



Pipes & Personalities

Cincinnati's Jack Strader

by Hubert S. Shearin

It was the indelible impression that those grand and glorious Golden Days of Radio made on him in the thirties, plus the myriad voices of the pipe organ then dominating much of radio programming, that led Jack Strader into a career in both radio and organ. A Cincinnati native, Jack was entranced by the signature themes for many familiar radio programs of that era. Many organists specialized in the art of setting the mood of a given program. This required not only able technique at the console, but also the ability to coordinate with directors, actors, announcers and sound-effects experts in the studio. These were the days of the studio organ, as they were called, a cross between the larger theatre organ and a residence instrument. That mellow voice in those early days had a definite impact on Jack Strader.

In August 1959, Jack and his wife Joan had the good fortune to meet the late Richard C. Simonton, his charming wife Helena and their family on a trip aboard the Steamboat Delta Queen. (This was prior to Dick becoming the major owner of the steamboat company.) Jack's great grandfather Captain Jacob Strader was among the pioneers of the steamboat trade circa 1818. During this trip a friendship with Dick developed, given their mutual interests in pipe organs as well as steamboats.

In this same time frame Jack learned that one of Cincinnati's cinema palaces located just out of the downtown area was facing closure due to poor attendance. The question of what would become of the Balaban-style, 15-rank Wurlitzer organ rang like an alarm bell in Jack's mind. After all this was the instrument Jack had

taught himself to play by ear!

The same fate that had brought the Straders and the Simontons together now seemed to deputize Dick as the Straders' mentor in the often-times hair-raising attempt to secure the instrument. Thanks to Dick's wise counsel and moral support, the former RKO Paramount Theatre organ was delivered to Straders' home in May 1961, and was tuned and playing by November of the same year. With Dick's introduction to Henry Pope of Los Angeles, the project was completed.

This Wurlitzer was a bit special. The lot on which the Paramount Theatre was built had been owned by Mrs. Howard Wurlitzer and she built this theatre and an attached shopping area on the site. This was a busy transfer point for streetcars of the day since about half of the city's cars passed this spot. Legend has it that the organ builders at the Wurlitzer plant at North Tonawanda, New York, knew when building it that it was for Mrs. Wurlitzer and some additional TLC had gone into its manufacture. One obvious feature on this organ is a set of tuned sleigh bells.

With the Wurlitzer as a living, breathing magnet the Straders' residence became the birthplace of the Ohio Valley chapter and soon the chapter had a project. That was the installation of the Mighty Wurlitzer, from Cincinnati's then doomed RKO Albee Theatre, into a new home in Emery Theatre uptown at Walnut Street and Central Parkway.

It is in this setting each weekend that the chapter operates the theatre offering nostalgic films from Hollywood's Golden Era plus an occasional silent with organ accompaniment. The Wurlitzer is played regularly before each film, at intermission, and also "plays out" the audience at the close. The placement of the organ chambers at the rear (or "upstage") area makes tours of the chambers after each show practical and popular.

While Jack is an accomplished organist occasionally appearing as a member of our organist staff, his regular responsibilities are two-fold. As a former radio newsman and announcer he prepares telephone tapes for the theatre answering machine where people can learn our theatre schedule 24 hours a day. Also he prepares Public Service Announcements for radio use. Capsulizing such information into short segments can only be done by a radio man used to getting the message across in few words.

These radio tapes are run locally by WVXU-FM, the station of Xavier University. Both Jack and Joan have worked very closely with Dr. James C. King, manager of the station. WVXU-FM has worked to publicize the merits of Emery Theatre in

our attempts to save the theatre in recent years. No small part of our success has been as the home of "Riders Radio Theatre" where this radio show tapes their shows each month for later broadcast to a Public Radio network.

We know Jack best as a dedicated organ-man. His background as a radio on-air personality is less known.

By the age of 17 Jack's interest in the comparatively new medium of radio had infected him for many years of active work in the medium. Jack received early education in the drama field at Shuster-Martin School of the Drama which was attended by many who went on to dramatic triumphs (including Tyrone Power). Later he attended the Cincinnati College of Music with classes in the Radio Department. Here he received first-hand experience on the air since several days each week he worked as a student at WLW Radio.



Jack Strader

Mayhew & Peper photo

Jack was privileged to have worked at WLW when it was known as "The Nation's Station." At that time it had a blast of 500,000 watts power — the highest ever used by an AM station in the United States. There were 10 studios, including three for its sister station WSAI. More programs were sent by WLW to the network than they took from the network. Their drama department was never equaled by an independent station. Here Jack learned more of his trade "on the job," performing with such actors as Bob Middleton who went on to Hollywood and movie fame. Anything less than "letter-perfect" could never get on the air. This was the "high" period of WLW's ownership by Powell Crosley, Jr. The Crosley name became known nationally on radios, refrigerators, and the first "mini" car — the Crosley.

WLW was called "The Cradle of the Stars" since in this period artists like the Mills Brothers, Fats Waller, Doris Day, Jane Froman, Andy Williams, Red Skelton, Eddie Albert, and Red Barber had started receiving national exposure. Also, a young organist working at WLW was beginning a career that would lead him later to the Arthur Godfrey show and theatre organ greatness. It was here as organist of the long-time *Moon River* program that Lee Erwin was first acclaimed.

Jack next worked at WKRC as a staff announcer doing the announcing jobs of that day ranging from the kitchen shows, poetry, and commercial announcements as Waite Hoyt re-created Reds' ball games from wire reports received in the studio. From there he became Chief Announcer at WCPO with studios on the 38th floor of the Carew Tower, Cincinnati's highest building. His work included interviews at the Albee Theatre with visiting stars including the big-band leader Sammy Kaye, and Ina Rae Hutton who, with her orchestra, was appearing at the Albee. Jack also was the announcer for "remotes" from various supper clubs in the area. One night Jack thought his radio career would come to an untimely end when the car in which he was riding with the engineer got stuck on railroad tracks enroute to an assignment. They made desperate attempts to push, kick, and otherwise influence the car to start as frantic whistle blasts from an approaching locomotive sounded loud and clear. At the last possible moment the car started and they made it safely off the tracks.

One night a trek from the 38th floor studios of WCPO to the lower floor Coffee Shop led to a chance meeting with the cashier who was attracted to his complicated-looking chronograph watch — a "must" for timing announcements. And they have been conversing ever since including the "I Do's" in October 1944.

One last call at radio stations was a stint at WCKY. Here he worked with some of the finest stars the local radio scene ever had. During this time their daughter Jackie was born. Then several older family members passed on, and Jack left the full-time radio business to handle family responsibilities.

The Straders' interest in organs has not been limited to the theatre organ variety. Through their Strader Organ Awards they have maintained scholarships for students at the College-Conservatory of Music of the University of Cincinnati. They also donated a new Balcolm and Vaughn pipe organ for the Watson Recital Hall. For a number of years they sponsored the Strader Organ Series in which great organists and organs were featured.

Their contributions to the work of the chapter started in a major way after the decision had been made to move the Albee Theatre organ to Emery Theatre. This was about 1968, and in the ensuing eight years the organ was completely rebuilt and then reinstalled in Emery, using only volunteer member labor.

By the time the installation and "Shake-down" period were completed they had donated to the chapter over a quarter million dollars in equipment. A deserted, forgotten theatre jumped to life with the building of a spacious modern projection booth, two rebuilt 35mm Simplex projectors, a brand-new 16mm projector and a new Hurley movie screen. Other aid ranged from "bricks and mortar" items to various mechanical equipment. And all this for a theatre that never had had an organ.

Emery had been built in 1912 for the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra which in 1937 moved to Music Hall. It had never had a pipe organ so its layout was woefully lacking in chamber space. It was solved by placing the chambers upstage across almost the whole width of the stage. Since some acousticians have placed Emery in the fine company of concert halls like Carnegie Hall, the organ and the theatre have been a perfect marriage. Without going into acute detail, the Straders' contributions included many other expenses involved in the whole organ installation.

Nothing comes easy in operating a movie theatre on a regular basis — shows on Friday and Saturday nights continuously since 1978. Jack's part starts with receipt of the film schedule for the coming two months. Joan researches from her film library pertinent facts and interesting bits about each film. Then Jack prepares the copy for both radio and the telephone tape. Once prepared, the copy is then voiced in his well equipped voice-over studio in his home. This professional work again is part of the Straders' continuing help in making our presence at Emery Theatre a success.

Note to any chapters looking for a Jack Strader of their own: we doubt is there is another like him who combines fine talent as a "voice-over" master, interest and talent in theatre pipe organs, and the imagination to help the chapter cut its own spot in the local entertainment picture. He has been a rare asset to Ohio Valley ATOS!

Valentine Concert at Renaissance

by Virginia White

The marquee of the Renaissance Theatre in Mansfield, Ohio, said "Valentine Organ Concert with Bob Ralston." But Mother Nature forgot to read it. She sent us one of her good sleet and snow storms about noon on the 14th of February.

But Bob's followers are a sturdy, persistent group. When the doors opened about 500 people came in to get warm. And that they did because the love songs flowed from the Hollywood Wurlitzer.

Of course "Funny Valentine" was his riser. Then his years with Lawrence Welk showed that he has learned hundreds of tunes. "Ah Sweet Mystery of Life" being one that we don't hear too often, and the organ can bring out its mellow chords so beautifully.

The grand piano got its share of lime-light. It being Bob's first instrument at a very early age he dearly loves the classics and does them so well. One of the highlights of the evening was a recitation of Old Glory. While sitting on a stool beside a fluttering flag, he gave us a story of how it had taken us through many a battle and is still waving in Saudia Arabia. Then he played several patriotic marches both at the piano and the organ.

While here, Bob had taken his morning walk around the city and found our newly constructed Carousel building. By late spring it is to be filled with 48 hand-carved figures. Mansfield is now the home of the only company still doing hand carving. This all reminded Bob of the wonderful music from the Broadway show *Carousel*. The organ can give us the tinkling sounds of the merry-go-round and then the rich tones of the tibias in "You'll Never Walk Alone."

Everyone had a chance to stretch their vocal chords with a sing-along. It proved that the old standards and their words are never forgotten. And we were in good voice.

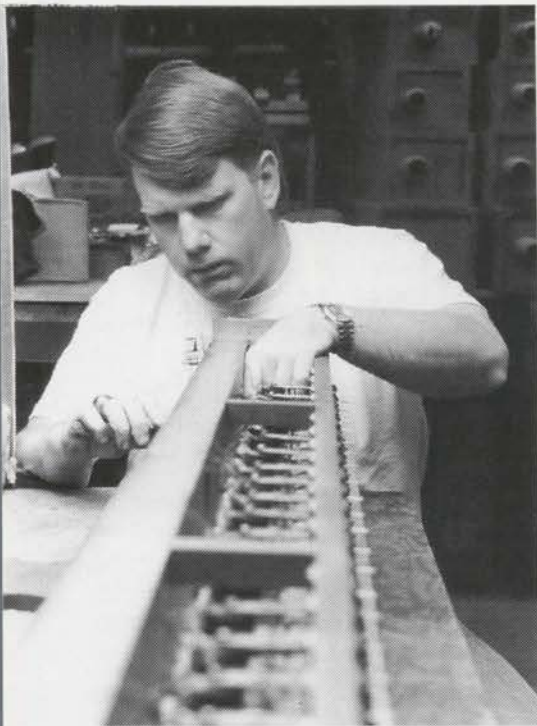
All in all, it was a warm way to send the patrons back into the cold and, hopefully, safely to their homes. We want them to return and bring a friend or two on May 19 for Father Miller.

We'll be at the door waiting for you.

(continued...)

*The greatest moments of the human spirit
may be deduced from
the greatest moments in music.*

AARON COPELAND, 1954



Buddy Boyd

(The following is reprinted from *Indicator*, the Westinghouse Company magazine.)

Promoting Theatre Organ in Maryland

Buddy Boyd Helps Revive Movie Theatre Grandeur

Although childhood memories are important in everyone's life, it is easy to become distracted by routine responsibilities and lose sight of these early visions. But for Field Engineer Buddy Boyd, what began as a childhood fascination in a Richmond, Virginia, theatre has grown into a lifelong pursuit. Thanks to his engineering skills, he has been able to bring his vision — restoring theatre organs — to life.

"I grew up thinking every big theatre in the country had a pipe organ. When I left Virginia, I realized they were not as common as I thought, and I wanted to do something about it," says Buddy.

Listening to organ melodies while he waited for movies to begin made such an impression on Buddy that it inspired him to begin restoring organs, an activity he has not been involved in for more than 25 years.

Buddy, who always considered himself a "music buff," was introduced to his hobby at an early age. At 15, he was asked by a friend to help move a player piano, which had a valve system similar to a pipe organ. He ended up helping to refurbish the instrument and began rebuilding player pianos regularly.

Later, a high school teacher introduced him to a group of enthusiasts who were dedicated to saving classic theatre organs. These unique organs were designed to simulate the orchestras that once accompanied silent films. Buddy has been an active member of the American Theatre Organ Society (ATOS) ever since.

"In restoring these organs, I apply state-of-the-art technology to instruments that are 100 years old."

As the use of theatre organs declined, Buddy became more determined to work for their upkeep, refurbishment and placement for public enjoyment. An affiliate of a group working in Baltimore, Buddy is one of 130 people restoring an organ that will be placed locally.

"In restoring these organs, I apply state-of-the-art technology to instruments that are 100 years old," says Buddy. "I do the electrical and mechanical engineering design and repair. It's an engineering skill that requires artistic talent to select the pipes based on how I think they should sound."

Buddy's specialties include the installation, checkout and computer software pro-

gramming of the organ. As a field engineer, he performs the same procedures on radar systems.

Theatre organs are complex systems, and restoring them is a challenge. Some have up to seven keyboards, 32 pedals, and thousands of pipes and chimes. The smallest pipe can be a quarter inch long and the largest up to 64 feet.

Buddy explains that he typically replaces the thousands of wires originally required to operate an organ with only 25. These handle the control functions that drive the systems in the organ chamber, where the sound is produced.

Through apprenticeships with electronic and pipe organ builders, Buddy learned the organ's intricate operations. "With my job, I have traveled extensively, which has given me an opportunity to meet a lot of people who are willing to share their knowledge about organs."

The Baltimore group is not the only club to which Buddy lends his services. He works weekends and vacations to restore nine different organs throughout the country. His projects include organs in Alabama, North Carolina and Tennessee theatres and the William Penn estate in Reidsville, North Carolina.

"I'm just a frustrated musician," says Buddy. "Working on the organs gives me access to play them after hours when no one is around." And it gives movie audiences a chance to rekindle fond childhood memories as they wait in anticipation of show time.



Buddy Boyd uses his engineering skills in his spare time to restore theatre organs.



Votteler-Holtkamp-Sparling in Turnpaugh skating rink.

Skating Rink at Nyona Lake

by Barbara Cranston

At Nyona Lake, near the little community of Macy, Indiana, is a dream come true for my cousin, Weldon Turnpaugh. One day a 50' semi pulled up to his lake-front home and unloaded a number of coffin-like boxes. The neighbors thought he had gone plumb crazy!

The truck, in fact, contained a 2/7 Votteler-Holtkamp-Sparling pipe organ which had been built years ago in Cleveland, Ohio, and was purchased by Weldon from a church in Indianapolis. The organ was stored in a garage while Turnpaugh built a 30' x 50' roller-skating rink in his backyard. As soon as the chest was moved into the rink, a labor of love began.



Farrand pump organ in Turnpaugh rink.



Weldon Turnpaugh at his synthesizer.

An English pump organ, built in 1906 by the Farrand Company, was installed at the opposite end of the rink along with two electronic keyboards, a turntable for records, and microphones for vocalizing (which he also does very well). A few theatre seats add to the decor, with shoe skates in various sizes available for the family and neighbors to enjoy.

Weldon's latest venture is the building of a calliope. This little gem will no doubt have a part in the annual Circus City Festival in Peru, Indiana, in July.

What will this creative cousin do next? Probably add more ranks to the organ. Although he doesn't read music, it has always played a large part in his life, and it will be fun to see what comes next. Weldon would love to hear from or meet any ATOSers who are interested. His phone number is 219/382-4195.



Turnpaugh's calliope.

Don Lewis Signs On as Rodgers Consultant

Well known musician/lecturer Don Lewis will be leading workshops on music technology and worship for Rodgers Instrument Corporation dealers according to Rick Anderson, Rodgers Director of Marketing.

Originally from Dayton, Ohio, Mr. Lewis grew up with music, electronics, a



musical family and church community as major forces in his life. As a young man he studied piano and organ and at 15 became the accompanist for the Mt. Enon Missionary Baptist Church playing for seven choirs.

As a student at Tuskegee University, Lewis sang in and accompanied the famous Tuskegee Institute Choir under the direction of Dr. Relford Patterson. He organized and directed the first USAF ROTC Chorus on campus.

Mr. Lewis continued to participate in gospel, liturgical and inspirational music as a choir director, pianist and organist at various churches ranging from Baptist to Episcopal.

He has been active as a guest lecturer and through his "Say Yes to Music" program has reached more than 100,000 young people in schools, introducing them to the power of music and music technology.

As a studio musician, Lewis has worked with such greats as Quincy Jones, Michael Jackson, Billy Preston, Sergio Mendez and Marvin Hamlisch. In 1990, Lewis released his own album "Mood Rainbow" which is a collection of "spiritual" music.

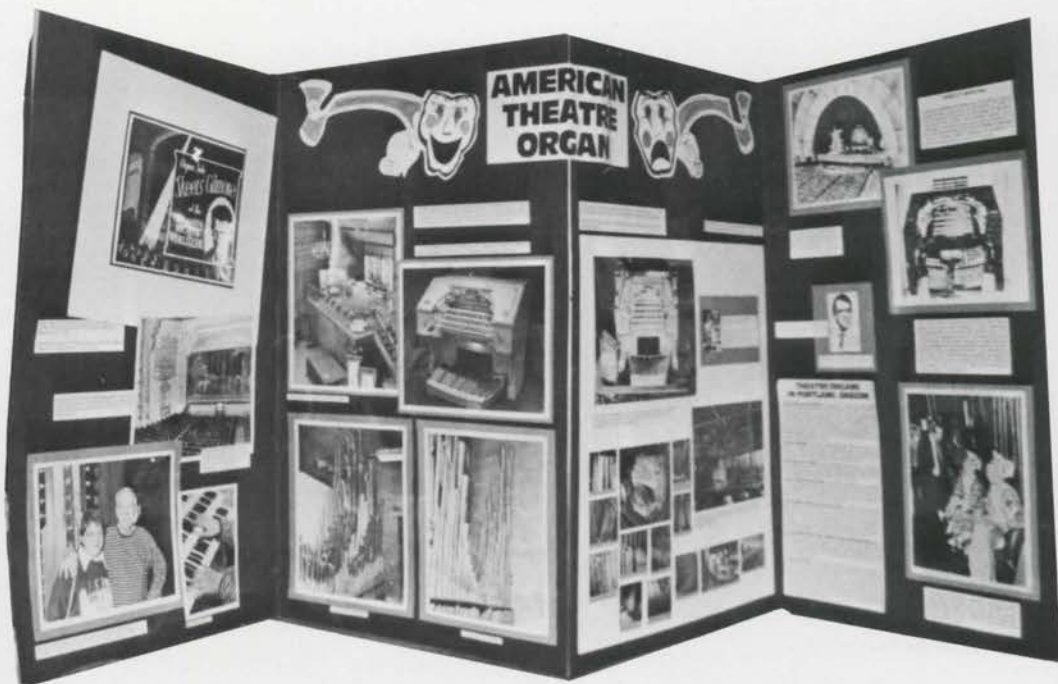
According to Anderson, Lewis will present workshops on Music Technology in Worship for Choir Directors, Pianists and Organists; Increasing Church Music Program Effectiveness with MIDI; and customized workshops for individual needs of churches/organizations.

Lewis will present highlights of his workshops at the 1991 Gospel Music Workshop of America Convention in Salt Lake City, Utah, August 11-15.

Rodgers Instrument Corporation, Hillsboro, Oregon, USA, is one of the world's largest and most prestigious builders of pipe and classical electronic organs and a noted builder of classically voiced digital keyboards. Rodgers organs are featured in prominent concert halls such as New York City's Carnegie Hall; Philadelphia's Academy of Music; and the St. Francis Cultural Complex in Caceres, Spain. Tens of thousands of churches have purchased Rodgers organs including Seoul Korea's Full Gospel Church (world's largest church) and many of the largest and most prestigious churches in North America. Thousands of additional Rodgers organs are installed in homes throughout North America and the world.



ELEANOR COSGROVE



I wanted my project to be about music. All kinds of music. But, I soon learned that my subject was too large. I needed to focus my research. So, since this was to be about my cultural heritage, I decided to see what I could learn about American music.

Editor's Note:

Eleanor Cosgrove, age 14, researched and prepared this project for her eighth grade Social Studies/Language Arts class at Robert Gray Middle School in Portland, Oregon. Her teacher, Georgia Liapes, was intrigued by Eleanor's topic because it had not been previously researched by any of her students. Eleanor's display was accompanied by a theatre organ tape recording made for her by Bob Shafter on his home organ. Her proud grandmother shares it here with you...

I learned that there are only two instruments indigenous (and I learned the word indigenous!) to our country: the banjo and the theatre organ. And, since I study the piano and since most of the music I've studied this far is by German or Russian or Italian composers, learning about an American keyboard instrument interested me! And, my great grandfather, Eliot Gilmore, was a theatre organist. I had grown up hearing stories about his playing for the silent films. My grandmother, Grace McGinnis, is the editor of the national publication: THEATRE ORGAN, is involved on many levels with the local and national chapters of the American Theatre Organ Society and loves to listen to, talk about and be around theatre organs and theatre organ music. So, from the time I was six weeks old, I cut my teeth (really) on the theatre organ music at the Organ Grinder in Portland. (Well, actually, I cut my teeth on the pizza crust while listening to the organ music!) I began my research by reading copies of the THEATRE ORGAN and these words stayed with me:

"Music in itself is one beautiful picture after another, but for the organist to interpret what he sees into music is a difficult task. To become a picture organist, one must have vivid imagination."

Ralph H. Brigham, Strand Theatre, New York

I understood just what he was saying! I know how it feels to have those times when words fail to express what music *can* say. I wanted to know more about this music that took the place of words when it accompanied

a moving picture. I soon learned that, just as Paul Quarino told me, there is no school where one studies how to become a theatre organist; there is very little written about theatre organs and theatre organ music. The computer file at the library did not list much. Like the organists who want to study theatre organ, the person who wants to study the subject must find people who know its history and "pick their brains." The people in ATOS are the keepers of this story. They are keeping alive a music that might have been lost to my generation. They do it by word of mouth . . . by preserving instruments . . . by apprenticing themselves to older organists who know more than they do. While I found quite a bit of information in the library of the editorial office of the ATOS THEATRE ORGAN, I learned most from interviews and from conversations with organists. I learned about the seven theatre organs in Portland — most of them I have been to see and hear. I learned that of the 95 original installations in this country, one is in Oregon. I learned a lot about my grandfather and what it was like for my grandmother growing up in the Depression but still being able to go to the theatre every week because her daddy was the organist! I learned about the magic of the music in the theatres when the films were silent. And, I learned that if our past is not to be lost, we need people who care enough to preserve it and write about it and tell about it. And, I am glad that what I have learned I might be able to share someday and a little bit of what I now know about American Theatre Organs and the music will be saved.