

30 Years and 30 Lbs. Ago!

EDITOR'S NOTE: In our last issue, under the heading of BLUE NOTES we ran part of a newspaper column written by a former theatre organist, Alice Blue, currently an editor of a small newspaper in Guerneville, California. We have just received what we feel is a most interesting letter from Alice Blue, together with a couple of pictures. We would like to share parts of this letter with our readers.

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"Everybody -- almost -- concerned with the rebirth of pipes is so much younger than I -- I feel like the reincarnation of something-or-other . . . Do you want to use these ancient history pics in your magazine? I WANT THEM BACK -- please -- they represent a lovely part of my life - so long ago.

"The large pic is the Hawaii Theatre 4/15 Robert Morton - now reinstalled at the Waikiki Theatre - John DeMello sometimes plays it. The small pic is the Palace Theatre Robert Morton in Hilo -- the lovely console was destroyed by the tidal wave some years ago, but the pipes didn't get in the water.

"I played all three of these fine organs in the years from 1931-1935. I know that I LOVED the Morton at the Princess Theatre the most of the three. They moved the Hawaii Theatre organ to the new Waikiki. I think they moved the wrong organ. All I know for sure is that I loved the Princess Morton more than any I have ever played. But it was SO long ago! Johnnie (now plain John) DeMello was just a lad, and he often sat in the front row watching me. Now he is a recording artist! I understand that through his personal efforts the two Honolulu Mortons have been saved. God Bless him.

"I never played silents there. Sound had been in for several years when I arrived. I did 10-minute spots before the feature pic. My first job was with the Hawaii Robert Morton. The hydraulic lift hadn't been used for years. My first matinee remains vividly -- a nightmare -- I hadn't had a chance to use the elevator before my initial performance before an audience that had been primed for my first appearance with a big lobby display, publicity in both Honolulu papers, etc. All I knew was that 'You push this button to go UP and this button to go DOWN and be sure and push the button before you want the elevator to do its stuff or you'll be stuck down in the basement where people can't see your opening measures or you'll be stuck at stage level after you've milked all the applause possible.' Nobody told me that



Alice Blue at Hawaii Theatre, Honolulu, 1931-1934.

stage level was a few inches above stage nor that a hydraulic lift made little jerks all the way. At stage level, I had the awful feeling that the lift would come out by the roots -- it didn't stop where I expected it to. I've never yet forgotten the feeling of relief when I realized that the elevator had 'landed' without pulling out at the roots and dumping me into that yawning cavern, the pit.

"The house was jammed. I was all done up in a glittering, backless white formal. I remembered, according to instructions, to push the down button a few bars before the end of my solo. The elevator gave a lurch and started down. As I stood to take bows (the applause was most gratifying) on the way down, I heard WATER. I thought the whole works

was about to dump me into the basement, but I kept smiling and acknowledging the lovely applause. Trickle, trickle -- so far, so good; then I saw what was causing the mountain stream sound effect -- a small Japanese boy standing at the edge of my spotlight, gazing up at me in rapture, while irrigating the potted palms in the pit! . . .

"I treasure these pics - the only ones I have of those happy years - there were many other pics, but I didn't realize that someday I would want them. 'Thirty years and thirty pounds ago.' Somehow, I think that before much longer, I will have a chance to once again play the Honolulu Robert Mortons - right now, I don't see how - but miracles DO happen - sometimes."

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