

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor:

"The Quintessence of the Smaller Theatre Organ."

I very much enjoyed George Baker's article on the Wurlitzer Style 165 and 165X organs (November/December issue). I regret that I did not have the opportunity to hear any of the half-dozen or so installed in British theatres, but organists Harry Farmer and Hubert Selby described the 165X Special at the Regent Ipswich as a most effective instrument. By the time I got to see a film there in the early 1950s, it was covered in dust!

I hate to be critical, but there are two mistakes in the list on page 15, with one omission. Opus 1978 should read 1878 and opus 2926 should be 2026. The omission is Opus 2042, shipped to Les Gobelins Restaurant, next to the New Gallery Cinema Regent Street, (which still possesses a 1925 Model F), on 26. March 1929. It was soon transferred to the Provincial Cinematograph Theatres Library, in the same building, for teaching purposes, and, in 1932, to the new Gaumont Palace theatre in Exeter, Devon, being opened there on 16. May by Fredric Bayco.

The console had an illuminated surround added at Exeter, similar to that shown on page 16, a rare example of a fixed console with illumination. The Gaumont was bomb damaged and the console destroyed in 1942 and twenty years later the organ itself was removed to the home of Kaye Gilbert, near Yeovil in Somerset.

Kaye's console came from the 165X Special at the Regent Ipswich when that organ was removed in 1961. So, there is still a 165 Special, albeit without its original console, singing away in the South West of England. I heard it quite recently.

I don't know where the idea came from that audiences in the UK soon tired of illuminated consoles with their colour changes. It is the one thing that members of the public remember about cinema organs, apart from the fact that they went up and down! Illuminated consoles were seldom, if ever, scrapped before the instruments were removed from the theatres and many survive today, for instance the beautiful example at the Odeon Leicester Square.

Yours sincerely,
Tony Moss, Vice-President
Cinema Organ Society

Dear Editor:

Your readers may be interested in acquiring a copy of our publication, PIPES AND PALACES, a 12-page Resource Guide, citing books, magazine articles, video tapes, records and organizations

dealing with great movie palaces and theatre organs of the 20s and 30s.

The PIPES AND PALACES RESOURCE GUIDE was compiled by me for a series of multi-media presentations here at the Nashua Public Library concerning this subject. The Resource Guide is available at a cost of \$5.00 from the Nashua Public Library, 2 Court Street, Nashua, NH 03060.

It also includes two suggested tours of movie palaces from Boston to Buffalo and from Maine to Florida with samples of movie palaces in every state en route.

Sincerely,
Clarke S. Davis, Director

Dear Editor:

I wonder if any readers in the Connecticut area can give me some information? I have a few questions I'd like to have answered, and I don't know where else to seek answers. They aren't vitally important, but are useful when some organ buffs get together.

I lived near Hartford, Connecticut, in the twenties and thirties, and remember the theatre organ scene quite well. At the time there were many theatres, organs and organists, and I've wondered what became of the latter.

Here are the questions:

Reginald DeVaux played the organ at the State Theatre. He later became a choirmaster for a local church. He passed away perhaps twenty years ago. The theatre was razed many years ago, but what happened to the organ? What make was it?

Clifton Strong was the organist at the Allyn Theatre, followed by Collin Driggs. I met Cliff in 1952, and know that he's left also. But what happened to Collin Driggs? ("Radio's Youngest Featured Organist" WTIC, Hartford). Last I heard he became Collins Driggs and had moved to Hollywood. I played the three-manual Austin for a couple of hours back in 1947, and I know it went to a location in Connecticut when the theatre was vacated. Where is the organ?

Walter Seifert played a Robert-Morton at the Strand. Where is he, and what happened to that organ?

Walter Dawley played at Poli's Capitol, and I last saw him in '41. I'm quite sure he's gone, also. What make was the organ?

Did the Poli Palace ever have an organ? I'd swear I remember Ray Felletter playing it for a silent *Rough Riders*, but someone told me Felletter later had a band, and that the Palace never had an organ. The organ I remember him playing was a small two-manual, and not a horseshoe console.

I remember when the Rialto Theatre installed a pipe organ "for \$25,000." That price would buy four homes in those days. I don't know the make or disposition of the instrument, but curiously, it was a Wurlitzer?

One organ I know of came from the Strand in Waterbury, Connecticut. It is presently privately owned here on Cape Code, Massachusetts, about ten miles from here. I hear it quite frequently, as the owner presents public concerts every summer. The story of this instrument was published some time ago in THEATRE ORGAN.

I'd really appreciate hearing from anyone with any info regarding the above. It will expand the discussion of pipe organs when my old crowd gets together!

Thanks for listening.

Yours truly,
Selwyn P. Miles.

PS: The State Theatre was very large, and boasted the largest single floor seating in the country, some 4,000 seats. Several years ago I tracked down its history, and the Hartford Rehabilitation Corp. sent me much info and blueprints. However, they had no records of the organ or projection equipment. By the way, the 4,000 seats were in an area 150 x 150 feet, which is pretty large. The stage was 60-feet wide and forty deep, and presented a circus act at one time. Pretty big, huh?

SPM
P.O. Box 34
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Dear Editor:

Currently we have very good resources for historical records and acoustical recordings of theatre pipe organs. The physical locations of the organs seem to change with great regularity. Even the original specifications seem to change as time goes on. One thing we don't seem to have is an acoustical recording of the original ranks played individually.

The value of recording the individual speaking parts of an organ, such as each pipe and percussion, would aid us in the future to reconstruct a notable organ for future playing. Imagine the ability to play the San Francisco Fox Wurlitzer in our own home!

A project of unimaginable value would be a reference library in the ATOS Archive of these individual sounds for future acoustical reconstruction in audio sampling/reproducing units such as used in the electronic synthesizer market today.

You might say this is re-inventing the wheel as any electronic organ manufacturers have done this for years. Perhaps

(continued on page 38)

LETTERS (cont. from page 6)

we, as an organization, should pursue this as a specific reference to the theatre pipe organ so when that favorite theatre, auditorium or pizza parlor is gone the sound would be saved.

Here, let me demonstrate this 8' Musette from the San Francisco Fox . . .

Sincerely,
Tom W. Yannitell
Marion, Ohio

Dear Editor:

I wonder if Gerry Gregorius was reviewing the same Steve Milo book that I have (October/November 1989). Having played the organ for 30 years, I found *Steve Milo's Easy Ladder of Progression and Dictionary of Chords for Organ/Piano* to be very valuable and easy to use for both beginners and seasoned organists.

I think Gregorius was nit-picking on some of the criticism of this well laid out manual. The finger numbering is completely logical and makes more sense. The purpose of this excellent reference is, after all, to simplify the understanding of chord progression, not substitute for a complete teaching method. All keyboard players will find it very helpful and teachers should make use of this method in teaching their students chord progression.

Sincerely,
Wally Dow
Naples, Florida

Dear Editor:

I have had a copy of Steve Milo's book for some time and I like it. His theory is innovative, interesting and EASY to comprehend. Gerry should have contacted Steve Milo before writing his critique.

All chords must be understood and played on root position before they can be converted to an inversion. Steve's theory on root position is very helpful.

The piano scale is written from Middle C down with thumb on Middle C being finger #1 for left hand accompaniment, but I understand that Mr. Milo's theory by chords are built on 1, 3, 5 fingering — with small finger left hand being #1. My reasoning shows if you put hand over hand with palms down, right hand thumb finger #1 goes over left hand #1 small finger to build chords only.

I find the size of this book easy to work with on my music rack or my theatre organ. With the Table of Contents it is easy to refer to any particular chord you may need.

Sincerely,
Marion E. Traa
Naples, Florida

Opinions expressed in this column are those of the correspondents, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors or the policies of ATOS or THEATRE ORGAN. Letters concerning all aspects of the theatre organ hobby are welcome. Unless clearly marked "not for publication" letters may be published in whole or in part.

NUGGETS (cont. from page 26)

and proceed to reunite in harmony. Throughout this picturization, words of the song are flashed onto the scrim and Brown accompanies at the console. A nice little number and the presentation angle put it over.

GOLD DUST:

12/34 WILLIAM MEEDER, New York's WJZ; RICHARD LEIBERT, New York's WEAF ... 2/35 ARTHUR CHANDLER, JR., Cincinnati's WLW; JOHNNY WINTERS, Newark's WOR; HARRY E. RODGERS, Boston's WAAB ... 5/35 EDDIE DUNSTEDTER, CBS Network; HAL BECKETT, Newark's WOR; GORDON JOHNSON, Buffalo's WBEN ... 7/35 FRANCIS J. CRONIN, Boston's WAAB; FRED FEIBEL, CBS Network ... 9/35 JESSE CRAWFORD, NBC Network; CARL COLEMAN'S "Nocturne" on Buffalo's WGR.

As seen above, radio came along in time to effect the change from the theatre to the "Opiate of the Masses" for many of the great theatre organists.

That's all for this time. So long, sourdoughs! Jason & The Old Prospector

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