



# FRESNO? FRES-YES!

by Grace McGinnis

Those of us who arrived on Thursday were privileged to attend a Sequoia Chapter concert by John Seng at the Warners Theatre. As soon as Chapter Chairman Tom Borgstrom introduced the "Mighty John Seng on the Mighty Morton," we went immediately "Around The World in Eighty Days" and encountered Mozart, Vierre and Duke Ellington via the "Dizzy Fingers" of this captivating artist. A couple of pipes decided to play on their own during John's program, and we were impressed with the poise with which he overplayed their intrusion. One fellow organist in the audience remarked that we usually read about an artist "demanding from the organ. But this time the organ was demanding, and the artist met its challenge!" This was a glorious way to start the weekend!

Friday was Happy Hour all day. It was an open day for registration and visiting and relaxing in the lobby of the Holiday Inn which was ideally arranged for theatre organ people. For the amateur organists, there was an open house — open console at the Bethel Temple Church which houses a 3/10 Robert-Morton. Visitors who were brave enough to take advantage of this opportunity indicated that they found the Morton to be "player-friendly."

Friday evening was the first official convention event: Jim Riggs at the Warners. A consummate nostalgist, Jim has done his homework and has researched a number of obscure pieces from the 20s and 30s which added to the sense of timelessness that this theatre manifests. "I'm Doin' What I'm Doin' For Love" was not only Sophie Tucker's philosophy in 1931, it also described Jim Riggs in 1990. And whoever heard of "The Peanut Polka?" No words

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*Four fantastic,  
fun-filled days, and we  
didn't see a single raisin  
dancing in the street.*

*What we DID see  
was nearly 300 theatre  
organ buffs having  
the time of their lives.*

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better describe this evening than "pure nostalgia at its best."

Hardy late-nighters were bussed to the Pizza & Pipes for a Jam Session and pizza buffet. They heard Candi Carley-Roth, Stan Kann, David Lowe, and Lew Williams on the 3/23 Wurlitzer that once entertained patrons of the Shea's Hippodrome Theatre in Buffalo, New York.

Saturday morning's schedule called for a nine o'clock departure from the hotel for a ride to Hanford, about 40 miles southeast of Fresno, where two excellent venues were filled by Tom Hazleton and Ron Rhode. The first stop was the Hanford Episcopal Church of the Savior where Hazleton and the 2/17 Murray M. Harris combined to present a program which was a reflection of the repertoire that was in vogue when the organ was new (1910) including a heart-rending version of the Rachmaninov "Prelude in C# minor," with its familiar chime theme, and a rousing "Torchlight March."

After a lunch break, we gathered at the newly restored FOX-Hanford Theatre where the 2/10 Wurlitzer was fired up and ready for the genial Ron Rhode. Ron's choices for this program ranged from a dashing version of "Who" to a pastoral "Green Cathedral" to "The Burning of Rome." There was something for everyone. He thanked owner Dan Humason for saving the FOX-Hanford and sharing it with us, and we thank Ron for his superb program.

Saturday night, back at the Warners, it was Lew Williams' turn . . . and this young man's artistry needs no explication. He chose a program of such infinite variety that we were hardly surprised when he led us through a "deranged" swamp song complete with swamp critters (no credit to Spike Jones for THIS arrangement). Whenever we hear Lew play the "Rhapsody in Blue" we are reminded just how orchestral a theatre organ can be in the right hands. The music, the laughter and the warmth of this artist illustrated what, for many, is the quintessence of good show business.

The lingering "party mood" in the hotel lobby continued until the wee hours in spite of the fact that we knew the Sunday busses would be loading at 9:30.

The Pizza & Pipes was full on Sunday morning when Kevin King, the youngest of the weekend's artists, took the bench for a thoughtfully selected program of songs that included "Taking A Chance on Love," a medley from *Oliver* and "The Little Red Monkey." His "Russian Rag" and "Roller Coaster" were excellent, and the *Trumpet en Chamade* (aka Garry Zenk) Mess Call surprised even the staff

at the pizza parlor. Kevin is scheduled to perform at the 1991 National Convention in San Francisco, and we are looking forward to hearing him again.

A no-host lunch was available at the Pizza & Pipes before the busses loaded for the trip to Fresno Pacific College for Paul Quarino's concert on the 3/20 Hybridizer. This organ is so named because it was erected with parts from eight different builders and brought into an ensemble by organmen Tom DeLay and Dave Moreno. The setting is unique in that the console is placed in the center circle of a basketball court, the chambers are located high on one wall of the gymnasium and the audience sits in bleachers on the opposite side.

Paul's program was sparked by a whimsical sense of humor, by songs that ranged from his famous "Elks Lodge Medleys" to classical arrangements, Gospel, and by some pyrotechnics with the computer system that rendered Tom DeLay speechless and the audience in stitches. At one point Paul remarked that the reverb in the gym

reminded him of a roller rink and he followed this with a 92-Blues version of "Green Door" which had many reaching for their skate bags. His closing number was, he told us, a number that today would be titled "Hey, Dude," but turned out to be a classical interpretation of the famous "Hey, Jude."

We were still chuckling when we arrived back at the hotel for a social hour and dinner before embarking for the Warnors and the final concert of the convention. Dan Bellomy was the fourth Warnors artist and we understand he is the "Unofficial House Organist" there. He brought his own automatic rhythm unit, a nimble young drummer named Brenda Myers, who managed (with very little rehearsal) to meld with Dan's style of Big Band jazz and ballad production numbers. His program built to a rousing "Surrey With The Fringe on Top" and encore "Something Wonderful." Which it was.

This wonderful weekend of madcap, dynamic, uninhibited, memorable music was emceed by the vibrant, vacuum-man,

Stan Kann. Stan added his own winsome humor and vivacious manner to the necessary informational announcements as well as to the introductions of each artist.

The success of this event must be credited to Tom DeLay and the Sequoia chapter members who gave so much and so freely to see that all were in the right place at the right time and were having a good time. One fact became particularly noticeable at this convention, and perhaps other chapters that may be reluctant to sponsor a regional could take note of it: You can present four organists on one organ and have the equivalent of four organs! The Robert-Morton in the Warnors Theatre showed four distinct personalities as each of the artists registered his own select sounds. So, if your chapter has only one or two venues available, take heart from what happened in Fresno. It was inspiring!

*(Special thanks to Tim Kreifels, Bill Taber, and Harry Heth for help with the coverage, and to photographers Paul Quarino, Randy Rock and Jim Koller. And once again, Claude Neuffer was an invaluable source of help with the pictures!)*

## The Production Staff . . .



Head honcho Tom DeLay. P/Q



Bus CEO Colonel Cor Barnents with his bus captain Chuck Turner. P/Q



The crew: (L to R) Harold and Adena Roque, chapter treasurer; Cid and Tom Borgstrom, chapter president. P/Q



Claude Halstead (left) and Dave McFiggen. P/Q