

THE SECOND EASTERN REGIONAL A. T. O. E. CONVENTION

A second eastern regional convention of the American Association of Theatre Organ Enthusiasts was again sponsored by the Potomac Valley Chapter, and was held on August 27th and 28th at Richmond, Virginia, and moved on Monday the 29th, into the Washington, D. C. area, formally closing that evening with a recital and silent film played on the area's largest theatre organ installation.



Chairman Ray Brubacher turning the reins of the convention over to M. C. Ben Hall.

ORGANS HEARD AT THE CONVENTION

To pen the story of all events, a description of the instruments available for the convention reads like the guest list at opening night at the new Metropolitan Opera House. There is perhaps no other area in the world having such a rich heritage when it comes to theatre organs in top playing condition. It is of interest to note that throughout the entire three days of the convention, all organs used both for formal and informal concerts remained virtually trouble free. There were no ciphers, nor were there any mechanical defects on the Richmond or Alexandria instruments used for the announced concerts. This is certainly a credit to those who maintain these instruments. The organs used for announced concerts were:

1. The 4-17 Wurlitzer — Byrd Theatre, Richmond.
2. The 3-17 Wurlitzer — Mosque Civic Auditorium, Richmond.
3. The 3-13 Wurlitzer — Loew's Theater, Richmond.
4. The 4-34 Wurlitzer — Alexandria Arena, Alexandria, Va.

The organs heard in informal recitals and during hours they were open to the membership were:

1. The 2-9 Moller — Doug Bailey Advertising W.P.I.K. Radio Studio Rockville, Md.
2. 3-13 Wurlitzer — Studio residence of Mr. & Mrs. Marvin Lautzen-

heiser, Springfield, Va.

3. The 2-7 Wurlitzer — Studio residence of A.T.O.E. National Vice President, Erwin A. Young.
4. The 3-15 Keller Special — Residence of Mr. & Mrs. Lem Keller, Frederick, Md.

REGISTRATION

Convention headquarters were located at the Hotel Jefferson which was four blocks from the center of convention events in Richmond. Guests had begun and by Saturday morning when registration opened, there were over three hundred on hand to line up at the tables. The registration committee consisted of El Marlowe — Potomac Valley chapter secretary and Win Marlowe, Betty Brubacher, Fran White, and son Paul. The transportation committee run by Dick Myers and Gordon Buschman were doing their best to book rides for those who needed them. Many members of ATOE having recordings of theatre organs for sale were also on duty at this time displaying their material. However, things were handled so efficiently, that by noon, the bulk of the registration work was completed. After a quick count, the number officially registered included 227 families making up 372 members in attendance.

FIRST SESSION OPENS AT THE MOSQUE AUDITORIUM

By 1:45, many members had already found seats in the spacious 5,000 seat auditorium at the Mosque Civic Center.

Those who know the acoustics of this fabulous cathedral sized house had wisely chosen seats in the mezzanine and first balcony where the organ can be heard to best sonic advantage. At 2:15 Potomac Valley Chapter Chairman and convention director Ray Brubacher stepped into the glare of the spotlight to welcome all those who had come from near and far and on comparatively short notice, to the convention. After a few brief remarks, Ray turned the convention officially over to our honored and genial master of ceremonies, none other than Ben Hall. Ben then introduced the first guest artist of the afternoon, someone who really needed absolutely no introduction because of his fame as being "Mr. Theatre Organ" the well known EDDIE WEAVER. Weaver knows Richmond and its heritage of organs in theatres perhaps better than any other artist in this respect, having been organist at Loew's Richmond, for some twenty seven years, and also organist for Miller and Rhoads for about this same period of time. So, it was only natural that Eddie Weaver should open the convention. For more than hour, members were treated to organ playing that can best be described as spectacular, running the gamut from the classical, to the ever popular Weaver specialty — the String Marching Band which only Weaver can conjure up so effectively. While absorbed in the performance, we noticed a young man of about 11, inching his way towards the console, finally pushing Weaver off the bench and then showing himself to be a very talented young man. It was all in fun, the boy turning out to be one of Weaver's best pupils, and we can be thankful that he is giving youngsters a chance to learn some of that special Weaver touch, and how many 11 year



Eddie Weaver acknowledging enthusiastic applause at the Mosque.



Melody Mac during his concert at the Mosque.



Jimmy Boyce talking organ with organ architect Reginald Watson, during registration.

olds can sit down at an organ which has a two second time delay from one chamber to the console, and make the instrument stand up and talk.

After a long sustained ovation, Ben Hall then announced the next artist of the afternoon session. Again, it was a personage so well known to theatre organ lovers, that there was no long introduction necessary nor was it given. Without delay, "Melody Mac," Leonard Mac Clain, a stellar name in theatre organ annals took his place at the Mosque console. Before long, his witty remarks coupled with some fantastically beautiful playing had the audience literally in his hands. Perhaps the most outstanding renditions delivered by Mac were a specialty of his in which he excels, that being operatic numbers. Those of you who remember his "Beyond the Sea" on one of the first MacClain discs for Epic records, will only begin to know just how thrilling this piece was played on the Mosque organ, and there was many a chill going up and down the backs of members, and more than one moist eye

and handkerchief was noticed. When the afternoon session ended at 5p.m., there was the general feeling that a sort of minor miracle had been witnessed by everyone in attendance, that being an organ so beautifully maintained and in an acoustical setting so fitting, played by artists so capable of getting everything out of such an instrument.

BANQUET ATTENDED BY 250 MEMBERS

By 6 p.m., things were beginning to move at the cocktail party held in the foyer of the grand ballroom at the Jefferson. Guests were engaged in the usual nothing else but "how many ranks have you got?" jargon. Ray Brubacher was observed in the last hectic minutes of putting place cards on the head table with some due respect to protocol, if any existed in the delightfully informal atmosphere created by the conventioners. The signal was given to eat and before long, all 250 places were filled. After desert, Ben Hall stepped to the microphone and introduced Captain Young, national ATOE vice president who commented on the recent ATOE National Convention in Portland, Oregon. Next, a headcount of chapters in attendance was taken, the result being that Nineteen of Twenty-six chapters had members present. This was certainly a credit to ATOE, and was a great boost to the artists and to all those who worked so hard in preparing the festivities.

Ben then announced the presence of a very special guest organist, a person who in her prime, had been one of the top organ virtuosi in the world, but who now had retired but consented to make a special appearance at the Hammond which had been brought in for the special occasion. Then, on stage stepped the great Martha Lake, and for the next fifteen minutes, presented a program bolstered with occasional swigs from a bottle so graciously presented by the entertainment committee headed by Dick

Smith. After a rather imbibing performance, the great Martha Lake took many well deserved bows and stumbled off of the stage leaving her audience gasping for more (of what we will not attempt to decide upon.) After a few more closing remarks by our m.c., who by this time was exhausted from having laughed so hard at Martha's presentation, the banquet was ended, and guests began to make their way back to the Mosque for the evening concert.

SATURDAY EVENING SESSION AT MOSQUE FEATURES BOB VAN CAMP AND CHAPTER GUEST ARTISTS

By 8 p.m. the stage was set for the evening concert at the Mosque. Ben Hall appeared in the spotlight and after a few remarks about the history of the theatre pipe organ, demonstrated the first unit orchestra ever conceived, that being a hand held you-name-it, it-can-do-it combination organ, percussion ensemble and kazoo! After a few side-splitting tunes on this mighty giant, a true forerunner of the Unit Theatre Organ, Ben announced the featured guest of the evening, none other than the organist of the still Fabulous Fox Theatre of Atlanta, Georgia, Mr. Bob Van Camp. Mr. Van Camp's experience in the field of theatre organ playing is very wide, and besides assuming the role as worthy servant to the big MO!, the 4-42 Moller in the Fox, he is also musical director for station W.S.B. Atlanta, and has a daily show for N.B.C. The next hour was made so very worthwhile by many original arrangements including an unusually beautiful treatment of a recent Beatle tune "Michelle" which certainly reflected the smooth and easy going but highly polished technique Van Camp is endowed with. All too soon it was ended, and many remarked that his program was entirely too brief. Visitors to Atlanta



Convention artist Bob Van Camp

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The great concert virtuoso, Martha Lake

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must not miss the weekend organ interludes at the Fox by Bob as they are treated with great respect by Atlanta moviegoers.

Next on the program was the delightfully refreshing neatness of style in the playing of Niagra Frontier Chapter representative Lowell Ayars. Ayars is a master at organ registration and proved it even with a sparking rendition of "The Merry Go Round Broke Down" with very tasteful use of the percussions. His more serious material remained highly interesting due to his taste in technique and registration. Bill Gage from the New York Chapter was next on the program and Bill's specialty seems to be outstanding renditions of famous patriotic numbers, and we were treated to many soul-stirring renditions of selections that have helped musically to make our country the great one it is. The final guest artist of the evening was Don Kinnear of the Delaware Valley Chapter and again the mood was completely changed to Viennese, with an outstanding selection of waltzes of old Vienna. The program was then turned over to those members wishing to play the Wurlitzer. At 11:45 Ray Brubacher put the great organ to bed with an original work called "My Prayer" composed by the late Harold Warner, Jr., the man responsible for the existence of the Mosque organ today. The last notes died away on the solo Vox Humana stop and it was offered as a tribute to Mr. Warner for the organ and for his life which he gave for the instrument, having passed away shortly before the 1961 annual meeting while

working in the Mosque organ chambers.

NICK PITT AND DICK SMITH PRESENT FIREWORKS DISPLAY AT LOEW'S SATURDAY MIDNIGHT

Through the courtesy of Mr. George Peters, manager of the Loew's Theatre, and through the efforts of house organist and maintenance man Nick Pitt, we were able to secure the use of the 3-13 Wurlitzer for a special midnight program. The management went all out to help insure the success of the program, the stars and clouds were running at their best in this delightful atmospheric house, and when house organist Nick Pitt brought the smartly attired white console out of the pit, a real cheer went up from all present. Nick related a bit of the history of the organ, then demonstrated the instrument with many delightful numbers. Nick then turned the console over to the featured guest of the evening, Dick Smith. Dick is the kind of organist one meets all too seldom, for his young 20 years he possesses a technique rivaled only perhaps by a very few of the elite concert organists, and for the following hour, the audience was held spellbound with some of the loveliest arrangements of operetta selections, and a really terrific finger dexterity display on Dancing Tambourine. Where this artist learned his technique, we'd like to know, but it is easy to say that he has to go around for twelve people. After Dick's outstanding program, the organ was made available to the membership.

EDDIE WEAVER RETURNS TO OPEN THE BYRD ORGAN SUNDAY MORNING

When the white shrouded 4-17 console rose out of the pit at the Byrd Theatre at 9:15 a.m. Sunday morning, Eddie Weaver lay sprawled out on the bench apparently sound asleep. That did not matter to the Wurlitzer for it kept right on playing proving just how educated an organ it really is. After some very funny antics in which Weaver asked the organ to do certain things, Eddie then put his own hands to the console keyboards and took us on a musical tour of the organ. After playing a few more witty and foot tapping numbers, he played his finale, "I'll See You Again" and there was more than one look of surprise when on the last four measures, Eddie got up off the bench and disappeared backstage while the faithful servant kept right on going, never missing a note or beat. Many thanks are due to Eddie's very talented daughter who assisted backstage at the famous "phantom" keyboard. The first guest artist on the program was Mrs. Patty Germain representing the Potomac Valley Chapter. Mrs. Germain is a professional organist having a great deal of experience playing theatre organs, and this was readily evident in her carefully controlled handling of this rather difficult to maneuver console. Perhaps her forte for the morning were her medleys of tunes by Cole Porter and George Gershwin and a most enthusiastic applause brought her back for an encore. Mr. Clyde Olson representing the Land O' Lakes Chapter took his place at the Byrd console and favored us with some beautifully phrased and registered selections and a simply beautiful rendition of "whispering Hope." Our appreciation for Mr. Olson's talent makes it such that we would like to hear more from him at a not too distant future date. Herb Wottle, the Ohio Valley Chapter representative ascended the bench and entertained with several recent hit tunes ending with a dazzling rendition of the "Galloping Comedians" using the master unenclosed xylophone for a most "galloping" effect. The last guest artist of the morning was Dick Schrum, national ATOE President. Dick played a few numbers that he has just recorded on a new disc featuring Bill Blunk's 5-24 Marr & Colton and after hearing his pro style, we are sure that his recordings will indeed sell very well. It was an honor to have the national chairman present for the occasion and also for him to bring the morning to so fitting an end. Again, the audience after it was over was one of the greatest enthusiasm and a sense of unbelieving—that the famous trio of theatre organs all so perfect in every detail, really existed.

**CONVENTION M. C. BEN HALL
PRESENTS THE STORY OF
THE MOVIE PALACE
SUNDAY AFTERNOON**

By 2 p.m. Sunday afternoon, all 300 chairs in the empire room of the Jefferson Hotel were occupied by members who had already heard of the wonderful slide motion picture illustrated lecture given by Ben Hill, on the history of the Movie Palace, at the Portland Convention. Ben began his interesting talk with a color motion picture made several years ago by David Brinkley for television, describing Ben's book, the BEST REMAINING SEATS. There were scenes of the Roxy and other "cathedrals" of the motion picture. Next came the slides with a very accurate and colorful description of many of the nation's former and a few still present, movie palaces. Members were indeed grateful to Ben for his making this special feature a part of the convention.

After the lecture, members began departing to make their way into the Washington area and into northern Virginia, where there would be several residence pipe organ installations available for inspection that evening. Organs that were on view were the 2-7 Wurlitzer formerly in the Loew's Theatre, Harrisburg, Pa., now in the residence of Captain and Mrs. Erwin A. Young, of Mount Vernon, Va., and the 3-13 studio Wurlitzer formerly in the Loew's Triborough N.Y., theatre, now owned by Marvin and Jean Lautzenheiser. Many more than were expected, attended the evening events and the Monday morning and evening events.

**MONDAY — MORE RESIDENCE
ORGANS, A TOUR OF THE
MOLLER ORGAN FACTORY
AND A REAL WHOPPING
FINISH AT ALEXANDRIA.**

Monday, August 29th, saw approximately 80 members in Frederick, Md., to view the organ installation, a three manual 15 ranker, built by Lem Keller and installed in his home. Mr. Keller has constructed most of the organ himself, and we are sure that many members picked up valuable tips on organ building and construction from this true hobbyist. That afternoon, a special tour of the M.P. Moller Organ Factory was arranged by Peter Daniels and Dick Kline. The tour was very thorough and those attending got more than an ample chance to see every phase of modern pipe organ construction in the world's largest organ factory. Upon returning to the local D.C. area, many stopped off in Rockville, Md., to see and hear the unusual installation, a 2-9 Moller organ, most of which is from the 3-31 Moller formerly in the Loew's Palace theatre, Wash-

ington, D.C., and now is owned by Doug Bailey who broadcasts the instrument over W.P.I.K. radio every day from 12:30 to 2 p.m. The organ was installed by Paul White and Bob Oberlander, and it is perhaps unique in the fact that it is one of the very few pipe organs to be heard live over the air every day in this country. We were glad to see Mr. & Mrs. Leonard MacClain present and "Melody Mac" taped a special interview for Doug which was broadcast on a following program. Many guests were invited to play, among them Esther Higgins who really seemed to be entirely at home on the console of this instrument.

**JIMMY BOYCE BRINGS
CONVENTION TO A FABULOUS
CLOSE WITH A BLOCKBUSTING
ACCOMPANIMENT TO THE
"PHANTOM OF THE OPERA"**

The Alexandria Arena story has been presented in a recent issue of *Theatre Organ*, so there is little need to go into a detailed description of this cavernous building and its outstanding feature, the 4-34 Wurlitzer, formerly in the Center Theatre, New York City. Over 200 guests had assembled for the evening concert and motion picture. Jimmy Boyce, owner and player of the organ, opened his program with selections running the gamut from Swan Lake to the Tiajuana Brass, so ably done on the ripping Post Horn rank. After a brief intermission which due to the extreme heat made everyone take off in the direction of the refreshment counter, projectionist and donor of the motion picture equipment for the evening, Woody Wise, opened the second portion of the program with some very amusing old nickelodeon slides which were accompanied by Jim. A comedy followed, but when the feature film, the full length "Phantom of the Opera" began, everyone settled back into their chairs, not realizing just what was in store for them. Jim had planned his music to coincide most carefully with the action on the screen, and at the height of excitement that is, the scene where the phantom is unmasked while at the organ, the effect of thirty four ranks unenclosed in an auditorium a city block long, literally lifted the listener right off of his chair. As the audience received one thrill after another it became apparent that some sort of phantom genius was at work with the organist weaving a special sort of magic into the accompaniment. A standing ovation with cheers and bravoos greeted Jim the instant the film came to an end, and what a tremendous end it was indeed. There could not have been anymore after this, there was nothing that could top it, the convention was over, but we are sure that no mem-

ber who attended will ever forget it, it is certain to be a shining light in the history of ATOE forever. The fact that so many more members who had not originally planned to stay over for Monday and who did, is a credit to the artists and all those who had a hand in making the convention the tremendous success it was.

In closing, *Theatre Organ* and the membership of ATOE and those who attended must feel very proud in extending their appreciation to the following who made the convention possible. To former chapter chairman Richard O. Haffer who accepted the bid for the Potomac Valley Chapter for the convention, to Ray Brubacher, chapter chairman, Tommy Landrum, chapter vice chairman, and El Marlowe, chapter secretary, who directed the entire proceedings, to the artists, Eddie Weaver, Leonard MacClain, Bob Van Camp, Richard Smith, Jimmy Boyce, the chapter area artists Lowell Ayars, Bill Gage, Don Kinnear, Patty Germain, Clyde Olson, Herb Wottle, Dick Schrum, and Loew's organist Nick Pitt, to Byrd Theatre manager Bob Coulter for his cooperation, to Loew's manager George Peters for the use of the Loew's theatre, to maintenance men Dick Barlow and Trigger Riley for their assistance, to the registration committee headed by Win Marlowe, Betty Brubacher, Fran White, and Paul White, to Gil White and Lloyd Trimmier who covered the convention as photographers, to Gordon Buschman and Dick Myers, Dick Kline, Henry Babb of the Jefferson Hotel, to national vice president Erwin Young, and all those who opened their home organ installations for members to play, and lastly to Ben Hall for his invaluable help in making the show the hit it was.

**WISCONSONITES
ENJOY A "REGIONAL"**

Manitowoc, Wisc., Aug. 24 — They didn't plan it that way but by Saturday noon it had become apparent to Chris Feiereisen and Ben Comstock that they had a sort of "Regional Convention" on their hands. For no particular reason and with no preplanning, a group of organ buffs descended on this 2-Barton town for the purposes of playing and listening. First to arrive was *Bombarde* stringer Dave Junchen, from Sherrard, Illinois. He showed up Friday evening.

Late Sunday the "conventioners" bid adieu and went their respective ways, except for Dave Junchen who stayed over for a trip to Madison with Chris Feiereisen to play a Barton in a theatre which Chris had restored while he was a student at the University of Wisconsin. They report that it still sounds great.

— Effie Klotz