

A REPORT OF THE NATIONAL ATOEO CONVENTION IN DETROIT



Ashley Miller talking to Don Baker, after Ashley's concert at the Senate.—Bill Lamb Photo



Floyd Bunt at the Calliope in the lobby of the Senate Theatre.—Bill Lamb Photo



Lee Erwin, John Muri, Don Miller, Allen Rossiter, and "Tiny" James, as seen at Cobo Hall.—Bill Lamb Photo



Ben Hall receives from Dick Schrum a special plaque sent by the Myers family of Portland.—Bill Lamb Photo



Registration at the Fort Shelby Hotel, left to right behind the table are Elaine Markey, Claude Sheridan, Jim Markey, Holley Prim, Harold Prim, Al Mason, and Jean Leuhrman.—Bill Lamb Photo



Reelected president Schrum shown with his wife Marilyn, new Vice President Richard Kling, and new Secretary Treasurer W. Tiny James.—Bill Lamb Photo



Photo of John Muri at the Detroit Fox, by Bill Lamb

★ ANNUAL ATOE MEETING AND CONVENTION ★



THINKING IT OVER — On far side of table are Al Rossiter (New York), Al Mason (Motor City), Bill Peterson (Oregon), Fred Kruse (CATOE), George Hardenbergh (Land o' Lakes), Judd Walton (Board Member), Tiny James (NorCal) and, in the distance, Fred Bayne and Ed Beckman (both Wolverines), and Russ Evans (Puget Sound). In the foreground, Erwin Young's back, Dotty MacClain (Delaware Valley), and Don Hall (Piedmont). — Stufoto.

Complete report of meeting on page 26.



I'LL TELL LEONARD YOU ASKED ABOUT HIM—Dotty MacClain gathers messages for a later phone call home to ailing 'Melody Mac.' Bill Peterson and Al Rossiter are seen in left foreground. From the far end of the table it's Russ Evans (Puget Sound), Howard W. Rowe (Valley of the Sun), Thomas O. Landrum (Potomac Valley), Stillman Rice (ConValChap), Ed Wood (Heart of America), Bob Carson (Los Angeles), Dick Kline (Potomac Valley), Bill Green (Delaware Valley), Don Hall (Piedmont) and Dorothy MacClain (Delaware Valley). The back belongs to Pres. Schrum. The beverage is pure Detroit tap water. — Stufoto.

Saturday, July 1, 1967

The first event was the National Board of Directors' meeting. A resume of this appears elsewhere in this issue. The first musical event was scheduled for 1:30 p.m. at the Senate Theatre, home of the Detroit Theatre Organ Club. At the scheduled time, Ben Hall, official M.C., came on stage, made several announcements and then introduced Dave Brewer. Dave presented a slide lecture showing the work necessary to rehabilitate the

Senate Theatre for installation of the Orbits (Ex-Fisher) Mighty Wurlitzer. Brewer's slides and commentary gave only a hint of the gigantic job done to make the Senate a tasteful, well-equipped auditorium worthy of continuing one of the best-sounding Wurlitzers in existence today. Following Brewer's commentary, Ben Hall made two or three more announcements and then introduced diminutive Susie Yurko, age 10, who climbed onto the bench of the mighty 4/34 organ and surprised the assemblage with a rendition of *Hungarian Rhapsody*. The little lady was almost engulfed in the console but played with the assurance of a 'pro'. She indicated no fear of the audience or of the maze of controls at her disposal. Her performance and poise was amazing for such a young person.

Hall then introduced Don Miller, who was the first feature artist. Mr. Miller opened with a medley of 1920's tunes and from the first chords, everyone was transferred back to the era that the theatre organ was a basic part of any top-flight theatre program.

Miller's artistry will not be forgotten by the listener as his program was flawlessly presented and his registrations were unique and in excellent taste. High spots were *Red, Red Robin*; *Mary Lou*; *Sophisticated Lady* (using extremely modern approaches to harmony); Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*; and a Crawfordian version of *Pale Moon*. He also played *Anvil Chorus* which was taught to him by Jesse Crawford. The rendition



READY FOR ACTION—A coatless Don Miller appeared for the post-intermission session. It was a very warm day, Don's tributes to his former teacher, Jesse Crawford, were much appreciated. — Stufoto.

was played note for note as learned from the famous 'Poet of the Organ'.

Mr. Miller's finish was greeted with a spontaneous standing ovation, which was the second he had received during his performance. Ben Hall called Miller back and Don said, "Some things come late in life—two standing ovations in one afternoon, recognition, appreciation, and acknowledgment . . . you've given me all these tonight." For an encore, Don played his radio theme, *Waters of the Perkiomen*, which he used for years on WJR Radio. The finish of this was greeted with yet another standing ovation and left many of the more sensitive



'SOME THINGS COME LATE IN LIFE'—Don Miller smiles back at appreciative audience. Don's arrangements were marked by mood-building, atmospheric introduction. He made passing musical references to time-worn clichés but also used dissonant modern harmony, often unresolved. — Stufoto.

members of the audience on the verge of tears. After the program, Miller was asked his approach to theatre playing and, to quote his words, he said, "I like soft music and I like loud music but not loud all the time." He also stated he could have done better if the program had been held later in the evening because, even at 71 years young, he still considers himself one of show business's 'night people'.

. . .

MARK KOLDYS SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE SENATE

He's only 20 . . . But!!

It was just past 7:30 p.m. on Saturday when Ben Hall stepped to the microphone on the Senate theatre stage and introduced Mark Koldys, a young man of 20 who has chalked up a raft of musical honors since he first played for the DTOC at the age of 15. Mark's solidclassical foundation (he's been playing since the age of seven!) was apparent in two of his first selections, a medley of mostly polkas and galops by Johann Strauss, Jr, then St. Saens' lively and ghostly *Dance Macabre*, a most "spirited" obse-guy. But between these two "heavies" he inserted a highly rhythmic *Cumban-cherio* to very the fare.

Mark exhibited a fine appreciation of the orchestral possibilities of the 4-34 Wurlitzer which is the pride of the DTOC. During *Warsaw Concerto* he performed the piano parts on the console-controlled grand piano which stands only a few feet from the console. He also played the orchestral parts, around which the piano



At 20 Mark Koldys knows the sweet sound of public acclaim.—Stufoto.

scoring flows.

On the lighter side there was a strongly Durantean *One of Those Songs* which had Mark swinging in past-perfect syncopation. Not only has this young man a keen ability to make music of permanent value come to life; he can also beat out items of passing interest.

After a brief intermission in the twilight of a day which was warm both inside and outside the Senate theatre, Mr. Koldys brought his audience back into the world of musical enchantment with a medley from *Carousel* that naturally included that big, booming waltz which so often is played like hurdy-gurdy music. But not in the Koldys version. Loud, yes, but with an appreciation for the symphonic approach instead of the caliope. The "oldie" medley included a rarely heard *Lucky Lindy* (remember the *Lone Eagle?*), a Lombardo-larded *Boo-Hoo* and a well-corned *Thoroughly Modern Millie* in thoroughly old-fashioned jazz style. After a pianistic *Elmer's Tune* (those keys moving up and down on the piano with no one touching them is somewhat unearthly!), Mark went operatic for a theme from *La Boheme* which featured the massed strings, a gorgeous sound on this instrument. Next, it was back to piano lesson days and Gautier's *Le Secret*, a tune requiring some digital dexterity, especially in the chromatic "trio." Again, the console-controlled grand did a lion's share of the soloing.

Mark Koldys big "feature selection" was the famed Rachmaninoff *Prelude in C Sharp Minor*, a piece designed for piano but which Mark proved to be of great dramatic value as an organ piece. It is, in turn, grave, despairing, wild—almost hysterical—and Mark brought out all these qualities in full combinations which sometimes seemed about to lift off the Senate roof. He received an equally wild ovation. His encore was a swingband version of *The World is Waiting for the Sunrise* with the melody played on a sharp combination, an "un-housebroken ripper" as the man in the next seat described it.

Mark's *Louise* brought out a number of the soft voices of the instrument which had been more or less covered by full combination until Chevalier's girl made her undulating entry. For a grand finale, the Koldys talent was turned to a reading of *Battle Hymn of the Republic* which can only be described as "colossal"—one of those musical experiences which fill one with a sudden desire to run for the nearest Union army recruiting station. After the flames of battle had smoldered to a dull red and Mark Koldys had taken his bows, Ben Hall moved the huge electric fan (placed on stage to keep organists cool) up close to the sizzling console. It's rumored that Mark Kildys is taking up the study of law. Music's loss!

DENNIS JAMES, LEE ERWIN and ATOE PREXY PINCH HIT FOR 'MAC'

The conventioners gathered once again at the Senate theatre at 1:30 on Sunday afternoon, after a lunch most likely partaken at one of the hash houses recommended by MC Ben Hall (he worried about the gastronomic situation during the entire four days!).

But now it was time for one of the great theatre organists of all time—Leonard MacClain! That's what the brochure said; Leonard would be there at the Senate.

But Leonard couldn't make it. He wanted to come—but his doctor had said no, his health was too frail at the present time. That was the word wife Dorothy had brought, and she had also brought Dennis James, a pupil of Leonard's.

After Al Mason had made a few announcements and Ben Hall had given his usual plug for a nearby beanery, Dennis James was introduced and we learned that he was only 16! He looked almost frail against the silhouette of that great console and then his first selection was announced—*Toccata* from Widor's *Fifth Symphony*. Was "Meloday Mac" pulling our collective gambi by sending a lad to do a seasoned musician's work?



'IT'S QUITE AN INSTRUMENT'—16-year-old Dennis James shows deep admiration for the instrument which served him so effectively during his portion of the Leonard MacClain show.—Stufoto.

Not at all. As soon as Dennis started playing it was immediately apparent that he knew exactly what he was doing. The familiar pedal melody with the complex digital ornamentation was all there—and besides it came out at music!

Toccata is always difficult for any selection to follow because it leaves such an

(Continued Next Page)

afterglow, but the four movements of the *Suite Gothique* provided much contrast in the hands of the young artist.

Mark was his own MC and his intros were to the point and often humorous. While introducing *Maria* he said he realized it was a love story although "I don't know much about that, yet." With *Maria* the lad indicated a talent for full-blown ballads, and proved it further with *Sunrise*, *Sunset* in a lighter vein. Then came a large concert selection whose title escaped us, followed by *On a Clear Day* with a slight beat behind a Tibia lead.



A portion of the conventioners experiencing the Dennis James artistry. The stage-based chambers are clearly visible here. The original Senate chambers (out of range) now house only percussions. Everything is under expression. Swell shutters are very quiet in operation.—Stufoto.

Because Dennis James' program time was shared with Lee Erwin (also standing in for "Melody Mac"), his contribution was a brief one. Even so, Leonard MacClain could justly be proud of a most promising student, an organist rooted in the classics but with a feeling for pops and standards which will prove valuable in years to come. And at 16, Dennis James has many years in store.

LEE ERWIN SILENT DURING SILENT MOVIE MUSIC

The next artist is a living legend to members of the middle-aged group who were within earshot of radio station WLW (Cincinnati) in the '30s and '40s. It was none other than Lee Erwin who, as Ben Hall put it, was well steeped in *Moon River* while Henry Mancini was still in knee pants. For well over a decade, Lee took listeners nightly "down the valley of a thousand yesterdays to the bright waters of *Moon River*—that lazy stream of dreams—where nothing is—but sleep . . ." None who heard it could ever forget that haunting introduction spoken softly over a languorous rendition of *Caprice Viennois* and then songs practically whispered by the Devore sisters. But here he was, the living legend—in person—with one of the most novel presentations of the entire convention. Lee opened with a brief *Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight* then Ben Hall returned to



Lee Erwin chuckles in response to an audience reaction to his "do-it-yourself" story line music.—Stufoto.

the microphone to explain that Lee was a really "silent" organist—meaning that Lee had no lines. So Ben explained that Lee would play portions of the original score he had been commissioned to write for the never released Gloria Swanson silent film, *Queen Kelly*, which he had cued recently at a special showing at the New York Beacon theatre. It was intriguing music which stood alone very well, minus the assist of the visual boost preferred by the film.

Next it was an experiment in silent film music, a "do-it-yourself" scenario. Lee supplied the cue music but listeners were on their own as to what the music referred to—thus the "homemade" script suggested by each listener's imagination. Lee steered clear of the obvious for the first few minutes and played in a rather neutral vein. Then, after a ustulating love theme, a chase started, and it led to some out-of-the way places marked by Klaxon horn honks, a variety of bells, whistles and grunts—which was Lee's sly way of wheeling in the kitchen sink. When the big, symphonic denouement came, each listener had experienced his own silent movie as projected within the bounds of his imagination. Well, it was invigorating to rescue Juanita Hansen from the slave traders once again but couldn't Lee have stretched out that romantic closing clinch just a little more?

For a closer Lee Erwin played a Ger-shwin medley which included a soaring



Lee Erwin is congratulated for his silent movie music by Ben Hall.—Stufoto.

Somebody Loves Me and a fast-paced *I Got Rhythm*, during which we noted that he preferred to use the individual swell shoes (controlling chamber volumes separately) instead of doing it the easy way with only the "general" (all swells on one shoe) to worry about. This detail gave Lee a very audible advantage in the variety of his registration and shading. It's unlikely that many listeners noted this but the ovation afforded Lee Erwin was a "here and now" demonstration of appreciation, and not simply a heart throb for a long gone "river." But all the same, Lee encored with his theme version of *Caprice Viennois* and it is still a thing of beauty as he performs it.



Three organists "sat in" for Leonard MacClain. Besides Dennis James and Lee Erwin, Pres. Dick Schrum did a brief stint at the Senate-Orbits Wurlitzer.—Stufoto.

The third man on the Leonard MacClain substitution team was none other than ATOE prexy Dick Schrum, the only time he played formally before the conventioners.

But Dick realized that there was still a lot of ground to cover before supper and he knew how great the next artist sounded at rehearsal, so he cut his contribution short to make way for Bill Buswell, who was introduced by Motor City Chapte chairman Al Mason.

BILL BUSWELL OLD PRO IN THE BIZ

Bill Buswell was only a few measures into *Jalousie* when the magnitude of his musicianship became apparent. Bill, with a lifetime of music making to his credit, soon established a friendly rapport with his Senate audience. His second selection was a group of Viennese operetta tunes, a sweeping *Merry Widow Waltz*, *Yours is my Heart Alone* and *Girls, Girls, Girls!* The latter tune, suggesting the merriment of Paris nightlife, sparkled brightly and its title may have influenced the group which followed, a medly of tunes named for girls, including *Marie* (with her continually breaking dawn), that darling of the true "boulevardier", *Louise, Margie, Linda, Mary Lou* and *Betty Co-ed*. Put them all together and they spell *The Girlfriend*, Bill's summary of the distaff situation.



Bill Buswell offered varied fare and displayed a mastery of the Senate Wurlitzer's orchestral facilities. And beside that, his music sounded good.—Stufoto.

There was a touch of Eddie Dunstedter in Bill's treatment of *Parade of the Wooden Soldiers* but his own ideas about drilling the troops prevailed for a fine "pass in review!" The stiff-legged platoon never showed more agility.

Bill likes to group similar titles even though the resulting music is quite dissimilar. This was noted during his "wonderful" medley, all tunes with that word in their titles. The group included a scintillating *Wonderful One*, a gallad-style *Mr. Wonderful* and Gershwin's bouncing *S'Wonderful* for a closer, selections with a wide range of variety which Bill increased further with many changes in registration. In fact, his obvious control over the complex instrument reflected the kind of self confidence one would associate with a long-time familiarity with the instrument—instead of a couple of hours of rehearsal time.

After his *New Moon* selections, Bill offered a tune dating from the silent movie era but more recently used as a theme for a new-fangled "talkie" entitled *Love in the Afternoon*. It was a Theda Bara-ish *Fascination*.

Next it was march time and Bill trotted out the full marching band for a big and brassy *Washington Post* complete with a *Paramount News* coda. That one brought the audience up out of their seats. A facet of Bill Buswell's flair for showmanship is the ability to gage audience demands. He never came near a "saturation" point but always managed to leave the house wanting just a bit more. He saved a clever novelty for his first encore. Taking the notes sounded most often in tuning an instrument, Bill used them as the basis of his *Piano Tuner's Concerto*, a humorous bit of flim-flam which had him pushing intentionally sour notes, then "getting it right." Comic as it was, it still required lots of musicianship to hang all the nonsense and tricks on an orderly framework. Bill made it come off.

For his final encore, Bill announced a group of hymns, but no specific titles. Listeners recognized *Charley, My Boy, Elmer's Tune, I'm Just Wild About Harry* and *Bill*. The audience caught on to the play on words: "hymn" should have been spelled "him!" But just for good measure, Bill hung a churchie *Amen* on *Bill*. Bill Buswell, a top entertainer with a flair for sustaining musical interest.

JOHN MURI SUNDAY JULY 2, 1967

The first program of the day, featuring John Muri, was held at the big Detroit Fox, which houses a 4/36 Crawford Special Wurlitzer. The hour was early (8:00 a.m.) but the program was well attended.

John played a first rate program including many numbers not usually included in a theatre organ presentation. His use of solo stops brought into focus many of the beautiful tunes available on this outstanding organ.

A highlight of Muri's program was a slide presentation which included slides from his private collection. He showed the audience slides used for openings of new theatres or organs in the 1920's in which the stops and effects were described on screen while the organist played the appropriate sound. His slide presentation ended with his use of a set used by Jesse Crawford for an Easter solo in 1925.

John Muri followed the slides with another group of selections which entranced the listeners by his musicianship and careful selection of registers.



John Muri at mighty Fox concert.

Bill Lamb Photo

ATOE BANQUET

Sunday, July 2, 1967—6:00 p.m., Ballroom of Cobo Hall.

The social hour began promptly at 6:00 o'clock and, since Michigan laws

limit Sunday libations to beer and wine, corks were popping on champagne bottles with machine-gun rapidity. As usual, theatre organs were the subject of conversation. A tasty banquet dinner of roast beef was served promptly at 7:00 p.m. At the conclusion of this repast, Al Mason of the Motor City Chapter performed introduction and turned the rostrum over to Ben Hall. Ben proceeded to make several 'announcements' and then called Dick Schrum, ATOE President, to the podium. President Schrum reported on the Board of Directors' meeting and stated that ATOE now has a membership exceeding 3,100. He then announced there were 524 registrations with 603 at the banquet (total ATOE attendance—registrants and families—was 852).

Introductions of all members of the Board of Directors, Chapter Representatives, Editorial Staff, and Past Presidents were made. It is interesting to note that all but two chapters were represented at the banquet. The high spot at this point was the announcement of the Honorary Member of the Year who turned out to be none other than Erwin "Cap" Young, who has dedicated himself to

(Continued Next Page)



VAUDEVILLE ORGANIST—Young Patty Driscoll not only supplied dinner music at the 3-deck Allen, but also accompanied the entertainment, providing authentically frenetic 'roaring '20s' rhythms for a teeny-dancer group which gyrated through a series of 'Black Bottoms', 'Charlestons' and the 'Varsity Drag.' Patty proved a real pro.—Stufoto.

ATOE BANQUET, cont.

the ATOE cause for many years. The applause greeting this announcement proved the Board of Directors had made the right choice.

An entertaining program followed featuring the Sarah Paull Dance Group;



A ROSE BETWEEN TWO CONN-MEN—Peg Nielsen, publisher of the Organizer and assistant editor of the BOMBARDE, exchanges quips with the Conn Organ Corp's emissaries to ATOE during the banquet. Bob Zadel (left) and Don Kingston were on hand to mainline pipe sounds—perhaps for eventual channeling into future Conn plug-in models.—Stufoto.

The Barbery Host Chorus (Oakland County Chapter SPEBSQSA, Inc.); and organist Patty Driscoll at the Allen Theatre Organ furnished by the Allen Organ Company.



HAPPY FLYBOY—Captain Erwin Young's smile reflects the pleasant surprise of being chosen the one who has done a great service for the theatre organ.—Stufoto.

HARRY BUNNELL

Following the banquet, a program was presented at the historic Fort Street Presbyterian Church. This was an unusual setting for an ATOE function. The 115-year old church houses a 4 /55 organ built by Hook and Hastings; rebuilt by Moller; and, later, by Aeolian-Skinner. In its rebuilding, it has followed the romantic trend, is well-balanced and features both a 32' Bombarde and a



Harry Bunnell at his concert Fort Street Presbyterian Church

32' Bourdon. The organ contains 3,253 pipes. It is known as the Swift Memorial Organ and has been played by the finest contemporary classic organists. For the ATOE group, Harry Bunnell performed as organist. Highlights of his program included "Sweet Gotheque", selections by Gigot; and "Tocatta in F" from the Fifth Symphony by Widor. His performance was played with great sensitivity and he displayed this great organ to its best advantage.

* * *

LOWELL AYARS
REDFORD THEATRE ARTIST
Monday, July 3, 1967-9:00 a.m.-Redford

This program was played on a nicely restored 3 /10 Barton organ. The organ is located in a well cared for neighborhood theatre and is mounted on a Barton four-post lift. Before the program started, TV equipment was brought in and Lowell Ayars gave a short rendition which was broadcast as part of the 5:00 o'clock news on a local TV telecast. Following this, Lowell proceeded to entrance the ATOE audience with his individualistic organ stylings playing old theatre organ standards, as well as



'FOUR POSTER'—Lowell Ayars greets his Redford theatre audience from the console of the 10-rank Barton. The posts at each corner of the console platform are part of Dan Barton's ingenious solution to the elevator problem. His 'four poster' required no excavation. It raises the console about five feet.—Stufoto

music in the more modern idiom. The organ is a very mellow, well-blended instrument with an excellent ensemble. Ayers took full advantage of these characteristics throughout his performance.

At the conclusion of his program, he was greeted with a rafter-shaking round of applause. For an encore, Lowell gave his listeners a special treat by singing "They'll Never Believe Me" in a beautiful, well-trained baritone voice. He played his own accompaniment which brought down the house.

Incidentally, as a point of interest, the Redford Theatre was one of three theatres built in the Detroit area in 1928, which contained identical 3 /10 Bartons. The openings of the theatres were spaced two weeks apart and each organ was premiered by none other than Don Miller. Of these three, only the Redford Barton has been restored thanks to the local ATOE Chapter. The Royal Oaks Theatre organ is still in the theatre but not playable. The Birmingham organ has been removed and is in storage.

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VIRGIL HOWARD, LOWELL AYARS PLAY CONCERTS

ON BILL HOLLEMAN'S 4-20 ARCADIA RINK WURLITZER

It was triple-star concert set for Monday afternoon. Virg Howard, Lowell Ayars and Bill Holleman were waiting in the wings as the conventioners taxied, hitch-hiked, mooched rides or pogoed to the Arcadia Rink where the genius and determination of Bill Holleman has provided a 4-20 Wurlitzer in an acoustically spacious setting. Lowell Ayars? The atmosphere was heavy with praise for his morning stint at the truly "golden-voiced" Barton in the Redford theatre as the arrivals traipsed through the entrance of the huge hall. He was already an old friend we looked forward to meeting again.



VIRG HOWARD, of Toledo Paramount fame, started the Monday afternoon festivities at the Arcadia Rink 4-20 Wurlitzer. It has two Posthorns, a Moller and a Gottfried. Verg used them both.—Stufoto.

For those who were not on the scene, the Arcadia is a huge floor surrounded on three sides by observer benches. On the fourth side is a stage—or was a stage before the Wurlitzer was installed to fill its entire area. The console is located in a raised "box" at the right of the stage. The rink has a high ceiling which has been treated with acoustical material, apparently to control reverberation.

The meeting was called to order by a mighty fanfare which rattled the timbers of the building as well as those of many of the listeners. Ben Hall introduced Virg Howard, an organist well remembered for his championing of the Toledo Paramount Wurlitzer as long as the theatre stood (it's now a parking lot) and his *Now is the Hour* album played on that fine instrument.

While Virg played his opener, a selection from *My Fair Lady*, we moved in toward the console for a closer look at him. We found a very young man sitting there and that was something of a surprise because we had expected an older person, for no good reason other than the maturity reflected in his recorded playing and in his written words.

Rink organs are always loud and this was no exception. This has one advantage in that listeners don't feel obligated to clam up as at the more formal theatre or church concert. It's possible to discuss the music, instrument, humidity or the miniskirt situation with one's neighbor without missing a single note played. Thus, a holiday spirit prevailed and the refreshment stands did a better than usual business for the time of day.

After Virg had finished a chime-spiked *Remember* (which had considerable Crawford content), he featured the big *Tibias throughout Someday I'll Find You* (remember radio's "Mr. Keen?"). Then it was novelty time and Virg played a medley of TV and radio commercial jingles, some long gone. No one had trouble identifying the Doublemint gum tune nor the Gillette sports theme. However, when Virg played *Singin' Sam's* Barbasol theme there were some blank looks among the young. But the oldsters recalled those intimate words, "No brush, no lather, no rub-in—smear it on your hairy chin!" Them was the days!

Next, the Howard musical imagery re-examined the "roaring '20s" with a set which included *Charleston*, *If You Knew Suzy* and *Toot Toot Tootsie, Good-bye*. He really played up a storm.

After exploiting the "schmaltz" possibilities of the 4-deck Wurler, (*The Sweetest Sounds* and *Secret Love*—the latter hopelessly impassioned), Virg closed with a football medley which brought us *Varsity Drag*, *Old Notre Dame* and *On Wisconsin*. This spirited group resulted in a fine show of enthusiasm among the multitudes, expressed by handclapping and shouts of "Now is the Hour," Virg's theme at the Toledo Paramount.

After a brief intermission it was Lowell Ayars' turn at the 20 ranks (two of which are Posthorns!), and his style of playing brought out entirely different characteristics of the instrument. His opener was a medley from *Snow White* and his treatment conjured up visions of the handsome prince serenading Snow White with *One Song*. Miss White cleaning up the woodland cottage with the help of the forest animals while she trilled out a shy *Whistle While You Work*, her prediction that *Some Day My Prince Will Come* (he did) and the march of the seven little men homeward to the strains of *Hi Ho* after a hard day mining diamonds, crossing the Technicolor log bridge with Dopey bringing up the rear sporting a huge tail light. It was all con-

jured up once again in its timeless beauty by the artistry of Lowell Ayars.

Next, Mr. Ayars gave his attention to the plight of *Chio-Chio-San* with his moderately oriental treatment of *Poor Butterfly*, a tune a later generation remembers as the nightly theme of radio's *Myrt and Marge*. Probably Lowell's most beautiful selection was Anderson's *Forgotten Dreams*, a hauntingly lovely melody line further enhanced by Ayars' sensitive treatment.

Yet, it is reasonable to predict that the most memorable number of the afternoon would tend to be another long-gone radio theme, *Little Orphan Annie*, mainly because of the vocal chorus gargled aloud by Ben Hall over the booming PA system. But that's an unfair evaluation; actually Ben performed this solo venture into the field of "lieder" with all the *savoir faire* one could expect from a lyric which includes such subtleties as *Arf goes Sandy!* The audience lapped it up. Down, Ben!



'ARF—GOES SANDY!'—Ben Hall doesn't seem quite certain of the next line for his unexpected vocalization of 'Little Orphan Annie' during Lowell Ayars' stint at the 4-20 Arcadia rink Wurlitzer.—Stufoto.

Lowell followed with a whole slew of musical goodies, including *Stardust*, *Give Me Something to Remember You By* (which never fails to recall that crooner Rudy Vallee once got a grapefruit in the face while singing the tune in a New England theatre! Careful, Ben!), a most romantic *Dancing in the Dark*, *That's Entertainment* (true!) and a scintillating closer, *I Feel a Song Coming On*, which should have been the opener.

After another intermission it was time for Chapter Representatives to play, those hardy souls appointed by their chapters to play short shots as called on. Standing by was Bill Holleman to help reps find the way around an unfamiliar instrument. The reps played "cold," with little or no previous playing time on the instrument involved. Brave souls! During the course of this session we were treated to some selections by Holleman in person, and he's a most remarkable person. After playing a Hammond in the rink for six years he decided to give his roller skaters a far greater return

for their money. He purchased the 4-20 from the Broadway Capitol theatre in Detroit and spent nearly a year getting the instrument in shape and installed. It has supplied the skating music since 1957. And there is a plan afoot to eventually move the Wurli to a more elaborate rink. Bill is a member of that small fraternity whose members have found ways to make possession of a large theatre organ pay off. More power to him! And to the fraternity!

The afternoon was getting short and to allow time for the long trek back to the Pick-Fort Shelby hostelry (that isn't how Ben Hall described it!) to freshen up, gulp a salami sandwich and either safari or thumb a hitch to the Senate for the Ashley Miller bash—well, we just had to leave before most of the Chapter Reps had done their stunts. A shame, because many of them brought fine offerings. The few we caught were first rate.

ASHLEY MILLER

'GREAT' AT THE SENATE

Sitting in the comfortable Senate theatre on Monday evening shortly before showtime, we recalled Ashley Miller's arrival at the theatre the day before. A large rented limousine pulled up in front



'BAT MAN'—Always willing to go along with a gag, Ashley made his post-intermission entrance with arms flapping after Ben Hall introduced him as 'Bat Man.'—Stufoto.

of the theatre and the organist emerged from the driver's seat attired chiefly in walking shorts. His attractive wife remained in the front seat and the rear seat was a sea of churning kids—the Miller "tribe." He wanted to talk, and we learned from what he said that Ashley Miller is his own severest critic. He expressed dissatisfaction with his performance at a previous West Coast concert. No alibis other than "sometimes we have it—other times we don't." Our reply was that this was the first time we had been informed that we shouldn't have appreciated that West Coast show.

Ashley left with the promise that things would be much better at this convention. Mrs. Miller, who had been listening, clucked concurrence.

A little after 8:00 p.m. (most concerts started a bit late), Ben Hall appeared with a slew of announcements including a harangue about some "steamtable se-raglio" he had discovered near the theatre which he had induced to remain open on the 4th for the benefit of hungry conventioners—IF he could produce the customers. So he proceeded to detail the menu—which turned out to be mostly Polish sausage. Ben appears to have deep gastronomic concern for his fellow man and we trust his choice was an improvement on the "ptomaine posadas" we habitually are drawn to in the downtown areas of large cities.

After Ben's dietary diatribe came Ashley Miller and an organ concert, the opener being a brassy *Strike Up the Band* followed by that musical invitation to come to the *Cabaret*. A low-level intro marked *From This Moment On* but the volume built as the tempo increased and finally the "big band" sound carried the tune, an orchestral effect at which Miller is most adept.

Like Don Baker, Ashley likes to group his selections and he doesn't waste any words talking about them. He opened *Misty* with ethereal passages on vibes but came back to Earth for a ride in a rattling, horn-happy *Tijuana Taxi*. He turned to waltz tempo for an interweaving of *I'll Take Romance* with *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World* while an attractive gal in the audience smiled and beamed. It was the same one we saw in the front seat of the rented car on the previous day. This will bear watching.

Like Don Miller's musical conceptions, all of Ashley Miller's (no relation) selections have greatly expanded intros which prepare the listener for the tune to come, a highly desirable form of "brain-washing." A fine example was *The Second Time Around*, that ode of hope for "first time losers" (and we are legion).

Miller rounded out the first half of his concert with *Pretty Butterfly* (a Boss Nova), a Bach *Fugue in G* (with the assist of a page turner), Victor Young's *Golden Earrings* and a selection from *Romany Life* which would appeal to the least hot-blooded "tzigane."

We have referred to the intermissions as "brief" but they always seem long, perhaps because of the "hangover" (if you'll pardon the expression!) a great artist leaves with his audience—a desire for more—now! So, Ben Hall's reappearance was welcomed with a burst of applause. Ben lost no time in bringing Ashley back (he'd obviously run out of restaurants) and this time introduced the organist as "Bat Man." Miller went along with the gag and entered flapping

his arms followed by a few bars of the caped crusader's boogie-woogie theme after he got seated. His opener for the second stanza was a big and bouncy *It's Delicious*. The Tuba carried lots of melody during *When Sunny Gets Blue* and when Ashley announced *Music to Watch Girls By* he added that the proper sequel might be *A Man and a Woman*.

Minute Waltz required more than one minute just as Miller predicted, because "minute" in this case means "little." Then a Sinatra-style ballad, *You Make Me Feel So Young*.

Miller's "oldie" medley included a well-Tibia'd *Among My Souvenirs* and *Street of Dreams* while *Whispering* rated some Glockenspiel tinkles. *La Cumparsa* waxed and waned like a fiesta parade while a Brass Trumpet wailed out the Latin melody.

Ashley Miller's big closer was a full-blown *Granada*, a rendition which brought his audience up out of their seats for an enthusiastic indication of approval. Miller had called his shots; we had never heard him better.

For an encore he obliged with a medley from *Where's Charley?*

Following the Miller concert, the DTOC technical crew conducted a mass tour through the chambers. They lined interested parties up in a single line along the left wall of the house, ran them through the chambers and the bedazzled visitors reappeared along the right wall. We counted the number going in and those coming out and the totals didn't match! Two hundred entered; one hundred and ninety-eight emerged. Of course, the missing two might have been those master maintenance men Messrs Brewer and Voydanoff returned to count the pipes after the tour! While the chamber tour was in progress an organist played soft music, tunes such as *Tip-Toe Through the Tibias*. It was a fitting closer for an eventful day.

KAY McABEE

FOX THEATRE-ARTIST,

Tuesday, July 4, 1967—8:00 a.m.

The early morning concert on the gigantic Fox Theatre Wurlitzer featured Kay McAbee. This proved to be a magnificent blend of a top-flight artist and a superb organ. Due to the early hour, Kay announced his opening number as *I Could Have Slept All Night* and played the well-known Lerner and Loewe tune. Throughout the program, McAbee exhibited complete mastery of the big 4/36 console. His registrations were well chosen. It should be noted that all his changes in registration were done manually since the combination pistons were not operable. His agility and musicianship was appreciated by those in at-



Kay McAbee Fox Concert. Bill Lamb Photo

tendance. He encoored with *Tea for Two* with a rousing arrangement that was a genuine topper.

ALLEN MILLS

LEAVES HIS MARK

Apparently Detroiters are naturally early risers. That's the only way we can account for a concert scheduled at 8:00 a.m. on the 4th of July! It wasn't the first time; it happened on Sunday, too. However, once there, the normal resistance to racing the dawn on a holiday was forgotten in the wonders of the Muri and McAbee performances. Thus we ruminated at 1:30 p.m., seated in the Senate theatre while waiting for the start of the Allen Mills concert.

Allen Mills—a name we had seen in print a number of times, usually surrounded by words of glowing praise.

But before Mills played Ben Hall was in the mood for some clowning. With the assistance of Lee Erwin he hauled a heavy-looking, concealed device on stage. He explained that this was an item from a Unit Orchestra just restored to working order, something he referred to as a "toy counter 'impedimenta'." Then he removed the blanket to reveal an H-shaped gadget with an air hose connected to it. Lee sat down at the organ and beat out some rhythm while Ben "keyed" the "impedimenta" for some thin clicks to punctuate the music in the correct spots. It sounded about like a typewriter and might have been a castanet action minus the clackers. The audience was amused at all the trouble Ben had gone to, all the showmanship of bringing on the concealed gimcrack and giving it a great buildup spiel, and then revealing it in action—a flat, dull clicking sound.

There was little to herald the artistry that was to come in Mr. Mills' appearance

when Ben Hall introduced him. He's somewhat slight of stature and appears to be in his mid-20s. But his microphone presence was one of assurance and when he broke into a selection from *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*, he did so with lots of musicianship and a fine flair for registration. After leaving his heart in San Francisco via a sweet Tibia-Vox combination, Mills decided to liven things up with some welcome regression to the '20s and a set from *Thoroughly Modern Millie* which included the jingling title tune, *Baby Face* (lots of piano) and then more *Millie. I Hadn't Anyone Til You* featured the Wurlitzer Clarinet, a well-regulated solo rank, plus some interesting variations on the tune. It closed with a choir of massed Strings, a real *Dave Rose* effect that Mills would use many times in tunes to come.

A sneaky *Alley Cat* prowled through the chambers at the behest of Mr. Mills, he stealth marked by steps synchronized with a single-tap Xylophone—until he ventured into the street and was nearly done in by a honking auto. *My Romance* was soloed on the Orbits-Senate Wurli's exquisite Oboe Horn, then the String choir took over while a plinking piano carried the bubbly melody variation. Allen Mills filled out the first half with Brahms' *Lullabye* (for his daughter) with much Glockenspiel tinkling, *Oh, My Darling*, and a vivacious *Once in Love With Amy. Spanish Flea* ended the half.

After intermission, Mills picked up with an arrangement of *Til There Was You* which explored just about every possible way of presenting the tune, from flip-pant to sentimental, from gushing to majestic, from quixotic to sincere. Then came a puissant *I Married an Angel* with a few hints of the supernatural.

Allen Mills, whose experience on church organs exceeds in time his work on the theatre organ, told his audience that he wishes church organs had traps so he could make such church processionals as *King William's March* more listenable. Then he demonstrated what he meant. The old chestnut took on new sheen when fitted with appropriate drum rolls and flourishes as supplied by the theatre organ. Next came an expansive treatment of *Londonderry Air* followed by a subtle and introspective *Try a Little Tenderness* during which the 4-34's vibes added much quiet pastel color.

Allen's movie theme was *I'll Wait for You* which was followed by a Tico Tico which Ethel in person couldn't have topped. It was wild, yet played within the areas which sound good on a pipe organ. Mills manages to get in a lot of color on the pedals without making it look difficult. That was Allen Mills' big feature selection.

Naturally his palm-beating listeners demanded more so Allen decided to



GADETRY! While Lee Erwin provides stop-time accompaniment, Ben Hall 'solos' a single stage 'toy counter impedimenta', obviously in an experimental stage. The sound was that of a quarrelsome typewriter in an echo chamber. —Stufoto.

show his audience in musical terms how he got started in music. He played *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* on the remote piano like a small boy who'd rather toss a football than practice music. Each succeeding phrase shed a few clinkers and soon Allen was swinging. Then he went into the variations with a two-part invention bit, then as a fugue, as a jazz bit, as a march and so on, through many treatments. His chromatic pedalling was something inspiring to hear (though he could have used a stronger pedal combination). This brought the Sunday afternoon house down. Allen Mills had earned the written kudos many times over.



Allen Mills acknowledges applause between tunes. —Stufoto.

DON BAKER CLOSES THE CONVENTION ON A NOTE OF TRIUMPH

The final spot on an all-star show is always a precarious one, a spot that calls for a super-star. Such an organist is Don Baker, a man whose many years of devotion to the theatre organ are well known.

But when concert time came, it was announced that Don hadn't arrived yet. So, it was decided to fill with an old film

of Don playing the New York Paramount 4-21 broadcast studio Wurlitzer. Closeups of the big horseshoe showed Don's hands as he went through several selections, panning slowly to his face then back to the hands. The film, made in 1938, indicated that time had been kind to Don Baker. The final tune on the reel was *Tiger Rag* and just to make things interesting, Don was blindfolded. He lit into the pre-tank tune with a vengeance but part way through another sound superimposed itself over the thin "Vitaphone" sound track—a big organ sound blasted out with *Tiger Rag* as the lights came up to reveal the real Don Baker at the Orbits-Senate Wurlitzer—still blindfolded. It was a starter which caught the imagination of the audience and they gave Don a fitting reception.

Don lost no time in going right into his program which started with a version of *Cherokee* which justifies the use of "mighty" with "Wurlitzer." It was thrilling music in a grand manner. Next came *Sound of Music* followed by that small jazz masterwork by Raymond Scott called *Twilight in Trukey*. The harem cuties Don conjured never looked so good. Don went farther East for a fetching and sweet *Poor Butterfly* followed by an arrangement of *Chinatown* which he must have whopped up after spending New Years there. The dragons were all over it! *Days of Wine and Roses* was marked by the skillful use of the swell pedal which is a Baker trademark and *Do Re Me* activated that "ghostly" piano with its keys a-bobbing, a few feet from the organ console.

With his first tune, it was immediately obvious that Don found the instrument to his liking, and with each succeeding selection the treatments became more daring. When Don Baker is in a good pipe-happy mood, he throws caution to the wind and often breaks a good many of the rules, with bold counter melodies challenging the main stream, sudden and shocking key changes, unexpected emphasis from sizzling reeds. All of these were heard but Don never departed from good musical form. His



DEAD SERIOUS—Don Baker's face is a study in concentration as he coaxes musical magic from an instrument which fits his stylings to perfection.—Stufoto.

modulations between tunes still included a bit of the ending tune while a hint of the coming selection rose from the ever-changing harmonies.

There was a great sob in *The River Seine* and the emotional impact of the *Old Refrain* sang of a vivacious Vienna of yesteryear. This, of course, was during Don's European medley which included *Arrivaderci Roma* and closed with a wild Italian peasant dance.

The intermission conversation sparkled with comments on how great Don was playing and this reviewer had to admit that in some thirty years of being a member of the Baker fan club (dating from NY Paramount days), never had he heard Don in better form. The master had found an organ he liked and the results could be described as superb.

Don opened Part Two with a theme from a John Wayne epic whose name escapes us, and followed with a *Carioca* which conjured pleasant memories of Fred and Ginger swaying gracefully to its South American tempos. We have heard Don play *Lady of Spain* many times but this lady was simply a gasser. She got the full Baker treatment with the familiar two-handed trem effect we refer to as "chop-chop" style. But Don never uses a trick long enough to give it any wear; he's too impatient to get to the next thriller.



DON BAKER ON PIPES—Don looks for a favorite combination on a strange stop rail during his memorable session at the Senate-Orbits 4-34 Wurlitzer. The former Fisher theatre organ is a special design with stopkeys arranged according to chambers.—Stufoto.

Straight from his 1938 Columbia record album came *My Darling* followed by a ustulating *Orchids in the Moonlight*.

The highlight of big and bold *Exodus* was the bolero treatment in the second part. All this time Don was sitting calmly at the console, knowing just where to find exactly what he wanted, as though he had played the instrument for many years (and it has an unusual stop key arrangement). After the faraway chimes in *Bells of St. Mary's*, Don performed one of his famous arrangements, his *Tea for Two*, a novelty treatment he had made known wherever a Conn theatre model can be set up for a dozen or more "plug-in" club members.

Don doesn't play long medleys any-

more (the customers carped that the seats got too hard and besides they wanted to applaud oftener), the average now being about three selections, such as Don's Irish group. It included the sprightly jigtime *Washerwoman* followed by a ballad rendition of *Mother MacChree*, then into a rousing *MacNamara's Band* which generated mid-tune applause.

Then Don had the pleasure of acknowledging a really meaningful standing ovation, one similar to the ovation afforded the opener, Don Miller. The audience had experienced a sense of great-



Music finished, Don Baker drops his 'playing pokerfact' and smiles for his legion of admirers.—Bill Lamb Photo

ness in both cases which had to be expressed. "I just went into orbit" said one cute blonde, and that about describes it.

Don Baker's first encore was his masculine version of *The High and the Mighty* which was all thunder and majesty, then *Cheek to Cheek* in an opulent "bounce" tempo. It was the perfect closing for a series of concerts marked by excellence throughout.

At the close of the Don Baker concert, Master of Ceremonies and Announcement Maker Ben Hall came to the microphone and stated he had one more announcement to make, which was, "I have no further announcements!" Thus a highly successful ATOE Annual get together came to a close.

Ben Hall bade the Conventioneers farewell and they reluctantly left the theatre, knowing full well that as they passed through the Senate doors they returned to the world of race riots, Viet Nam, increased taxes, the middle East, unrest in Africa and crippling strikes. But they would carry with them the glow of a make-believe world which remembered the glittering theatre, living entertainers and—above all—the wonderful theatre organs of a simpler and more graceful era fondly remembered. No one would deny that the effort had been worth it.

**SEE YOU NEXT YEAR
IN LOS ANGELES**