

theatre organ

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Mr. James:

Just received the latest issue of Theatre Organ. Excellent as usual. It's nice to be on the receiving end of such a top-quality publication.

Here in Miami there is a group of 120 volunteers who operate a full-size steam-powered railroad train. It's rather interesting that of these 120, three are ATOEers--Jim LaVake, E. J. Quinby and I. There must be some correlation between old-time railroading and theatre organs.

T. O. might be interested in the following "sad but true" story. It happened to me last August:

When planning my western vacation this past June, I explored the idea of flying back to Miami by way of Atlanta, rather than taking a non-stop flight. Sole purpose for this was to hear Big Mo in the Atlanta Fox. Since I had never heard a pipe organ played before a theatre audience, I wrote the Fox management to see if Bob van Camp still played at the at the Fox on weekends. The Fox replied, and I made plane reservations. A stopover of 4 hours or more increases the total fare, so I got space on a flight leaving Atlanta 3 hours and 59 minutes after arrival there.

Arrived in Atlanta on a dreary, rainy Sunday and, never having been to Atlanta before, took a cab to the Fox. I had already seen the movie in Miami, so after exploring the balcony for awhile, I decided to ask the doorman when Bob van Camp would be heard. Imagine how I felt when he replied, "Oh, he's on vacation; nobody's playing the organ today!"

So it was back to the airport and on to Miami. It cost me about \$10 to see a half-hour of a movie I had already seen, and I lost \$200 in travelers cheques somewhere between Atlanta and Miami. But I did see the stars and clouds in the Fox, so it wasn't a total loss.

I hope for better luck next time. Maybe I can coordinate next year's vacation with the ATOE convention which I gather will be in Chicago.

Cordially,
"Buck" Price

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Dear Sir:

Well, the May Issue of Bombarde finally did it. The sly and slightly snide references to various artists who occasionally played a passage reminiscent of the Crawford era and one reporter's reference to 'plug in operators' and 'undulating sound emanating from loud speakers' has made my blood boil. The rumblings deep within me

akin to the lowest pedal note of a 32' Bombarde have caused my swell shutters to open up and pour forth this blast.

I was a theatre organist in the late 20's and played some decent sized Mortons & Wurli's I was not great, but feel I could cue a picture as well as other mediocre organists of the time. Who of us didn't use our beautiful tibias a la Crawford when playing sad and tender love scenes? We older ATOE'ers are actually living in the past and that's the way we want it. Most of us enjoy closing our eyes and in our deepest consciousness can hear the T.O. changing our moods as scenes shift from love to anger to the chase.

Jon Brent (it is reported) avidly avoids listening to Crawford recordings because he feels it would influence his style. This makes him more or less of a bystander as a theatre organ enthusiast, he apparently being interested only in his own concertizing. It would follow that he should not listen to ANY recorded artist nor should he attend any concert. All artists have their own distinctive styles.

For my money, Theatre Organ is exactly what it's name implies and I'm trying to recapture some of my old stylings - stealing a little here and there from a number of the greats of the past and present, including Crawford.

Another gripe. Theatre Organ belongs in the theatre and most ATOE'ers are dedicated toward trying to keep it there where large auditorium acoustics make for the most beautiful sound this side of heaven. The average home is completely unsuited for a decent size installation with the chambers only 15 to 20 feet away from the listener. Almost invariably these installations become just boxes of deafening whistles combined with the sound of escaping air, thumping of regulators and tremuloes, coupled with blower and motor noises.

Granted that the home installed pipe organ is assembled with loving care, great ingenuity and expense are a source of pride to their owners, but they become the product of the tinker's art and sound more like steam calliopes rather than theatre organs.

Now a slight brief for the plug in electronic gadget with the undulating sound emanating from loud speakers - so despised by your correspondent referred to earlier.

I happen to own one - that is, the Bank of America and I. Some day it will be all mine. In my home during the past two years, I've had three different makes and eight models before I finally settled on the what I feel is the electronic gadget with the closest approach to the theatre sound. Let's face a fact to begin with, an electronic tone generator cannot duplicate the overtones and

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DON BAKER PLAYS FOR OPENING OF NEW OAKBROOK THEATRE

"The days of old" when the theatre organ and its master at the console were headlined as star attractions were relived in Oak Brook, Ill., a western Chicago suburb, on December 18-20.

Don Baker, long-time theatre organist of yesteryear and now a Conn Organ and Kapp recording artist, and Balaban & Katz, Chicago based giant among the nation's theatre operators, teamed up for this revival of the old days. The event marked the special preview festivities for the new million dollar Oakbrook Theatre, the first new facility to be constructed by this chain since 1938.

Don played the new Conn Deluxe Theatre organ at all of his performances during the three days. His program was arranged to include something for everyone, regardless of age, and ran the gamut from present day pop tunes, to "White Christmas" and other all-time holiday

favorites, and selections from the theatre organ days of long ago.

Friday night at the Oakbrook was a special invitational affair for members of the press, radio, TV, movie industry and special guests only with an estimated 300 in attendance. Saturday and Sunday were billed as "open house days" for the general public. An estimated 6,000 took advantage of the opportunity to thoroughly inspect the 1200 seat house which rightfully boasts of many new innovations including: Rocking Chair seats with each row on its own level; unprecedented "stretch-out" room between each row; perfectly proportioned screen; foyers and lounges with continuous music and other luxurious appointments all keyed to the comfort and convenience of moviegoers, even to the extent of pushbutton telephones.



This smile of complete approval is worn by Don Baker, Conn Organ concert artist, as he sat at the console of the new Conn Deluxe Theatre Organ and turned back the clock recently to briefly relive his many years of theatre organ playing, which included a 13-year engagement at the famous Paramount Theatre, New York City. The event which prompted Don's smile here marked a 3-day "open house" on December 18-20 to herald the opening of a new million dollar theatre in Oak Brook, Ill., a western Chicago suburb.

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resonances of wood & metal pipes. We really don't expect that miracle nor can we expect our "plug-ins" to produce a sound that can compare with that of the beauty and majesty of well voiced pipes emanating from lofty chambers. But the deftly controlled loud speakers are still better than a blast of shrill whistles in the ear which can hardly be dampened even by tight closing swell shutters in the average living room. How many of us can afford the proper installation of several sets of ranks plus the monstrous consoles we all love? I'll venture to guess that 95% of all members and readers own and enjoy an electronic gadget.

I've said my piece and probably have trod on a number of toes, but this is the way I feel. I wonder how many agree with me?

Yours very truly,
Maurice Scharman
member L.A. A.T.O.E.

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Console, 3 or 4 manual with or without relay. Wurlitzer preferred. C.M. Henningsen, 4356 Gertrude Drive, Fremont, Calif. Phone Sycamore 3-4310.

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PATENT COPY COLLECTIONS, Electronic organ, Electronic music. Send list to ATOE (PATENT), P.O. Box 248, Alameda, California 94506.

Wurlitzer Stop Tabs. Send list and price to A.T.O.E. c/o Stop Tabs. P.O. Box 248, Alameda, California 94506.

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