

Quentin Maclean

By William J. Kessel
Niagara Frontier Chapter

Quentin Morvaren Maclean passed away July 9 at the age of 66, in St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto, his adopted city.

His fame in Britain and in Canada far surpassed even that of Jesse Crawford, who died a short time ago. Anyone who has access to organ literature, serious or popular, in England can readily verify this. When, a year or two ago, it was rumored that a trip back "home" to England was planned, the organ buffs were breathless.

Mac, said to have been independently wealthy, was the perfect host to ATOE's Eastern Chapters in 1961 when Niagara Frontier Chapter held their "Pipes On Parade" in Toronto. His performance at the Maple Leaf Gardens, Canadian Broadcasting Studio G and Holy Rosary Church will long be remembered. Those who met him learned for themselves why two continents vied for his residence.

Quentin Maclean studied at Vienna and Leipzig. One of his teachers was Max Reger, himself a pupil of Brahms.

His was a musical family; his father, Aleck Maclean, was conductor of the Spa Company at Scarborough and composed the comic opera *Quentin Durwood*. His grandfather, Sir Charles Maclean, was a classical scholar and organist.

Mac spent four years during World War I interned in Germany; but he found a harmonium, and was eventually presented to his sovereigns as "the camp organist of Ruhleben." He spent a term as assistant organist at Westminster Cathedral (stet).

In 1920 he discovered cinema organs, and a little later was "the first cinema organist to broadcast."

The 1920's and 1930's found him playing theatre organs around London, and in 1928 he designed "the biggest theatre organ in Europe at the Regal Marble Arch." Colin H. Betts, of the Cinema Organ Society, writes: "Maclean's reputation is always associated with the organ at the Trocadero, Elephant & Castle, a huge cinema on the south side of the River Thames which has only recently been pulled down. This organ has been bought by the Society and is at present in store awaiting a new home." The organ is a 4/21 WurliTzer with 217 tabs on its gilt console.

Mac also played at least a weekly broadcast lasting a full hour. "It was not uncommon to hear a Bach item. He was one of four organists who opened the BBC Theatre Organ in 1936, a Compton which was bombed early in World War II", Mr. Betts adds.

Mac also made records for (British) Columbia, which are collector's items. *Radio Times*, about 1936 wrote: "They include a selection of dance tunes, an exhilarating 'Ride of the Valkyries', the ever-popular second Hungarian *Rhapsody of Liszt*, Finale to Widor's *Fifth Organ Symphony*, a couple of wedding marches, a selection of ballads, and a spectacular arrangement of 'Rhapsody in Blue'. In this record he displayed astonishing ingenuity by reproducing the famous clarinet glissando in the opening of this work with the aid of the syren (stet) that is numbered among the many effects..."

Radio Times continues to tell of snappy rhythm arrangements contrasted with a record of the Grieg concerto which he made by superimposing a piano rendition on the organ background. (This is no trick for today's engineers, but Mac did it all himself with headphones.)

Do we exaggerate his fame? Tributes by his contemporaries and his competitors attest to the regard in which Mac was held. Reginald Foot, Reginald New (are all British organists including Dixon named Reginald?) are on record. He was clearly Dean of the Cinema organ until 1939 when...but let's take that in turn. A final paragraph from that *Radio Times*: "In every bar that Maclean plays there is that which reaches the very height of artistry and musicianship, be it fugue or foxtrot, Bach or ballad. He has the power of revealing the latent musical beauty of anything he plays and rendering it intelligible to any listener. He has broadcast items that in the hands of any other cinema organist would have been dull, except to the musician and connoisseur. He takes Bach and Widor in his stride along with the latest foxtrot, and when inclined can play a rhythm number with anyone...No-



Quentin Maclean at Mapleleaf Gardens WurliTzer.

thing that can be written on staves is beyond him. His arrangements of orchestral works are object lessons in what is now called 'orchestral organ playing', and his registration is a byword in the profession."

And then in 1939 he visited Canada. It was to be only a vacation; he stayed on for 23 years, building as glorious a reputation in Toronto as in London. Buffalonians heard him twice a week on Canadian stations; once with a small studio organ, once with an electronic instrument. Poetry, in the minds of ATOE listeners, got in the way. But in Toronto he did more.

He played Shea's Theatre for 8 years, the Victoria Theatre for 2 years. And for 20 years he was organist at Holy Rosary Roman Catholic Church. A typical combination for the only Cinema organist ever invited to give a recital to the Royal College of Organists, of which he was later made an associate member!

And Maple Leaf Gardens! A few years ago Shea's Theatre WurliTzer was moved into the big hockey rink, and augmented with more ranks. Here Mac presided.

"*Organ Tone and Terminology*", a book by Quentin Maclean, is on the presses in Chicago. If we may editorialize, wouldn't a reissue of some of his records be in order?

Niagara Frontier Chapter members were impressed by Mac's interest in ATOE last year. What a pleasant contrast with professionals in some other hobby fields, where the fans are but tolerated!

To his widow, to his fellow-parishioners, to the hockey fans of Toronto, and to all who remember Quentin Maclean when Shea's and the Troc were standing, ATOE and especially Niagara Frontier Chapter offers assurance that Mac's kindnesses to them are not forgotten. The world of organ music will miss this truly fine musician.

DETROIT ORGAN ACTIVITY

As reported by Claude Sheridan
Royal Oak, Michigan

Bill Buzwell, head of the organ department at the J. L. Hudson Company in Detroit, entertained members of the Detroit Theatre Organ Club at their regular meeting on Sunday evening, July 29, at the Iris Theatre, playing the ex-Fisher Theatre WurliTzer.

Bill is an old-time theatre organist

who still retains a love for the instrument. He first began playing in theatres in Scranton, Pa., about 1929, and played regularly in several local houses thru-out the thirties. Later, Bill turned to club engagements, including one in Cleveland that lasted for nine years. Later Bill was a featured performer on the "World's Largest Organ" in Convention Hall on Atlantic City's famed boardwalk.

Bill's Detroit program was in three segments. The first group included "Jalousie", a Victor Herbert medley, a Fred Astaire medley (from Astaire movies),

and a medley of Parisian tunes. The second portion opened with the "Washington Post March" (the rafters really vibrated on this one); followed by a medley of popular tunes, "Dancing Tambourines", "Fascination Waltz", a medley of real oldies, and tunes from "Oklahoma". The final portion of the program ranged from a South of the Border medley, pop songs from the late forties and "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers" to "Moonriver", "Because of You", and "A Smile" song medley, and closed with a vigorous version of the "12th Street Rag."

theatre organ