

NUGGETS
from the
GOLDEN DAYS

Prospected
by
Lloyd
E.
Klos



Sources for this column were *Diapason* (D), *Local Press* (LP), *Melody* (M) and *Variety* (V).

June 1925 (M) . . .

After thoroughly preparing for a musical career by studying with Frank and Carl Hauser, Claude B. Ball, and Dr. Anselm Goetz, following preliminary work at the Dana Musical Institute, VERMOND KNAUSS entered upon a successful professional career, as conductor and organist. This included conductor of the Tulsa Band, Hagerstown Municipal Band, the Kilties' Band, the Rose Maid and Pinafore comic opera companies, the Martelli Grand Opera Company; and guest conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra (later joined with the New York Philharmonic) when his own symphonic poem was presented.

During this time, Mr. Knauss was also conductor and organist at some of the Fox theatres in New York. At present, he is organist at the Pergola Theatre in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

This extensive experience has given Mr. Knauss a complete understanding of theatre organ work. In order to give others the benefit of this experience, he has established in Allentown the Vermont Knauss Studio of Theatre Organ Playing and to it have come aspiring and well-advised organists from all over the country. There is a special course for those pianistically trained who are broadening their talents to include theatre organ work, and another for the organist whose previous experience has been confined to church work. There are courses in theory, orchestration and conducting.

Mr. Knauss has installed a Kimball concert organ, especially designed to acquaint the student with the resources of any organ he may use in theatre work. After the pupil has completed the course, he is assisted in securing a good position to start a career which will be limited only by his own ability and ambition. So far as training, advice and opportunity go, Mr. Knauss sees that nothing is lacking.

Radio fans can hear him every Tuesday and Thursday at 11:00 p.m. on Allentown's WSAN at the 229-metre wave length.

October 1925 (M) . . .

By George Allaire Fisher. Many theatre organ fans have listened to the Boston Chamber of Commerce recitals, broadcast by WEEI. In response to questions about the organist, we secured some very interesting information.

LOUIS WEIR one of the youngest concert organists, was born and raised in Roxbury, Massachusetts. Although his first instruction was on the piano, he became interested in the organ, and when only 15 became assistant organist at the Codman Square Theatre in Dorchester. While here, he continued studies under Humphrey of Boston, then later attended Germany's Leipzig Conservatory.

Weir is 21, and the amount of practice and diligent effort which have made him successful at an age when most young men are on their way through college, can be better imagined than expressed.

The C of C organ is a Hope-Jones Unit Orchestra, built by the Wurlitzer Company. It has two manuals and 63 stops, and though not as large as other Wurlitzers, its tone quality is believed to be inferior to that of no other organ.

The radio programs have been remarkable for their variety, cleverness and artistry. Special numbers have introduced reproductions of almost every sound with which the average person is familiar: the choo-choo of a locomotive, the clang of fire bells, the yodels of Swiss villagers, Scottish bagpipes, the street corner hurdy-gurdy, the calliope of the circus, and the whistle of the care-free truant from school on his way to the old swimmin' hole. Standard concert numbers have not been neglected, presented with just as much cleverness and musicianly understanding as are manifest in the popular selections.

When one appreciates the resources of the C of C organ and the care with which the WEEI programs have been arranged so that every listener, no matter what his inclination or disposition, will hear something which he likes, played as well as it can be played, it is not difficult to understand the popularity of these programs.

June 1927 (D) . . .

Just as the process of nature robs us of the great performers of the past, so it compensates by developing new giants to replace those who pass into history.

Occasionally a youth comes into the light of publicity who shows progress toward greatness which can hardly be halted except by some calamity. One of

these is a Chicago man, still in his twenties, rapidly making a reputation as an excellent player. Primarily a movie organist, the career in which he started, he also holds a good church position and is in demand for concert work and performances with orchestras.

EDWARD EIGENSCHENK began playing motion pictures at 16. He has held positions at the Broadway Strand, Stratford and Archer's Metropolitan, and for the last five years, has been at Lubliner & Trinz's Michigan Theatre, all in Chicago. Last November, he was appointed organist of the Universalist Church of the North Shore. He is first assistant to Frank VanDusen at the American Conservatory of Music, where he teaches a large class of pupils, besides conducting special classes at the Fulco Little Model Theatre, which he and VanDusen established for the school of motion picture organ playing at the Conservatory.

The secrets of Mr. Eigenschenk's rapid rise as stated by his closest friends: hard work and application.

Mr. Eigenschenk's first honor was in 1922, the American Conservatory's gold medal for excellence in organ playing. In 1925, he won first place in the organ contest of the Society of American Musicians and gained distinction as soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. In April 1926, he played the premier performance of Eric DeLamar's "Weaver of Tales," composed for the organ festival of the Illinois Chapter National Association of Organists.

Mr. Eigenschenk's latest kudo was won May 5 when he took the first prize of \$250, offered by William H. Barnes in the organ contest conducted by the Illinois Federation of Music Clubs.

June 20, 1927 (LP) . . .

Those in the Rochester area who enjoy organ music will be interested to know that WHAM is making extensive improvements to the organ studio in the Eastman School of Music. While the former acoustical treatment was fine for listeners in the room, it was not the latest development for radio presentation.

Ernest E. Chappell, manager of WHAM, with cooperation of the school, has caused many yards of loose woven cloth to be draped throughout the room. The ceiling will be especially treated.

March 1936 (V) . . .

"Radio Theatre of Famous Classics." With EDDIE BAKER (Doc Bebko) at the organ. Broadcast over 43 stations.

Along the highbrow side, but definitely good radio, are these adaptations from the classics and near-classics in the book world: Ibsen's "Doll House" and

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"Master Builders," Guy deMaupasant's "The Inn" and "Artist," R.L. Stevenson's "Suicide Club" and "Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde," Dumas' "Camille," Wilde's "Importance of Being Earnest." These form the mainstay. Dished up in good adaptations, done with drama and suspense, with competent acting and directing, the series clicks. Such a platter as "The Inn," for instance, seemed highly professional with good diction as well as drama, the standout.

The program, on about a year, has an estimated \$1100 cost.

GOLD DUST . . .

10/38 DICK LEIBERT and singer Dick Todd over New York's WJZ; JESSE CRAWFORD, NBC Network; GEORGE LUNDQUIST, Jamestown, N.Y.'s WJTN; MARY FOUNTAIN, Harrisburg's WHP; "Between the Bookends with Ted Malone and organist ROSA RIO, NBC; FRANK RENAULT, York, Pa.'s WORK; TRUMAN TAYLOR, Syracuse's WSYR; TOM GRIERSON, Rochester's WHAM; HARRY SPRINGER, Elmira, NY's WESG; "Console & Keyboard," Philadelphia's KYW; CHARLES PAUL, CBS Network.

That does it for this time, sourdoughs. So long! *Jason & the Old Prospector*

CLOSING CHORD

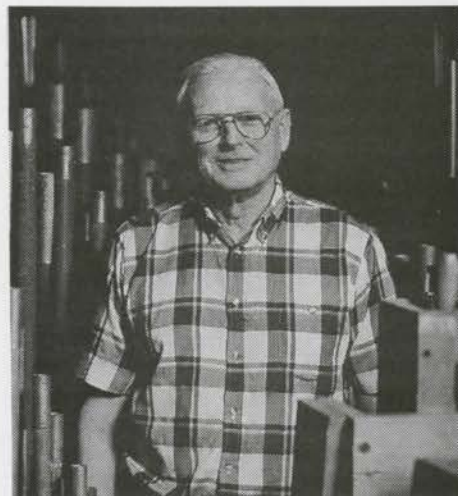
Leonard Vernon

A charter member of ATOS and of the Oregon chapter, Leonard Vernon passed away on February 16. He was 68.

A lifelong resident of Astoria, Oregon, Leonard had a Robert-Morton theatre pipe organ in his home and, on numerous occasions, hosted chapter events as well as visiting organists from all parts of the country (see January/February 1990 THEATRE ORGAN).

Leonard's interests and talents ranged far beyond theatre organs, however. His life was closely tied to the Columbia River, and he served as a volunteer at the Columbia River Maritime Museum. He was well known for his slide show presentations of Columbia River steamboats. He was also active in Boy Scouts, Kiwanis and the Association of Steam Engine Enthusiasts.

He is survived by his brother, Bill, and nephew Blaine with whom he served as volunteer crew members on the Lightship Columbia. He will be missed.



Virginia Byrd Wolfram

Virginia Byrd Wolfram, sister of ATOS Hall of Fame member Dessa Byrd, passed away suddenly on February 11, 1990, at the age of 76. Well-known in musical circles in Indianapolis, Indiana, Virginia carved herself an enviable career. Although too young to have played for silent movies, she appeared at the consoles of many local theatres in the thirties. She was the first demonstrator locally for the Hammond Organ Company.

Virginia was a lifelong entertainer in many venues including radio and TV stations. For 35 years she was Music Director at WISH-TV Channel 8, and at the time of her death she was organist at Unity Truth Center. Also active in many Indianapolis arts organizations, including the Central Indiana Chapter of ATOS, she was a member of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra Women's Committee, the Indianapolis Opera Guild, Matinee Musicale, Mu Phi Epsilon, and the Indianapolis Chapter of the American Guild of Organists.

She had held many offices in Central Indiana Chapter and was a trustee of the Dessa Byrd Memorial Scholarship Fund that she founded to honor her sister's memory. Proceeds from this fund are used as awards for the chapter's Young Organist Competition. Winners of this local competition have gone on to win four of the five national ATOS competitions.

Her wit, charm, talent, energy, and enthusiasm will be sorely missed by us all.

Tim Needler

Chester E. Klee


Chester E. Klee, known as "The Music Man of Olean" (New York), died on February 28 after a long illness. He was 84.

A composer, teacher and performer, he was dedicated to bringing good music to Olean for 55 years. While attending the Eastman School of Music in his native Rochester, he played the organ in the Madison Theatre and several others, and led a jazz combo. He earned a Bachelors' Degree in music with emphasis on piano and theory, and a Master's Degree in composition.

For nine years he was assistant professor of music at St. Bonaventure University, then opened a private studio in 1936, teaching voice, organ, piano, theory and composition. As organist at St. Mary's in Olean, he played for more than 1,000 weddings and 2,000 funerals.

A charter member of the Olean Civic Music Association, he was responsible for bringing many greats of the concert world to the city. Mr. Klee served on the Board of Education, wrote a column for the Olean *Times-Herald* and received keys to the city in 1959 and 1974.

He is survived by his widow, a son, two daughters, two sisters and four grandchildren.



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