

# Letters To The Editor

Dear Editor:

Patrons on the mailing list of the Oakland, California Paramount Theatre were sent a brochure naming the players for the 1991-1992 organ series. My name and a spurious quotation from me were included. The theatre had no right to distribute this false advertising, through any medium, for they had no signed contract from me.

Early in the Spring the general manager told me by telephone that he had decided to have a second performance on each date from each artist. I reluctantly gave a tentative agreement but reconsidered and refused after several days of thought about the proposal. I might add that the suggested fee for the second show was less than twenty percent of my usual fee.

I recommended that a second performance be given on the next day, Sunday afternoon, hoping that the day would probably draw a larger audience than a Saturday afternoon. I offered the Sunday date at my minimum fee which is less than half of what I regularly received at the Paramount.

A compromise proposal was then offered to me: Have someone else play a Saturday matinee with myself playing that evening. I rejected this on a standpoint of logistics: conflicting piston setting times on an already recalcitrant worn out console.

I have been hurt and distressed by this entire matter of false advertising. The theatre management knew of my decision months before the 1991 convention. I will appreciate your help in correcting any misapprehension in your Fall issue so the truth of the matter can preclude the usual misinformation/gossip from the unofficial grist mills.

Sincerely,

George Wright

Dear Editor:

May a crotchety reader cavil over two minor errors of fact in your May/June 1991 issue?

The first is in Robert M. Gilbert's "It's Ninety-One-Derful." On page 10, he states that the New York Hippodrome Wurlitzer (opus 1538) was a Publix #1. Not so! It was one of two four-manual oddities which were designed on a three-division basis. The first division served the Accompaniment and Great, the second the Orchestral and Solo, and the third, a floating string section, was available only through couplers.

The second error is in Chapter Notes on page 45, in the statement; "He played for us on Allen's top-of-the-line three-

manual theatre product, the MDS Theatre III Deluxe." The Custom Theatre organs, *not* the Theatre IIIs, are the firm's big guns. I bring this up only because Allen has been so modest about promoting their largest instruments that other writers in your Journal have also been beguiled into considering the Theatre III groups to be AO's best effort.

Sincerely,

Robert Gates  
Mendham, NJ

Dear Editor:

May I add a few words to the Closing Chord tributes in the May/June issue for both Erwin Young and Tommy Landrum.

I first met both these long-standing members of ATOE/ATOS during my first visit across the herring pond in October 1962. From Washington, D.C., a particularly memorable day's program included sampling, as an appetizer, Erwin's home studio installation before proceeding to Richmond, Virginia. There, Tommy hosted us on a grand tour of the Mosque and the Byrd Theatres plus a stop at Miller & Roades to hear Eddie Weaver at lunch time.

I met them again on subsequent visits, and Tommy came over here for the first Safari in 1976. I think I last saw Erwin at the Los Angeles convention in 1979, and Tommy was on his home ground in Richmond in 1986. It may sometimes be said that first impressions count a lot. If one forms those impressions at an impressionable age and in impressionable circumstances, as I guess I did in 1962, then the memory may be even stronger.

By their long and distinguished service to the theatre organ cause, both these salwarts have left us an example to follow. To their nearest and dearest, I send my most sincere condolences. Let us look forward to the day when we may meet again around the Great Wurlitzer in The Sky.

Sincerely,

Michael Candy  
Hertfordshire, England

Dear Editor:

The London and South of England chapter would like to express their thanks to all who attended our Celebration Safari in May. The marvelous letters of appreciation and the interest in coming over again has led us to thinking ahead. We are proud of the installations we have, and we assure you there will be more for next time. We loved having you!

May I also thank the members who voted for me in the recent election for the

national board of directors. It was gratifying and will give me an incentive to carry on with the aims of ATOS within our chapter. Thank you for your confidence in me.

Sincerely,

Edith Rawle  
London, England

Dear Editor:

Like most people, I rarely find any reason to write to magazines or newspapers. I am moved to respond, however, to the comments and observations of Steve Levin, noted in previous issues.

As we approach the 21st Century, the leadership of the ATOS has expressed an interest in broadening its membership base, and in finding new ways to "raise the consciousness" of the public about theatre organs. These are laudable goals, worthy of the time and effort allocated to them; but there is one area that seems to be lacking attention, and one word mentioned by Mr. Levin seems to cut to the core of the matter: "authenticity."

Amongst the stated purposes of the American Theatre Organ Society, I am not aware of any guidelines or specific encouragement for *historical restorations* of theatre organs (*not* rebuilding; there is a difference). Little effort seems to be put forth to preserve instruments in their original condition and specification, and much effort seems bent on "improvement" (I suspect that Steve's style 35 is likely the only one left in this world; the rest have been "improved" out of existence).

The theatre organ should certainly move into the 21st century, and its rebuilders (or builders) should take advantage of new technologies and new concepts in specification, as all builders of "living" instruments do. As an enlightened organization, however, we should remember that, as with all fields of human endeavor, the theatre organ has no future without its past. Its history is part of its credibility as an instrument and provides the foundational roots to anchor and direct the innovations of the future.

Bearing that in mind, I suggest that the "authentic" theatre organ is an endangered species, and will soon become extinct if we as an organization do not take steps to prevent it.

The time to stop this trend is NOW; the instrument IS an endangered species. A look at the "census" of original installations published in THEATRE ORGAN some time ago will bear out my concerns.

Soon, perhaps, when someone asks

*continued ...*

## LETTERS cont.

"what were theatre organs like in their Golden Age?", we will only be able to say, "don't know; never seen one," because there will be no original, preserved instruments to study and enjoy. The instrument will have lost its roots, and with them, its direction and identity. If that happens; indeed, if we let it happen, it will be the only genre of pipe organ in existence (beyond the hydraulus) for which there are no surviving original examples.

We should enthusiastically support the efforts of those who labor to install historical and original instruments in public places where they will become a community asset. Even the installation of "new" organs is a commendable goal if it is accomplished by using only the "remains" of organs too damaged to be whole again. At the same time, however, and particularly relative to instruments in their original state, we as an organization should discourage the "hot-rod" mentality noted by Steve Levin, and recognize it to be potentially destructive of the historical foundation upon which the theatre organ as a legitimate instrument must build and grow.

Sincerely,  
Greg Rister

Whittier, California

Please print in your next edition some type of retraction to Mr. Mecklenburg's finger-pointing at the musicians union. We will inform Radio City Music Hall that they may be liable if they continue to use the American Federation of Musicians as a scape goat for their penny pinching.

Thank you,  
Tom Olmstead  
New York, New York

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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## THINK\*

See the next issue of THEATRE ORGAN for information on how you can be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

*Harry Heth, Nominating Chairman*

\*Yes, I know it is misspelled, but it got your attention, didn't it?

Dear Editor:

In your July/August '91 edition of the Journal, author John Mecklenburg gives an account of his recent visit to Radio City Music Hall. In that article he states one reason why the organ is so infrequently used is "union regulations concerning conditions under which the organ should be played and a maze of other reasons."

As a member and employee of Local 802 of the American Federation of Musicians who knows Radio City Music Hall intimately, I can say emphatically that there are NO regulations from 802 concerning the use of the Mighty Wurlitzer.

The only paragraph in the contract between Local 802 and Radio City Music Hall mentioning the organ states, "In the event the Employer decides to engage an organist, the identity of such musician shall be solely up to the Employer. The Employer agrees to give the organist a letter (copy to Local 802) setting forth said individual's terms and conditions of employment."

As an ex-employee of Radio City, organist and former member of the ATOS, I can tell you the reasons why the organ is not played as often as it is. The Music Hall management refuses to spend the money to keep it in good repair, or hire a full time organist to play on a regular basis. An organ must be played, and often, or it tends to deteriorate.

## 1991 Young Theatre Organist Competition

THE AMERICAN  
THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY

Ages: 13 thru 21 (as of July 1, 1991)  
THREE DIVISIONS:

Junior .....	13-15
Intermediate .....	16-18
Senior .....	19-21

A chapter may submit one entry in each category. Deadline for submitting entries is April 1, 1992. A chapter may sponsor a qualified candidate from another area.

Rules and regulations have been sent to all chapter presidents and may also be obtained by contacting chairman:

**Dorothy VanSteenkiste**  
9270 Reeck Road  
Allen Park, Michigan 48101  
313/383-0133

Contact your schools, music studios and teachers. Make your theatre organ available to these students early so that they will be ready for competition. Will your chapter have a winner in 1992? Encourage your young people to try . . .



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## GREAT NAMES

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Kimball Strony Weissrock Skinner Hazleton Kilgen Wilson  
Wickerham Gledhill Strony Kimball Nordwall Wurlitzer

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Oriental Theatre      Piper Music Palace      Gesu Church

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**November 1-3**