Theatre Organ Club (TOC), and of course the ATOS. Each jealously preserves its separate identity and independence. There are also many much smaller societies all struggling along; each self-governing and seeking an audience. Surely, when resources are scarce, they should be gathered together and used for maximum effect. As it is, the resources are too fragmented for this to happen.

Second, while some of these societies have democratic constitutions, some have not, but the overall effect is the same. The societies are run year in, year out by the same people so that, with the best will in the world, they become very introspective.

I emphatically agree with John Ledwon that the theatre organ should be a part of the current ENTERTAINMENT scene. It will not however survive as long as it is perceived by outsiders as the exclusive plaything of a few elderly, slightly eccentric people intent on preserving a museum piece. For this reason, transplants into museums, dark old church halls and musty schools must be considered ill-conceived and entirely inappropriate. The theatre organ is such a marvelously versatile instrument that it deserves to be found in multipurpose places of entertainment where it can be used for singing, dancing and indeed wherever music is heard and played. But, as John Ledwon says, it has to be promoted, not just presented.

Until those who dominate and control the theatre organ scene realise this, and do something about it, I fear they will ultimately destroy the very thing they seek to preserve. Sadly, they do not have time on their side.

Yours faithfully,  
Donald M. Wood  
West Yorkshire, England

Dear Editor:

I read with interest Victor C. Searle's article on restoration of the Tokyo Mitsukoshi Department Store Wurlitzer. I was, however, taken back with the author's condescending statement implying that the owners consulting Casavant about a

restoration was somehow inappropriate. Quoting, "from Casavant (of all places!)"

I am an authorized Casavant field technician and I love and respect theatre organs. Also I am well qualified in the new solid-state systems having converted several organs. Having the qualifications to service prestigious tracker organs does not preclude one from being able to be a sensitive technician on a unit electric action instrument either pneumatic or direct electric. I am disappointed that Searle would assume that.

Also on the subject of the conversion of the Washington Cathedral Skinner to direct electric action. True, re-leathering is an expensive proposition, such that modern electropneumatic builders have greatly improved the simplicity and serviceability of their chests. Modern chemistry has been called upon to analyze and help formulate tanning techniques which should improve this serious liability. Let us not be fooled, however, into thinking that direct electric chests put an end to organ maintenance. One direct electric builder secures the bottom of the chest with thumb screws for quick access as leaky valve seats are anticipated.

We all would prefer that organ technicians would direct their energies into preserving the instruments we love without including rude insults in their articles.

Sincerely,  
Paul Jernigan, Jr.  
Houston, Texas

Dear Editor:

There are three ways in which all members of ATOS could participate in promoting the Theatre Organ and its music into the future:

1. Until about five years ago, most electronic organs were small imitations of the Theatre Organ. They could be played like organs and they suggested, if not imitated, the sound of an organ. This cannot be said of the newer instruments. These programmable, computerized "things" may be very fine instruments when played by a professional musician, but they are NOT organs. We should write to all the manufacturers and commend Allen, Baldwin and Rodgers for their fine theatre style organs and urge all the others to provide a moderately priced Theatre Organ for the home organist.

2. We should make an effort to promote the installation of electronic Theatre Organs into the auditoriums of most high schools. During the 1950s and 60s, when I had a studio in Reading, Pennsylvania, many of the high schools and some junior high schools had organs, and I was busy teaching student assembly organists from towns within a radius of thirty miles.

These same teenage organists took part in local talent contests and very often won prizes. Where there are no organs, there is no incentive to learn to play one.

3. Every member who can play the organ, even just a little, should visit music stores and inquire about their methods of teaching beginner organ students. There must be a few stores around the country who have real organists teaching organ, but I have not found many in this area. Many stores do not want organists. They have their sales people or guitar or sax players showing their customers how to "push the buttons" with no attempt to teach musical values.

And then look at the music they are using. Imagine "Sweet Georgia Brown" written in quarter notes with all the syncopation removed. Most songs are oversimplified in the key of C with no intros or endings. All diminished chords and other "obstacles" are removed. And nobody is learning to play in a musical manner.

This might be excusable for unmusical senior citizens who want to "have fun" on a \$30,000 instrument, but children are also being taught to operate the organ without playing it — one finger chords and no pedals. If we in ATOS don't find a way to do something about this — who will? And what will become of popular organ music?

Sincerely,  
Al Hermanns  
Clearwater, Florida

Dear Editor:

Cheers to Lyman Nellis for taking certain points of the most recent convention to task! He gave credit where it was due ... Ron Rhode. Ron not only saved "... an unbearable situation...", his all too brief "cameo" was for me an absolute highlight of the convention. Thanks be to Ron's "salvation" cameo.

My other verbiage is with regard to the excellent article on "Wurlitzer's Style 165-X ..." in the November/December 1989 THEATRE ORGAN. This was a superb piece on these little gems and has thankfully been recorded permanently.

There is one perhaps relatively minor error/oversight with regard to the information on the bottom of page 10. It correctly makes the assumption that the 165 Tibia and Flute extensions were not confined to the 165 alone. However, there is a problem in saying the Style F became the Style 190. This is not true. The 190 and the F had a few major different pipe specifications. Number one, the style F had a 16-8-4 Tuba unit. The 190 had only an 8' "Style D" (#2) Trumpet. The fact of

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the matter is the Style F went on to become the Style 200, not 190. Excepting the extended Tibia unification, the F and style 200 were stop-for-stop the same. All three, F, 190, and 200 were 2/8s, but of differing stop specifications. The only reason I make somewhat of an issue on this is my first Wurlitzer "love" was and is a 1928 style 200-special (special = preparation for a roll player that was never installed), opus 1887. True, the F and 200 may have lacked a buzzy color reed (or English Horn of the style 216), but they were a magnificent breed of Wurlitzer. Most Style 200s went to Great Britain.

With regard to the nineteen opus numbers for the 165/165-X, the following might be interesting for what it is worth:

Opus 1978, 165-X was factory equipped with an 8', 10" pressure English Horn IN PLACE of the "Style D #2 trumpet. This also applied to opus 1971 and 1982. When opus 1982 was moved to southern California, its English Horn was removed and replaced with a Wurlitzer Tuba, with the addition of a Dulciana. It was, I believe, installed by the late Lee Haggart.

Opus 1943 has been broken up for parts. The console, I do not know its whereabouts; the chests and some pipe-work added to a style 210 Special, with the relay, Diaphone, and some percussions a major part of the all Wurlitzer assembled style 216 copy installed by Sequoia Chapter in the Fox-Hanford Theatre, in central California.

Opus 1900 is still installed, though under different ownership, and has an added Orchestral Oboe and 8-4 Voix Celeste-Wurlitzer, on Wurlitzer chests. A separate Tibia Clausa tremulant was also added — Wurlitzer regulator and tremulant.

Opus 2926 was used for a "mid-west" regional circa 1970 or 1971. Where it is now, I have no idea.

Opus 1915 is most certainly a 165 but close inspection will show it does not have a Pedal 16' Bass/Diaphone. Opus 2068 *might* have also had this discrepancy but is difficult to really tell by the photo on 16. During the 1976 ATOS Safari I recall hearing another organ which I thought was a 165 in the area around Liverpool — some name like Dingle or some such. However, it was probably a single chamber, later opus style D — without the Pedal 16' Bass.

Congratulations on the foresight of George Baker to document what could someday become an extinct style of Wurlitzer organ — gobbled up in some giant 6/600 of every Wurlitzer rank built. Kudos particularly to Dave Junchen for driving home the point about saving what is left of the 165s — and his point regarding restoration. As a further matter

of point, opus 1900 WAS originally only equipped with two (count 'em!) tremulants: Main and Vox Humana. This opus literally came to life with the addition of a separate Wurlitzer regulator and tremulant for the Tibia Clausa. Original? Hell, no! Musically, vastly improved. There was absolutely no way the organ could satisfactorily have had a good "shake" under the original two-tremulant affair.

Another restoration case is my own diminutive 2/3 style 109C. After a concert on the thing, organist Larry Vannucci recalled similar organs in the Bay Area — all of them sounding worse than ghastly. He correctly suspected this opus 777 did not sound in the theatre like it does today. When it was reinstalled, there it was in all its ugly tonal state; Salicional Mirabilis, Vox Nannygoat, Flauto Mirabilis, and of course 18 notes of tuned door bells as Richard Villemin called them. Chimes replaced, the rest of the organ was carefully and fully tonally regulated. Even on a little 2/3, it was well worth it — offsets were removed from the ORIGINAL tremulated winding. Original? Of course not, "just" musical.

Sincerely,  
Tom L. DeLay  
Fresno, California

Dear Editor:

I was most interested to note from a letter in the September/October issue from George Worthington III that many of your theatre organs had been sold out of the country. I know of only one that has reached Great Britain, namely the Buddy Cole Wurlitzer/Morton organ. I should be pleased to hear of any others which have apparently had the same fate.

Over the years many British theatre organs have left these shores, having been sold to the highest bidder or, in some cases, to the only interested party. It is nice to know they are singing merrily away in places far afield as Canada, Holland, Switzerland, Germany and Australia. It is better they are installed as a whole unit than broken up for spares or for enlarging other installations.

Mr. Worthington says that these treasures are being "spirited out of the country by those who claim to love the theatre organ." In Great Britain, the majority of theatre organ enthusiasts loved the BBC Foort Moller organ, but where is it now? It is in the USA via Radio Hilversum, Holland. We didn't shed tears over this great loss — we were pleased to know this beautiful organ had found an excellent home and is being well cared for by our American cousins.

My best wishes to fellow ATOS members in the USA.

Sincerely,  
Allen Moyes  
Dorset, Great Britain

Dear Editor:

Having read the President's Message in July/August THEATRE ORGAN, I wish to suggest a new approach to promote the theatre organ. Mr. Ledwon suggested that some "shaking up" is in order, and I'm sure this will shake up more than a few people. We may be but one registration and a mere 16 bars away from having our favorite instrument heard nearly everywhere. Theatre organ can be, and SHOULD be introduced into the mainstream of pop music, but on pop music's terms, not the organ's. The history of theatre organ in recorded rock is the shortest on record (no pun intended). Although the classically voiced pipe organ has found its way into recordings of Yes, Emerson, Lake and Palmer, and Styx, to name a few, the only recollections of a theatre organ being recorded are in The Who's movie soundtrack of *Tommy*, a roller-rink style "Welcome to the Park," and on Lee Michaels' hit "Do You Know What I Mean" (and other songs from his album, "Fifth") both produced in the seventies.

Since much of today's pop music is laced with heavy synthesizer textures anyway, why not use theatre organ parts for that portion of the arrangement? There are some albums out, Santana's "Moonflower," for instance, in which the synthesists are heavily hinting at theatre organ registrations, maybe even without knowing it. A major hit of several years ago, Prince's "1999," was written around a keyboard theme perfect for a massive string-vox registration. Van Halen's "Jump" is based on a keyboard theme or "riff" that also could have been done on theatre pipes.

For mainstream pop acceptance, the organ will have to coexist with electric guitars, bass, drums, and pop vocalists. The theatre organ sound would then ride in on the coattails of sounds familiar to the modern ear. The style of performance would have to be more in the manner of today's keyboard styles. There is more than one way to play a guitar, piano, or trumpet, so there should be more than one way to play a theatre pipe organ. Theatre stylings, although more technically demanding, sound dated when brought head-to-head with today's music.

What of registrations? What pipe sound will capture the music listening public? If I knew, I would publish the registration notes right here and now, then go out on location and record this very day. One thing is sure, the *Phantom of the Opera*-type organ passages, or the old style theatre playing are going to have to be replaced by something more "hip." One sound, one passage, the right one with a musical "hook" could turn things around. If Buckwheat Zydeco could suc-

(continued on next page ...)

## LETTERS cont.

cessfully introduce the accordion into mainstream pop Rock and Blues (he did — four albums worth), there must be a place for theatre pipes.

Mr. Ledwon mentions media exposure and advertising. The right group with a theatre organ in a Rock Video could have more impact than all previous publicity. Massive horseshoe consoles with three, four, or five manuals and hundreds of stops have endless artistic possibilities for video.

Do these suggestions sound "off the beaten path?" I'm sure they do, but as I interpret Mr. Ledwon's message, the "beaten path" is not leading us to where we want to go.

Les Knoll  
Carol Stream, Illinois

Dear Editor:

In the Chapter Notes from Quad Cities (November/December) there are some important corrections to the items written about me: 1) I became a professional musician in 1949 not 1969; and 2) at Augustana College, I also studied piano with Gladys Southwick — studied organ with Dean Swanson, who was a former theatre organist.

Thank you for setting the record straight.

Sincerely,  
Charlotte McCoy  
Davenport, Iowa

*(Editor's note: We received several letters from members correcting information in the article by J. Marion Martin. Rather than print all of them, we have elected to mention the basic facts which are being challenged: 1) Jesse Crawford did not record on Blue Bird, but rather on Black Seal Victor; and 2) Crawford's appearance could not have been in 1933 as Hammond organs did not exist that year and the movie in the ad is for VOGUES of 1938).*

Dear Editor:

I have decided to emerge from the distant past to re-acquaint myself with the National. As a dedicated long-time member (probably 30 years plus), I continue to hold our group in very high esteem for their undying efforts in continuing the preservation of such a fine and cultural entertainment medium.

I just received my issue with my good friend, "Tiny," on the cover. He was truly an outstanding person with so much talent. He most certainly will be greatly missed.

Also in the most recent issue, in the ATOS *International NEWS*, on page 2, "School Dedicates Donated Link Organ," that great baby, opus 616, was mine originally — I dubbed it the "Missing Link." My efforts to remove it and haul it home (26 days worth) were awesome, to say the least. Months of restoring and refinishing the console in wedding-cake fashion and cleaning years of coal soot from the more than ten tons of components was a staggering challenge, and thinking back 30 years ago I wonder how I ever accomplished the chore! Must have been my youthful strength and abundant enthusiasm!

It's really no big deal, I suppose, but I just can't figure how a dumb little four-letter work can get so bungled. No harm done since no one remembers me, anyway, but the name Arey (not Airly) has been in the ATOS Archives one way or another for a good, long time and is even mentioned in the *Encyclopedia of the American Theatre Organ*. By the way, the specs of the 616 were submitted by me way back when, while I was in the midst of restoration!

My best wishes to all my fellow ATOSers for now and the future.

Sincerely,  
Duane D. Arey  
Painesville, Ohio

## NUGGETS cont. from page 18

### GOLD DUST . . .

7/27 R. WILSON ROSS, Rochester's Victoria ... 2/35 ARTHUR CHANDLER, Jr. WLW, Cincinnati; JOHNNY WINTERS, WOR, Newark; HARRY E. RODGERS, WAAB, Boston ... 5/35 GORDON JOHNSON, WBEN, Buffalo; FRED FEIBEL, WABC, New York; LLOYD DEL CASTILLO, WEEI, Boston; FRANCIS J. CRONIN, WORC, Worcester, Massachusetts; HAL BECKETT, WOR, Newark; "EDDIE DUNSTEDTER Entertains," CBS Network; EDDIE WEAVER, WICC, Hartford . . . 7/35 MAURICE B. NICHOLSON, WBEN, Buffalo; J. GORDON BALDWIN, Rochester's WHEC ... 9/35 WILLIAM MEEDER, WJZ, New York; JESSE CRAWFORD, NBC Network; RICHARD LEIBERT, WJZ, New York; CARL COLEMAN, WKBW, Buffalo ... 3/37 "Organ Moods" with ANN LEAF, CBS Network; LEN SALVO, Chicago's WGN; TOM GRIERSON, Rochester's WHAM.

That should do it for this time. So long, sourdoughs!

Jason & The Old Prospector



*With thanks to Mary Jane Secor of Indianapolis for the following as it appeared on the editorial page of the STAR on Wednesday, October 11, 1989:*

## His Songs Sang It All

IRVING BERLIN, for whom SAY IT WITH MUSIC was the theme of a lifetime, has joined the other American musical immortals. His probably was the most imposing presence in all of Tin Pan Alley.

It didn't matter in what situation you found yourself — there was a Berlin melody to fit the scene.

If you were ALL ALONE and it was SUPPERTIME, he would remind you, IT'S A LOVELY DAY TOMORROW.

We were told it was all right to be LAZY and to LET YOURSELF GO.

If there was a HEAT WAVE, why not think about the time when there would be a WHITE CHRISTMAS?

In the spring, always there was time for the EASTER PARADE. If you had insomnia, you were to COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS. Should it shower, he remarked, ISN'T IT A LOVELY DAY TO BE CAUGHT IN THE RAIN? Don't worry. There's always A FELLA WITH AN UMBRELLA.

When you kept telling yourself, SAY IT ISN'T SO, it was time for SOFT LIGHTS AND SWEET MUSIC.

THE BEST THING FOR YOU, I learned long ago was music by Irving Berlin.

GOD BLESS AMERICA for nurturing this marvelous talent. After all, THERE'S NO BUSINESS LIKE SHOW BUSINESS. Will the world REMEMBER Irving Berlin? ALWAYS.

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