
Book Review

By
Lloyd E. Klos

THE BEST REMAINING SEATS by Ben M. Hall, Clarkson N. Potter, \$15.00.

Considered by many as the foremost authority on the history of the Theatre Organ, Ben Hall has made a real contribution to the lore of the Golden Age of the Movie Palace in America with a thrilling 266-page book. Done on glazed paper with several colored plates, the work could be correctly labeled "The Life of Roxy", for the golden days of the Motion Picture Theater did revolve around this human dynamo, and there are few pages in which Samuel Rothafel is not in evidence.

Following the foreword by Bosley Crowther, movie critic of the New York TIMES, the reader is taken to the grand opening of the Roxy Theater, the biggest, most sumptuous movie theater ever constructed to that time, March 11, 1927. He is personally escorted through the doors and the massive rotunda, and thence to his seat, amid the glitter and excitement of a big opening. "The amber house lights dimmed. Majestically, from the bowels of the orchestra pit, rose not one, not two, but three great organ consoles, each manned by an organist in a sort of green velvet smoking jacket. Dezso Von D'Antalfy, Emil Velazco, and Casimir A. J. Parmentier were their names, and they thundered through 'The Pilgrims Chorus' with a fervor befitting the occasion."

Through the succeeding 27 chapters, the reader follows the life of Roxy, meeting his friends and associates such as Gloria Swanson, Major Bowes, Lew White, William Fox, and his famous "gang" which pioneered in radio variety programs. How Roxy brought new life to old movie houses is graphically shown. The man was rich in ideas, he was sure those ideas would work, and work they did.

Of special interest to the Theatre Organ Enthusiast is that in addition to 41 pictures which show organ consoles and some of the stars who presided over them, there is an 18-page chapter devoted exclusively to "The Apotheosis of the Mighty Wurlitzer." For once, we have an author who is not afraid to delve into the subject. All the major makes of organs are mentioned. The ideas of Hope-Jones are explored. The rise of Jesse Crawford is followed, and included is the notation that "When John Philip Sousa's Band played a week at the Paramount, trained nurses were stationed in the aisles to assist those overcome by the sheer magnitude of sound when the Sousa Band, the Paramount Grand Orchestra, and Mr. & Mrs. Jesse Crawford at the twin consoles of the Mighty Wurlitzer all joined in their rendition of 'The Stars and Stripes Forever'".

All the big names of the theatre or-

gan world are mentioned—Don Baker, Ann Leaf, Georges Montalba, Lew White, C. A. J. Parmentier, Melody Mac (Leonard MacClain), Iris Vining, Henry Murtaugh, Milton Charles, Sigmund Krumgold, Dick Leibert, Eddie Dunstedter—a veritable "Who's Who" at the Console.

Other chapters deal with the operation of the plush movie houses, the ushers and their daily rituals, the machinery backstage, production, projection, every conceivable facet is covered most adequately. Finally, with the advent of the talkies, comes the inevitable decline of the great movie theaters, and the final page shows Gloria Swanson amid the ruins of the Roxy in 1960, making the circle complete after she had attended the grand opening 33 years previously.

ATOE members are listed as having contributed to the success of the book by its author. Among them are H. Clelan Blakely, Jesse Crawford, Mel Doner, Dr. Ray Lawson, Ann Leaf, Richard Loderhose, Al Miller, Roger Mumbrue, Daniel Papp, E. J. Quinby, Dick Simon-ton, and Ray Shelley.

The book with its 301 assorted pictures, illustrations, plans and drawings is a must for every theater organ lover's library. To Ben Hall, after four years of research, goes an accolade from this reviewer, who shouts "Well done!"

LETTERS

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tunity to partially restore this beautiful instrument. There still remains a lot of work to be done, but everything in the organ works. I play it every Friday evening before the movie begins and sometimes on Saturday evenings during intermissions. I would be pleased to answer any inquiries concerning the organ, but the Manos folks have definitely stated that the organ will not be sold.

Yours truly,
Nick Snow
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State Teachers College
Indiana, Pennsylvania

1960-61 ROSTER

THE ROSTER of the ATOE membership for 1960-61 is now available at 50¢ per copy. Just write National Secretary Ida James, P.O. Box 248, Alameda, California, include your half dollar, and your copy will be forthcoming.

- THANKS -

The officers and staff of THEATRE ORGAN wish to take this opportunity to extend to all of our members best wishes for a happy and prosperous New Year. Please accept our thanks for the many holiday greeting cards that were received.

Geo. Wright San Francisco Concert

Saturday midnight, November 4, 1961, will go down in theatre organ history as an experience to remember. This was the night George Wright put on the best show yet in his series of midnight organ concerts at the mighty Wurlitzer (4/36) in the Fabulous San Francisco Fox Theatre. An audience in excess of 4,000 were treated to organ music in the "Wright" manner for two hours during which time George played everything from brassy show-tunes to "The Rosary" and a rendition of "Bringing In The Sheaves" that will never be forgotten by those privileged to be in attendance.

Judd Walton, Bud Perry and Bob Jacobus had labored many, many nights and week-ends to put this giant Wurlitzer in such perfect shape that George was able to demonstrate each and every individual rank and percussion on the organ, much to the delight of the entire audience, many of whom had never heard some of the really beautiful ranks that appear on this organ. George made it a point during the show to publicly thank Judd, Bud and

Bob for the tremendous job they had done on the organ and said that it was in the best shape that he had ever known it to be. This no doubt had a lot to do with George extending himself to the utmost to do his best concert to date.

Many thanks are due to Fox Manager Bob Apple. Here is a man who really loves this theatre and especially the two organs that it houses. He sees to it that the organ is under lock and key so that it may be kept intact, but is always willing to let the organ be used for organized ATOE meetings. He also makes use of the organ in conjunction with various events that take place at the Big Fox. Those in the San Francisco-Oakland area are extremely lucky to have managers like Bob Apple of the Fox, Earl Long of the San Francisco Paramount, Herman Kersken and Gordon Stoddard of the Oakland Paramount and Mark Alling of the RKO Golden Gate in San Francisco, for without their cooperation, organ entertainment would be hard to come by.

\$5.00 - DUES ARE DUE FOR '62 - \$5.00
