

NIAGARA CHAPTER "INVADES" TORONTO

By H. Clealan Blakely

"Well, this really is a Mighty Wurlitzer", exclaimed an enthusiastic ATOE member at Toronto's huge Maple Leaf Gardens. Horace Lapp, the genial Gardens' organist, had just opened the concert with a rousing rendition of "Strike Up the Band".

The Gardens concert was the climax of a Theatre Organ weekend in Toronto June 10 and 11, staged by the Niagara Frontier Chapter of the ATOE. The proceedings started early Saturday morning at the Royal York Hotel at the 5/110 Casavant Organ in the Concert Hall. Harvey Elsaesser from Buffalo, one of our more talented members, entertained with a medley of familiar favorites. While the big Casavant is primarily a Concert Organ and suffers from its bottled up location backstage, it has many beautiful orchestral voices as well as plenty of traps and percussions.

Later, at the Odeon-Carlton Theatre, we entered the beautiful lobby to be surprised and delighted with the discovery of a big poster saying, "The Odeon-Carlton Extends a Cordial Welcome to the American Association of Theatre Organ Enthusiasts". This was just the first indication of the red-carpet treatment accorded to us by Victor Nowe, the Odeon manager, and his staff. The Carlton is the gem of the Odeon chain and, unquestionably, the most beautiful theatre in Canada. The smart blonde horseshoe console of the 3/19 Hillgreen-Lane organ was rolled out on its track at the right of the stage and a small section of the huge contour curtain was lifted to frame the console.

Mr. Colin Corbett, former resident organist at the Odeon opened with a thrilling arrangement of "Bless This House", then carried on with a medley of all-time favorites. His arrangement of "Dancing Tambourine" was a real standout. This organ is only partially unified, but has plenty of couplers and good pipework. There are no traps, and percussions consists of chimes, xylophone, and orchestra bells. The kinura-krumet is rather cutting but effective.

After the finale, Colin Corbett came to the stage mike and expressed his



Quentin Maclean at Mapleleaf Gardens Wurlitzer.

pleasure at discovering that an organization like our ATOE was attempting to preserve the tradition of the theatre organ. He hoped that the day would come when the organ would return as a regular part of the theatre program.

Having heard of a pipe organ installation in the T. Eaton Company Department Store, a few doors away, a group decided to investigate and were cordially invited by the management to try out the 4/90 Casavant. Harvey Elsaesser put the organ through its paces and tells us that it was in beautiful shape and the voices outstanding, a much better installation than the one at Royal York Hotel.

At 2:30 p.m. we assembled at Maple Leaf Gardens to hear Quentin Maclean and Horace Lapp at the 5/21 Wurlitzer. The Gardens is Toronto's huge Sports Palace, home of the Toronto Maple Leaf Hockey Club, with a seating capacity of almost 17,000. The organ is basically a Style 260 Wurlitzer which was originally installed in Shea's Theatre. When the Gardens bought the organ early in 1957, they had to work fast to keep ahead of demolition crews. All the original wiring was removed from the chests and, when the organ was re-installed, complete new all-electric relays, switches and wiring were supplied. Mr. Doug Morris, Technical Director of the Gardens, designed complete new organ chambers, bandshell and press gallery. The chambers are adequate in size and are lined with glazed tile for maximum sound reflection. A new 5-manual console was designed and built right on the spot. It is not a horseshoe console but has stopkeys in angle side jambs, and is covered with pale green arborite trimmed with white. Four of the keyboards came from the former right console of the Paramount Theatre Wurlitzer in New York. The wiring is color coded, with a distinctive color for each note throughout the relays, switches, console, etc. The percussions are in a separate chamber, amplified electronically to the proper level with Altec mike and horns.

After Horace Lapp's opening number, he introduced Quentin Maclean, who then played a fast-swinging medley.

After playing a request number, he called Horace back to the console for a medley of operatic favorites. Mac came back to the mike to announce that he would play a medley he had prepared especially for the occasion. From here the familiar melodies melted into each other with constantly changing registration. This time Mac poured it on; everyone knew by this time about "The Magic of Maclean" which our English friends felt when he played at the Trocadero. Horace Lapp then played another clever arrangement which was followed by a Charlie Chaplin comedy (silent) while he played the accompaniment. Horace was organist at Shea's and Pantages (now Imperial) theatres in the twenties, and demonstrated here that he has not forgotten the art of photoplaying. After this showing Maclean returned to the console and concluded the afternoon program with another beautifully handled medley.

Sunday morning we arrived at Studio "G" at the CBC on Jarvis Street to find Quentin Maclean already seated at the console and we were greeted by the music of Chopin in a typical Maclean style. Maclean then introduced David Legge, the son of Franklin Legge, who built the organ. Mr. Legge traced the history of the 3/14 unit from its first home in Casa Loma (an authentic castle in Toronto) in 1926, its removal to the CKNC studios in the Everready plant on Davenport Road, to its present Jarvis Street location. Quentin then followed with a program of request numbers from the members.

In reflection of our memorable week-end, it is quite remarkable the distances that some enthusiasts travel to hear these organs. Among others we noticed in the audience were Reginald Watson, designer of the famous BBC Moller and owner of a beautiful 17 rank organ in Manhasset, Long Island; also Rev. H. Harrison Flint from Maitland, Ontario former theatre organist in Boston, Massachusetts, and Mr. and Mrs. Bill Purdy, owners of a Style 235 Wurlitzer in Syracuse, New York.



Horace Lapp at Mapleleaf Gardens Wurlitzer.



Colin Corbett at the Odeon-Carlton's Hillgreen-Lane.

theatre organ