

Pipe-Oriented Eatery Organization Plans Five Locations in San Diego

by Stu Green



For the past year rumors have been echoing around southern California about a company being formed to open a chain of pipe organ-equipped restaurants in the San Diego area. The name of the firm seemed to be "Organ Power", and no one at the mailing address was talking. Then the famous 5/27 BBC Moller came home from Holland to the Moller factory and it was learned that the purchaser was "Organ Power." That set us off on a renewed round of ferreting, and we finally hit the jackpot. We learned that the man behind the plan was a retired San Diego business man, Preston M.

◀ "Sandy" Fleet. His organ chambers span the near end of the music room.

▼ Approach to the Fleet music room is by gravelled pathway shaded by many trees.



("Sandy") Fleet. With some difficulty, because Mr. Fleet has a preference for privacy, we contacted him. When he learned of THEATRE ORGAN's interest, he opened up. Yes there was such a plan, the BBC Moller was a part of it and would we like to attend a recording session to be followed by a stockholders' meeting at his home, where installation of a Style 260 Special Wurlitzer had just been completed. Would we!

On a hot July day we nosed the bug down a winding private drive, through the 22 acres of the Fleet Estate near Escondido, California (north of San Diego). We were directed to a building about 100 feet from the Fleet residence. Through the door came the sound of organ music. We waited for a break, and knocked. The door opened and there was "Sandy," a man much too young to be a retiree.

Inside, the paraphernalia of recording covered the floor while organist Don Thompson went over a tricky passage of his carefully written arrangement. Handshakes all around, and the recording continued until the stockholders started to arrive.

Then we started seeking information. We learned that two companies have been formed. One is called Organ Restaurants of San Diego. The president is Ed Barr, who left his job as vice president of the Intermark conglomerate to accept the position. Don Thompson has been appointed vice president and Director of Entertainment, or chief organist. Both are working full time on the project. Signing of a lease for the first restaurant was imminent as we went to press, and the opening has been set for circa 90 days after that.

The second company is Organ Power. This company owns five theatre organs which it will lease to the restaurants. Sandy Fleet will keep an eye on the entire operation in behalf of the other stockholders. In time, the companies plan to have five pipe-equipped restaurants operating.

So much for organization. How do the prospects look? If Sandy Fleet's home installation is a sample, the future looks very encouraging. He has spared no expense to build a music room of proper dimensions to contain

a 16-rank organ. The Main and Solo chambers are at one end while the Percussion Chamber, also under expression, is on a little balcony at the right of the Solo. The Percussion chamber also houses a crackling Post-horn, the only addition to the Style 260 Special, so far, except for a piano.

The Wurlitzer came from the Strand theatre, Portland, Maine, and was crated for 13 years. It was owned by the Durst (organ supply) Co., Erie, Pa. and made the East-to-West safari with minimum damage, according to Gene Ginder and Wendell Shoberg, San Diego pro's, who installed it. Only one pipe was missing and a couple of more had to be straightened. It's opus number (for historian Judd Walton's benefit) is 1778.

The studio building is about 60 ft. by 35 ft. and with a 16 ft. ceiling. The acoustics qualities are bright, brighter yet when the carpets are taken up. The room also houses a grand piano (with Vorsetzer automatic roll player) and some old-time automatic music makers, which Sandy enjoys playing for his guests.

The center of interest, however, is the organ. The console is on a long

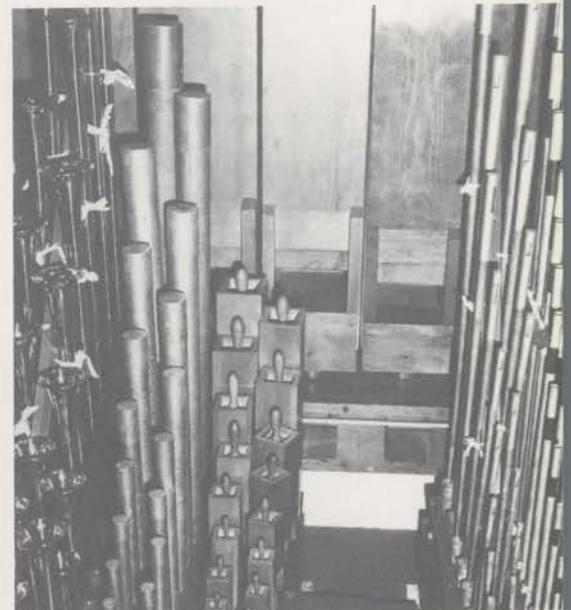


Bob Miller and Hugh Solas tend their 8-track recording rig. Framed on the wall are original letters written by such composers as Liszt, Wagner and Mozart.

Don Thompson takes a break in his recording session for this portrait. Behind Don are the Main Chamber and grand piano. Walls of music room are decorated with abstract paintings and old movie posters.

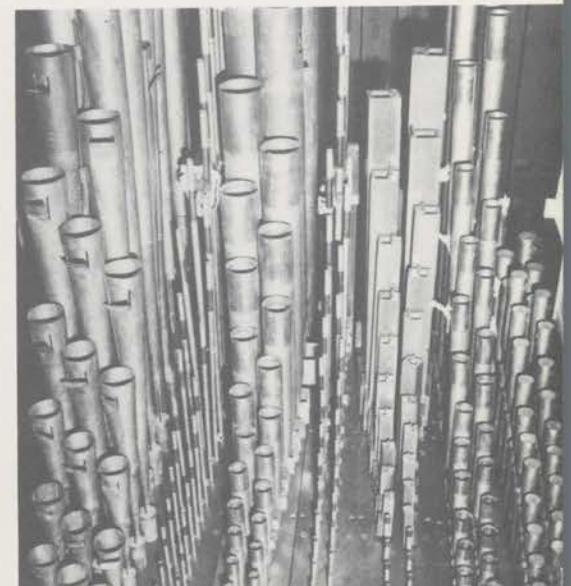


Sandy Fleet (center) inspects Brass Trumpet pipes with installers Wendell Shoberg (left) and Gene Ginder. Gene has been servicing pipes most of his life.



Part of Solo Chamber.

Part of Main Chamber.





Console shell is a standard style 260 Wur-litzer with scrollwork above stopkeys.



Sandy turns on one of his automatic music makers to entertain the arriving guests.

Ed Borgens is a veteran of silent film days. His concert consisted mainly of memory tunes from "way back when" and included a patriotic tune he wrote during World War II.



The Music Room. Main Chamber (left) and Solo Chamber (behind console) are seen through plate glass. Shutters are above windows. A portion of the Percussion Chamber may be seen at upper right of photo. Here, arriving guests wait for the concert to start.

cable so it can be set back away from the chambers on its dolly. However, for the recording session and subsequent demo-concert, the console was placed fairly close to the chambers (see photos) to allow for seating space for the guests.

If there were any questions in the minds of the stockholders about the superiority of a pipe organ in an entertainment location, those questions should have been answered by the two artists who put the Fleet organ through its initial paces. For the modern/pop aspects of music, Don Thompson recreated some of the pop-standard-oldie arrangements he had recorded an hour before and closed with a rip-roaring "Suite Gothique" (Boellman). Don also accompanied a silent comedy with a good effect. For those whose musical experiences go back to the Golden Era, Sandy Fleet produced a genuine silent era organist, Ed Borgens, who played a program of old timers, religious and patriotic selections which found instantaneous acclaim from his audience. For some listeners, whose experience had been mainly with electronics, the Thompson-Borgens mini-concert was a revelation.

We'll keep readers informed of

THEATRE ORGAN

progress as it materializes. Five restaurants with pipes are something worth keeping an eye (and ear) on. □

Photos by Stufoto

Don Thompson's concert included some of the oddball musical oddities he likes to spring on audiences, such as the early '20s cootch dance, "The Vamp." Behind the console is seen the glass-shuttered Percussion Chamber.

