

# Organ Enthusiasts'

# DREAM CHURCH

By Sandy Thompson



The Choral-Aires backed by 15-piece orchestra in Oakland Neighborhood Church.

Among theatre organ enthusiasts there is generally cause for sad feelings when a mighty theatre organ is purchased by and installed in a church. Not so the fate of one late model Robert Morton.

Not too many years ago, Pastor Jacob Bellig of the Neighborhood (inter-denominational) Church in Oakland, California, decided that in order to bring people to his church, it would be necessary to compete with TV, sports events, and people's natural tendencies to loaf on Sundays. The best way to compete, he decided, was to adopt methods of showmanship.

In keeping with this pronouncement, the church, with its \$750,000 investment at 84th and MacArthur Boulevard, lists some unusual features to be associated with a church. Among these, a visitor will find a hydraulic stage, with a stage director for the spectacles presented; a fifteen piece orchestra; a glass front baptistry; dimmed lights; the lavish use of spotlights; illustrated sermons with sound effects; and a chorus of men in white dinner jackets singing with pretty uniformed girls; individual lounge chairs in lieu of pews (more comfortable, too!); a nursery, and a rich red velvet curtain

covering the stage (the curtain was once in San Francisco's Tivoli Theatre); AND A ROBERT MORTON THEATRE PIPE ORGAN, Opus No. 2443, installed complete with all the 'goodies' intact.

The organ, a Morton Style 23N, was originally installed in the California Theatre in Pittsburg, California, in 1928. It was removed and re-installed in the Neighborhood Church in 1949. About a year later, an echo organ was added. The latter is a Style 135 WurliTzer from the Eastmont Theatre in Oakland.

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Console of 3/10 (plus echo) Robert Morton in Oakland's Neighborhood Church. Console can be moved to stage center for concerts.



# DREAM CHURCH IN OAKLAND



Oakland's Neighborhood Church has no pews. The congregation sits on comfortable individual chairs. Echo organ speaks through openings in ceiling where first row of spotlights is visible. Dual-purpose projection room and nursery can be seen at rear of balcony.



The Choral-Aires as seen from the balcony of the Neighborhood Church. Note organ grilles on either side of stage.



The Pastor, Jacob Bellig (center), with aides David VonRotz, left, and Kenneth Backlund.

## DREAM CHURCH (Concluded from page 8)

ATOE member Reverend David VonRotz presides at the console, playing gospel songs and hymns in true theatre organ style complete with tremulants and percussions. VonRotz is particularly effective with the sound effects and music which backgrounds some of the illustrated lectures.

In addition to being used in conjunction with the regular church services, the organ is featured in a half-hour FM broadcast direct from the church on KEAR-FM every Sunday morning on a program appropriately titled "Dave VonRotz At The Organ". A half hour organ prelude each Sunday evening precedes the regular service. This latter program has been played by Dave VonRotz for the last 14 years. A dyed-in-the-wool

ATOE'r, upon hearing this instrument, would probably exclaim, "This is the way it should be done!" As a matter of fact, ATOE member Jay Quinby was visiting on the West coast a few years ago, and President "Tiny" James took him out to see, hear and play this organ (among others). He is still talking about it!

The vocal group, the Choral-Aires, have also become popular in their own way, being featured on an LP recording made on Christian Faith Label.

The church has now grown to the point where it now owns 15 acres of land a few miles East of its present location, where the plans are to build a new and larger church that will seat 2500 persons, at an estimated cost of one to two million dollars. Plans for the new church include a new and larger THEATRE ORGAN.

On page 9 is a complete stop list of the Robert Morton installation in Oakland's Neighborhood Church.

## CINERAMA OPENING FEATURES ORGAN

The long-silent Robert Morton in the San Francisco Cinerama/Orpheum Theatre was heard again by the public for the first time in over twenty years during the opening week of the latest Cinerama production, "How The West Was Won."

Everett Nourse and "Tiny" James shared the spotlight during the opening week, and the management advised this writer that many fine comments from the patrons both in person and by letter were received concerning the use of the organ. Many of the patrons were surprised to know that such an organ existed in the theatre.

Sam Pearlman, managing director of the San Francisco Cinerama operation, was responsible for featuring the organ, and has hopes of using it in conjunction with future showings. He also is interested in having the organ featured for solo concerts along the lines of the recent George Wright, Gaylord Carter and Tom Hazelton programs that have been so successful in San Francisco.

ATOE and THEATRE ORGAN extend Mr. Pearlman and the Cinerama/Orpheum Theatre its congratulations, and want him to know that we will help in any way we can in any future organ programs.

Last but not least, a lot of credit must be given to the theatre's chief projectionist, Ernie Langley along with Ron Downer, both ATOE members, have toiled for many years to keep this organ in playable condition. Its one major setback occurred when the stage caught fire after the show one night, and firemen doused the console with water while putting out the blaze. Insurance partly covered the damage, but the brunt of the work fell on Langley and Downer.

## TRY A CLASSIFIED!

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