

Letters To The Editor

Dear Editor:

Reading Mr. Woods' and Mr. Lowe's letters in recent issues regarding the theatre organ scene in England prompts me to reply that there are many groups who have preserved theatre organs and are giving pleasure to their members. They are thriving and are in good financial status. Lancastrian Trust, Portslade, Gosport, Worthing TOC, Craig Theatre Stevenage, Guild Hall Southampton, ATOS London Chapter, and museums at St. Albans, Brentford, Turners Northampton, Thursford, Birmingham Cycle Museum (where Buddy Cole's organ is), Sanford Park, all are playing to packed houses each weekend.

It would not do for all of these to be under one umbrella. Each venue must show its own initiative to do its own promotions and not consider the others as opposition. It has been described as cutting the cake in too many slices. That is the wrong attitude to take. The more venues, the more organs will be saved, as long as the venues are promoted and presented well and run correctly with the financial side in the hands of responsible people. London Chapter has presented choirs, Barbershop, orchestras, soloists and dancers with the organ. Our monthly tea dances are a great success, and we run, in conjunction with the Windsor Trust, two buffet dances each year with the Compton organ. We all work as a team and, hopefully, in 1991 will see tea dances in our own area dancing to the chapter Wurlitzer in the Local Arts Centre.

Our Annual Competition brings forth new faces each year, so we say "Good luck" to all groups who present and preserve the theatre organ and to the new presenters of the future. Our chapter is always ready to help out in any emergency as many will know, but we still keep our identity as a society, and certainly we are NOT in opposition as some folk imply. However old you are, you can always work toward keeping the theatre organ alive and not be classed as destroying the theatre organ's future. It is the older ones who pass on the tips and experiences to the younger ones. The opportunity is there if you have the inclination to learn. One cannot do without the young or the old to get a good job done.

Sincerely,
Edith Rawle, Concert Secretary
London Chapter

Dear Editor:

I have read with great interest Thomas L. DeLay's account of "The Forgotten

Estey." At the risk of shattering his dream, I can assure Mr. DeLay that the Sacramento Estey is definitely NOT the only "intact example of a four-manual Estey cash-register organ playable in the United States." There is a fine example of one in the Scottish Rite Auditorium on Lakeside Drive in Oakland, California. This organ is completely unaltered in any way since it left the builders' hands. It is used frequently and is in superb condition.

The reeds are gorgeous, the strings shimmer (especially the big three-rank Celeste in the Solo), the flutes are warm and colorful (the Harmonic Flute in the Solo is probably the most beautiful large solo stop I have ever heard), the Principals are robust and warm in the style of their period (1927). To sum it up, the organ serves perfectly in the role it was built for: to support and enhance the ceremonies of the Scottish Rite order.

Unfortunately, the organ, like many others in this area, was severely dealt with by the Loma Prieta earthquake last October. The 16' Open Woods were torn loose from their bracing and fell across the main Great windchest. Many large reed pipes (especially on offset chests) were ruptured and thrown about. Since some of the divisions moved structurally within the building, a number of the wind lines were broken, damaged, or torn. Since the entire four-manual console moved, throwing exposed terminals against metal ductwork, the organ had extensive ciphering. Now, however, all has been restored to its original "as new" condition and the lovely old organ continues to serve its owners.

Indeed, the light-up push-button stops do pose a problem. If you play by ear in semi-darkness, the stops are beautifully visible. However, if you use a score and have the music light "ON," about all you can do is trust the pistons to give you what you want; even squinting hardly makes it possible to see the individual stops.

Unfortunately, the building is not normally open to the general public; do rest assured, however, this lovely old gal is in good hands and continues to earn her keep just as she was originally designed to do.

Sincerely,
Frank H. Taylor
Oakland, California

Dear Editor:

Fairly recently a movie was released with actor Robin Williams called *Dead Poets Society*. One scene took place in

what appeared to be an original teens or twenties theatre.

In the doorway of the front, right-side auditorium exit could be seen a shadowy outline of a two-manual theatre organ console of some sort. A few scenes later the same console could be viewed with its console lights turned on.

Question is, where is this theatre and, of course, what is the organ? As the setting for the film took place in New England, it might be assumed to be in that part of the country, though not necessarily so. Chances are, once we know the theatre, the organ will be known.

Anyone have some information?
Sincerely,
Thomas L. DeLay
Fresno, California

Dear Editor:

In response to George Nitchman's note about his being 43, I say NO ONE is too old to learn something new! Any instructor who truly teaches, encourages, and gets you to play simple songs so as to *apply* the scales, chords, arpeggios and technique, is the best thing you can do for yourself at the present time. If you do all the exercises, but never play a tune, then you will have made a mistake.

I, personally, would without hesitation take you on and get your earliest tunes to sound as theatrical as possible. You'll also discover that organ music's hidden virtue is that it naturally relaxes you better than pills or vacations (except for our conventions). When a person foot-pumps a song on a player piano, one song is equal to one or two laps on a track.

No, you are never too old to learn, provided you never allow yourself to become "frozen" or "wedded to your ways." To seek a second career in organ requires that plus sacrifice, realistic availability of organs, both pipe and electronic, and not relying entirely on automation except combination pistons. You must be a real optimist, point yourself in a real direction to accomplish the career you seek, and not allow anyone to discourage you.

Yes, there should be a competition for older starters and lesser known players. When chapters feature their own people as well as the better known artists, they will be proving that they are truly educational as well as non-profit. We must share theatre organ with all people. It is, after all, music's youngest musical instrument. So keep up your courage and you'll be encouraging others, too.

Sincerely,
Robert K. Legon
Malden, Massachusetts

continued ...

Dear Editor:

Re: "An Acre of Seats in a Palace of Splendor," may I thank you for the inclusion of this feature and I would like to correct information "Organ: Kimball 4/29, St. Louis Theatre, MO." The number of ranks was 19 confirmed by console purchaser, Jim Breneman, Colonial Theatre, Phoenixville (THEATRE ORGAN, July/August '89). The 19-rank figure is also verified by the Kimball opus list, *Encyclopedia of the American Theatre Organ*, Volume I, David Junchen.

You suggested in your review of the 58-page, soft cover *Memoirs Of A Roxy Usher*, "... if you are looking for historical information about the Roxy Theatre, ... look somewhere else." I would like to suggest the Theatre Historical Society publication, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1978, which featured a most comprehensive historical and pictorial coverage. This is still available from THS, address page 24, THEATRE ORGAN, July/August.

To President John Ledwon's request for ways to attract new audiences for theatre organ, I would like, as a start, to suggest an update of the repertoire. In previous correspondence, I have indicated that I shall take a walk during the next rendition of ubiquitous "Diane" — the background music written for a silent movie in 1927!

There are many contemporary ballads adaptable for theatre organ but I don't see them programmed. I remain unimpressed by displays of digital dexterity. It sometimes seems that organists are playing for each other. Constant use of the tremolo and over-use of the Tibia show lack of imagination. Sustained projection of chimes, marimba and piano is counterproductive. The organ produces a majestic orchestral sound, and I find that this concept comes to me in small quantities contemporarily. There have been too many occasions when I mentally compared the rendition to the sound of a hurdy-gurdy or carousel.

Years ago, there was a device called a color organ which featured a hand painted disc projected on a cyclorama and which blended an evolving color/artistic impressionistic scheme coordinated with the mood and tempo of the specific rendition. An amateurish imitation of this idea is unwittingly attempted by current programmers who change the stage lighting during the playing. Classical concert organist Virgil Fox attracted large audiences with his showmanship. His flair and theatricality created an interest among the younger generation. I could write pages more.

One man's opinion — I wait for those few moments that thrill me with the sound of the instrument.

Sincerely,
Irvin R. Glazer
Springfield, Pennsylvania

Dear Editor:

Could a kind person tell me where I might secure one or two bottles of Sound Guard record preservative or Lifesaver record preservative?

I apply either of these products before playing organ recordings the first time of use. It does reduce static electricity on the vinyl surface.

I am now using my last bottle of Sound Guard, and the manufacturer advises me that the product is discontinued.

HELP!!!

Sincerely,
Jack Kalman
45-53 204 Street
Bayside, New York 11361

PS: Letters published in THEATRE ORGAN bring a wide response.

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.

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(Errata: In the July/August For the Records the review of Robin Richmond's "Sounds of Granada," the second sentence in the second paragraph should read: He tends to play closer to what you might call old-school British theatre organ. Our apologies to Mr. Shafter and Mr. Richmond. Ed.)



The ATOS Board of Directors at the meeting in Indianapolis approved a slight increase in the advertising rates in THEATRE ORGAN effective January 1991.

For new rates see page 60.



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