

While engaging in research relative to the Theatre Organ course which was established by the Eastman School of Music in the 1920's, Rochester ATOE member Lloyd E. Klos came across a very interesting textbook. This book, one of the few in existence, was written about 1926 by an Englishman, George Tootell, the first British Cinema Organist. Through the generous cooperation of Dr. Ruth Watanabe, Librarian of the Eastman School of Music's Sibley Music Library, Mr. Klos has been able to extract portions of the book, and thereby make them available to Theatre Organ readers. It is hoped that much of the material will be of benefit both educationally and entertainingly to ATOE members.

HOW TO PLAY THE CINEMA ORGAN

A Practical Book by a Practical Player
by GEORGE TOOTELL

Doctor of Music, University of Durham, Fellow of the Royal College of Organists, Solo organist of the Stoll Picture Theatre, London; The Palace, Accrington; The Coliseum, Glasgow; The Picture House, Douglas (Isle of Man); The West End Cinema, Birmingham; etc.

INTRODUCTION

Early Recollections. It seems but yesterday that, as a small boy, I stood gazing with awe-struck eyes upon a gorgeous individual, arrayed in a frock coat suit and top hat, and armed with a large cigar and walking stick, who stood at the top of a flight of steps leading to the entrance of a traveling show, shouting "Walk up, and see the moving pictures." In between his spasms, a wheezy mechanical organ laboriously croaked "God Save the King," this procedure being carried out until the tent was full of people. Having paid my modest penny for admission, I viewed, with wonder, films of about 400 feet in length, chiefly of "interest" subjects, which were shown in silence, the only accompaniment being the remarks and applause of the audience. After about half an hour of this, everybody was turned out, the imposing individual reappeared on the front, and you were invited to pay another penny and see it all again. It seems but yesterday, and yet this happened 23 years ago!

Incidentally, but a few short months have elapsed since I saw a cinema manager arrayed in top hat, frock coat, knitted pull-over, navy serge trousers, tan boots, and a large buttonhole, standing at the entrance to his theatre (presumably a

high-class cinema), shouting the old formula; which shows that in one feature at least, some cinemas have not advanced much in 23 years.

My next impression is of a raveling cinema show visiting the local town hall with a film called "Our Navy," which comprised pictures of our warships and naval men doing wonderful things. This film was accompanied by a pianist who played "A Life On the Ocean Wave," "Rule Britannia," "Jack's the Boy," etc., and also by effects such as the splash of water and the bang of the guns. After 20 years, effects are now reintroduced into the cinema, so once again, we are apparently back at the starting post.

I pass on a year or two, and now find a cinema established as a permanent local entertainment. Feature films have grown to greater length, and Mary Pickford has appeared in barnstorming dramas. A pianist is installed to provide a musical accompaniment, and this pianist impresses me. He is not only a good player, but is very clever in the way in which he follows the action of the picture with suitable music. I am in my teens, and though I have gained my FRCO diploma, am still busy with the study of harmony, counterpoint, and all the rest which is included in an academic training. This pianist gives me ideas as to the possibilities of music in conjunction with the photoplay, and I realize the enormous possibilities of an organ of the right type in the cinema.

Strange are the workings of fate! In November 1925, I gave demonstrations on a large Jardine cinema organ in Glasgow, and this very pianist who inspired me with my first cinema aspirations, called upon me at the theatre where I was appearing to apply to me for an appointment!

I pass on a few more years, and am now comfortably installed in a good appointment as a Church organist (my third of

such appointments) and enjoying a lucrative private practice. My eye had been constantly on the cinema; I saw from the first, the artistic possibilities to the musician, especially to the organist, and had quietly studied the whole question from every conceivable point of view and formulated my methods. I intended to be a cinema solo organist, and when my opportunity should come, I intended to be ready for it. But I intended also to have a genuine cinema organ, and up to this time no cinema organs had appeared in Great Britain.

The First Genuine Cinema Organ. A few years later, I received my first offer, as a solo organist, of a cinema appointment through the late Mr. Easthope Martin, the well-known songwriter, and declined it because I did not consider the organ to be either suitable or adequate for solo work. I realized from the first that the cinema required a special type of instrument and that the ordinary type of church or concert organ could never succeed in the cinema. But it was not long before the opportunity for which I had waited and hoped came to me, when I was offered the position of solo organist at The Palace, Accrington. Here, the organ, constructed by Jardine & Co., was built under my supervision and embodied most of my own ideas as to what a cinema organ should be. This organ was the first genuine cinema organ built in Great Britain, and is still one of the finest examples of cinema organ in this country. The remarkable success of this organ, not only from the artistic but also the box office point of view, gave impetus to cinema organ-building in England, but unfortunately other builders did not profit by the example, with the result that a number of organs were built for cinema purposes which were never quite suited to their purpose, being purely church organs. Nevertheless, we are now seeing organs erected which are more genuinely cinema organs; if the introduction of the Wurlitzer organ into this country from America has only illustrated to British builders the necessary design for cinema purposes, it has served a valuable purpose.

In 1921, I accepted the position of solo organist at the Stoll Picture Theatre, Kingsway, London, when the large 3-manual Jardine organ was erected there. This instrument, again built under my supervision, was the largest and most perfect cinema organ which had appeared up to that time; it is still one of the largest organs to be found in a British cinema.

INSTALLMENT NO. 2
WILL APPEAR IN
THE NEXT ISSUE OF
THEATRE ORGAN
BOMBARDE

* * *

1967
National A. T. O. E.
Convention
JULY 1, 2, 3, 4
Detroit
Michigan