

TOSA NEWS

Oct. 2020
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Important Message

**“Due to Covid 19 virus situation
Committee will advise
Members in the November TOSA
News whether the
Christmas Concert at the
Orion Theatre is to proceed or not ”**

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Vice Presidents

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Secretary

Simon Ellis *secretary@tosa.net.au* 0403 548 354
PO Box 63 BUXTON NSW 2571

Treasurer

Geoff Brimley *treasurer@tosa.net.au* 0403 308 915

Membership Inquiries

Margaret Badman (02) 4776 2192
PO Box 589 RICHMOND NSW 2753
membership@tosa.net.au

Committee

Barry Tooker 9744 1535
Pam Lawson 0457 866 010
Robert Gliddon *christieorg@bigpond.com*
Ernie Vale 0415 626 064
David Badman 0408 230 337
Allan Reid 0400 352 098

TOSA NEWS Editor

Ernie Vale 0415 626 064 *editor@tosa.net.au*
P.O. Box A2322, Sydney South, NSW, 1235

Marrickville Players Convener

John Batts 0420 424 103
Neil Palmer 9798 6742 (after 7pm)

Orion Players Convener

Craig Keller 0418 484 798 phone or SMS
John Batts 0420 424 103

Ticket Secretary (Concert Bookings)

Theo Langenberg 0410 626 131 before 8:00pm please

Artist Liaison Officer

Craig Keller 0418 484 798

Photography Barry Tooker 9744 1535

Publicity Officer Ernie Vale 0415 626 064

TOSA News David & Margaret Badman

Printer Printers of Richmond

President



Keep safe, wash your hands, wear your masks and bump elbows when you see your friends.

Craig Keller
President

Dear Members,

It's difficult to find new and interesting things to say in this column while we're still in Covid Limbo Land. One day – hopefully soon – this cursed virus will be controllable and we can resume life with some form of normality. But I think it will be different to the “norm” we had pre 2020. I saw a comment on Facebook recently that stated **“Before I agree to 2021 I need to see some terms and conditions”**. Do we all feel the same?

Meanwhile some life at TOSA NSW continues. The Orion Wurlitzer was recently tuned by John Parker. It's better to keep it in tune rather than have to drag it out of the depths and its last tuning was prior to David Gray's concert last October. Both Orion and Marrickville are being regularly used for members' events with Covid safety protocols in place. Some maintenance work is occurring when time and personnel allow.

There is no news on a concert before the end of this year but the chances of there being a concert are practically zero anyway. Better for us all to be safe.

Lastly, thanks to all the members who took up the discount renewal option and to Margaret Badman for her efforts in assisting members with their renewal enquiries.

Editorial



Hello Members,

I hope you all enjoyed the series of articles by Reginald Foort, over the last number of TOSA News. I found it very interesting reading as I typed the articles into TOSA News. There is one more article to go about the Travelling Moller that I know you will find very interesting.

My thanks to Rob Gliddon for suggesting I run the series for you whilst we are unable to hold concerts this year and for loaning me his copy of “The Cinema Organ.” Also my thanks to President Craig in helping me transfer the articles by providing a suitable format.

I visited the Orion Theatre this week when the organ was being tuned and am delighted to report that Council is utilising this down time to replace the carpet, resurface the stage with a smooth timber flooring without carpet and replacing the air-conditioning. So the Orion will be in great shape when we are able to return.

Regards.
Editor TOSA News.
Enjoy the Music Live,
Ernie Vale

From the Mailbox...



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Thanks for your responses and please continue to email or write in, telling us what you think.

Where space permits we will do our best to publish your comments, but as space is limited, the editor reserves the right to edit any submitted comments and, as always, the views expressed by any individual may not necessarily coincide with the views of TOSA NSW Div.

Please submit all comments via email to:

The Editor editor@tosa.net.au
or in writing to:

The Editor - TOSA News (NSW Div)
PO Box A2322
SYDNEY SOUTH, NSW, 1235

Please Note Change to TOSA Bank Account

The Society's only bank account now is with **St George**. Details are **BSB 112-879, account number 442 088 530**

Please direct all payments to this account with St George Bank.

Obit Anne Zietarsky

Our Member, Elizabeth Anne Zietarsky, known as Annie, passed away on Wednesday

30th September. Anne had been a member of TOSA NSW since June 2015.

On several occasions she came along to the concerts and helped with set-up and afternoon teas. Anne made the tailored cover on the tea trolley at the Orion, as she spent many years in the dressmaking industry.

Anne had the chance a few years ago, to move to Tumut and buy a home and be near her daughter Katherine, and son-in-law Mark and some of her grandchildren.

Anne maintained her membership in TOSA. She came to Sydney for the visit to the State Theatre, which she enjoyed very much. Anne looked forward to receiving her Tosa News, she enjoyed staying in touch and reading about the happenings of the society.

From her friend, Pam.

July/Aug Mystery Organist

I have had responses from Peter Held and John Batts to identify the Mystery organist in the August September issue of TOSA News. He is Stanley Tudor at the Gaumont Manchester now transferred to Folly Farm in South Wales. *Editor*

To Watch Out for

December concert at the Orion ?

Your Committee are still conscious of the situation around presenting a concert taking into account the restrictions imposed upon us all by this Covid 19 virus. A number of matters will determine whether the Christmas concert can go ahead.

For example, are the artists:- Is Tony Fenelon, who now lives in Queensland allowed to travel to NSW and when he returns to Queensland does he have to quarantine for 14 days? Is John Atwell who lives in Melbourne allowed to travel to Sydney and when he returns to Melbourne does he have to quarantine for 14 days?

Also what are the logistics in place closer to the date for the concert in early December around number of people allowed at the Orion Theatre?

Your Committee will make a decision at the meeting in late October on whether it is safe for the artists and our patrons to attend the Orion for the Christmas Concert. **Members will be advised in the November TOSA news of the final decision Yes or No!**

Advertising

Rates in

TOSA News

For Members:

Small, Organ related ads = FREE!

For all other cases:

Quarter Page = \$25

Half Page = \$50

Full Page = \$100

Full Page Insert = \$125.00

Members' Playing Dates

The Orion Theatre Campsie Second Thursday of the Month

Player Days under Covid 19 restrictions. Contact Craig or John to confirm dates for Orion. Convener is Craig Keller on 0418484798 or John Batts on 0420424103

**Marrickville Town Hall
4th Monday afternoon/evening**

No players days for the moment until the Corona Virus is well under control

Convener is John Batts on 0420424103
will email you to confirm the day is available or
Neil Palmer on 9798 6742 after 7:00pm
to confirm availability

Christie report for October 2020

Work done since last report includes:

Accompaniment chamber:

Clarinet chest not successful; more work required.
Two tremos fitted and wired for strings and flute/diapason;
adjustments in progress.
Issues identified with 16' Diaphone boots; some joints separated.

Solo chamber:

New winker installed and wound to chimes / glock / xylo / effects;
adjustments needed.
Gunshot wired.
Effects chest wiring error corrected.
Nightingale filled with baby oil and tested.
Train whistle adjusted.

Console:

Uniflex definition file adjusted further; string celeste control now works correctly.

Piano:

Vacuum pump is at Yarramundi for manufacture of mounting frame and supply of motor.

Several tracks from a church video recording session have been captured within Uniflex for playback during testing procedures.

John Weismantel

FREE TO A GOOD HOME

1.Thomas “Celebrity Deluxe” Model 821 organ

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THE RESCUE OF WURLITZER ORGAN OPUS #1808

By TOSA Member Rod Blackmore

The Regent theatre, in George Street, Sydney, was an impressive building built on behalf of entrepreneurs J.C. Williamson's by James Porter & Sons. The architects were Cedric H. Ballantyne and Hare. It was leased to Hoyts Theatres Limited as a cinema, opening on 9th March 1928. "Regent" theatres were Hoyts' flagships in the capital cities throughout Australia (except Perth in Western Australia.) The Sydney Regent was an "A grade" theatre with seating capacity of 1012 in the dress circle and 1189 in the stalls. It cost £300,000.

Placed on order to coincide with the theatre's opening was a Wurlitzer theatre organ of 2 manuals and 8 ranks, style F (opus #1730). The organ's console was on its own hoist to the left of the orchestra pit (which also was a rising platform accommodating up to 40 members of the orchestra.) Sydney organbuilder Thomas C. Edwards secured the contract for installation of the Wurlitzer.

The organ chambers to right and left of the proscenium were constructed of timber in a high-up position. Within months, however, it was considered that the 8 ranks instrument was quite inadequate for the large building. Wurlitzer organ opus #1808 which had left the factory in the U.S. on 30th November 1927 destined for the Capitol theatre, Perth, Western Australia, was ordered for redirection to and installation in Sydney's Regent theatre. Opus #1730 was removed from the Regent and redirected to the Plaza theatre, Melbourne, Victoria. On 23rd August 1928 four additional ranks were provided for this organ. Some parts of the original installation of opus #1730 at the Regent (eg the timber chambers and swell shutters) remained for use in connection with the installation of opus #1808.

Opus #1808 was a "style 260" boasting 3 manuals and 15 ranks. Other theatres around the nation had similar instruments. Opus #1808 had a rank of 32' Diaphones; these enormous pipes were installed lying horizontally above the proscenium. The overall voicing was much more pleasing than the instrument's counterpart at Sydney Capitol theatre. The opening organist had been Roy Devaney from the United States. Other overseas organists who followed included Wallace Kotter, Stanley Wallace, Eddie Fitch, Eddie Ford and Leslie Harvey. Australian organist

Owen Holland remained in residence from 1931 until 1945, followed by Stan Cummins until 1958, and finally Reubert Hayes until the organ was closed down in May 1960. After orchestras were dispensed with in 1949 the organ console had been relocated to the centre of the orchestral stage. The console was painted cream and was flanked by ornamental plaster features.

In 1953 the theatre built a false proscenium forward of the original to permit installation of the wider Cinemascope screen. This entombed the organ console beneath. Organists then had to play without being visible to audiences and by listening to the sound of the organ relayed through a small speaker above the console.

During Reubert Hayes' residence as organist he utilized the organ's Piano stops to provide a Tibia chorus at all available pitches (the upright Piano having been disconnected and sent on loan to another theatre.) This provided an exceptional tonal effect.

In the 1950s the majority of organ-equipped theatres in the suburbs dispensed with organ presentations and terminated the services of their organists. Their organs were placed on the market for sale. City theatres held back on this action into the 1960s. Theatre organists were then frequently employed as salesmen of electronic organs. The last performance at Sydney's Regent was in May 1960.

Capitalising on the availability of these instruments at budget

Show & Membership Prices

	All Artists
Non-members	\$40
Non-member Pensioner/Seniors Card holder	\$35
TOSA Members	\$25

All Students FREE on confirmation of Student status

All Children FREE accompanied by an Adult

Group Booking for 10 or more Adults \$22 per person

First time Adult \$25 by completed Voucher at Box Office

New Membership Fees for 2020-21

\$50.00 Full membership, \$40.00 Concession, Interstate or

Overseas \$50. \$5 discount if TOSA News emailed to you

Membership enquiries David & Margaret Badman

(02) 4776 2192 membership@tosa.net.au

Associate Membership for a spouse/partner is an additional 50%

prices emerged organist Jack Penn Hughes. It is believed that a dozen organs passed through his hands as he brokered sales to third parties (churches and private residences). Third-party purchasers did not always receive what they expected – Hughes retained many of the best pipe ranks for himself to be incorporated into the 16 rank hybrid organ for his residence at Bexley and provided purchasers with similar but inferior ranks. His residence organ was principally based on the Wurlitzer opus #748 from the Plaza theatre, Sydney, and the Christie organ opus #2714 from the Empire theatre, Dunedin, New Zealand.

In 1961 Rod Blackmore and Jeff Aspinall – members of the Theatre Organ Society of Australia (TOSA) – were commissioned by the TOSA committee to document what had happened to redundant organs. This exercise required visits to the theatres involved and inspection of the organs if still available. A visit to the Regent theatre was appropriately organized and viewing of the console (in its tomb), the organ chambers, blower and Diaphone pipes assisted by the theatre's caretaker. An effort to achieve playing of the organ was thwarted, the noise apparently created by the blower's bearings being too excessive for that purpose. These visits to city theatres (State, Capitol, Lyceum, Prince Edward) led to TOSA obtaining access for private playing and in some cases to permission for repairs to be done. John Atkinson was one, with Barry Tooker, who took the opportunity of learning the workings of the Wurlitzers.

Hughes hosted musical events at his residence, inviting numbers of former theatre organists and organ aficionados. One such event in 1963 included the attendance of Ronald Sharp, noted creator of the organ at Sydney's Opera House (then under construction). An irate Hughes is reputed to have remonstrated with Sharp for having purchased Wurlitzer opus #1808 "behind his back". Hughes would have wished to have this jewel among Australian theatre organs for himself.

At about this time John Atkinson (a TOSA member and electrical engineer) was frequently working with Peter Rowe (who had approval of the Greater Union management as a sometime curator of the Wurlitzer organs of the State and Capitol theatres) and Barry Tooker (another TOSA member) who often tended to these instruments on weekends.) John came to hear of the Sharp purchase and the Hughes reaction. Tooker had suggested to John that he take home some stop motors from the Capitol organ to be releathered and he in fact performed an excellent job stirred by

his growing interest in the Wurlitzer instrument. John rang Ronald Sharp asking to be able to see the Regent organ, most of which Sharp had removed to storage in his Mortdale factory. He there saw ranks of pipes set up on manual chests and in a pristine condition. Sharp had sold the organ's piano to one Paul McLeod and the Swinnerson blower to Arthur Esgate of Wahroonga.

John rang Ronald Sharp asking to be able to see the Regent organ which was in storage. He there saw ranks of pipes set up on manual chests and in a pristine condition. Sharp told John that he intended to use the Tibia rank from the Regent, together with percussive and non-tonal effects (castanets, snare drum, bass drum, Chinese block, Tom-tom, triangle, crash cymbal, auto horn, fire gong, steamboat whistle, horse hoofs, bird whistle) so that the Opera House organ could be a multi-purpose instrument. Sharp had left at the Regent the 32' Diaphone pipes, relays, plus cabling for the piano and 32' Diaphone rank.

It was then that John realized if Sharp carried out his intentions that would effectively be the end of this otherwise intact and beautiful instrument. He said to his wife Sue "Something has to be done about this!" and soon after negotiated with Sharp to buy the organ. This action then involved the task of removing the remaining sections of the organ from the theatre – an exercise usually carried out on Sundays with the help of a number of friends including Alan Tranter, and Bob Ellicott. Alan recalls how previously he had assisted Sharp carefully removing parts of the organ to be taken to Sharp's factory at Mortdale. On the land adjacent to where John was living at Carlton he constructed a shed for storage of the organ parts of which he had gained control, but found that he did not have complete legal control of all of the organ. John withheld payment and felt compelled to require Sharp to enter into a legal agreement to gain control.

An important, and ultimately visible, part of the organ that John had then put immense effort into rescuing, was the console. Sharp had the console at Mortdale and had painted it green! – a most extraordinary course of action. Top and side boards of the console were devastatingly affected, requiring long and intensive restoration. It is now the visual centre-piece of the organ's installation.

The instrument is the striking feature of the lower floor of John's residence. The pipework is in a single chamber at one end of this music room but is set out so that it restores the ambience of two chambers beside one another as they had been in the

theatre. The chests and pipework were mostly in original condition, and all components were placed in position with wiring complete over a period of about 4 years. Swell shutters have been accommodated in smaller apertures, and the music room has decor reminiscent of the Regent. John also has constructed mechanism for a Kawai 7'6" grand piano playable from the organ, replacing the original Wurlitzer upright piano that had been disposed of by Sharp.

In 1997 John added a Trivo English Posthorn rank to complement the organ's disposition of pipework. In late 2006 the organ was placed on the National Trust Register in recognition of the considerable effort taken to rescue and revitalise this musical icon.

The disposition of pipework of the organ is as follows:

Main division

Diaphonic Diapason
Tuba Horn
Clarinet
Viole d'Orchestre
Viol Celeste
Stopped Flute
Vox Humana

Solo division

Brass Trumpet
Tibia Clausa
Kinura
Orchestral Oboe
Brass Saxophone
String
Oboe Horn
Quintadena
English Posthorn

The Regent closed as a cinema in January 1976 but continued until May 1984 as a venue for live stage productions, ultimately being demolished in 1989. It is most fortunate that the Wurlitzer organ (opus 1808) had been rescued prior to that final fate.

Postlude. This article was compiled by Rod Blackmore with John Atkinson's assistance, and the assistance of his friend Alan Tranter in January 2020. It is greatly regretted that John suffered major strokes and died on 6th August 2020.

John Atkinson was Editor of TOSA News in the mid 1970s when it incorporated The Diaphone as evidenced by a copy of Volume 13 Number 6 in the possession of your current Editor, Ernie Vale.

The first item in that edition was a notice of "THE BANKSTOWN ORGAN SPECTACULAR", a joint presentation by TOSA and the Bankstown Lions Club. Then came notice of a Free Sunday

Afternoon Pipe Organ Concert at Marrickville Town Hall played by well known and popular member Joh Congert. Editor



**The Late John Atkinson, owner of the ex Regent Theatre, Sydney,
Wurlitzer Opus #1808**



**Articles from
THE CINEMA ORGAN by
Reginald Foort, F.R.C.O., A.R.C.M.
Second Edition**

Chapter XI

"WE ARE NOW GOING OVER TO THE MARBLE ARCH ... "

To me, broadcasting is one of the biggest joys in life; principally, I suppose, because, in the shape of the many thousands of letters

of appreciation which I have received from every part of the British Isles and the neighbouring countries of Europe, I have concrete proof of the fact that my playing really does give pleasure to people.

Years ago, before I commenced playing the cinema organ, I was one of the first pianists to broadcast from the old Marconi House Studio. I shall never forget the terrible feeling of sitting in an empty room, and imagining that I was playing the piano to millions of unseen listeners. Probably in those days my audience only numbered hundreds or possibly thousands, but the mysterious feeling of playing to unknown certainly gave me cold shivers down my back! I was so nervous that it seems to me I played, far more wrong notes than right ones, but I suppose my playing could not have been too bad as I was frequently invited to broadcast afterwards.

My first experience of organ broadcasting was at the New Gallery, in 1926. Fred Kitchen had a magnificent orchestra there in those days, and it was proposed that they should broadcast once a week. When the B.B.C. authorities came round to listen to them, fortunately for me, they happened also to hear me playing the organ, and it immediately occurred to them that this organ offered possibilities of something new and entertaining, so, instead of the orchestra playing for an hour, it was arranged that they should broadcast from 4.15 to 5.0 p.m., and that I should play the remaining fifteen minutes.

The New Gallery organ was then a complete novelty, and happened to broadcast perfectly, with the result that the B.B.C. received so many letters from all over the country asking that the organist might be allowed to broadcast for more than a quarter of an hour, that, after a few weeks, it was arranged that I should broadcast for the whole hour.

Those were the days of silent pictures and I found myself faced by the problem of trying to provide an accompaniment suitable for the picture and at the same time to make a programme which would be interesting to listeners from Land's End to John o' Groats. I used to spend many hours each week working out my programmes, my greatest difficulty being to find music which would fit the innumerable sinister and villainous scenes and yet be worth listening to from the broadcast point of view. The amount of "sinister" music which is suitable for broadcasting is so very limited!

When I began to broadcast for the whole hour, I tried to fit the

pictures too closely and my first programme contained twenty-four items, run more or less into a continuous medley, hardly one of which I was able to play in its entirety. The result was a very poor broadcast programme and the B.B.C. sent me an urgent request to cut down the number of items and play each one right through. After a little more experience of broadcasting with silent films running, I succeeded, by not adhering too closely to the pictures, in constructing more satisfactory programmes.

In spite of all my efforts, however, many amusing instances occurred of the unsuitability, from the point of view of the picture, of items in my broadcast programmes, but I think one of the worst was when I was broadcasting the *William Tell* overture while *La Boheme* was being shown. I thought I had timed it beautifully so that I could finish the finale of the overture before we came to the tragic part of the picture. Unfortunately, the speed at which silent pictures could be run was capable of enormous variation, and, on that particular day, owing to the queues of people waiting for admission to the theatre, the operators, unknown to me, had been instructed to run the picture at top speed in order to allow a good long interval for the waiting queues to enter the theatre. The result was that I found myself playing the extremely cheerful military movement at the end of the overture while poor Mimi lay on the ground drawing her last breath!

On another occasion I had been asked to do a special fifteen minutes' broadcast and my programme had to be sent in weeks in advance, so that it could be printed in the *Radio Times*. We had no idea what type of picture would be running, so I had to choose my programme and hope that the gods would be kind to me. Right up to the last minute it appeared that they were, but, unfortunately, the main picture was Buster Keaton's latest, and, owing to the huge audiences who were crowding to see it, they decided to depart from the usual routine of three shows a day and run it four times. As a result, my broadcast of a selection of Carmen and a group of popular Schubert pieces happened to come right in the middle of Buster Keaton's effort, so no one heard a note of my music, and the broadcast consisted of fifteen minutes of continuous shouts of laughter. This was undoubtedly the best piece of unintentional advertising the New Gallery Kinema ever received !

Incidentally, I was the first organist in the country to be invited

to broadcast during an evening programme. I played for half an hour, one Tuesday, from 9.0 to 9.30 p.m., and chose a whole programme of popular classics. The B.B.C. told me afterwards that this broadcast created so much interest that they received more letters of appreciation for it than for any previous organ broadcast.

The advent of talking pictures at the New Gallery made it impossible for me to continue broadcasting during the show, so I left the theatre, and after holding various other appointments at home and abroad, I settled down at Bournemouth and began to broadcast once more. Owing again to talking pictures, my broadcasts had to be finished before the theatre opened at 2.0 o'clock, but we found that the lunch time broadcast from 1.0 to 2.0 p.m. was really a very popular time.

There were many difficulties in connection with broadcasting from a place so far away owing to the enormous length of land line before the sounds reached the transmitters, and I had many experiences, both amusing and annoying, as a result of this.

The sounds went over specially installed lines from the theatre to the Bournemouth station and thence over ordinary Post Office trunk telephone lines via Southampton to Savoy Hill. The B.B.C. had to hire these trunk lines for each broadcast, and I believe the Post Office treated my broadcast as an ordinary trunk call lasting an hour, which cost the B.B.C. about £10 every time I played!

Owing to the tremendous length of land line over which the broadcast went before it was transmitted, it had to go through repeaters and amplifiers en route, so there was a good deal of trouble from intermittent humming and other line noises; before each broadcast, I always had to spend a considerable time playing the organ for line tests so that these noises could be traced and eliminated. It says a good deal for the keenness and efficiency of the B.B.C. engineers that I do not remember there ever having been a complaint of humming or line noises during an actual broadcast.

On one occasion there was a terrific gale on a Sunday evening, which blew down over a thousand trees between London and Bournemouth, and removed literally miles of the telephone lines. It was over a fortnight before I was able to broadcast again. Incidentally, I had been to London by car for a weekend, and, coming back on the Monday morning, it was not until we had passed Basingstoke that we knew anything about the storm at all. Fortunately, the wonderfully efficient A.A. organisation had the

situation already well in hand and had, in most cases, cleared a pathway through the fallen trees, but we had two quite long diversions from the main road, and I just scraped into the theatre at one minute to 2.0 with a silent picture to play at 2.0 o'clock. My assistant organist was with me, so, if we had not been lucky enough to get back in time, I am afraid that particular picture would have been very silent!

Saturday is invariably the busiest day of the week in every theatre, and when I am broadcasting on Saturday afternoons, the theatre is full of people, so, to make it possible for me to play my programme silent pictures are shown on the screen. On a recent occasion, a silent Laurel and Hardy comedy was put on which was so funny that I simply *had* to watch it; although I had never seen it before, I could see that Laurel was going to fall off a wall into a greenhouse, and when he did, I got so carried away that I forgot all about my broadcast and put in the missing bump in real silent picture style with a *glissando* right down the keyboard! Listeners that day must have thought I had collapsed on the organ!

The actual routine of broadcasting is quite simple. My programmes have to be worked out and sent in to the B.B.C. some time in advance, the only difficulty being that each item must be carefully timed in order that the total length of the programme will be correct. I always endeavour to keep my programmes as light and varied and entertaining as possible, as, in these rather grey times, I am sure people need all the cheering up one can give them. Every request I receive is carefully considered, and, if suitable, is fitted into the first available programme. Incidentally, I much prefer listeners to give their names and addresses when writing to me; I always dislike the idea of anonymous letters, even when the writer says all kinds of nice things.

On the day of the broadcast, engineers test the lines between the theatre and the control room, and when the actual moment for broadcasting arrives, switch on the little red pilot lamp which I have had fitted on the organ. I always start and finish each broadcast with a peal on my "Carillon," the "Bells of Marble Arch" as they have come to be called, as I think it is a good idea to have some distinctive "call sign," so to speak, to assist listeners to identify my particular broadcast.

Although organ broadcasts on the whole are extremely successful (and this is all the more surprising when one remembers what an extremely difficult instrument the organ is to

broadcast, owing to its immense range of compass and volume and different acoustical properties of the various theatres), it is not every organ which can be successfully broadcast.

Long before I went to the Regal, the organ was tested for broadcasting, but was rejected as being unsuitable. When the B.B.C. heard that I had been appointed organist of this theatre, they asked for a further test, which I had to carry out a week before taking up the appointment. The organ, of course, was exactly as it was before, and I had had no opportunity whatever to practise on it; so it is easy to believe that the B.B.C.

authorities not only refused again, but said that it sounded far worse with me playing it than it did my predecessor, Quentin Maclean!

Having accepted the appointment, I was determined to broadcast on the Regal organ, so, after studying the instrument inside and out and putting in a tremendous amount of hard thinking, I believed I had discovered why it would not broadcast successfully. After examining the plans of the organ at the factory and holding several lengthy consultations with the builders, I decided to ask for thirty-seven alterations to be made in the organ. The owners agreed to have these carried out and the organ builders gave me their two best men from the factory, who worked on the organ every night from 11.0 p.m. until 8.0 a.m. continuously for eight weeks (incidentally, I stayed with them all night on a good many occasions), and shortly before the alterations were completed, I gave my first broadcast from the Regal on Christmas Day, 1930.

Owing to the alterations which were being carried out, I was unable to practise on the organ at all, and had to sit down and broadcast without having been able even to try over any single item of my programme, but I am glad to say it came over very well, the result confirming my theories as to the reasons for the previous unsuitability of the organ for broadcasting.

It was really rather an extraordinary experience to sit alone at the organ, in the deserted theatre, on Christmas Day of all days, playing the organ to an unseen audience which must have numbered millions.

One of the greatest difficulties about broadcasting is that you cannot listen to the sounds which you are actually producing "over the air." Some combinations of stops which sound quite pleasant in the theatre itself sound different when broadcast, and it is only by a lengthy process of trial and error, by getting one's

friends to listen in and report frankly what sounds well and what does not, that one can discover what stops and what combinations of stops are most suitable for the purpose.

I should like to quote one curious example of this. Soon after I began to broadcast on the New Gallery organ several of my friends reported that they frequently heard an unpleasant effect which sounded like an accordion being played. One by one, I eliminated every combination of stops which I thought might be producing this, and finally, after many weeks, found to my surprise that it was produced by the following combination: violin, 16 ft.; violin, 8 ft.; flute, 8 ft.; violin, 4 ft.

One of the most interesting features about broadcasting regularly, as I do, is the very large number of requests and letters of appreciation which I receive, and not the least curious is the comparatively large proportion which come from Holland, many of them in Dutch; fortunately, I have several friends who are able to translate these letters for me. Because I have rather a Dutch-sounding name, many of the good people of Holland appear to think I must be a Dutchman! The explanation is, probably, that our English stations are heard so well in Holland that listeners in that country tune in to us as often as they do to their own stations.

Cinema organ broadcasts are undoubtedly among the most popular of all regular weekly features, and this is hardly surprising when one remembers the extraordinary amount of variety of which the cinema organ is capable and how suitable it is for playing the light, popular, melodious music which listeners enjoy so much in their leisure moments.

CHAPTER XII

A FEW PERSONAL NOTES

I am not inclined to be superstitious, but I think it not a bad portent for one who was destined to be a broadcasting organist to be born at Daventry. I do not know when I started to be a musician, but I can remember performing on the piano at the age of seven, and I began to play the organ when I was eleven, soon after my parents had removed to Rugby.

For several years I studied the organ with Basil Johnson, Esq., the Master of the Music at Rugby School, and the piano with Mrs. Yuille-Smith, and to both of them I owe a debt which I can never repay. Such success as I have made is largely due to the splendid

trainingjg they gave me, which undoubtedly formed a solid foundation for all the work I have put in since.

Later on, I went to the Royal College of Music with a Free Open Scholarship, to study with one of the greatest organ teachers who ever lived, Sir Walter Parrat. Soon after I went to the college, Sir Walter sent me in for my F.R.C.O., which I was fortunate enough to obtain, and, about the same time, I was offered and accepted the appointment as organist and choirmaster of St. Mary's Bryanston Square, London. When I look back on these early days (I was then seventeen), I cannot help smiling at the enthusiasm I must have brought to bear on my work. I was fortunate enough to have a fully paid choir, but, of course, the boys were the usual type who attended the local church school, and I actually succeeded in persuading them to come to choir practice every morning at 7.30, as well as putting in an hour in the evening three or four times a week! This obviously was too good to last. I had always been fond of the piano as a solo instrument, so when I met Dalhousie Young, who had been a pupil at Leschetizky, and he invited me to study with him, I took up the piano with enthusiasm.

After working for some time as a solo pianist, but finding it unremunerative, I turned my attention to the cinema, and instantly came up against the vicious circle which existed then as it does now: you could not get a job until you had had experience and it was impossible to get experience until you had had a job.

It took me a good many months to solve this problem and I did it finally in rather a curious way. In London practically every cinema is open seven days a week, but there is a strict rule that every one employed in a cinema must have one day a week free. This involved bringing in deputies to play for the seventh day, so I succeeded in fixing up a kind of circuit of deputizing, and for four months played in a different cinema every day, sometimes as pianist in the orchestra, sometimes as orchestral organist, and occasionally as solo organist.

At the end of this time, I really believe I knew all there was to know about playing for the pictures. It was a terribly hard method of getting experience, but I have never regretted it, as the only way to now all about any job is to tackle it from the bottom.

After four months I found the constant deputizing too much of a strain and accepted an appointment as second organist at the Marlborough, Holloway, on a curious old, two manual, second-hand church organ. This was just at the time when Wurlitzer organs

made their appearance, and the firm for which I was working (even then the biggest circuit in the country) were installing a Wurlitzer at Edinburgh and simply could not find any one to play it. I had never played one, but felt confident that, with all the experience I had, I could soon learn to do so if I could get the opportunity to practice on it, so I left for Edinburgh on a certain Thursday night, went straight round to the theatre as soon as I arrived on the following morning, and, to my horror, found that the organ was not completed: the opening was fixed for the following Monday at noon, with every celebrity in the city invited to be present!

Not a note could I play on the organ until the Saturday night, so when, at 11.30 that evening the organ builders told me the organ was finished, I sat down to practice and played away as hard as I could go all night. After breakfast and a couple of hours' sleep, I went back to the theatre and worked until the evening, and when the opening ceremony arrived next day at noon, I got through my performance somehow, though I shudder to think what it must have sounded like! In those days, however, Wurlitzers were distinct novelties and the good people of Edinburgh had never heard one anyway, so, fortunately, comparisons were impossible; once the opening was over, I promptly started to work to learn all I possibly could about the organ, from the point of view of both playing and construction.

Friday night at this theatre was "musical night," so on the Friday night in my first week, I was allotted the entire half-hour (usually given to the orchestra) to give an organ recital. At the end of my half-hour, the audience, carried away by the novelty of an organ which was fitted with every conceivable kind of orchestral effect, applauded so vociferously that it was impossible to continue with the pictures; after the pictorial and the comedy and the gazette had been cut out and I had continued my organ recital for well over an hour, the manager came down and hauled me off the organ by main force, as he had to get his big picture finished by 10.30, when his licence expired! Even then I remember the audience continued all through the first reel of the picture to clamour for more.

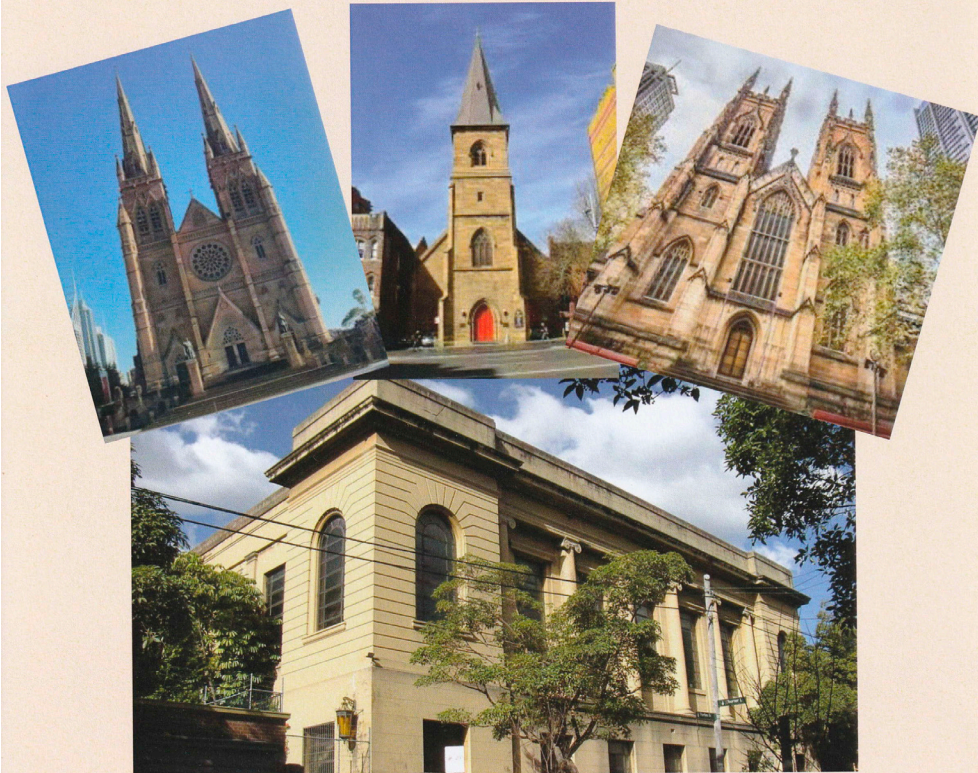
Nine weeks later, I was transferred to the New Gallery Kinema, Regent Street, London, owned by the same company, and there followed one of the happiest periods of my life. I always enjoyed accompanying pictures and most of these I was given to play for at this theatre were particularly suitable for organ accompaniment.

I really regret the passing of the silent film; I have never found anything quite so satisfying as the pleasure of providing an organ accompaniment to a film, particularly a good comedy, and realizing that one is really "getting it over" to one's audience. Many a time, when I have succeeded in producing from the organ some particularly comic sound which has set the audience off into roars of laughter, I made myself laugh so much as almost to have to stop playing.

When, owing to the advent of "canned music," it became impossible for me to broadcast any longer, I left the New Gallery and went over to Paris to open the Paramount Theatre. Incidentally, I found it very difficult to practice on the organ before the opening, as all the workmen, who were finishing off the interior of the theatre, knew every single tune I tried to play, both classical and popular, and insisted on whistling it with me! I came back to the Palladium, in London, when it was converted into a cinema, and later on, in collaboration with "Sandy" Macpherson, opened the Empire, Leicester Square. It is an extremely curious thing, which I cannot explain, but I found both the American managements terribly difficult to work for. Unlike the English firms for whom I have worked, they simply could not let me run my job my own way, and, although I had looked forward tremendously to working for them in the hope that they would really have some ideas in the way of featuring the organ, as we have all been given to understand is the case in theatres in the States, I was reluctantly compelled to realize that I should never succeed in "setting the Thames on fire" as long as I remained in a theatre under American control.

I must confess that at the New Gallery, at the Regent, Bournemouth, and at the Regal, all controlled by English managements, I have been extremely happy. When I first came to the Regal, for various reasons, there was no time in the programme to give the organ much of a show. Now, however, I am glad to say that it has become one of the outstanding features of the theatre, and I sincerely hope that I may remain here for many years to come.

In conclusion, I should like to say that I shall be amply repaid if you have enjoyed reading my little book half as much as I have enjoyed writing it, and to express the hope that, next time you listen to the organist in your favourite cinema, or tune into an organ broadcast, your pleasure will be increased as a result of knowing "how it is done."



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