

NUGGETS

from the
GOLDEN DAYS

Prospected
by
Lloyd
E.
Klos



Sources were *Diapason* (D), *Jacobs* (J) and *Melody* (M).

June 1925 (M) . . .

We have heard the old saw that if a man lives in a dense forest and makes the most perfect mouse-trap in the world, his eager customers will beat a path to his door, or words to that effect.

When that bit of homely truth is applied to pipe organs, the name of RALPH H. BRIGHAM comes to mind. He prepared for success by thorough study, being graduated from the New England Conservatory of Music. He was for a number of years organist and choirmaster in Northampton, Massachusetts. While serving in this capacity, his gift for improvising attracted the attention of S.L. Rothaphel, better known as "Roxy," and shortly afterwards Brigham was presiding at the console of the Strand Theatre's organ in New York where he remained for seven years.

He appeared as organist with Sousa's Band at the Hippodrome; has given more than 500 successful organ recitals; was organist at the Capitol Theatre in St. Paul, and the Senate Theatre in Chicago; and is a colleague of the AGO and a member of the National Association of Organists. At present, he is associated with the Orpheum Theatre in Rockford, Illinois. In all these activities, his sincerity and ability brought him success and audience approval.

He considers "perfect synchronization of music with the picture" the most necessary detail of the many which help make the theatre organist's work successful. He also contrives special featured numbers for his programs, and puts them over in a way which enhances the stature of the playhouse and himself.

November 1926 (J) . . .

JOHN B. DEVINE, the doughty and highly musical little son of Erin, who presides at the Wurlitzer console in Chicago's Biograph Theatre, is not trying to "console" his audiences with the usual

routine stuff one hears in movie houses. Instead, he is knocking them over without apologies or explanations. It may be that his recent plunge into the matrimonial sea has had something to do with it in the way of furnishing inspiration, but Johnny, like all sophisticated people when interviewed, insists that success is nine-tenths perspiration, and . . . oh, well, you know what we mean.

John was a pianist with leading dance orchestras of the Friar's in New York, musical director for the wonder Marvel, the deaf mute dancer who recently appeared at the leading Balaban & Katz houses; and has played some good movie houses in the middle west.

If you ever notice that the keys of the Biograph's console are belching forth smoke and flame, and cracking noises are heard, you needn't holler "Fire!" It'll be because Johnny is doing some red-hot jazz. And as for cuing pictures, making you emote is one of the easiest things he does. He understands "Themeing," cuing and anything connected with making a picture almost talk. One patron, having put the bandana away after an unusually dramatic moment which J.B. had beautifully accompanied, turned to a friend and said, "Can't John B. Devine?" We'll say he can!

(Editor's Note: It was on the sidewalk outside the Biograph on July 22, 1934, that John Dillinger, Public Enemy Number One, was gunned down by Federal Agents under Melvin Purvis after they had been tipped off by "The Lady in Red." The movie which Dillinger had seen inside was Manhattan Melodrama with Clark Gable.)

September 1927 (D) . . .

HENRY FRANCIS PARKS is one of the best-known theatre organists in the United States and a first-class musician. Mr. Parks realizes the need of thorough training for good theatre work, just as is required for church or recital work. He is one of the prominent theatre organ teachers, being on the Chicago Musical College faculty. Mr. Parks insists that his pupils use both feet on the pedalboard, that they become familiar with Bach and other masters' works, and that they attend theory lectures and study harmony. During his summer master classes this year, he lectured on "Dramatic Plot Psychology," "Orchestration for the Theatre Organ," "Registers and Their Influences," "Musical Synchronization" and "Emotional Playing."

Mr. Parks was born in Louisville, Kentucky, October 27, 1895. When he was four, the family moved to New Orleans and a year later he began piano study. Next, he studied in Mexico at the

National Conservatory under Ignacio Lazcano and Raphael Rodrigues. At 19, he returned to the United States and some of his first work was as conductor of light opera. He also did piano accompanying and studied the flute and cello. For two seasons, he conducted the 60-piece Butte, Montana, Symphony Orchestra.

Mr. Parks next turned to the organ. For a time, he was the official Wurlitzer demonstrator in Chicago, then opened the Alamo Theatre in Louisville. He has graced the consoles of many of the best houses in America: Lyric and Metropolitan in Cincinnati; Mary Anderson, Walnut, and Alamo in Louisville; Wigwam in El Paso; Isis in Houston; American in Butte; Rialto and Blue Mouse in Tacoma; Lyceum in Minneapolis; Tower in St. Paul; and the Hollywood in Chicago.

At present, he's at the Roosevelt in Chicago, having also the orchestra contract until recently when the pressure of other duties made it wise to confine his work to featured organist. Mr. Park's compositions have been published by Presser, Forster and others. A new work, "The Jazzology of Organ Playing," will be published soon.

March 1928 (J) . . .

by Roxy organist, Emil Velazco

During the past year, a wave of despondency has swept the ranks of eastern organists. This mood of falling spirits has become reflected in the columns of some organ periodicals. It appears that this condition has been created by the demands of eastern theatre patrons for a more modern style of organ playing. For the last 10 years, they have sat back contentedly and listened to conservative playing; now they are twisting uneasily in their seats and vociferously requesting something more in keeping with the trend of the times.

Both the radio and talking machine have had much to do with this restlessness of a heretofore tame public. These two agencies have been spreading the playing of our western organists into eastern households, and the members thereof have acquired a taste for this occidental article. Many players, conscious of impending change and fearing disaster, have sat down to weep instead of examining the cause of their premature grief. Were they to do the latter, they would be agreeably surprised and heartened, for this threatening and ill-omened cloud has a real silver lining. The western of California style of organ playing, by raising theatre organists to stardom, has brought higher salaries and better living conditions in its train.

(continued on page 30)

pel choir rendition — with a grand diapason on a pipe organ. Seeing the mathematical structure of music akin to the order of planets in astronomy, she developed her own system of rhythm and harmony and devised an instruction method with a folding keyboard, long before similar systems were marketed.

Theatre organs were her lifelong passion. She visited famous Wurlitzers and Kimballs with friend and enthusiast, Hugo Smith, retired film projectionist. She was an avid rockhound, loved to cook for "potlucks" among musical friends (doing much augmenting, diminishing and transposing of foods in her kitchen). When not at a keyboard, her hands, stiffened by arthritic nodes, crocheted, embroidered and did exemplary crewel work.

Moma studied composers, world religions, geology, American Indian art, mythology. And she wrote of places, people, food, health. Registrations for each musical instrument she touched: the Yamaha ... the pipe organ ... the Wersi ... the Conn ... the Allen. Notes for her organ classes. Lists of "sets" to play at musicales.

Perhaps her last decade at "Goforth Village" mobile home park in Orange, California was happiest. This haven for musical senior citizens houses several organs in its recreation room. Goforth owner Tom Caldwell says Gladyce was remarkable, "... a 'purist' as oldtime theatre organists are about electronic 'poor imitations for a pipe organ,' "and that with talent, she didn't need all that gadgetry to achieve her effects. But he said she was unable to resist the challenge of digital computerized organs and was soon having fun with the theatre Model 650 Conn organ (her favorite), a three-manual organ with American Organists Guild (AGO) concave pedal board.

Gladyce thought the Allen 675 at Goforth sounded like a real pipe organ, also enjoyed the three-manual Lowrey GX325. But she was really intrigued by the DX 500 two-manual Wersi, with its complicated computer combinations and stops, and undertook to learn the instrument, even joining a Wersi club. "There's nothing worse than a Wersi!" her letters moaned, but when we visited, she gleefully demonstrated Wersi's variety. In our last video of Moma at eighty-five in May 1989, she performs on several organs in the club room.

Most amazing was Moma's persistence in refining her musical skills. She adapted classic "curved fingers" into an arthritic stiff-fingered approach to the keyboard. Despite lower vertebrae fractures, bursitis, arthritis, two carotid artery surgeries, and falls resulting from osteo-

porosis — one requiring an aluminum hip replacement, another breaking the left hand (she continued practicing with the right) — she never stopped progressing with her music or learning new music. The will of steel in that small, delicate body kept her lucid, optimistic, caring and sweet up to her last agonizing days.

Mornings began with practice on her Serenate spinet piano — Chopin, Liszt and Beethoven ("I expect to meet Beethoven one day and want to be ready," she said). Then she was off to the recreation room to rehearse programs for organ group meetings and devise new combinations and effects. Until weeks before her death, she was active in "The New Dimension Wersi Club;" "Mo Sarts," Lowrey enthusiasts who meet at Mo's Music Store in Fullerton, California; "The Tuesday Night Club that Meets on Wednesday," as well as the "Organized" club meeting regularly at Goforth's.

At her funeral, praise and affection flowed from Gladyce's musical friends. At Goforth, she achieved the stardom that eluded her younger days. On a card crowded with personal messages sent to the hospital, her "landlords" and friends, Tom and Marge Caldwell wrote: "Everyone at the 'Sunday musicale' wants you to know we all love you and miss you ... (and) your beautiful music ... You have made our musical instruments come alive like no one else ..."

Gladyce's musical gifts and her gentle existence will enrich us throughout our days. A note penned during her last year says: "Be open to new ideas ..."



At the Wicks theatre organ, Gladyce Campbell performed in the Orange Theatre in Orange, California, in 1946. Photo courtesy of family of Gladyce Elinor Campbell

That it has successfully invaded New York is an acknowledged fact, and above the keening of the local mourners, it has been accepted with whoops by the public. The writer was a resident of Chicago when the fateful invasion swept in from the coast. The cry of "To Arms!" was raised, and the faithful among organists rushed to defend their citadel, which they fondly and mistakenly believed to be the only bulwark capable of sheltering "good music." I saw many others join the invaders, and I'm happy to say that I was among them. The effect on good music did not bear out the forebodings of the Old Guard. It was not murdered by barbarian hordes, but tastefully bedecked and presented anew in a more entertaining if not quite so dignified a manner. The irreconcilables of the Windy City are still casting a sheep's eye at the past and bemoaning the sad state in which they find themselves.

We are prone to forget that people go to a show to be *entertained* — not educated. An organist with an itch for uplift should not join the ranks of the motion picture brethren. As a matter of fact, most of the latter are at the job because it pays well.

See you next time. So long, sourdoughs!
Jason & The Old Prospector

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