



Foort at the 3/17 Mosque Wurlitzer, Richmond.

REGINALD FOORT

One of the "all-time greats" of the organ world, "Reggie" Foort, was the top European concert and recording organist for 25 years, before he moved to America in 1951. Since coming to this country, this British-born artist has not only made outstanding classical recordings of the great organ in the Boston Symphony Hall, but with his popular organ records made at the Acca Temple Mosque Wurlitzer in Richmond, Va., he started the current revival of theatre organ music in America.

A man of remarkable energy, precision, and imagination, Foort is one of those rare organists equally at home with Bach or "rock". Educated at Rugby and the Royal College of Music in London, he received the coveted degree of Fellow of the Royal College of Organists (F.R.C.O.) at the age of 17. After five years in the Royal Navy during World War I, and several years of serious piano study under a pupil of Leschetizky, Foort began his meteoric career as a theatre organist in 1925. His activities from that moment on were characterized by "firsts".

Foort, in 1926, was the first organist in Europe to broadcast on, as well as the first to make a recording of, a Wurlitzer theatre organ. When the British Broadcasting Company set up its organ department in 1937, Foort was chosen over hundreds of applicants as its staff organist. With his own theme song, "Keep Smiling", his friendly chit-chat, and his superb artistry, Foort so endeared himself to the British public that he was named first

in the radio popularity poll conducted by the London *Daily Express*, circulation 4 million, winning out over all other entertainers, actors and orchestras. And as the most popular organist of England and Europe, he opened 43 new theatres, played over 2,000 radio and TV programs in twelve different countries, to which he piloted his own plane, and somehow also found time to make more records than any other organist on the Continent - over 200.

Perhaps the most spectacular undertaking of Foort's career was his 25-ton "traveling organ". After several years at B.B.C., he resigned to tour the vaudeville theatres of Great Britain with a 5-manual 27-rank specially designed and constructed Moller Theatre Organ. To transport the console, the 2,000 pipes, and the many electrical and mechanical units, Foort used five 30-foot long 13-foot high trucks, and carried with him a staff of 14 organ builders, electricians, stage riggers, etc., to reassemble the giant instrument in each theatre.

When the advent of World War II ended this project, the organ was sold to B.B.C., and Foort undertook a rigorous schedule of giving five recitals a week, each in a different town or city, in churches and concert halls throughout Great Britain. He maintained this pace for ten years before coming to America on Christmas Day 1951, to join an organ venture in Suffolk, Va.

Shortly after his arrival from Eng-
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The Consoles are up in Richmond!

By Mac Murrill

With three theatre organs still in active use, Richmond, Virginia, has laid claim to the title; "Theatre Organ Capital of America". In support, Richmond organ enthusiasts point to the following: Eddie Weaver, who for nearly three decades was in the live organ spot at Richmond's Loew's Theater; the Byrd Theatre Wurlitzer, revived three years ago, featured Harold Warner nightly at the console until his recent death; and the famous Mosque Wurlitzer, like the previous two, is kept in first-class condition, and is played for many of the public functions held there.

In addition, a dozen recordings on Richmond theatre organs have been made in recent years by Reginald Foort, Dick Leibert, Ann Leaf, and others.

What are the fortunate circumstances which have led to all of this theatre organ activity in a world of talking pictures and Cinemascope screens?

Let us go back to the silent movie days in Richmond. The mighty theatre pipe organ, an instrument of almost unlimited musical resources, was at its peak of popularity in this entertainment world of over thirty years ago. Every movie house at that time boasted of its "giant organ", used to provide the mood-music and sound-effects for the silent "flickers", as well as a

spectacular novelty solo at intermission time, and accompaniment for the between-reel community sings. This was the era when Jesse Crawford and Ann Leaf were national idols. In Richmond a dozen organs were pouring forth throbbing, spine-tingling music at the old Bluebird, Isis, Bijou, Lyric, National, Colonial, and Strand, as well as at the newer Brookland, Capitol, Mosque, Loew's and Byrd theatres. Even the Tantilla Garden Ballroom had its own pipe organ for between-dance interludes.

Then all of this was changed. With the introduction of talking pictures in 1928, the expensive organs and organists were no longer needed, and theatre organs throughout the country gradually fell silent. Today it is difficult to find a city with a theatre organ playing. Even in New York, only one, at the Radio City Music Hall, is still regularly featured.

But in Richmond the glorious organ music was not forgotten. Although many of the organs here vanished during the Dark Ages (1928-1952), and others went into a more sedate existence - such as the fine Brookland Theatre Wurlitzer now in the Broad Street Methodist Church - fortunately, due to far-sighted managers and some talented

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Weaver at the 4/17 Byrd Wurlitzer, Richmond.

EDDIE WEAVER

Edward J. Weaver, a genial fellow with a ready smile and a quick wit, was born in Catasauqua, Pa. in 1908. He learned piano from his mother and later studied violin for five years. At the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N. Y., Eddie mastered the church and concert organ, but when someone offered him \$100 to learn to play a theatre organ to accompany silent pictures in a Rochester movie house, his career was determined. After playing in various theatres in New York and in Florida, he went to New Haven in 1926 where he was a star attraction for ten years. Eddie learned some of his organ tricks from Henry Murtagh in Buffalo and from Jesse Crawford and his wife in New Haven. Even today Eddie can give out with a "Crawfordese" glissando which is close to Jesse's best.

The author first met Eddie while a student in New Haven and recalls the many pleasant moments spent listening to his organ numbers at the Paramount, and later dancing to his 15-piece band, which Eddie directed from the Hammond, at the Hotel Taft. It was a delightful surprise, then, on returning to Richmond, to find that Eddie had preceded him here by a few months. That was in 1937, and Eddie Weaver, "Weaver of Songs", was a main feature at Richmond's Loew's Theatre from that time until very recently.

It is not difficult to understand Eddie's long popularity in his three jobs: at Loew's Wurlitzer (three to four shows daily for 24 years), at the Ham-

mond, playing luncheon and fashion show music, in nearby Miller and Rhoads department store tea room (21 years), and on his daily morning radio show over WRNL (10 years). His technique is flawless, sprightly and imaginative, whether he is playing Chopin or Chacha. He has a bubbling personality and a keen sense of humor, and his wit and originality have always shown up in his steady production of new and interesting organ novelties - which must have been quite a trick to keep turning out after more than 20 years at the same stand. (For these, as well as his original parodies of popular songs, Eddie credits his wife and his daughter, Joan, an English teacher, with assistance).

One of Eddie's spectacular organ interludes, which run from three to nine minutes in length following the song-slide "community sing", features Eddie playing three tunes at once: "There's a Long, Long Trail A-Winding" with his right hand, "Keep the Home Fires Burning" with the left, and "Just a Song at Twilight" on the pedals. (If you think it's easy, just try in on your own Wurlitzer!) For another novelty, Eddie plays the "Minute Waltz" in a minute, racing against a clockhand projected on the screen. His imitation of various types of organs and organists from church to steam calliope and from Jesse Crawford to Ethel Smith is most realistic, while his famous horn-pipe dance (dancing out the tune on the pedals) and

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Below: Warner at the 4/17 Byrd Wurlitzer, Richmond.



THE CONSOLES ARE UP IN RICHMOND! (continued)

and dedicated individuals, Richmond's three largest organs at the Loew's, Byrd, and Mosque survived the changing times, and have been thrilling a new generation of audiences with their mighty sounds.

At the Loew's Theatre, the live organ spot on the three-manual, thirteen rank Wurlitzer has been a constant drawing card for audiences ever since the theatre first opened on April 9, 1928. The Loew's astute management has kept the organ playing daily from that day to the present, setting a record unmatched in any other American city. A succession of good organists has played there: Lloyd (Wild) Oscar, Tim Crawford (no relation to Jesse), Waldo Newberry, Bill Dalton, and Felix Gotschalk, who played the morning radio broadcasts. But the "Old Master" was Eddie Weaver, who delighted audiences daily at Loew's until very recently-in fact, over a period of 24 years.

When the Byrd Theatre opened on Christmas Eve, 1928, Richmonders were greeted with the music of the "largest theatre organ in the South". And despite the "talkies", born the same year, the mighty four-manual seventeen rank Wurlitzer in the Byrd was featured with each show for more than a dozen years, beautifully played by Carl Rond, Art Brown, Bill Dalton, Slim Mathews, "Paul Nelson" (Winston Nevell), "Bob Mack" (Bob McComb), Waldo Newberry, and others. And even after the organ spots were

HAROLD WARNER SUFFERS FATAL HEART ATTACK

Harold L. Warner, Jr., died of a heart attack suffered in the organ chamber of the Mosque, Richmond, Va., on Monday, February 13, 1961. Many A.T.O.E. members will remember that Warner received nation-wide recognition in an ad featured by the Bell Telephone Company and carried in most leading magazines several years ago.

Warner had been in telephone contact with A.T.O.E. President Judd Walton regarding plans for the National Convention to be held in Richmond in June, many times in the weeks immediately preceding his death. He was very enthusiastic about the coming event, and although the matter has been debated since his passing, it has been decided to carry out plans for the meeting in Richmond, as it is an almost sure thing that Warner would have wanted it that way.

He had apparently stopped in at the Mosque to work on the Wurlitzer he loved so well on his way home from work. He was stricken about 4 P. M. and was found in a sitting position the next morning by workmen who saw the lights on and heard the blower running. He still held a pair of wires he had been working on in his hands.

discontinued (a World War II casualty), the theatre manager, Robert Coulter, jealously guarded his fine instrument against rats, children, and time; so that today, thanks to his wise policy, the Byrd organ is still in tip-top shape.

The huge and exotic Acca Temple Mosque opened on January 9, 1928 featuring spectacular stage shows and movies. Early organists at the console of the three-manual, seventeen rank Mosque Wurlitzer were Charles J. Possa, Waldo Newberry, and Ferdinand Himmelreich. The last was a blind organist whose wife sat on the organ bench with him to cue his playing to the action on the screen.

After the Mosque was closed down as a movie house during the depression, the building was little used for almost a decade until it was acquired by the City of Richmond as a civic center. Fortunately, during this time, the organ chambers on the fifth floor level were locked and inaccessible to plunderers. However, years of dust and neglect had made the organ unusable, and when renovation bids ran as high as \$30,000, the city decided to junk the instrument. At this critical moment, Harold Warner, a telephone company employee, offered to donate his services in restoring the organ (see The Tibia, Fall 1956).

For two years, with the help of some other enthusiasts, he spent his spare time renovating the organ, an action which earned him the Sertoma Service to Mankind Award from the mayor of Richmond, and national recognition from the Bell Telephone Company. Today the beautiful Mosque organ is again in use for public concerts such as the recent ones by David Ulrich and Reginald Foort, as well as being featured with visiting symphony orchestras and at conventions, graduations, and such events as the Kiwanis travelogues, when genial Russell MacDonald presides at the console.

It was the revival of the Mosque organ which catapulted Richmond into international fame in the organ world. Shortly after the instrument was restored, Cook Laboratories of Stamford, Conn. made some high fidelity recordings at the Mosque of Reginald Foort, England's top theatre organist. With the records, it issued an illustrated folder about the Mosque organ. When the Foort Mosque records were exhibited in the Audio Show at the New Yorker Hotel in October 1952, the "tweeter-and-woofer" set took to them en masse, and interest in the theatre organ, with its challenge of extreme range in pitch, dynamics, and color, crescendoed into a revival of appreciation for the long-neglected Wurlitzers, Mortons, et al. in America. Soon scores of other recording companies jumped on the "one-man-band" wagon.

The close of the First Golden Era of the Theatre Organ, precipitated in

REGINALD FOORT (Cont.)

land, Foort was asked by Emory Cook to make a theatre organ recording for the high fidelity "Sounds of Our Times" series. The search for a theatre organ in good playing condition ended happily when Reggie was introduced to the Mosque Wurlitzer by Harold Warner, Jr., who had just completed a two-year renovation of the instrument. Foort's four LP releases on the Mosque organ started a boom in organ recordings which is still in progress.

Foort, who has a grown son and daughter, lives in Chicago, where he is with the Organ Division of the Baldwin Piano Company. He still finds time to make recordings on various organs throughout the country, as well as give public concerts, such as the one in 1959 at the Mosque sponsored by the Richmond Organ Enthusiasts Club.

Very enthusiastic about America and particularly American automobiles, Reggie is the opposite number to the American foreign-car addict.

"The last four cars I owned in England were American," he says. "I never get tired of driving, even in Chicago in the rush hour!"

Of the Mosque organ, Foort says: "I consider this organ, with its setting in the unique acoustics of the Mosque, as the finest I have ever played."

EDDIE WEAVER (cont.)

his "haunted organ" act are real classics of showmanship. But he is at his very best when he features one of his arrangements of a classical number or a popular ballad "dressed up" in all the subtleties of the Weaver registration and nuance.

Someone should record this fellow!

1928 by the introduction of the "talkies", had culminated with the shutdown of the North Tonawanda factory in 1943 when the remaining stocks of Tibias and Flutes were burned and the Trumpets, Tubas, etc. were smashed into junk. And though a few consoles, such as the Loew's, remained lighted

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ANNUAL MEETING - - 1961

A.T.O.E. will go to Richmond, Virginia for its annual meeting. The arrangements have been made, and the Mosque and Byrd Theatres will be the sites of our concerts. Saturday afternoon and evening, June 24th, were chosen as the best available time when these organs could be had exclusively. Further announcement will follow shortly, and details will be given as they become certain. With the death of Harold Warner, this meeting and its music are projected as a tribute to his tireless efforts - - we know he'll be listening.

THE CONSOLES ARE UP! (continued)

during the benighted decades of canned theatre music, we may properly mark the beginning of the Second Golden Era with the Foort recordings in 1952 at the Richmond Mosque.

In the wake of this revived interest there sprang up a national organization, the American Theatre Organ Enthusiasts, and two organ magazines, Al Miller's *Kinura* and the A.T.O.E.'s *Tibia*, predecessor to *Theatre Organ*. The story of the Mosque organ was carried in these and foreign magazines, as well as in nationwide advertisements of the Bell Telephone Company.

"The Mosque organ has brought this city a great deal of publicity and good will," says Marshall Rotella, Richmond's Chief of the Bureau of Recreation, who manages the Mosque. "Visitors from as far away as Australia have stopped to see the organ they have heard so much about."

Besides Foort's three recording sessions at the Mosque which have produced for LP records, another top company, Westminster Records, has turned out several recordings here in Richmond. Dick Leibert, Radio City Music Hall organist, had tried out the Byrd organ more than 25 years ago. When the Westminster people wanted him to do a theatre organ recording in 1956, he remembered the lush sound of this organ and suggested that it be done here. The result was the album "Leibert Takes Richmond", which besides its stirring music contains several pages of photographs and descriptions of the Byrd instrument. The following year Leibert returned with Ann Leaf and Graham Jackson for another session at the Byrd to produce several more outstanding records.

"We have a fine instrument here at the Byrd," says Robert Coulter, manager, "and I am happy that it is being heard both in the theatre and throughout the country on the Westminster recordings."

The unique sound of the high wind-pressure orchestral-voiced theatre organ, with its mellow tibias and flutes, shimmering strings, distinctive reeds, brilliant brass trumpets, and tinkling and crashing percussions, cannot be conveyed in words. However, a close look at the Byrd Wurlitzer, the largest in Richmond, will reveal that the term "mighty" applies to more than just its tone. Built at a cost of between \$30,000 and \$40,000 (1928 value), the Byrd organ is housed in a row of four adjacent rooms four stories up behind the large golden grillwork above the stage. Here the blower and relay rooms flank the long shallow Main and Solo Chambers with their 1229 pipes, ranging up to sixteen feet in height, which are unified to produce the effect of 6,577 pipes.

The Byrd Wurlitzer's seventeen ranks are: Tuba Horn, Brass Trumpet, Gottfried French Trumpet (originally Tuba Mirabilis), Diaphonic Diapason, Tibia

Plena, Tibia Clausa, Orchestral Oboe, Kinura, Clarinet, Brass Saxophone, String, Viole d'Orchestre, Viole Celeste, Oboe Horn, Quintadena, Flute, and Vox Humana.

There is also a Concert Grand Piano, (with Mandolin effect), visible in the left balcony box, an unenclosed Master Xylophone under the piano, an unenclosed Marimba-Harp, under a decorated Stringed Harp visible in the right balcony box, an enclosed Xylophone, Chrysoglott, Glockenspiel-Bells, Chimes, and tuned Sleigh Bells, as well as a bass drum-kettle drum, snare drum-tom tom, tambourine, castanets, chinese block, sand block, triangle, cymbal, crash cymbal, aeroplane effect, surf effect, wind effect, birds, horse hoofs, fire gong, steamboat whistle, auto horn, doorbell, and two thunder pedals. The 390 percussions and effects are unified to produce 568 sounds.

The four-manual velvet-draped mahogany console is on a centerstage elevator which rises from the sub-basement. There are 202 stop tablets, double bolstered, and 39 combination pistons. The console with its 1680 key contacts is connected by a cable of 1882 wires to the relays, where over 10,000 contact-points are controlled by magnets and pneumatics. From these another cable of 1359 wires goes to the various pipes. Over 2300 magnets and several miles of wire are used

throughout the instrument.

While the organ is being played, the relay room sounds like the chatter of a busy telephone exchange, reflecting its heritage from the inventor of theatre organs, the English telephone engineer, Robert Hope-Jones. And here in Richmond, two telephone company employees, Warner, until his recent death, and Tommy Landrum, have spent their spare time keeping the big organs in the Loew's, Byrd, and Mosque in top electrical and musical condition. Without the technical skill and the hundreds of hours of labor of these two, no theatre organ would be playing in Richmond today.

In view of all of this activity, then, it is not difficult to understand why Richmond has been called the "Theatre Organ Capital". For not only is it the birthplace of the Second Golden Era of the Theatre Organ; this city actually is still living in the First, which never ended here. Richmond has always been a "theatre organ" town, never without "live" Wurlitzer music, from the early days of the gifted Carl Rond to the Eddie Weaver era.

Virginians have a proud tradition of preserving what is best from the past; perhaps this is the real reason that in Richmond today the Mosque, Byrd, and Loew's Theatres still resound to the throbbing, spine-tingling music of "The Mighty Wurlitzer".

NOTE ON WANAMAKER ORGAN SPECIFICATIONS

The John Wanamaker Organ Supplement enclosed with this issue of THEATRE ORGAN is furnished by courtesy of Anna and Joseph Oelhaf (A.T.O.E. members who have the former Radio City Rainbow Room Wurlit-

zer in their Greenwich Village, New York City, pent-house) and Margaret and Jay Quinby (A.T.O.E. members who have the former State Theatre, Orange, N.J., expanded U.S. Pipe Organ in their Summit, N.J. coach-house).

CINEMA ORGAN SOCIETY OF ENGLAND PURCHASES WURLITZER

The largest Wurlitzer Theatre Organ in Europe, the Trocadero Cinema 4 manual 21 rank Wurlitzer has recently been acquired by the Cinema Organ Society of England to be installed and used by Club members, it was announced recently in the Society's official journal. Using funds saved for the purpose, and relying on popular subscriptions, the club's officers made the decision to purchase the organ and to put it in storage for the time being. Later on it is hoped a suitable place will be found to install the instrument where concerts and practice sessions can be held.

In response to the call for cash subscriptions, A.T.O.E. President Judd Walton forwarded an A.T.O.E. check in the amount of \$25.00 to be used for the organ project by the Society. "This is one way we can express our friendship and mutual feelings to our fellow enthusiasts in England," said Walton. "We send with it the best wishes of our members for

success in this monumental project," Walton said on making the announcement. We will follow with interest the Society's undertaking, and A.T.O.E. members can help individually by subscribing to the Journal and making whatever other donations they might like to send. For either purpose, write to the Society's overseas treasurer, R. Nicholson Elmhirst, 118 Kings Avenue, Woodford Green, Essex, England."

VISIT TO A CHRISTIE CINEMA ORGAN

The newly formed THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA, in one of its sessions last year, saw about 50 members and friends paying a visit to a Christie Cinema Organ. According to John Clancy, secretary, the organ is now located in the Church of St. Columba at West Ryde, N.S.W.

Says Clancy, "Master Organist Ray Myers used to play this organ in Gordon Theatre at the tender age of 16! Now 21, he ably demonstrated the eight units with improvisations, then opened

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