

ATOE'S 1965 ANNUAL MEETING

DATELINE - CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Saturday, July 13

The annual ATOE meeting opened at fast tempo and speeded up as event after event took place.

The Chicago Chapter showing considerable foresight, set up registration desks at both the Baker Hotel, St. Charles, and at the Holiday Inn, West.

For several hours both lobbies were filled with ATOE'ers renewing friendships and making new ones. The air buzzed with talk of 216's, pipe work, reservoirs, and remembrances of past meetings.



The lobby of the Holiday Inn during the registering period - also a chance to renew acquaintances and exchange notes. *Trimmier Photo.*

Since the first event took place in St. Charles, the Baker Hotel became Mecca for everyone. Needless to say, the program committee of the Chicago Chapter planned it this way since the hotel lobby contains a sweet-sounding Geneva Organ of 3 manuals and 9 ranks. This, of course, suggested a jam session and numerous ATOE members could be heard for the balance of the day playing this nice lite instrument.



A group of ATOE'ers 'jamming' at the 3/9 Geneva in the Baker Hotel lobby. *Trimmier Photo.*

The thought that went into setting up this year's meeting was evident as gen-

uine pipe organ music greeted the ear of everyone gathering at the Baker Hotel. Even the National Board of Directors, hard at work in a private conference room of the hotel, conducted business to the strains of music coming from the lobby organ.

Shortly before 8:00 p.m., the entire contingent walked from the Baker Hotel to the Arcada Theatre, located a block away, for the first planned program.



Entering the theatre, the ATOE group was pleasantly surprised to observe a well-kept, clean theatre. In the pit, a white console sat gleaming under a brilliant spotlight.

Lowell Ayars led off with a series of numbers that showed his virtuosity at the console of the Geneva 3-13. Lowell played a fine series of melodies. Among the highlights were "When Day is Done", "Bye, Bye Blues", "Vienna Dreams", and "Stumbling". The program was enhanced by the expert spotlight work and the unique inset lighting featured on the almost abstract console design.

Lowell followed his formal program by playing a song-fest which included a beautiful collection of old, illustrated



Lowell Ayars at the 3/13 Geneva in the Arcada Theatre. *Trimmier Photo.*

song slides. The "Organlog" included such nostalgic gems as "Poor Butterfly", "that Old Gang of Mine", "Ain't She Sweet", "Together", and "Walking My Baby Back Home". The ovation of the well-filled house was thunderous.

Bouncing out of the pit came Al Schmitz, our perennial emcee, who introduced John Muri. Mr. Muri, a well known Mid-West organist, immediately went into a group of musical compositions not usually associated with movie playing. In doing this, he demonstrated excellent musicianship and the versatility of the unit organ. He led off with "Oberon Overture", then came an unusual series wherein Mr. Muri took rock'n roll themes and produced listenable music. This was followed by "Spellbound" and others, such as a medley from "Fantasticks".

Then came an expert cueing of a silent Laurel & Hardy comedy entitled "You're Darn Tootin'". This particular comedy contained a real challenge because it called for music cues for a brass band and solists on various instruments along with the usual pratfalls, dives into manholes, shin-kicking, and a hilarious scene involving 20 or 30 men calmly shredding the clothes off each other. The laughter in the theatre virtually drowned out Muri's closely cued score. After this fun-fest, John Muri announced an encore and remarked, "I was sitting there laughing and playing". The console was then turned over to all comers for jam session.

Weary (but happy) groups drifted back to the hotels contemplating the next day's program.



A view of the Audience during John Muri's performance at the Arcada Theatre. *Trimmier Photo*

theatre organ

Program Number One featured the Barton 3-10 at the MontClare Theatre. This program was divided into two segments. The first was played by Bob Van Camp, known for his interludes at the Atlanta Fox Theatre's 4-43 Moller.

Bob's program consisted of a wide variety of popular selections with emphasis on expert registration to make this sweet sounding Barton really sing.

At the conclusion of his program, Mr. Van Camp paid tribute to ATOE when he said:



"I want to tell you that I'm a real lucky guy - who just happened to be in the right place at the right time - and I'd be less than honest if I didn't recognize your part in it. Some several years ago, when ATOE re-conditioned the Atlanta Fox 4-43 Moller, I was fortunate enough to be

there and to get the bid as House Organist in that fabulous house. It was then, and is now, a lifelong ambition realized to play one of the biggest in one of the top houses and I want you to know ATOE made it possible. That's a big part of my job. And there's another very large part - your wonderfully warm reception of me this morning. Let me assure you, there's a real and grateful feeling this morning in my heart."

The second segment was played by Reginald Foort. It was announced that Mr. Foort would play the accompaniment for the silent feature "Ella Cinders", starring Colleen Moore. This came as a surprise since most or-



Reggie Foort cueing "Ella Cinders" at the 3/10 Barton - Montclare Theatre. *Trimmier Photo*

gan enthusiasts think of Mr. Foort as a soloist, famous for orchestral arrangements for theatre organ. His superb cueing of this famous feature proved that Reggie is at home in any type of theatrical playing.

Needless to say, both artists received a tremendous ovation for their efforts. Special mention should be made of Walter Rathmann's efforts in restoring the Mont Clare Barton. His hard work was apparent in the nice sound it provided. This program was held in the morning. After lunch, the ATOE headed for the Chicago Stadium.



Bob VanCamp at the 3/10 Barton in the Montclare Theatre. *Trimmier Photo.*



A general view of the giant Chicago Stadium before the afternoon concerts. *Lamb Photo.*

Everyone approached the huge stadium, which covers a city block, with enthusiasm as the actual live sound of the world's largest theatre-type unit organ had been described many times but not heard in person by many of the ATOE members. Al Melgard, Staff Organist for the Stadium, hosted the group. Most members filed past the huge 6 manual, 883-stop organ console for a close look.

Al started the program by playing "Hello ATOE" (lyric by Al Melgard) to the tune of "Hello Dolly". No group has ever been entertained by a more gracious host. Each number was announced by Mr. Melgard with touches of humor and then well played. His numbers included "The Fire Department March", "My Vision", "St. Louis Blues", "Stormy Weather" (complete with thunder and lightning), and many others. Of special note was the "Lord's Prayer", which was played with simple dignity. This showed that the super-large, brassy Stadium Barton can be played reverently.



A close-up of the giant Barton console in the Chicago Stadium. *Trimmier Photo.*

At the conclusion of our host's program, the microphone was turned over to ATOE's emcee, Al Schmitz, who introduced Pearl White, Chicago's effervescent Queen of the Theatre Organ.

Pearl, who never had played this huge 6-manual organ, approached it with no evidence of fear and the assemblage was treated to some fine organ music - sentimental ballads, South American rhythms, and well known pop tunes. Each tune ended in a climatic crescendo that was deafening. The big Barton lived up to its reputation as being the largest of its type and, no doubt, the loudest. Pearl White received a standing ovation which was richly deserved.

Emcee Schmitz then introduced Don Baker who took over the console in a manner that made one feel that he was right at home. Don's numbers contrasted with the stylings of both Al Melgard and Pearl White.

The extreme echo present in the stadium would have a tendency to be bothersome to any organist. However, Don's choice of registration was carefully chosen and his usual bouncy, crisp style was in evidence throughout his part of the program.

Mr. Baker played his well known arrangements of standard melodies. His final number, "I Love a Parade", started building up from the first chord. He kept adding stops as the music proceeded until the finale, which was as great a demonstration of sound as one is likely to hear.

No one in ATOE who attended the Melgard-White-Baker program at the Chicago Stadium will ever forget the experience.



Pearl White at the Stadium Barton. *Lamb Photo.*



Al Melgard, staff organist at the Chicago Stadium Barton since its opening. *Trimmier Photo.*



The giant Barton console with the ATOE members lined up to get a close look. *Lamb Photo.*



Genial Don Baker poses at the Chicago Stadium Barton. *Lamb Photo.*



Al Melgard salutes Bob Montgomery and his organ maintenance crew for a job well done. *Lamb Photo.*