

TOSA NEWS

May 2020
Volume 59 No.3

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**Unfortunately due to
the Covid 19 virus
our concerts for 2020 have
been cancelled or postponed
for the time being.**

**We hope you enjoy the articles
in this issue along with
the latest Christie report**

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Dear members,

Little did I know when I wrote the report for the March TOSA NEWS how quickly our entire worlds would change! By now you have received a letter from me explaining the situation for our society. Thank you to those who have already sent messages of support for the decisions the committee has made and applied.

For this issue Editor Ernie has warmed up his typing fingers and transcribed sections of a famous but long out of issue book by English organist Reginald Foort. We hope you enjoy reading some of his thoughts and experiences.

You will have received your membership renewal notice for 2020/21 due by the end of June. For existing members the renewal rate has a 50% discount applied as a gesture of goodwill for your ongoing support. If you feel inclined to assist the society you may wish to make a donation towards our continued operating and maintenance costs – this can be via inclusion on your membership renewal. Donations will certainly help in the ongoing expenses of the society and towards maintaining our instruments. If you wish to separate your membership renewal and a donation, you may make that donation via bank transfer methods (see page four for account details) or by sending a cheque

made out to the society to Treasurer Geoff Brimley at 26 Maple Crescent Lithgow NSW 2790.

We're looking forward to resuming some form of live theatre organ performances as soon as possible. Meantime there have been a number of live-streamed theatre organ or piano events presented by well known artists. I ate my breakfast last Sunday morning while watching and listening to Mark Herman play a live concert on the former Paramount Studios organ at Bandrika Studio in Los Angeles – a novel experience. Membership secretary David Badman will include some links to events like this in regular updates and keep a watch on social media channels such as Facebook – if that's your thing.

Keep safe, look after yourself, family and friends and we'll all get through this together.

Craig Keller

Editorial



Hello Members, In order to keep in touch I bring you some interesting articles from British Theatre Organist Reginald Foort, well known UK theatre organists of his day who wrote about the Cinema Organ in detail.

More articles in the next issues of TOSA News.

Enjoy the Music Live,
Ernie Vale *Editor*

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.

Claret is the liquor for boys;
port, for men; but he who
aspires to be a hero (smiling)
must drink brandy

Volume 3 of George Wright biography available for purchase by pre-order

I've just received an email from George Wright biographer, Dr Bill Coale, regarding orders for the third and final volume of the George Wright book trilogy titled 'George Writes'. It contains quite fascinating correspondence from George (who was a prolific letter writer) as well as many new photographs.

If we can put a bulk order together, the freight costs can be substantially reduced. The cost is US\$100.00 plus freight. If you are interested in purchasing a copy, please contact me urgently, either by email: cliffbingo@gmail.com or by phone: 0412 967 902.

The print run is limited to the number of orders received and the cutoff date is 15th May. Grab one while you can.

Kind Regards
Cliff Bingham

Two guys were talking and the violinist says, "when I die please bury my violin with me", his mate says, "good job you don't play a Wurlitzer".

***To Watch Out for
You can now pay for
tickets at the box office
by credit or debit card
including Pay Pal.***

*TOSA Members please show
your TOSA membership card at
the box office when purchasing
tickets to assist Theo*

Season Tickets for 2020

These have been cancelled and
payment refunded

Something New for Afternoon Tea

The Committee have
purchased a coffee percolator to
improve our afternoon teas.
We hope that our Members will
enjoy having a cup of percolated
coffee or a cup of tea with a
tasty treat.

To keep costs down the bulk of
the food is homemade and
baked fresh on the Saturday
prior to Sundays Concert.

As from the next Concert we
will be increasing our Afternoon
Tea price to \$4. We believe this
is good value for a tea/coffee
plus a tasty treat. There will be
a choice of 4 tasty treats, 1 of
which will be "gluten free".

Most Coffee Shops now have
coffee and cake for \$6.00 plus,
so this is a bargain. I'm sure
you'll agree.

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**

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

**Convener is
Craig Keller on 0418484798
or John Batts on 0420424103**

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

Start time is 6:00pm

**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 May 2020

The lockdown associated with the COVID-19 virus pandemic has seriously impacted progress on the Christie installation and caused TOSA to postpone ideas of a December 2020 opening. To offset this some projects have been undertaken "at home" in preparation for resumption of regular work on site at WRAC:

- New winker manufactured to supply tuned percussions and effects in the Solo chamber (a lot of work in that!). ***see below***



- Adapter manufactured for Pea Whistle effect. ***see below***



- Spring support bar manufactured to finish winker in Solo for Shutters/Sleigh Bells.



- Manufactured safety rail and hinge items for Orch Oboe platform ladder.



Ladder down



Ladder stored

Unfortunately, removal and reinstallation of the Sleigh Bells delayed work to mount three regulators to supply the Vox, Tibia, & Tuba/Krumet in the Solo. This had to wait for the Sleigh Bells due to limited access space in this area and then COVID-19 hit.

Before the pandemic lockdown we had released part of the organ for use by Phillip Bongers for church services as the Conn

electronic was effectively unuseable. During the lockdown period the limited ranks have been used regularly for recording segments for internet broadcast to parishoners. This has the advantage of exercising the action and settling in the new leather/felt.

Sounds available so far include:

- Concert Flute 8' through to Tierce (there is no 16' Bourdon on the organ)
- Diapason 16' through to 4'
- Tibia Clausa 16' offset only (12 notes)
- Ophicleide 16' offset only (12 notes)
- Viol d'Orchestre 16' through to Fifteenth
- Kimball Celesta
- Marimba/Harp (still needs work!)
- Tuned Bird Whistles
- Tuned Sleigh Bells
- A few non-tonal percussions

Limited visits to the church during the last week or so have resulted in:

Accompaniment chamber:

- Adjustments are continuing to the Oboe tremulant which is proving difficult to tame.
- Clarinet regulator dismantled and repaired; spindle for small flap valve was binding on the side of its airway slot. This was fixed and the Clarinet is now back on it's correct pressure (it was being severely overblown and would not tune).

Solo chamber:

- Fitted improved spring mounts on the winker for the Shutters/Sleigh Bells to replace the temporary test arrangement using broom handles.
- During rebuild of the Sleigh Bells the wiring was modified to allow re-iteration control via the Uniflex system rather than the mechanical contacts originally fitted. The original action has been retained in-situ for historical accuracy of this rare item.
- Additional code added to Uniflex to handle the re-iteration.
- Mounted the Pea Whistle adapter on unused pipe location on Tibia manual chest.
- Finished installation of stowable ladder for Orch Oboe platform access, along with a safety rail.



Mystery Photo for May. Please contact the Editor if you know the organists name.

Pretty stylish outfit for organ and organist.

Do you know the location of the organ?

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%



Articles from
THE CINEMA ORGAN
by

Reginald Foort, F.R.C.O., A.R.C.M.

Second Edition

PREFACE

I have thoroughly enjoyed writing this book, because the cinema organ has become, in a few short years, one of the most popular musical instruments in existence, and one which appeals more especially, not only in the theatre itself, but also through the mediums of gramophone records and broadcasting to the "man in the street."

The modern cinema organ is capable of such an amazing variety of effects that many people find it difficult to understand how all the sounds which they hear can be produced by a single performer.

I have, therefore, endeavoured to avoid using technical terms and to describe the various parts of the instrument and explain how they work, just as if I were escorting the reader for a personal inspection of one of these organs, and I venture to hope that the said reader will find the multitudinous and ingenious contrivances, by which the different effects are produced, as fascinating as I do myself.

I should like to express my sincere thanks to Messrs. Hill, Norman & Beard, Ltd. (makers of "Christie" unit organs), to The John Compton Organ Co., Ltd. ("Compton" organs), and to Major S. J. Wright ("Wurlitzer" organs), for their kindness in providing

me with so many of the illustrations and sketches, many of the latter having been specially prepared for this book. My thanks are also due to the Columbia Graphophone Co., Ltd., for whom I record exclusively, for allowing photographs to be taken during an actual recording session at the Regal. Finally, I should like to thank A. W. Owen, Esq., the musical editor of the Kinematograph Weekly, for his assistance and encouragement and for the many valuable suggestions he has been kind enough to offer.

R.F.

THE INCEPTION OF THE CINEMA ORGAN

So rapid has been the rise of the cinema organ as a factor in the entertainment world, and so popular has it become with both audiences in the theatre and listeners "over the air," that I am delighted to have an opportunity of describing it to the "man in the street," and explaining how the various effects are produced.

My broadcast recitals and gramophone records have brought me thousands of letters from almost every part of the world, and it is surprising what a large number of these contain questions about the organ itself: Do I produce all the various effects myself or have I other instruments playing with me when I broadcast or record? Are those fascinating "glissando" effects produced by mechanical means? - and so on.

So light is the touch of these organs and so incredibly rapid is the modern electric action that, when I first went to the New Gallery Kinema, in London, quite a number of people refused to believe that an organ could be played at such speed by a human being, and were convinced that I was merely operating it with a perforated roll, like a pianola!

The essential difference between the orthodox church organ and the cinema organ is that the former is intended primarily for the purpose of accompanying large bodies of singers, for which it is necessary to build up huge masses of ponderous diapason and "full swell" tone, and, owing to the vast spaces and consequent rolling echoes, any attempt to play any kind of rhythmic music is practically hopeless.

The cinema organ, on the other hand, is designed purely for the purpose of *entertaining an audience*, and its effects must be essentially pleasing. Indeed, it is more in the nature of a one man orchestra than an organ, and, apart from the fact that its

sounds are produced by organ pipes and it is played from keyboards and pedals, it bears little resemblance to the orthodox organ, for the combination of the modern electric action and the acoustics of the theatre enable the most amazing rhythmic results to be obtained.

When moving pictures were first introduced, it was at once realized that they could not be "run cold," that there must be some kind of musical accompaniment to disguise the fact that speech and other essential sounds were lacking. So the early moving pictures were accompanied by any kind of an orchestra, usually a trio, who played any kind of music they happened to have, without any idea of "fitting the picture" or synchronizing their musical accompaniment so that it would be suitable for the various events which were depicted on the screen. Many obviously ridiculous combinations of picture and music resulted from this haphazard method, pathetic scenes being frequently accompanied by dance music, and *vice versa*.

Obviously, the orchestra could not be expected to play for eight or nine hours at a stretch, and while they paused for rest and refreshment, some kind of musical accompaniment still had to continue. The result was the introduction of the relief pianist, who would accompany the second feature or the "shorts," the pictorials, comedies, gazettes, etc. As the relief pianist constituted a one-man band of his own and had no one else to follow, he could improvise to the pictures and frequently produce a far more suitable accompaniment, particularly in the comedy scenes. On the other hand, the thinness of tone of the piano by itself "let the whole show down" as soon as the orchestra stopped playing, and I have no doubt it was this fact, combined with the facility with which the relief pianist could provide an accompaniment which really fitted the pictures, which led to the introduction of the first organs in cinemas.

I have heard many arguments as to which actually was the first pipe organ to be installed in a picture house, and it is difficult to form a definite conclusion, but first, was at the Electric Pavillion, Clapham, S.W. This was a very small, second-hand church organ with less than a dozen stops altogether.

Other cinemas soon followed suit, and even with those early, unsuitable, "churchy" instruments, the possibilities of the organ in the cinema were quickly grasped; several-organ building firms installed organs specially designed for the purpose; e.g. Tower Cinema, Peckham (Norman & Beard, 1914), London Opera House

(Jardine-Smith, 1917), Shepherd's Bush Pavilion (Compton, 1924).

Now, although each of these early cinema organs contained some stops in imitation of orchestral instruments, they were all more or less orthodox organs, and it was not until the first Wurlitzer organs were brought over from America in 1925 that what the "man in the street" calls the "cinema organ" can really be said to have arrived.

The Wurlitzer organ was the result of the co-operation of one of the greatest organ-building geniuses of all time - Hope-Jones (an Englishman) - and the Rudolph Wurlitzer Co., of America.



Robert Hope-Jones



Hooton Grange

Robert Hope-Jones was born at Hooton Grange, Cheshire, in 1859, and began to play the organ at a very early age. When only nine years old he was assistant-organist at Eastham Parish Church, and, by the time he was seventeen, had held several important appointments as organist and choir-master, the last being at St.John's Birkenhead, where he did his first great work in connection with organ building.

The improved electric action, movable console, and many other inventions destined to startle the organ world were devised and made by him there with the voluntary help of enthusiastic choir men and boys, after the days business and evening's choir rehearsals.

All this, however, merely formed occupation for his spare time, and, at the age of seventeen, he was apprenticed to a firm of

electrical engineers, and afterwards became chief electrician of the Lancashire and Cheshire Telephone Company. In connection with telephony, he invented a multitude of improvements, some of which are still in universal use. In 1889 he resigned his connection with the telephone company in order to be able to devote more time to the improvement of the church organ.

His organ at St. John's, Birkenhead, became famous and was visited by thousands of organ lovers from all parts of the world. After building a large number of organs of similar style in various parts of the world and experiencing serious financial difficulties and every possible opposition from other builders, he went to America and joined forces with Skinner Co., of Boston. Owing, however, to further financial embarrassments, his patents and plant were sold to the Rudolph Wurlitzer Co., of North Tonawanda, N.Y., and Hope-Jones entered their employment. The Wurlitzer Co. took up his ideas with enthusiasm, saw the possibilities of employing them to evolve an organ like a one-man orchestra, and spent large sums of money in experimenting and standardising, the result being the Wurlitzer organ as we know it.

The first Wurlitzers to be installed in England were at Walsall, Tottenham, and the New Gallery Kinema, Regent Street, W., where I became organist in February, 1926. A few months later I began to broadcast and make gramophone records on this organ, and its instantaneous success was really remarkable. **Here was something entirely new, an instrument that could play any kind of music in the world - cheerful or sad, symphonic or ballad, fox-trot or folk-song, in such a way that it could be thoroughly enjoyed by the "man in the street."**

An instrument - virtually an orchestra under the control of a single performer - with an extraordinary range of tone colours, complete with all the orchestral effects, drums and symbols, glockenspiel and chimes, which was ideal for accompanying pictures and could be made to sound like a cathedral organ or reproduce with amazing rhythm the effect of a dance band, it is hardly to be wondered that the said "man in the street" took to it in the theatre or it came to him through his wireless set, found it a thoroughly satisfying form of entertainment.

The New Gallery organ forms a new departure in the history of the cinema organ in England. Nothing like it had been heard before, and, from the moment that I began to accompany pictures on it and play it to the world at large through the medium

of broadcasting and recording, it had tremendous influence on the design of all the cinema organs installed since.

All the British organ builders instantly showed great interest and began to incorporate, some in a greater and some in a lesser degree, its characteristic features, all in spite of the fact that, compared with the enormous organs to which we have since become accustomed, it was a mere baby, having only eight units (or tone colours) and two keyboards. Compare this with the "Christie" organ which I am playing at present at the Regal, which has four keyboards, thirty units and well over three hundred controls in the shape of stops, pistons, etc.! As our publicity has it, it is indeed a "mammoth" organ!

From the time of the earliest cinema organs until the advent of talking pictures, the primary use of the organ in the cinema was to accompany silent pictures, and only in comparatively few instances did one hear of its being featured as a solo instrument. Gradually, however, as talking pictures became universal, the need for accompanying silent pictures disappeared and the organ is now used in the majority of theatres to provide a musical interlude, independant of pictures, in every show.

Wherever there is a good up-to-date organ, played by an organist gifted with musicianship, imagination, and showmanship, the organ interlude will be found to be a most popular part of the programme, and **a sound box-office attraction.**

A PRELIMINARY TOUR OF INSPECTION

The modern cinema organ consists of two parts - the part you see and the part you don't see. In church, the tradition throughout the ages had been to install the organ itself in full view as an imposing array of decorative pipes, but to hide the organist away out of sight. In the cinema, with its luxurious comfort, beautiful lighting effects, and the all-pervading idea of pleasing the senses, this policy is reversed; organ builders and architects have combined in building up a kind of mystery about the organ, by carefully concealing it so that you cannot see whence the sounds proceed, while the organist is made as conspicuous as possible.

As a result, I am afraid quite a number of patrons go away with the impression that that part of the organ which looks rather like a harmonium, and comes up from the depths on a lift, constitutes

the entire organ, and that all the wonderful sounds with which they are entertained proceed therefrom!

This, of course, is merely the *console* from which the organ is controlled. All the pipes, drums, bells, etc., that actually produce the sounds, are installed in chambers hidden away (probably in the roof), the sounds entering the theatre through a cunningly devised grill. Indeed, whenever I have taken visitors through the organ chambers, they have invariably experienced a kind of pleasant surprise at the size and ramifications of the unseen portion of the organ, and have found it unexpectedly interesting.

The various sections of the instrument are described in detail later on, but it will probably give the uninitiated reader a better general grasp of things to be first taken for an imaginary look round an organ of moderate size, like the one I played at the Regent Theatre, Bournemouth.

We shall naturally start our tour of inspection by having a good look at the console: here the visitor will be fascinated first of all by the large number of stop keys, coloured red, white, or yellow, arranged in a semicircle above the keyboards; these have replaced the old-fashioned draw stops and are, of course, immensely more convenient to manipulate.

This innovation became necessary in view of the constant changes of stops demanded by the orchestral type of playing which is now essential. These stopkeys control the various ranks of pipes and effects, so that the organist can, by using them in an infinite variety of combinations, produce the exact tone colour he wishes, very much as a painter takes colours from his paintbox and mixes them until he obtains the precise shades he requires.

It will be observed that there are two keyboards (or "manuals"). This enables the organist to play a solo with one hand on the top manual, using any desired solo stops, while the other hand plays the accompaniment on the lower manual, using a different combination of stops. Indeed, in a two-manual organ, the top keyboard is called the "solo," and the lower the "accompaniment."

Larger organs are equipped with a greater number of keyboards in order to facilitate rapid changes of effect which the organist attains by playing alternatively first on one and then on the other, thus obviating a considerable amount of stop changing.

Other features at the console are the small white buttons under the keys, called "pistons," by which the player is enabled instantaneously to change combinations of stops by a single action; the toe-pistons, worked by the feet, which operate some

of the drums and other effects; the two rectangular swell pedals operated by the organist's right foot which control the *volume* of sound; and the push buttons for starting and stopping the motor which supplies the wind.

Until it is pointed out to them, most visitors do not realize that the organist plays not only with his hands but also with his feet; as in the church organ, the bass notes are played on a pedal board which is simply a very much enlarged replica of the ordinary black and white keyboard. Incidentally, the first problem which the young organ student has to tackle is to learn to find the notes with his feet without looking at the pedal board, and the next is to train himself to play with complete independence between hands and feet.

The connection between the movable console and the organ chambers, upstairs, consists of a flexible electric cable containing hundreds of fine wires, each carefully insulated from the remainder, very much like the cables used under the street for telephones. This is arranged in a long loop hanging down under the console in such a way that the organ can be played in any position or even when the console is moving up or down. (The reader will notice such a cable hanging beneath the car of an automatic electric lift.)

Having ascertained that the visitor's lungs and heart are in sound condition, we proceed upstairs, and after negotiating some dozen or so flights, the top one of which is an awkward spiral staircase, we arrive at the door of the motor room. I am afraid the old-fashioned organ blower, who used to pump the handle laboriously up and down in the days of our youth, would hardly be adequate for providing the wind for the modern cinema organ, so he has been replaced by a 5-h.p. electric motor which drives a rotary fan to supply the necessary wind.

In the motor room, driven by a belt from the big motor, there is a small generator, which provides the 12-volt supply for working the electric action. The visitor will also be interested in the mechanism, controlled by buttons at the console, for starting and stopping the motor.

Dirt and dust, of which the atmosphere of towns is so full, are not at all healthy for the interior economy of organs, so an ingenious arrangement has been devised for filtering the air before it goes into the rotary fan. This consists of a rack containing a vast number of small hollow copper cylinders, something like used cartridge cases, which are coated with a very

thin film of special oil; this arrangement is fixed in front of the main air intake, and the air, on being drawn through it, deposits all its soot and particles of dust on the oil and arrives inside the organ in a comparatively clean state.

After inspecting the motor room, we come through another door into the relay room, which is full of complicated electric and electro-pneumatic mechanism enclosed in glass cases to protect it from dust; then through yet another door into the organ chamber itself, or rather into the first of two separate organ chambers.

One side of each of these chambers, which open to the theatre (and through which the sound travels), is closed with swell shutters -- an ingenious contrivance for controlling the *volume* of tone. These are arranged on the same principle as a Venetian blind and are operated by two balanced pedals worked by the organist's right foot. It should be noted that we are now actually *above* the ceiling of the theatre and visitors get a good idea of the relative position of the organ chambers by looking through the swell shutters right down into the auditorium.

The first organ chamber contains all the drums, cymbals, glockenspiel, bird whistles, and other effects, and also all the ranks of pipes which are mostly used for the purpose of playing solos. The visitor will be interested to note the various rows of pipes arranged on top of the wind chests, and, below these, the reservoirs, which look very much like the old-fashioned bellows, but which are controlled by strong spiral springs in place of the weights on top which were formerly employed.

These contain the reserve supply of wind and are connected to the wind chests so as to keep the supply steady at the pipes whether the volume of tone used necessitates a small or large quantity of wind. The wind is conveyed from the rotary fan in the motor room into the organ chambers by means of a huge metal wind trunk, and is then distributed to the various wind reservoirs, etc., by smaller trunks of similar construction.

Those rectangular wooden boxes, whose lids are perforated with numbers of circular holes, are the tremulants; on the right-hand side of the chamber is the "effects unit" with all its controlling mechanism, the various drums, the tambourine, castanets, triangle, Chinese block, klaxon horn, etc.

We now proceed through a door in the dividing wall into the second chamber, which contains all the sets of pipes which are used principally for accompaniment work, the diapason, string stops, flutes, etc.

Every stop key, every piston, every note of the keyboard, is virtually an electric switch, and whenever one of them is moved by the organist, it makes a contact which allows the 12-volt current to travel through its appropriate wire in the connecting cable to do the necessary work upstairs in the organ chamber. When the organist wishes to play, he puts down some of the stop-keys, thereby causing certain electric switches up in the relay room to make contact; this brings into action the required sets of pipes or effects. Then, when he plays the organ by pressing down the keys at the console, further electric contacts are made, and the current is sent through more wires in the connecting cable, and this, operating through the relay mechanism, allows the wind to enter the pipes.

In the next edition of TOSA News we will take a closer look at the various parts of the organ thanks to Reginal Foort. (Ed).

THE MAN WHO STARTED IT ALL

A Personal Glimpse of Reginald Foort

by Ben. M. Hall

One spring day in 1953 I found myself in Richmond, Virginia, with some time to kill before catching a plane. That suited me fine, as I had, for some months, been anxious to see Richmond's famous Mosque Auditorium--not only because of its theatrical splendor (it seats 4,000 in Arabian Nights opulence), but because of a record I had heard.

The record was by an organist named Michael Cheshire who made it on the Wurlitzer pipe organ in the Mosque. What, you might ask, was so special about a recording of a theatre organ? And who in the world, you might ask, is Michael Cheshire? I can only say that this record, a little 10-inch LP produced by Emory Cook, was totally revolutionary. It was the FIRST HIGH FIDELITY THEATRE ORGAN RECORD EVER MADE.

Recorded in Richmond early in 1952, it was the absolute sensation of that years Hi Fi Show in New York (an annual event that used to turn four floors of the New Yorker hotel into a musical Tower of Babel). This record was the darling of all the equipment demonstrators at the show because it provided, for the first time since High Fidelity had become Big Business, a musical way to put woofers and tweeters, turntables and styli,

through their paces. The thunder of the 16-foot Diaphones and the peep of the 2-foot Piccolo covered the entire sound spectrum. The most startling demonstration of all was in Emory Cook's own exhibit where the record was being played--wonder of wonders--binaurally. Here was not only high fidelity come of age, but stereo in its complicated dual stylus infancy. I can still hear the Niagara of sound that Michael Cheshire's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2* unleashed in that small room, while next door the monster Klipshorn speakers in Colonel Klipsch's establishment were echoing it with Michael Cheshire's *Bells of Saint Mary's* and down the hall H. H. Scott was amplifying Michael Cheshire's *Zampa Overture* to the decibel limit. Oh it was grand!

For the true lover of the theatre organ this was almost too good to be true. My collection of Jesse Crawford 78s had long since lost the Battle of the Surface Noise, as had all the other 78s in my collection, and the only two theatre organ LPs available -- Don Baker at the Paramount Studio organ and Buddy Cole at his own Robert Morton -- were both transfers from 78s with a fi that was anything but hi. Suddenly a whole new world of theatre organ sound had been opened up, and I lost no time in buying the record that was to be the trail blazer in a whole new field of recording. Today, hundreds of theatre organ LPs later, the little record still sounds marvelous despite Emory Cook's printed *apologia* for the hiss: "If we want pipe organ of this flavor," he wrote, "then we must accept the air noise ..." (Today there are no audible wind leaks in the Mosque organ).

But who was Michael Cheshire? All I knew was that he was wonderful and I wanted to find out more about him. So, that day in Richmond, I made a bee-line to the Mosque, determined to see if anyone there could tell me what I wanted to know.

As I entered the dimly-lit auditorium--actually even before I got inside the lobby I could tell--someone was playing the organ. My excitement reached perfect pitch as I crouched down in a seat at the rear to listen, and heard the unmistakable strains of the *Coppelia Waltz*, just as it had been played on the record. When the organist finished, I summoned up my courage and walked bravely down to the console at the left of the stage. A friendly-looking gentleman with a neat mustache turned around on the Howard seat as I asked: "Pardon me...but...are you Michael Cheshire?"

"Well, yes and no," was the reply. "I'm really Reginald Foort."

Reginald Foort! One of my most highly prized 78s was a 12-inch Victor recording of Reginald Foort playing *In a Persian Market* on the Wurlitzer in the New Gallery Cinema in London. And there I was, face to face with the master himself. I stammered out an explanation for my intrusion and started back to my seat in the rear of the theatre when he said: "Oh, don't run away. Actually, you can hear much better down front here. What would you like me to play for you?"

When my private command performance of *In a Persian Market* had ended, I excused myself long enough to run to the telephone to call the airline to see if there was a later flight I might catch. I couldn't dream of leaving Richmond now. Good luck. There was another flight leaving in three hours. When I returned, Mr Foort had a problem. There was a cipher--a B-flat on the Vox Humana was yodeling away all by itself and wouldn't quit--so he decided that there was nothing for it but to climb up to the organ chamber and fix it himself, providing I would help by testing the note at the console after he had re-seated the magnet.

When it finally came time for me to get to the airport, Reggie (of course, he was still "Mr Foort" to me then) insisted on driving me out himself in his big green Lincoln. On the way he explained about "Michael Cheshire", and how he happened to be in the United States. He had come over to help establish an American foothold for the Standaart Organ Company, a Dutch firm of considerable repute. A factory had been opened in Suffolk, Virginia, down in "ham country" near Richmond. He was under contract not to use his real name on recordings because Standaart, for some obscure Netherlandish reason, thought that his name on recordings of "light music" (goodness knows the titles on those early Cook recordings were anything but pop stuff) might tarnish Standaart's image as a builder of church organs. Hence the name, Michael Cheshire, a *nom-de-console* Foort had previously used in England for a series of recordings on the Eclipse label.

Emory Cook, meanwhile, had heard of the Mosque Wurlitzer. Having documented the sounds of steam locomotives and ocean liners in his "Sounds of Our Times" series, he was eager to capture the sound of what seemed--then--to be a vanishing piece of musical Americana, the Mighty Wurlitzer. He had heard that Reginald Foort was in Suffolk, and the result was the little record that sparkedplugged an industry.

So, all in one afternoon--it was March 23, 1953 (I know because I wrote the whole thing down on some Western Union blanks

when I finally got on the plane)--I found a true identity of Michael Cheshire, I met a long-time idol face to face, and, for the first time in my life, I sat at a Wurlitzer console, holding notes for Reginald Foort, no less.

All that was nearly twenty years ago. Since then, turntables and tape machines around the world have been putting out the limpid, roaring, throbbing, sobbing tones of the theatre organ with higher and higher fidelity and for an ever-widening circle of devotees. Theatre organs, thanks to the ardent good works of the members of the American Theatre Organ Society, have been restored, or given new homes, by the hundreds. And Reginald Foort, is as vibrant, busy and popular as ever. Although he has become one of the most enthusiastic transplanted Americans I have ever known, his name is still "big time" in Britain. Only last Christmas Day (1969) the BBC produced a special holiday program featuring live cinema organ music from a number of instruments around England. High point of the show was--of course-- a transatlantic telephone interview with the Dean of Cinema Organists himself, the one and only Reginald Foort.

Since that first meeting, it has been my privilege to know Reggie Fort as a friend. I have seen him at work in recording sessions where his professionalism is a revelation: let there be a minor clinker in a cadenza, and Reggie stops instantly, says "Lets try that again, shall we?" Then, to the joy of the engineers who are used to having to record a whole passage or an entire selection again for most organists, he starts in, right in tempo, just at the place where the clinker clinked. I have heard him thrill huge audiences in many parts of the country, with his deft interpretations of serious classics, light classics, show tunes and pop tunes, and of each genre. Best of all, I am looking forward to dropping in on him and his lovely wife, Betty, in their new home in Florida. Don't worry, unlike my un-heralded interruption of his practice session in Richmond, this time I have been invited. That is why, when I think of Reggie Foort, it's easy to carry out the advice of his famous BBC signature tune and "Keep Smiling!"

Ben M. Hall is the outhor of *The Best Remaining Seats, The Story of the Golden Age of the Movie Palace*, and his notes are to be found on the jackets of numerous theatre organ recordings.

Members Diary

Next Committee Meeting - TBA

As you know the March 15th concert with Simon Ellis and Glenn Amer was cancelled. The concerts with David Bailey in May, Justin Stahl in July and John Giacchi in October are also cancelled. The concert with Tony Fenelon and Dr John Atwell in December is not cancelled but postponed by one day.

Pending relaxation of restrictions in place we are contemplating the re-scheduling of Simon and Glenn's concert to sometime in October. What was to be the concert marking the opening of the Christie at West Ryde is now effectively cancelled at West Ryde and postponed until the following day (Sunday 6 December) at Orion Centre, Campsie. These are both pending confirmation of course.

Membership Renewals The committee discussed this issue in some detail and decided for a range of reasons to offer existing members a compensation on membership renewals due this coming June. **All existing members will be able to renew their membership with a 50% discount applied.** David Badman, Membership Secretary, will be forwarding these renewal notices shortly by email or post depending on your previously selected communication method.

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

www.omss.org.au (our sister society, Organ Music Society of Sydney OMSS)

www.ATOS.org American Theatre Organ Society

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Web Sites of Interest: <https://www.facebook.com/tosansw>

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