

TOSA NEWS

April 2013
Volume 52 No.3

Price: \$2.00

Sunday 28 April 2013 2:00pm

Acclaimed young Organist

Donnie Rankin USA

Plays

**“ Star Trek, Nat King Cole,
Slaughter on Tenth Avenue
and more”**

on the Genuine

Wurlitzer Theatre Organ

at Orion Centre Theatre

155 Beamish Street, Campsie

25 years at the Orion this year

Directory

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John Gorrie and John Atwell

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Neil Palmer 9798 6742 (after 7pm)

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101 Crinan Street, Hurlstone Park NSW 2193

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From the President



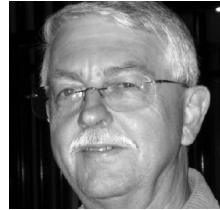
Despite a forecast of inclement weather, a good number attended the David Bailey show at Marrickville on the 3rd March. Thank you to all who attended: I'm sure you enjoyed David's presentation. He will be back later in the year to accompany a Silent Movie so watch out for more details.

Our next Artist, Donnie Rankin, comes with great credentials and you won't want to miss his unique style and presentation.

Your Committee is conscious of the financial strain being experienced by many of our members and has contained Membership and Ticket Prices at the lowest possible level. With ever-rising costs it is not easy to balance our budget. To maintain the existing cost structure for our members we need to increase both Membership and attendances at our shows. It has been proved repeatedly that the best way to do this is by word of mouth and personal invitation. It is in the interest of each member that we individually become promoters and advertisers of the Society and its events. Can we count on your help?

Happy organizing
Geoff Brimley

Editorial



It occurred to me whilst preparing the advertising for Donnie Rankin's show this month that at 21 years of age he wasn't even born when the Orion Wurlitzer opened at Campsie in 1988.

This year is the 25th Anniversary of the opening of the Orion Theatre Wurlitzer and we TOSA members and friends are so fortunate that young musicians have taken up the challenge to play the Theatre Organ so that its future is assured as an entertainment medium in the music world. Donnie is a gifted musician having played lead pan and drum set for three years in Ravenna High's steel band and played drum set for four years in the jazz band.

To assist members in promoting the theatre organ and to encourage other people to become interested in TOSA I have included a Free Ticket form in this issue of TOSA News so you can invite friends or strangers along to Dannie's show at the Orion or a future show/silent movie. We need TOSA members to help keep our membership growing please.

Deadline for TOSA News is the 12th of the previous month.

Enjoy the music,
Ernie Vale
PO Box A2322
SYDNEY SOUTH, NSW, 1235
editor@tosa.net.au

From the Mailbox...



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

New Members

TOSA welcomes new members & wish them a long and happy stay

No new members this month

THANK YOU Members

The Executive and Committee thank those TOSA members who stayed back after David Bailey's show at Marrickville Town Hall to help pack up the chairs and rearrange the hall. It was a big help and much appreciated.

Christie Report :- Glockenspiel completed ; Xylophone 70% complete ,assembly only still to do ; Chimes Action – work continues; Marimba Harp restoration just commenced; All of the above percussion stops require much time on rebuilding due to their complex design. Construction of new swell engines has commenced; Rebuilding of Brush Cymbal action 60% done ; Bolts installed for blower mounting at WRAC; Rolls of Cable have been moved to St Columb's.

For Sale

ROGERS CENTURY '340'- complete with stool and lit surround.

Great rare instrument entertained at Fairground Follies but has not been played for three years.

**\$7500 ONO. Craig Robson
02 9550 1700**

To Watch Out For
Sunday 19 May
2:00pm
Marrickville Town Hall
TOSA Members play
The Wurlitzer
to raise funds for the
Christie Organ restoration Fund

FOR SALE

THEATRE ORGAN RECORDS

(LPs) Large collection from many countries (collectors items). Many recorded in original theatres (and by their organists) long gone, with magnificent large photos on the covers.

(LPs give the best sound with good speakers). These records are unavailable elsewhere - (mostly new). Also Fair Organ and Carousel (LPs) etc.

New record players and LPs are back.

Contact TOSA Member

Peter Anderson,

PO Box 35 Deepwater 2371

Advertising
Rates in
TOSA News

For Members:

Small, Organ related ads = FREE!

For all other cases:

Small bubble = \$11.00

Quarter Page = \$24.75

Half Page = \$49.50

Full Page = \$99.00

Full Page Insert = \$125.00

Members' Playing Dates

The Orion Theatre Campsie

There will be some players days in 2013 - but not every month. Craig Keller will notify members by text when the dates have been confirmed .

Craig Keller on 0418484798
Players and listeners welcome.

Marrickville Town Hall
4th Monday evening at 7:30pm

For PLAYERS DAY in April & May Please contact Neil to confirm availability

To be sure there is no last minute cancellation at Marrickville please ring Neil on 9798 6742 after 7:00pm the Friday before.

Vale Barclay Wright

1934 - 2013

From the SMH Timelines by David Klages

Gentle Scholar and his forte: pianos

A virtue of birth to musical parents was that Barclay Wright's fondest memories from his formative years were of time spent around the family piano. For the Wrights, as it was for many Australian families, the piano was the heart of family and social activity, with night-time concerts providing escape and the opportunity to forget hardships.

For Wright, the memories ignited a lifelong passion - not just for music but also for the instruments that bought joy into people's lives. He became an expert on the player piano, a modified piano that allowed people to "play" the instrument by foot without having to learn it. Suction power generated by pedals drives the player action, a system of bellows and pneumatic valves, and the piano "reads" the perforations in a paper roll and operates the keys, producing music. In its heyday of the 1920s, it is estimated half of Australian households had a player piano and its attendant pile of piano rolls.

Barclay Robert Wright was born in Belmore on August 14, 1934. His father, Stanley Wright, was a singer and his mother, Inez (nee Cottier) a pianist. He quickly demonstrated

his capacity for creative, innovative thinking. When other neighbourhood children mowed a patch of grass for cricket, Barclay built a tennis court, complete with judge's chair from which he'd adjudicate, although throughout his life he hated actually playing sport. When others built billycarts, Barclay built a stage coach complete with velvet curtains.

He went to Homebush Boys High School, where he was a senior prefect, then qualified at Balmain Teachers College. He started his teaching career at Redfern Public School with underprivileged and disabled children, an area in which he excelled.

He went on to teach at a NSW child welfare home in LaPerouse, where he worked to change attitudes towards children in care. One Christmas, he diligently waged a campaign of "annoyance" until all his friends had agreed to take a child from the school home for the holiday. The school dorm rooms were quiet that night but, all over Sydney, orphans and state wards sat around the tables and pianos of caring strangers - many experiencing a family Christmas for the first time.

Then, still in his 20s, Wright left teaching to pursue his love of music - a love that would define his life.

In the early 1900s, two firms manufactured piano rolls in Australia. A celebrated child prodigy pianist, Les Luscombe, had produced Australia's first piano rolls at his company, The Anglo-American Player Roll Company, and G.H.Horton & Co.Ltd had started manufacturing in

1919, selling rolls under the name Mastertouch from 1923. In the late 1920s, crowds flocked to Horton's Castlereagh Street showroom, where, between concerts, 20 to 30 player pianos could be sold on a Friday night.

Wright's passion for player pianos dated to his teenage years. His engagement with the industry started when Wright complained to Luscombe that he was unable to find modern music on the rolls then being manufactured.

Bruce Gyngell welcoming Australia to television in 1956 was a nail in the coffin of the player piano, but Wright fought on. On Luscombe's death in 1957, Anglo-American was sold to G.H.Horton, who moved the factory to Sydney and employed Wright as a recording artist to replace Edith and Laurel Pardey. Then before Wright could record, he had to repair much of the ageing machinery used in making the rolls. He quickly became an authority on the machines and process of manufacture.

To make a piano roll, when the recording artist depresses a key on a specially wired-up piano, a signal is sent to a recording machine, which punches holes in a moving roll of paper. Originally, editing was done by punching extra holes by hand or patching unwanted holes with sticky tape but eventually the process was done by computer.

As well as working on the recording and manufacture of rolls, Wright, perforce, became an expert in the repair and restoration of the player pianos. Nevertheless, sales were in a steady decline and by

1960 there was no avoiding the fact the industry was in trouble. When G.H.Horton & Co moved its Columbia plant from Waterloo to Lane Cove in 1961, it decided to finish piano roll manufacture. Not wanting or willing to let part of Australian musical history slip into oblivion, Wright negotiated to buy the Mastertouch rights and its complete library of masters.

In 1962, mastertouch was moved to a new factory in Canterbury and Wright had a business. He pioneered the new methods that allowed his old machinery to record the music of the day - from the latest musicals to the emerging rock'n'roll. By 1963, Mastertouch was manufacturing again and even selling direct to the public through their store on Canterbury Road.

In 1970, to gauge the state of the industry, Wright toured the US visiting many famous manufacturers - such as Steinway and Wurlitzer - as well as numerous famous music venues. The trip consolidated his view that there was, and always would be, interest in player pianos, and that when the time came, Mastertouch should be the centrepiece of a mechanical music museum.

Wright returned home with a renewed interest in the preservation and restoration of Australia's musical heritage and started buying and restoring pianos and organs of historical significance. In 1975, Mastertouch bought the Petersham Christian Science building and, as the collection expanded, Wright established an advisory council to oversee the creation of the Mastertouch Mechanical Music Museum.

Soon after, Mastertouch opened as a working museum, and continued trading in Petersham for much of the next two decades despite its core business progressively slowing.

In the late 1990s a Heritage Assistance Program loan was granted by the NSW government, which let Mastertouch buy the Stanmore fire station. Wright, along with the Friends of Mastertouch organisation, started a program of restoration, turning the neglected building into a fitting home for the museum, with working factory, display areas and a theatre. However, by 2004, despite support from employees, friends and volunteers, the museum had become unsustainable.

Wright knew that in order to prevent his collection and life's work being broken up, the museum needed a new owner. In 2005, with his customary generosity, he donated the entire Mastertouch collection, including all manufacturing equipment, recording masters and the collection of restored pianos and organs, to the Powerhouse Museum.

He was diagnosed with a terminal illness in late 2012. In keeping with the way he lived his life, he wanted no fuss made. He sought no treatment and died quietly in his sleep. Barclay Wright is survived by his sister, Deirdre, and his nieces, Zoe and Eve.

Editors footnote:

When storing a large part of the Orion Wurlitzer in the "Organ Loft" at Haberfield and running members workshops to restore chests, including a 4 rank chest from the Marrick-

ville Wurlitzer, Mastertouch was a primary source of various grades of felt for secondary motors etc. and of cork for gaskets.

**The Selwyn Theatre Group
visits the
Simon Ellis Theatre
to hear his magnificent
4/34 Allen George Wright
Unit Orchestra**

On Sunday 10 March a group of some 30 TOSA members and friends of the Selwyn Theatre travelled down to the southern highlands at the invitation of Simon Ellis to hear his Allen Theatre Organ (as the plate on the console states "Unit Orchestra").

Member Ritchie Willis had arranged a small coach for 20 people to save us all driving down to Balmoral Village. Others enjoyed the drive down, lunching at Picton on the way.

It was a lovely sunny day and whilst warm outside, the theatre is air conditioned and so we were very comfortable.

Member John Batts played us into the theatre before Simon welcomed us all and gave us the history of the instrument.

The first half comprised of:

The main Stein Song
Yellow Days
Parade of the Wooden Soldiers
Tenderly
I love to hear you singing
Trolley Song
The Man That Got Away
Somewhere Over the Rainbow
I Won't Dance
Your Tiny Hand is Frozen



Simon Ellis at the 4/34 Allen George Wright Unit Orchestra

Second Half:

Smile Darn You Smile
Elizabethan Serenade
Dam Busters March
Ye Banks and Brays
The Swan
Serenata
Poleme
March Slav
Ma Ma Mia

As friends of the Selwyn Theatre have come to expect, a magnificent afternoon tea was enjoyed at Interval accompanied by Tea & Coffee provided by Simon's wife Anna.

Many thanks Simon & Anna for a most enjoyable visit to hear the Allen which sounds very authentic in your theatre setting.

Show & Membership Prices

The following TOSA show ticket prices now apply:

	All Artists
Non-members	\$32.50
Non-member Pensioner/Seniors Card holder	\$27.50
TOSA Members	\$23.00

All Students FREE on confirmation of Student status

All Children FREE

Group Booking for 10 or more Adults \$20 per person

Annual Membership Fees are now: \$35.00 for Full membership,
and

\$25.00 for Concession, Country, Interstate & Overseas.

Membership enquiries Geoff Brimley (02) 6351 3122

membership@tosa.net.au

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

American Theatre Organ Society Convention in Atlanta Georgia 2013

Two Days and Five Big Shows at the Atlanta Fox on Mighty Mo

July 4th with Two Big Concerts on Big Bertha at the Alabama

The Stephenson H. S. Grande Page in Stone Mountain

The Strand Theatre Allen GW-IV in Marietta

Featuring a lineup of your Favourite Concert Artists

At the Fox Theatre, with its 4/42 Moller, see and hear:

Richard Hills, Clark Wilson,
Dave Wickerham, Tony Fenelon,
and Larry-Douglas Embury, Organist-in-Residence!

**At the Alabama Theatre, featured at Big Bertha, the now
4/30 Wurlitzer**

David Gray and Mark Herman!
The Awards Banquet in Birmingham is INCLUDED

At the Stephenson H. S. Grande Page: Dwight Thomas

At the Marietta Strand Theatre Allen GW-IV: Lance Luce

Overture in Chattanooga, with concerts at the beautiful Tivoli Theatre
3/13 Wurlitzer with Jonas Nordwall

plus the Memorial Auditorium 4/81 Austin with Walt Strony!

also visit and dinner at Rock City on Lookout Mountain

The After-Glow, South Georgia, Rylander Theatre 3/13 Moller with Ron
Rhode & the Grand Theatre 3/18 Barton with Jelani Eddington

Accommodation is at the luxurious J.W. Marriott Hotel in Buckhead,
Atlanta's most prestigious location, at a special convention rate!

***Y'all come to "HERE WITH THE WIND":
2013 ATOS Convention, July 1-6, in beautiful Atlanta, GA!
see www.ATOS.org for more details***

**Players' Events Early 2013:
Campsie (17th January) &
Marrickville (25th February)**

After a gap of many months TOSA(NSW) members' afternoon was again held at **The Orion Centre, Campsie** (17th January). And apart from a few ciphers the Wurlitzer did not disappoint. The attendance was modest but the enthusiasm undeniable. The Wurlitzer piano was also up from the garage for a superficial check in case the following Sunday's visiting artist wished to use it.

The players who took turns on the Wurlitzer bench were: Tom Barber, Graeme Costin, Kevin Eadie, Ian Georgeson, Basil Kaplan, Craig Keller, and John Batts. Among the listeners were Kevin Clancy, Theo Langenberg, Barry Tooker and Ernie Vale. Theo, alas, could not be persuaded to play.

Most TOSA members had brought along something to eat or drink so we managed to offer some refreshments.

After its recent re-painting, **Marrickville Town Hall** looked resplendent when the lights were turned on (February 25th). It is to be hoped that the TOSA Members' Evening there may be the first of more regular get-togethers henceforth on the fourth

Monday of the month.

Notwithstanding the unsettled weather this summer, the occasion drew only half a dozen members. Those who came much enjoyed their extended console time; the lucky quartet were Graeme Costin, Kevin Eadie, Ian Georgeson and John Batts. Committee man John Weismantel was on hand to show us the handsome and bright Beale upright piano stored in the locked box on stage awaiting its hook-up to the Wurlitzer console; and his wife Sharon listened attentively while inadvertently demonstrating the mysterious arts of crochet. Don't forget that you too can be part of these members' events each month; as player or as listener you will be most welcome. A last-minute phone call or email to Neil, Craig, or John should confirm that event will be taking place.

Provided by Member John Batts

To pontificate, to let opinions rule your appreciation of wine and to be unable to feel, as the candles gutter and the moon rises on a warm summer night, that the wine on the table, however unsung and lacking in renown, is, for that short moment, perfection itself, is to miss the whole heart of wine - and of life too.

Oz Clarke

The next show

Donnie Rankin (USA)

Presents

“ Star Trek, Nat King Cole, Slaughter on Tenth Avenue and More ”

on the

**Genuine Wurlitzer Theatre Organ
Orion Centre Theatre**

155 Beamish Street, Campsie



Sunday 28 April 2013, 2:00pm – 4:30pm

Donnie Rankin first took an interest in the theatre organ at the tender age of three when he first heard the sounds of the Mighty Wurlitzer at the Civic Theatre in Akron, Ohio. Following that initial introduction to the King of Instruments, he frequently played on his great-grandfather's home organ. In 2000 **Donnie** acquired an instrument and began taking formal lessons. Classical piano training followed in 2005, and his budding talent quickly blossomed into first rate musicianship.

Since then, **Donnie** has won several organ competitions and awards, including being named the Overall Winner of the American Theatre Organ Society's (ATOS) Young Theatre Organist Competition in 2007.

Donnie began studying with noted organist Jelani Eddington in September 2007. Since that time, **Donnie** has performed for theatre organ audiences from coast to coast. He resides in Ravenna, Ohio, and is a staff organist at the Civic theatre in nearby Akron – playing the very same organ Donnie first heard when he was three years old.

Now at the age of 21, **Donnie** is well regarded by his peers as the complete Theatre Organist who will entertain you with his mastery at the Wurlitzer Theatre Organ. **Donnie** is an accomplished drummer and will play the drums to accompany his pre-recorded music played back live on the Wurlitzer.

**Tickets : Members \$23;
Non Member Pensioner/Seniors Card \$27.50
Non-Members \$32.50;**

All Children FREE. Students FREE entry on confirmation of student status by phone booking a ticket prior to the show or download the Free entry form from www.tosa.net.au and send it in

Group booking for 10 or more adults \$20 per person

for the best paid reserved seats

book early and securely online at trybooking.com

Visa & Mastercard accepted

Go to www.tosa.net.au click on Events, then the show title, then scroll down to [to buy your tickets click here](#) and complete your booking by selecting your preferred seat

or

book by phone to Theo Langenberg 0410 626 131

Visa & Mastercard accepted

' O happy indoor life in Chorleywood...' Part 2

This article is reproduced with the kind permission of Len Rawle and with thanks to John Leeming, Editor of Cinema Organ UK

Richard Hills and Len Rawle

Part One of the Empire Wurlitzer saga ended as Len and his father set about trying to gather a team of people together to help them with the huge task of removing the instrument from the theatre. Only two weeks out of three remained to get the organ to safety. Richard picks up the story at the crucial point...



"BY THE END of the week we'd assembled the team together and we just went for it," said Len. "We waited for the film to finish at ten or ten thirty (it was Ben Hur) and we went round as a group trying to identify where everything was – where the cable went from the console and that sort of thing."

I asked Len if he had time to give the organ a final play before they started to remove it.

"No, we didn't play it again," said Len, "which was hard. I can remember wanting to, but there was no question of that – we just needed to start removing and crating the precious pipes".

"We commenced in the Main chamber," he continued. "What we decided to do was to exit everything through the swell shutters. These were fairly high up on the right hand side of the proscenium arch and somehow we had to take everything from there over to the edge of the circle. Having taken the shutter blades out to see exactly the relationship of the chamber to the rest of the building, we quickly established the art of the possible. With no staircases to help us I decided to use ropes and a lot of man-power to help steady all the large components out. In the case of that right hand chamber, if you look at photographs, the point at which the circle ends indicates the lowest point of the shutter frames.

"With all 4 sets of shutter blades removed we decided to use scaffolding planks and the organ's strong passage boards to build a

bridge across to the circle. It was a dangerous operation sliding and steadying the very weighty parts across it. I recall someone saying, that it was like walking the plank with no hand rails or anything to hang on to. Piece by piece arrived safely in the circle. We then managed to obtain the services of an engineer from the demolition company to find a suitable fixing point up high amongst the theatre's roof trusses that we could fasten a block and tackle to. A rope was dropped down into the auditorium and then commenced process of dropping every item down on to the stalls floor. Everything had to be lifted up on to the stage, then from the stage to street level. Because the stage was about 20 feet below ground level the lift up to street level was formidable and very time consuming. Care was essential as it all had to exit via a roller shutter directly on to the side street. If you go up the right hand side of the theatre today, you will see the shutter to what was known as the scenery dock is still there.

"With controlled enthusiasm we cleared the Main Chamber with no damage to any part of the organ, although I have to admit handling the 6-rank main chest with all its weighty cables was a potential killer. None of us had experienced anything quite so heavy before, but it proved to be good training for later! At this time we also removed the console, the blower and the detached setter-board unit through the same egress.

"We progressed upward to the Solo chamber. This spoke into the auditorium from very high up on the left hand side of the proscenium arch. Funnily enough, for all that it felt as if we were 'up in heaven', being much higher in the building than the Main chamber, the easiest part of the entire removal process proved to be the stripping out of the Solo chamber. On first inspection of this cramped chamber however we were really worried. Having first taken the shutters out, we thought, 'Gosh, is that all the space there was for the sound to get out?' There appeared to be extremely limited openings in the ceiling plaster-work. Yet somehow the 10 ranks in here certainly made their presence felt. I learned a lot about sound transference from that observation, but that is another story. Our first thought at that time was, 'How are we going to get everything down to street level?' We were really high, and more than half of the shutter opening was blocked off by decorative plaster-work. I clearly recall looking through the shutter opening and seeing the very top of the plaster-work arch you may detect in one of the photographs. This will give you an idea of where we were operating on the left side of the theatre!

"Initially I said, 'We're going to have to forget this half,' and Father said, 'Well, I don't know, it came in here: how did it all come in here?' I said, 'Well we're never

going to swing it out through the shutter opening as we did in the Main chamber.'

"One of the big safety issues when trying to lower things from elevated organ chambers is that you normally have to rely on lifting equipment suspended from the ceiling roof trusses. In our case a block and tackle was attached to a rope hanging down into the auditorium. We then had to pull it into the chambers and make best use of it, and swing things out using it. Unfortunately in the case of the Empire's Solo chamber, with its low ceiling height, the angle of the rope entering the chamber was so acute as to prevent any form of lifting. It wasn't so much a nightmare for us with the Main, as it had a very tall chamber indeed with its full-length Diaphones and stately 16' Gambas. But the chamber was sited much lower down in the building and we had the angles which comfortably allowed us to swing things out into the auditorium area.

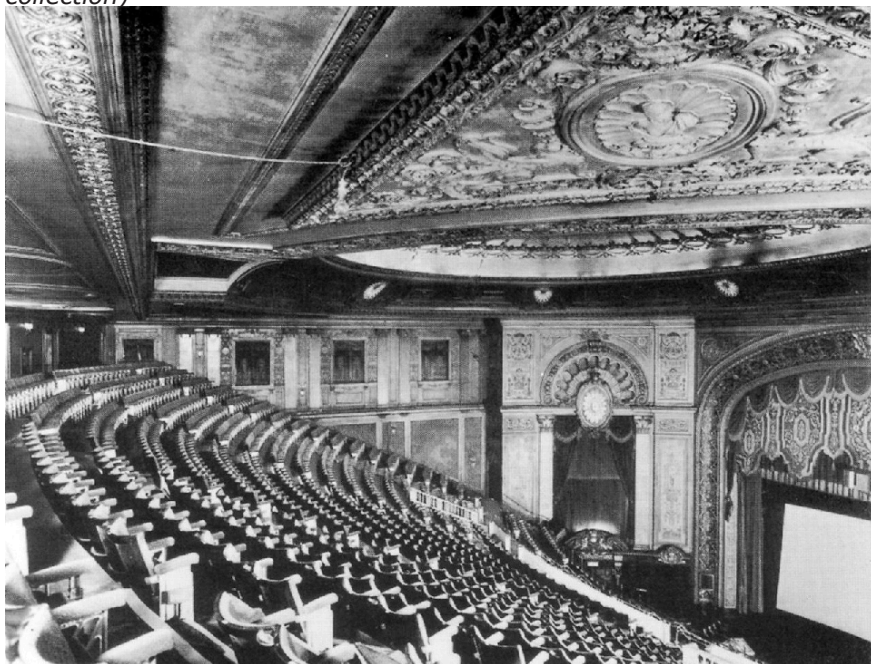
"Whilst dealing with the nitty-gritty of removal, let us turn to the most difficult part of the whole operation and the one that could so easily have killed off the Empire organ if the operation had gone wrong. We are talking here of the potential for the extremely heavy brain (or relays) of the organ crashing to earth from a great height.

"Even higher than the solo chamber, the four weighty stacks

of relays were housed in a room that was built around them after installation. This 10ft × 12ft brick room was situated directly beneath the roof, not too far from the plasterwork that comprised the decorative dome over the circle area. Access to the relays was only possible through a small trap door at the top of a frighteningly long wall ladder. For days it remained a nightmare as we tried to figure the way they must have been installed. Undaunted, Bill Sellars and I continued the week-long process of removing all the 'spreaders' that connected all the relays both to themselves and to the console.

A view from the back of the circle at the Empire. The solo chamber, unconventionally on the left of the proscenium, is behind the decorative archway (Len Rawle collection)

"Once Bill and I had all the cables off – nothing was cut, everything was unsoldered – and in the case of the delicate stop switches all were secured to protective pieces of wood. We then demolished the surrounding walls of the room and fixed each relay on to a scaffold board; this we planned to use as a skid. The scaffold board also helped maintain the structural integrity of the relay and allowed us to slide each relay along passage boards placed on the concrete floor. At the same time we tied a very strong rope around the centre of each relay stack and another around it sideways. We created a single pickup point on top and looked for a way of hoisting these terribly heavy units out of what can only be described as a remote and extremely filthy roof space.



"Bill had no idea how to get the things out, even though he'd done so much maintenance and tuning of the organ over the years. We kept searching with a hand lamp as there was no fixed illumination. Everything seemed against us, the darkness, years of accumulated London dust and grime then there were the endless cables wrapped in, of all things, the dreaded asbestos tape – it was a terrible, terrible place to work. We were itching everywhere and returned home daily looking as if we had been down a coal mine!

"Bill had been working hard during the day on the un-soldering, and every night I went there after my day job – because we worked through the night – and we caught up with one another and tried to work out how to get them out. He said, 'They came in somehow – we've got to find a way of getting them out into the auditorium!'

"Over the years I have been lucky to 'discover' two plots of building land, one for my parents and one for myself. But my most satisfying 'discovery' came as I searched in that dimly illuminated area for a way out for the relays. It was a eureka moment, as they say, for suddenly, I picked out an area of walling that appeared to be slightly different in colour. I recognised the brickwork as being of the hollow variety and knew it would be easy to knock through. I said, 'Look, I reckon they came in here and it's

been bricked-up afterwards!' The final run of Ben Hur had finished at that time, so I said to both Bill and my father, 'Let's knock one of the bricks out and then go into the auditorium to see exactly where we are!' At that point we didn't know we were to the side of the dome, we just thought we were up high above the chambers somewhere.

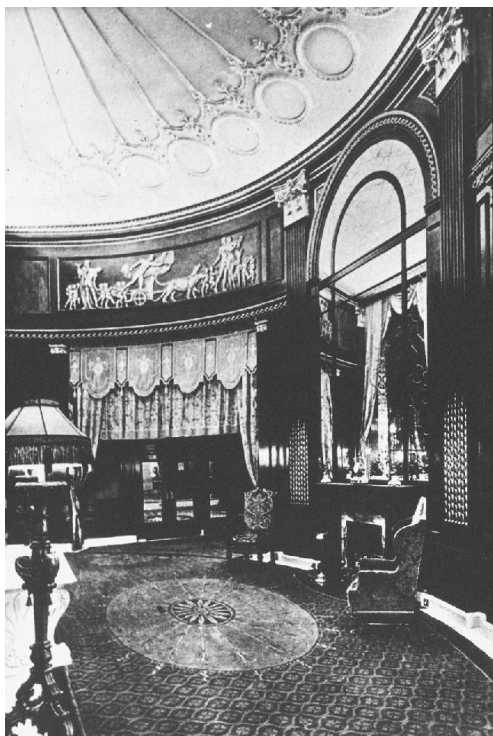
"Anyway, we knocked a brick out and in the still of the night waited until we heard it crash on the floor below. It seemed to take a while and we thought, 'Blimey, that's a long way down!' From inside the auditorium we saw the position of the hole we had created and luckily it was directly in line with our half-way staging post for removal of the Main chamber.

"We eventually knocked a few more bricks out, shouting to make sure there was nobody down there. As soon as we could, we put our heads through the aperture and couldn't believe it. It was like being on top of the Eiffel Tower and a somewhat frightening sight. We had to push on through and I remember feeling dreadful about destroying the decorative plasterwork as brick after brick went flying through. We eventually had a six foot by six foot opening through which we could push the relays!

"The damage to the building didn't matter then, of course, because the whole of the interior was to be gutted as soon as we left. The next step was to get the rope for our block and tackle re-

positioned on a sturdy roof truss. We then had to rely on all our judgements, double checks and reassurances to one another as we pushed the first of the relays towards a point where the concrete floor finished. We gingerly pushed the passage board with its relay strapped on top over the edge until the relay was balanced almost half way into the auditorium. That's when my heart went in my mouth, and I said 'Well, it's got to go'.

Another view of the wonderfully-decorated Empire foyer (Tony Moss archive)



"My father was worried because I was at the back of this stack holding it down, stopping it from tilting. He feared I would hang

on too long and he said 'You're going to have to let it go, Len'. I said, 'Yes, but is it going to be alright? He said, 'I don't know if it's going to be alright!' So with no more assurance I let it tilt up slowly. Then, as if we had done it a thousand times before, I just allowed it to slide off the plank that we were using as a kind of chute. I guess we all shut our eyes as something like a ton of organ slid down and away from us. I do remember standing far too near the edge for comfort and steadying it with a rope to stop it from swinging too violently. Thankfully the ropes did their job and for a moment we allowed the relay simply to hang from the roof as we caught our breath.

"That was the first stack on its way and we dealt with the others in the same way. Each section was lowered down on to the scaffolding boards we had put across from the Main chamber. The reason for that was that the drop of the hoist wasn't long enough to reach all the way down to the floor, so we had to take a fresh grab at it. Not satisfied with having done all the winding to get it down that far (it wasn't an electric hoist, but a manual one) we had to have guys steadying it on our temporary bridge in the middle of the theatre – can you imagine how risky that was? – we then took a fresh bite with the hoist and took it down on to the floor.

"Once the entire relay system was down we then had manually to get it over the orchestra

rail, into the orchestra pit, up on to the stage (not satisfied with that, it was a heavily-raked uphill stage). At the back of the stage we had another hoist organised to lift each part up to the scenery dock door. Even that was dangerous, because whenever that was open, with no safety barrier, any member of the public or our crew could just fall in straight down on to the stage! Touch wood, we didn't have any problems, and we took everything and everybody safely away. It seems a miracle looking back on it but we didn't even break a single piece of glass in the relay cabinets.

"At this point many things were happening at the same time: we had a team working in the Main Chamber, a team working in the roof, I had somebody else digging away trying to get the concrete away from the main cable and somebody else stripping down the blower. Only the Solo chamber remained to be dealt with in the last couple of days.

"Everything seemed to be happening at once. It had to! I did not realize it at the time but I suppose that was where my ability to control a team developed, and I have been a team person ever since. It led me to enjoy working for the Royal Insurance Company as an industrial surveyor and later to developing a team of teachers for the Yamaha Music School network. But back in 1960 I never knew I could take on such a role. However, taking such

a large installation to pieces and removing it led me to understand the importance of always circulating, going from one team to the other and making sure who was doing what and at how much risk.

"Dad was working during the day in his grocery store, and all our organ removal activity took place at night. During the first week we used to get there at ten o'clock at night and work through to about two o'clock in the morning each day. The second week most of us took one full week off from our jobs (although Dad didn't stop working) so that we could all sleep during the day. You can imagine the importance of ensuring such well voiced pipes were handled properly and put safely into trays, whilst at the same time the heavy stuff was going on. That's where the management thing was important.

"People were, frankly, very good to me in that sense, because they respected the fact that I'd stuck my head in the noose to do this thing. They didn't mind when I was faffing around and asking them to be extra careful about this and that. I made one major rule, that at least two people needed always to be working in each area of activity looking after one another.

"We dealt with the Main chamber, relays and blower during the first week and then in the last days of the second week we got up into the Solo chamber. Having looked out of the swell shutter opening here I found it impossible

to get anything out that way. Even so we made a start by taking out and packing all the delicate treble pipes. Having created some elbow room for ourselves we started to get the off-note chests and little bits and pieces stacked in corners, but we still couldn't find an exit route. Fortunately there was another eureka moment when someone said 'What's behind those 16' Tubas?' A reply came 'That must be the back wall of the theatre,' so I said, 'Let's get those pipes down and see if there's something there.'

"We up-ended the pipes in a corner and, lo and behold, it revealed an enormous green door covered with thick sound-deadening felt. We ripped the felt off and in no time managed to open the door! The funniest thing there was that we were opening it at one or two o'clock in the morning and found we were looking into the 'ladies of the night' bedrooms in the street at the back. Because they were operating high up with no need to draw the curtains, you can imagine we all had a good laugh at the situation!

"Anyway, we brought the lorry up to the rear of the theatre and out went the big Tubas. Before we knew where we were, we were cracking on with all the disconnection involved in clearing the Solo chamber out! But we were getting perilously close to the back end of our allotted time in the second week. I recall Dad saying to me, 'What are you going to leave behind? You're not going

to make it.' He was always pessimistic like that. I said, 'Well, if we have to leave anything behind, we're not leaving any of the pipes or chest-work, it's the Marimba.' He said, 'Right. You've made your decision!'



The Main chamber was on the right of the proscenium, behind the drapes (Len Rawle collection)

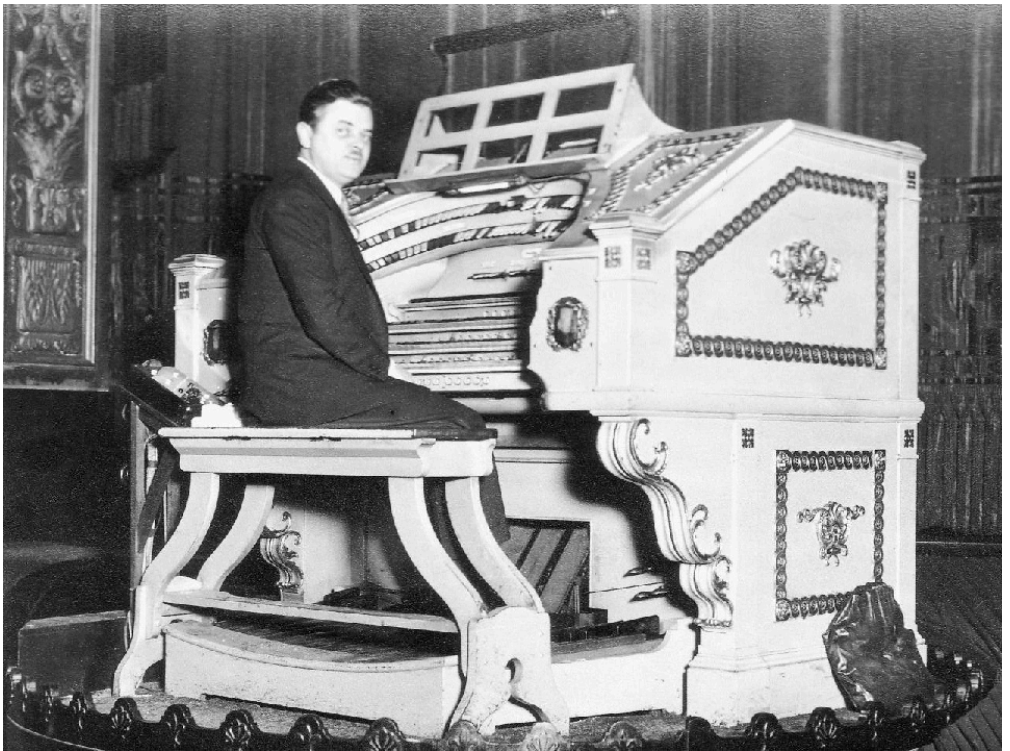
"We kept going, and it's true to say we only made the deadline by two hours. Yes, we only just managed to get my much-admired Marimba Harp out. I didn't want to leave it but there were only about four or five hours for us to remove it on that particular day, and it's such a big brute of a thing. We were tired and it would have been easy to have said, 'Let's leave it, we've got ninety

percent of the organ.' But, there we are, that was the very last piece we dropped down onto our lorry. And I have to say it has given me great joy ever since.

"Funnily enough we didn't have to speak to anybody at the end. With not many minutes to spare, once we finished the job we simply drove the final components of the Wurlitzer away from the famous Empire, Leicester Square. There was nobody there, and all we had to do was to slam the fire exit door behind us. There were however very mixed feelings knowing that the demolition contractors were only a matter of hours behind us."

To be continued

Jesse Crawford at the Empire console, photographed during his legendary visit there in 1933



Members Diary

April 2013

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Web Sites of Interest:

<https://www.facebook.com/tosansw>

www.theatreorgansaustralia.info (history of cinema organ installations in Australasia)

www.sydneyorgan.com (our sister society, the Organ Music Society of Sydney OMSS)

www.ATOS.org for details of the ATOS Convention, Atlanta Georgia USA

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