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Colonel Jack Moelmann's Custom Rodgers Installation

by lone and Ray Danford

As Mary Poppins' song is unique, so is Jack Moelmann's organ installation. It is also superb, creative and notable. Jack, the Past President of ATOS, is a Colonel in the U.S. Air Force stationed at Scott Air Base near St. Louis. While he is deputy director of communications and computer operation for the Air Force, he is, by avocation, an organist and technician of electronic and pipe organs.

To fully appreciate this installation, one should be familiar with the aesthetic and visual features of Jack's home. As we enter the Music room we see a sign which says, "Seating Capacity Limited to 8001. Fred Glotz, Fire Inspector." This is a room 28 x 40 feet, but these could be mini-midgits or tiny critters. Now, Jack is not only organ-minded and people oriented, but also treasures animals — stuffed, that is. There are three sets of animals and people dolls which adorn the mantle, speaker cabinets and the player piano. These include a monkey, whistling and drinking bears, a dog drummer, birds, an Indian drummer, Santa Claus, an Hawaiian dancer, and a barking dog. All are animated, and their realistic motions are controlled from the Rodgers console. Jack accompanies their varied antics with suitable organ music and concludes the act with a short film cartoon with organ accompaniment. The screen and projector are also controlled from the console — shades of a pizza parlor — it even has a mirror ball.

Jack has traveling colored lights draped around the perimeter of the room, and the player piano has lights which glow against the white and gold-trimmed piano which can be played separately or from the console. There is also a Hammond L-112 in the room, and when visitors are there, as we were, some lively jam sessions occur. We heard Jack and his friend, Mark Gifford, on the various instruments and the Kurzweil synthesizer which sits directly to the left of the Rodgers.



Jack Moelmann's custom Rodgers console.
Ray Danford photos

The Rodgers organ has 69 speakers distributed in 21 cabinets with fourteen power amplifiers. There are also a set of Deagan chimes, xylophone, cymbals, triangle, castanets, bird whistles, three (electric) glockenspiels and six ranks of pipes. Four of the ranks are Kilgen: Diapason, Flute, Cornopean and Dulciana; the Positiv and Calliope are from a band organ. These are powered by a two-horsepower, three-phase Spencer which generates up to 25".

The Rodgers 340 console is theatre style, complete with horseshoe, two rows of stop tabs, and three manuals and is white with gold ornamentation. The previous owner, Leonard Lipman, of Red Bank, New Jersey, is a member of Garden State Chapter, and when Jack learned, in January 1989, that it was for sale, he leaped at the chance to buy it. It was shipped from New Jersey and arrived at Jack's home in mid-February. The console wouldn't pass through any of the doors into the music room which meant that the entire sliding glass door assembly had to be taken apart and the console carried around from the garage to the back of the house in freezing weather. It took eight men to carry the 800-pound behemoth and place it on a specially built platform which has wheels for mobility. It was placed in the center of the room because an enormous amount of work had to be done to enlarge and improve the organ.

Jack obtained 16 new stop tabs from Peterson, and he installed them in every available spot on the stop rail and back rail. Twenty-seven new thumb pistons were added for special effects in addition to the 20 thumb pistons already on the console which control the computer-

ized combination action. The toe pistons were increased to a total of 16. A new relay was built which added reed relays to the key contacts, and a complete MIDI system was obtained from INTERMIDI Company to allow MIDI to be played from all three manuals plus pedals. A pull-out drawer was built to house some 100 switches and controls for the many effects. A separate control console was built for the Kurzweil, two rhythm units, projector and animal controls.

The organ came with six tone speaker cabinets and six Rodgers amplifiers; included are a 30" woofer and Leslie speaker. The entire organ speaks through six channels of audio: Main, bass, brass, string, celeste, Post Horn/Kinura and Tibia. This was interfaced to the already existing eight tone cabinets (Leslie and Hammond) which were connected to Jack's Hammond organ. The sound is awesome! And at times LOUD!

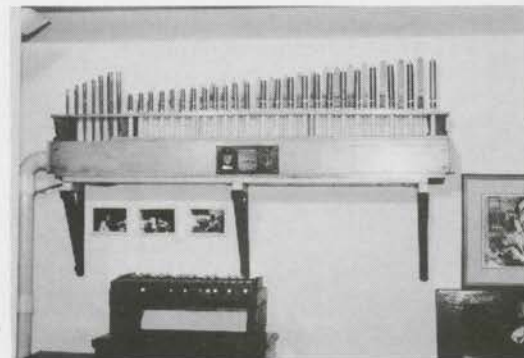
The entire project of setting up the relay, connecting all the interfaces (this took 14.5 miles of wire), was completed in July 1989, a total of four months. Randy Drumstra, a local man from the Scott Air Base area, did a lot of the wiring, and Chuck Wiltsch, an ATOS member of St. Louis Chapter, did most of the speaker alignments.

St. Louis Chapter is fortunate to be able to have meetings and programs at Jack Moelmann's home, and we felt privileged to see, hear and play this fine installation. Jack has in his files a complete stoplist for this custom organ, and would be happy to share this information with anyone who might be interested.

Anyone who is visiting in the St. Louis area is always welcome to share Jack's music-entertainment room and his excellent Rodgers/pipe organ.



Part of toy counter.



Two ranks of pipes and the Glockenspiel.