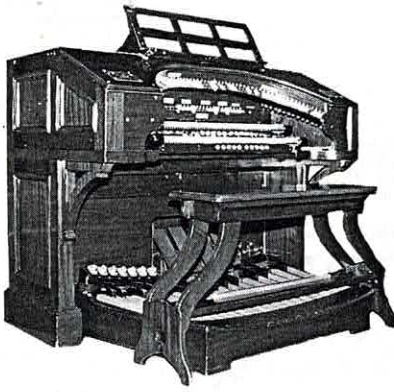
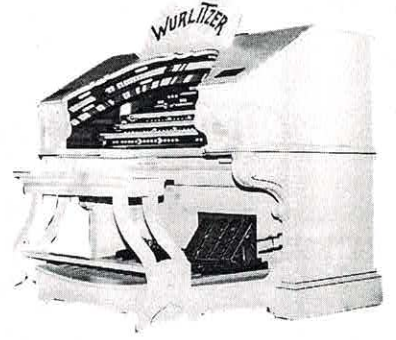


APRIL, 1994



2/11 WurliTzer Theatre Pipe Organ  
Marrickville Town Hall

# TOSA NEWS



3/17 WurliTzer Theatre Pipe Organ  
Orion Centre Campsie

## BILL SCHUMACHER

and

## CLIFF BINGHAM

playing the fabulous **Wurli Tzer Theatre Organ**



**Sunday, 24th April, 1994 at 2pm**

**Orion Centre, 155 Beamish Street, Campsie.**

Volume 33

Issue 4

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\$1.00

# TOSA NEWS

APRIL, 1994

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## COMING EVENTS

### APRIL

## PERTH ENCORE '94

Friday 1 - Monday 4 NATIONAL CONVENTION  
PERTH, W.A.

Four days of Music, Mirth and Merriment with  
fellow Conventioneers from Interstate and  
Overseas, followed by a full day trip to New Norcia  
on Tuesday 5th April.

Sunday 10 at 2.30pm **Members' Afternoon**  
Epping Baptist Church

Monday 11 at 7.30 pm **Committee Meeting**

Sunday 24 at 2.00 pm **CLIFF BINGHAM**

and

**BILL SCHUMACHER  
CONCERT**

Orion Centre, Campsie

### MAY

Monday 2 at 7.30pm **Committee Meeting**



**REMEMBER TO TUNE IN TO  
2 CBA-FM 103.2**

EVERY MONDAY AT 9.00 pm.  
For "Theatre Organ Highlights"  
Presented by Chris Styles

# From The President

Greetings!

It was wonderful to see so many people at the **Chris McPhee** concert - all 550 of you. It would be great to see then same level of support for all our concerts. With this in mind, may I urge you to include as many of our concerts as possible in your diaries for 1994, as we have a very fine programme lined up for this year.

In late January, I was fortunate to travel to **Los Angeles** to the **National Association of Music Merchants Trade Exhibition** at the **Anaheim Convention Centre**. This is the largest trade show in **America**; about three times bigger than the **Darling Harbour Exhibition Centre**, and full of music. A fascinating show where one can unexpectedly meet up with all sorts of people. I strolled into the **Korg Keyboard Display Room** only to see **Stevie Wonder** having an impromptu jam session with the resident product specialists - a fascinating experience.

On the organ front, I met up with **Donna Parker**, **Jonas Nordwall** and **Walter Strony** - the last two are looking forward to their up-coming **Australian** tours.

I also spent three days in **San Francisco**, where **Jim Riggs** did the right thing by me and arranged for me to play the **Oakland Paramount Wurlitzer** (4/26) and the **Stanford Wurlitzer** (3/20). Through **Jim's** introduction I met up with **Ray Taylor**, the owner of the **Castro Theatre Wurlitzer** (4/22) who also arranged for me to play the **Berkeley Community Theatre Wurlitzer** (4/34) - four exceptional instruments. All these friends send their best wishes to **TOSA NSW**.

On the home front, the committee has been working hard co-ordinating the rebuilding of the **Marrickville** console and control system. We have been waiting for the merger between **John Parker** and **Peter Jewkes**. This



is now complete and the console will be shipped to **Peter's** workshop shortly. **John's** quote for the work, as accepted by your committee, will be honoured.

We are still awaiting a reply from **Canterbury Council** regarding practice on the **Orion** organ. I apologise for the delay but we really are doing our best to overcome the multitude of difficulties.

Until next month,

**Cliff Bingham**

## WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome to our "ranks" the following new members, and we hope their membership will bring them great pleasure for a long time to come:

**C.J.Callinan - Waverton**  
**R.A.Philpott-Drummoyne**  
**D.Minett - Regents Park**  
**I.Menzies - Sydney**

# Editorial

What a delight **Chris McPhee's** concert (as expected) turned out to be, and such great and well-deserved audience support for this young man with such a bright future in the theatre organ world !! All the reports about him from the overseas magazines, reviewing his performance at last year's **ATOS Convention**, were absolutely glowing. I'm hoping to publish them in a future edition of **TOSA News**, and we all hope to have him back in **Sydney** again soon.

This month's concert (where you get two for the price of one!!) should be great fun with both **Bill Schumacher** and **Cliff Bingham** playing the **Orion Wurlitzer** for us. They both have a terrific sense of humour and a long history of successful concerts. I'm sure we will all be greatly entertained by their expert playing skills and showmanship.

A reminder that the next **Members' Social Afternoon** is at **Epping Baptist Church** on Sunday, 10th April at 2.30pm. This friendly event is totally free of charge and we will get to hear some of **Sydney's** best organists playing the **Christie Theatre Organ** in an informal atmosphere. However it would be appreciated if you could bring something to be shared with everyone for afternoon tea.

Next month's **TOSA News** will include an extended article on the **Christie** organ recently purchased by **TOSA NSW** and on its original location in the **Gordon Theatre**. **Rob Gliddon** undertook this research and found it quite difficult to find information about the organ, but he has unearthed lots of interesting details.

Thanks again to all those who have contributed so generously to the pages of **TOSA News** by submitting articles, photographs and reports on concerts and events touching **TOSA** and its members. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Best Wishes,  
**Colin Groves**

*Articles in this journal need not represent the views of the committee or the editor*

**The deadline for each edition of TOSA News is the 12th of the preceding month**



## POLISHED PIPES

Brilliant young Adelaide artist, **Chris McPhee** at the **Capri Theatre Organ**. Tracks: *The Bare Necessities, Walkin' My Baby Back Home, If, A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square, Ben Hur Chariot Race March, When Day Is Done, Aladdin Medley, From This Moment On, Easy to Love*, plus 8 more!

Available on Compact Disc for \$25.00, or on Cassette for \$15.00.

\*\*\*\*\*

Purchase them at TOSA Concerts, or by Mail Order from:

TOSA (NSW Division) Inc.  
304 Parramatta Rd  
ASHFIELD NSW 2131

\*\*\*\*\*

### Postage :

Compact Disc : \$2.80

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## FOR SALE

Price : \$3,000

E 49 "ELKA" organ

As new condition

Installed in quality

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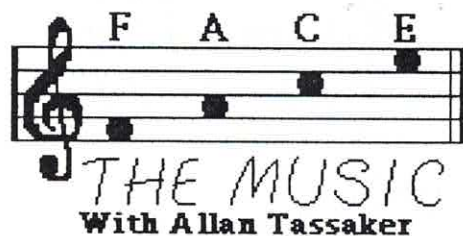
**DON'T FORGET THE MEMBERS' SOCIAL AFTERNOON AT EPPING BAPTIST CHURCH AT 2.30pm on SUNDAY, 10th APRIL.**

**Bring a plate of afternoon tea to share.**

**Tea and coffee provided.**

**Hear some of our best local artists on the Christie Theatre Pipe Organ.**

On the corner of Ray & Carlingford Rds.  
One block from Epping Railway Station



Allan Tassaker reckons his music is better-looking than other members' music.

"How can that be?" you may well ask.

"Easy," says Allan....

"All my notes are wearing ties !!"

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# "THE MUSICAL EVENT OF THE DECADE"

Last year TOSA member, Allan Brooker of *Belfield*, had the good fortune to attend the ATOS Convention in Chicago and then to be present at the opening of a fabulous theatre organ installation. So that we can share his enjoyment, he has very kindly provided this wonderful account of a truly memorable event.

I thought TOSA members may be interested in hearing my impressions of a very special theatre organ event that took place after the ATOS Convention in Chicago in July 1993. I hasten to add that these are the impressions of a theatre organ layman who is not completely versed in all the appropriate technical terms that our more experienced members would use.

The reputations of many of the artists and venues scheduled for the 38th ATOS Convention were enough to entice me to venture forth to only my second convention in the USA. However it was event that was scheduled for the day after the convention concluded that most attracted my interest (See advertisement right).

Promoted as the "musical event of the decade", I was to realise that to so describe the inaugural public concert at the **Victorian Palace** was to dwell in understatement. On 10th July, 1993, around 400 theatre organ lovers were privileged to see and hear a 5-manual, 78 rank theatre pipe organ - the largest and most extensive ever created in the world, and in a setting to rival the most lavish movie palaces of the past.

This stunning auditorium was the recent addition to the residence of **Jasper and Marian Sanfilippo**, situated in the beautiful **Barrington Hills, Illinois**, about one and a half hours' drive from **Chicago**.

As our bus pulled into the long driveway leading down to the residence I began to realise this was no ordinary house. "Mansion" would more appropriately describe what was before us, set amongst lush open grass areas with a lake and fountain, spouting gracefully, surrounded by trees that held this magnificent sight back until the last minute.

Alighting from our transport one ventured with eager anticipation

## A Very Special Event.....

On July 10, 1993,  
**Mr. Lyn Larsen**  
will play the inaugural concert  
on the spectacular  
5 MANUAL, 78 RANK  
WURLITZER PIPE ORGAN  
located in the breathtaking  
**Victorian Palace**

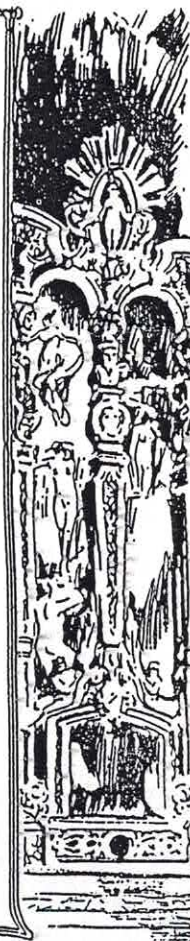
This privately owned music salon must be seen to be believed: with the opulent decor and reverberant acoustics of a full-sized theatre, the Victorian Palace is a fitting home for the largest Wurlitzer theatre pipe organ in the world.

Attendance is limited to the first 350 persons who write in, so reserve your space now!

The cost for this very unique event is \$46.00 per person (100% of the profit from this Gala goes to benefit the Hopeful Heart Fund.) This includes transportation from the ATOS convention hotel, complimentary refreshments at intermission, and a demonstration of several of the larger superb orchestrions from the priceless collection housed in the Victorian Palace. Private autos cannot be accommodated for parking, so use of the bus is a requirement for all attending. You will leave the hotel at 9:30 AM, & return 2:30 PM.

Send in your check today, to:  
Hopeful Heart Productions  
Post Office Box 578121  
Chicago, IL 60657

Hopeful Heart Productions is a private fund which provides much-needed financial support to persons involved in the arts who are facing life-threatening illnesses such as cancer, AIDS, stroke, etc. Mr. Larsen accepts no payment, fee, commission, or royalty for any live performance or recording which is sponsored by Hopeful Heart Productions. Your support is greatly appreciated by many!



towards the house entrance. The dominating feature was the sweeping stairway, marble columns and tastefully positioned potted palms. As each guest stepped inside one could be forgiven for thinking they were undergoing a religious experience. The first words uttered were invariably "Oh, my God!" as eyes gazed up and around in astonishment. To the immediate right of the main entrance one entered the **Victorian Palace**.

The first feature to stand out was the huge royal blue, gold painted scrim curtain, behind which was hidden the forward facing organ chambers. At 42'

high and about 60' wide it appeared larger than curtains gracing most cinemas. Eyes now gazing to the rear of this music salon revealed the presence of a balcony which was served by its own Victorian, "bird-cage" styled elevator (with a carpeted lift-well, no less).

As one's senses began to drift into "overload", the astonishing array of musical instruments became apparent. After the main concert, we were to learn that they were all in working order, as one by one they were demonstrated - Orchestrion, player pianos, circus band wagons, nickelodeons and countless other musical machines beyond my expertise to describe. Below the main auditorium was the steam engine room where all manner of steam powered engines were displayed in spotlessly clean condition.

Back to the auditorium itself where the only visible pipes were the huge 32' reeds along with several others of lesser size on each side of the room. Directly in front of the chamber curtains, a low stage contained the circular, carpeted pit from which the organ console would rise.

It was Showtime! The audience was welcomed and at last the artist announced. With those awesome wooden pipes towering above us one could expect to be drowned out with sound. However, the first notes to penetrate the auditorium spilled out of the organ chambers to caress our ears in what could be described as a subdued fashion. Before us arose the most stunning console with burgundy inlays and cherubs on all corners.

America's premier organist, **Lyn Larsen**, astride the royal blue Howard seat, looking stunningly healthy in his white jacket, was caressing the ivories with delicacy and finesse. The occasional sideways glance to the audience, with a cheeky twinkle in his eyes, was the first indication that the

unexpectedly subdued opening number was just a "tease".

Lyn played 3 numbers before speaking to his audience - each one building slightly in intensity. "Anyone can play loud!" Lyn announced to his audience for the first time. "Let this instrument introduce my songs for me!" and with this he swung back to that console with its dazzling array of red, yellow, black and white stop-tabs, befitting the flight-deck of a Boeing 747.

On Lyn's suggestion, we in the audience allowed the sounds to "wash all over our bodies". As the Larsen magic came into being - first one corner, then the others, up high, down low - the organ chambers came "alight", like lights switching on in a multi-storey building at night.

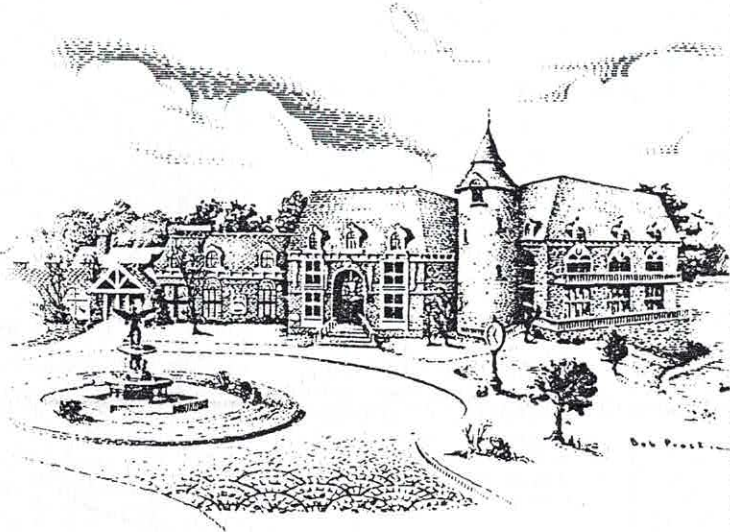
I now believed there really were 78 ranks of pipes hidden away behind that curtain. It now also became abundantly clear to me how splendid the acoustics were in this room. Even the tiniest pencil-sized pipe could be heard with crystal clarity. The big ranks did not overwhelm as I had expected. This clearly was the most balanced theatre organ sound I had ever experienced.

The late David Junchen, whose brainchild this magnificent "Wurlitzer" was, had aimed to create the near perfect instrument. I think he has succeeded! Even percussions such as crash cymbals, which can be overbearing in some instruments, seemed perfectly balanced with all other sounds. Although promoted as a Wurlitzer, "mostly Wurlitzer" would be a more accurate description.

Within the mind-boggling specifications of this instrument, such as the nine ranks of Vox Humana or the ten or more ranks of the Flute family, several makers such as Kimball, Gottfried, Aeolian and others are represented. And to think that there are another

## Place de la Musique

PLUM TREE FARMS · BARRINGTON HILLS, ILLINOIS



30 ranks yet to be added to this colossus, according to one of the many "helpers" strategically placed around the room!

Lyn's well researched, kaleidoscopic programme embraced almost every conceivable taste in theatre organ music - from novelty

tunes to lyrical ballads such as *Somewhere In Time*, to the finale - a huge arrangement of *Fantasy Impromptu*. A no less fiery arrangement presented itself in *Czardas*, but my own personal favourite was the best version I have ever heard of *Mary - What Are You Waiting For?* - encompassing the smallest to the largest pipe, this one tune typified the enormous range of this organ.

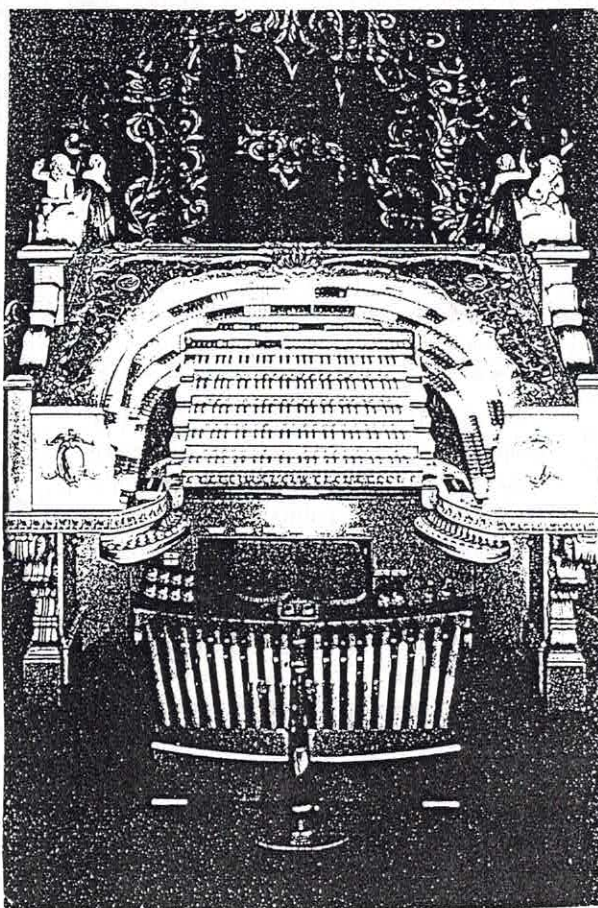
A standing ovation that seemed to last 5 minutes showered well deserved thanks on Lyn Larsen. By now an emotionally drained artist stepped down from the stage to embrace an appreciative Jasper and Marian Sanfilippo.

This wonderful concert raised some \$13,000 for the **Hopeful Heart Foundation**, a private fund providing support to persons involved in the arts who are facing life-threatening illnesses, such as cancer, AIDS, stroke, etc. Lyn Larsen, who donated his services for this incredible event, has written to all who attended, announcing that it will become an annual "Concert For Life".

Thank you to David Junchen for the inspiration, to Mr and Mrs Sanfilippo for the venue and to the many, many tireless workers who gave so much of themselves to make this extraordinary concert possible.

With a beautifully restored park organ, atop an equally beautifully restored truck, playing its heart out near the front entrance of the **Victorian Palace**, we stepped back out into the "real" world. There weren't too many dry eyes or hearts that weren't pounding just a little, as we climbed back into the bus which would return us to Chicago.

What a day!! What an organ!!



# Music of the past still lives Pianola business plays on

These two contributions come from friends of TOSA News. The article comes from the *Glebe & Western Weekly* and concerns an enterprise well-known to a lot TOSA members. The cartoon by Philip Jamison comes from the pages of the *Music Box Society International's* journal.

by AMANDA PARK

WALKING into the Mastertouch Piano Roll Company at Petersham is a little like walking into a museum or library.

The 1940s art deco building, originally a church, is lined with shelves of piano rolls packaged in beautifully decorated cardboard boxes.

Mastertouch was founded in 1919 and is believed to be the last piano roll maker to manufacture pianola rolls in the traditional method in Australia.

The company has about 2000 rolls of music in stock and include everything from Brahms' waltzes to Elton John's Blue Eyes and even Phantom of the Opera.

The rolls cost anything from \$17 to about \$35 each and are printed on strong data entry paper using traditional hole punching machines (each hole corresponding to a musical note).

Owner Barclay Wright, has been running the business since 1975. He joined the company in 1956 and was originally employed as a recording artist but later moved into administration.

Mr Wright, who has no immediate family, has made the business his life's work.

Years of lifting pianolas and a bad attack of arthritis led to both his knees being replaced in December last year and has meant Mr Wright now has to take a little more time on the office stairs.

But he is still as enthusiastic as ever about the business.

"This company has a strong belief in the need to preserve Australia's living history for future generations," Mr Wright said.

"It is my personal dream to see Mastertouch maintained in its working entity by a government body interested in preserving his-



Barclay Wright keeps the good time music rolling

torical artifacts," he said.

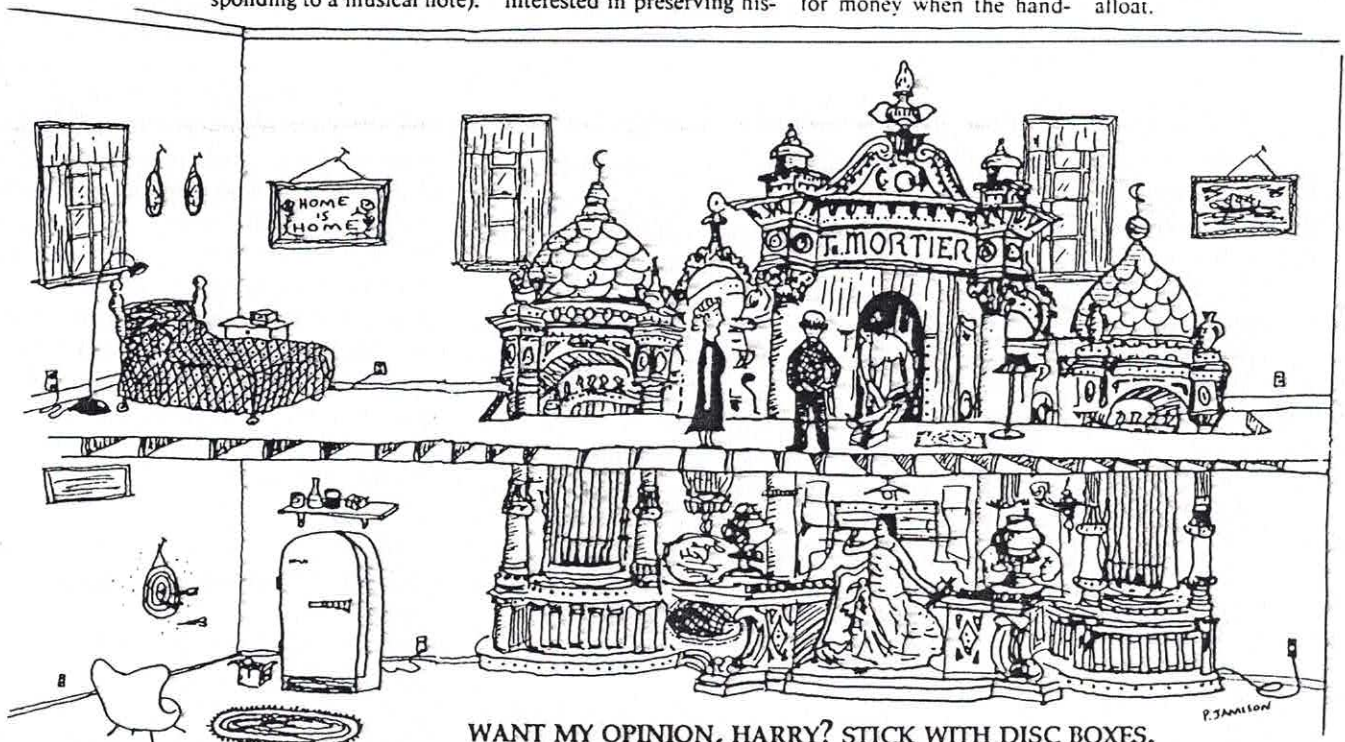
Mr Wright said he believed his firm was the first company ever to record Australian artists, and was well worth conserving.

Mr Wright has a collection of pianolas, pianos, a player-saxophone and player accordion, along with a stuffed performing monkey once used to beckon passers by for money when the hand-

cranked barrel piano (a forerunner to the pianola) was used.

Since the hey day of the pianola the company has weathered all sorts of storms including the influence of television on family entertainment.

Keeping up with new trends and making boxes for other businesses during hard times has kept the company afloat.



WANT MY OPINION, HARRY? STICK WITH DISC BOXES.

## The **WILBUR KENTWELL** Story

The story of **Wilbur Kentwell** is a fascinating one indeed, revealing as it does that enterprise and hard work are the necessary ingredients if one is to climb the ladder of success. **Wilbur Kentwell** climbed that ladder to the top and stayed there over many years. He was born in **Castle Hill**, an outer suburb of **Sydney**, about 6 miles or so from **Parramatta**. He started learning the organ at the age of 8 years and was playing the pipe organ for church services in a **Castle Hill** church at the age of 12 years. Two years later, he heard **Leslie V. Harvey** play the **Wurlitzer** organ of **Sydney's Prince Edward Theatre Beautiful**, and he lost no time in commencing to study the complex techniques of cinema organ playing.

It was not too long before he attained the standard necessary and he was featured in duet work with well known **Des Tanner** at the **Roxy Theatre Parramatta**, where a 3-manual **Christie** organ was installed. In 1937 he was appointed pianist-accompanist to **Radio 2KA** at **Katoomba**, in the heart of the famous **Blue Mountains** tourist mecca. In 1938 he was selected to be organist at the **Savoy, New Lambton, Newcastle**, and signed a contract for 6 months with a further 6 month option. Such was his popularity in the city of Newcastle that his contract was renewed several times and he remained in residence for some years.

The **Savoy Theatre**, designed on ultra-modern lines, was strikingly lit by tube lighting recessed into troughs in the ceiling, and was a lovely theatre which retained its intimate atmosphere despite its largish size. The organ was a **Hammond** electronic one, equipped with an elaborate glass console, indirectly lit and with full colour changing effects. In addition, a full set of real chimes was installed on the right hand side of the proscenium, about half way up and in full view of the audience who could see them operate. The chimes were played from a set of white buttons located just below the music stand of the organ, and were a most effective asset as electronic organs at that time did not possess the electronic chimes now standard on

almost every make of electronic organ.

**Newcastle** citizens were extremely organ-minded, and were very appreciative of the "organ spectaculars" which **Wilbur** presented from time to time. In one such "spectacular", a recording of **Sir Malcolm Sargent** conducting the "**William Tell Overture**" was played through the theatre's sound system as **Wilbur** accompanied the orchestra on the organ. On stage a forest setting with large trees made a most effective backdrop to the music and in the finale artificial rain came pouring down whilst lightning flashed during the storm sequence. This presentation so pleased the patrons that it ran for several weeks.

**Wilbur** also featured at the theatre's grand piano for speciality presentations. This was located on a dais close to the organ console. Four or five mornings each week **Wilbur** broadcast "live" from the theatre's organ at 8.15am, playing for 15 minutes and he also broadcast again from the theatre for a further 15 minutes on the same number of evenings. This latter broadcast took place during the 6pm to 7pm time slot, and usually found **Wilbur** playing the grand piano, although the organ was used on some occasions. This meant that **Wilbur** was "on air" 10 times each week, without taking into consideration the special feature broadcasts which he did from time to time.

During the War, **Wilbur** saw military service and rose to the rank of sergeant. He was connected with the production of visual training films screened to servicemen. In 1945 he returned to civilian life again and settled in **Sydney** where **Radio 2CH** signed him as staff organist and he played the **Hammond** organ for the famous "**Humphrey Bishop**" shows, as well as appearing in numerous other productions. He had his own weekly 30 minute programme sponsored by the Farren Price Watch Salon, aptly titled "**Music Timed for a Lifetime**" which ran for 2 or 3 years.

As well as his radio work **Wilbur** became resident organist at the **Vogue**

**Theatre, Double Bay**, once again at the console of a **Hammond** organ which was located in a recessed organ-loft high on the left side of the proscenium. **Wilbur** often recalled the perilous climbing of the steep steps from the darkened backstage to the organ's lofty position. During this same period he became organist and speciality pianist at the **Trocadero Ballroom** in George Street, **Sydney**. I remember a number of occasions when I drove **Wilbur** in my car from the **Vogue Theatre** to the **Trocadero Ballroom**, then back to the **Vogue**, and finally back to the **Trocadero** again. This was necessary so that he could do his solo presentation at the theatre around 8.10pm, dash to the **Troc** to play for dancing during the orchestra's 15 minute break, return to the **Vogue** to play the intermission music, and be back at the **Ballroom** in time for the orchestra's next break around 9.45 or 10pm.

In 1945 **Wilbur** was appointed Musical Director to the **Macquarie Broadcasting Service** of **2GB** and associated network stations. He was closely associated with the great **Jack Davey** shows, which were probably the most listened to programmes ever broadcast on **Australian** radio. He was a personal friend of **Jack's** and when the **Davey** shows originated from other cities than **Sydney**, which was quite often, **Wilbur** was there on hand at the keyboard to provide the musical part of each show. During the time he was Musical Director at **2GB** he was associated with, and played for, many of the big stars who came to **Australia**, including such names as **George Formby, Ann Ziegler & Webster Booth, Wee George Wood, Allan Jones, Joe E. Brown, Nat King Cole, Johnny Ray, Bob Hope, Donald Peers** and many others. He also played for many famous **Australian** stars such as **Gladys Moncrief, John Fullard** and **Strella Wilson**.

In August 1959 the opening of **QTQ Channel 9 Brisbane** gave **Queensland** citizens their first glimpse of the wonders of television. **Wilbur** was appointed Director of Music at the Channel and under his capable guidance many noteworthy productions came to



light. It has been said that he was one of the few who did not get a blast from newspaper critics in those early days of TV in Queensland. In 1967 Wilbur was invited to become Musical Director at TVQ Channel 0 and he accepted. He presented a regular show entitled "Musically Yours" in which he played request numbers for viewers for viewers and also featured a guest artist. For his Channel 0 appearances he was seen at the console of his own Conn 640 electronic theatre organ. He also played for 5 pre-school shows called "The Wonder Shop" and a one hour talent-seeking show called "New Faces". He was also featured in a 2 hour children's show televised live every Saturday morning. He also appeared nightly at the Regal Motel in Brisbane, thus rounding off his very busy days.

Wilbur was the first Australian

organist to make a Long Play Microgroove record in 1950 and he was also the first organist to make a multiple-track recording in Australia. On that occasion he was heard playing organ, piano and celeste simultaneously. It is also claimed that he was the first Australian organist to be recorded in the Stereo process. Together with the late Flo Paton, one of Sydney's best loved and most popular pianists in the 1940's, he was responsible for many wonderful organ and piano duets on radio and on 78 RPM records. He was the first to use the Bourne Electronic organ on an LP record. This album entitled "Strolling Down Broadway" was an outstanding success. The organ was manufactured by a Newcastle firm trading as Bourne Organs Newcastle, and I had the pleasure of accompanying Wilbur to Newcastle one weekend in 1955 when

he went to try out the Bourne organ and decide whether it would be used for the "Strolling Down Broadway" recording. A tape recording made during that memorable weekend is still in my possession and is a valued souvenir indeed.

Wilbur was a most active and popular member of the Queensland Division of TOSA, giving frequent recitals for them, always to capacity crowds. He was friendly, natural and easy to get along with.

Possibly the most recorded organist in Australia, Wilbur Kentwell was a polished performer on both organ and piano, with a flair for producing musical arrangements which pleased and delighted his many fans.

Frank Ellis



An interesting letter and photo from Fred and Nita Weekes of Wentworthville :

"We enclose an article for the mailbox - a bit of trivia and a photograph which may provide a bit of general-interest reading.

Way back in January 1985, Dale Sutcliffe and husband Michael were visiting New Zealand and whilst on the North Island called at a motor museum somewhat north of Wellington (someone will probably know of it) and were surprised to see a WurliTzer therein.

Somebody said "anyone want to have a go?", so Dale (proficient at organ, piano and voice) took up the

challenge and was photographed whilst playing.

Michael and Dale are not TOSA members but are conversant with TOSA's activities through friendship with Juanita and Fred Weekes.

Yours faithfully,  
C.F. & J.I. Weekes"

The museum is no doubt the Southward Museum. The organ opened in this museum in 1983 and is the 3116 WurliTzer originally installed in Auckland's fabulous Civic Theatre, whose owners reportedly tried unsuccessfully to buy it back for the theatre quite recently.- Ed



# An Afternoon at the Mechanical Music Museum

TOSA members were privileged on Saturday, 26th February to have a preview of this exciting project which **Craig Robson** has opened at his **Service City** complex in industrial **Alexandria**.

Some much-appreciated chairs were soon filled with expectant viewers, although much of the area was roped off so that we could only view the beautiful facade of the **Amsterdam Street Organ**. At 4.15 we heard a few tunes on this instrument, followed by silence again as we waited for the show to start. Many of us wandered over to the huge **Rodgers Century Organ** to admire its vast array of stops - and we were all wondering who the mystery organist would be.

Eventually the ropes were taken down and we were able to have a good look at the rear of the **Amsterdam Organ** and inspect the magnificent restoration work which had been done to the **English** carousel horses and several decorative panels from the **Carousel**. The organ which sits in the middle of the carousel is still undergoing some restoration but we were privileged to hear its first public demonstration.

**Nick Lang** gave some interesting



information about the carousel and a wall display showed the condition of the horses before restoration. We then moved on to a display of memorabilia from **Luna Park**, and some of the penny-in-the-slot Arcade machines from the 1920's and 30's.

The **Mills Violano** next attracted our ears and eyes. This is a rare machine with a small piano (with bass strings in the middle) and 2 violins all played electrically from a special 10-tune roll. There are no pneumatics involved at all and this is one reason why a relatively large number of these

machines has survived. (There are at least 3 double **Violanos** in **Australia**, as well as 4 or 5 single violin machines).

Unfortunately crowding 80 people into a small room to hear delicate music made it difficult for some to see and hear the items. Among the larger items was a roll-playing **Aeolian Grand Reed Organ**, a **Duo-Art Reproducing Piano** and an unrestored **French Barrel Piano**. Two large disk-playing music boxes were easier to hear and everyone marvelled at the auto-change **Polyphon** which took a selected disk from the rack at the bottom, played it and then returned it to its original position - the forerunner of the **Juke-box**. A **Tanzbar** roll-player accordion was played too. These were often favoured by the old-time music-hall performers who wanted to show off their many "talents" - the unit appears to be played manually, when in fact a small roll inside the unit is actually making the music.

Moving back into the main (huge) space allowed us to hear the superb **Decap Dance Organ** with its Art-Deco front and changing coloured lights. The music is enhanced by the 2 Piano Accordions and 4 Tuned Wood-blocks, which give a most novel sound. Suddenly a large puff of smoke emanated from beside the organ and award-winning, ballroom dancers, **Jackie and Mischa**, from **Melbourne** emerged to give a demonstration of Ballroom Dance, accompanied by the **Decap Organ**.

Another rare **Decap Organ** was the **Robot Orchestra** with 3 animated figures. This was one of several built in the 1950's, and only 3 have survived. Originally the **Decap** used a **Hammond Organ** to play the music - accompanied by a real accordion "played" by one of the robots and a percussion set-up played by another. Now the **Hammond** has been replaced by a **Werzi Organ**. The robots shrug their shoulders, move their eyes left, right and centre, and the Saxophonist stands up in a most realistic manner to "play" this instrument.

The **Golden Lion** is the largest of the instruments, and features a wonderful variety of pipes and both a Xylophone and a Glockenspiel. It sounded superb.

**Craig Robson's** latest purchase is a

**Dutch Street Organ** called **De Klok** (The Clock). This instrument has to be played by turning a large fly-wheel at the back of the machine. Several people were invited to try their hands at turning the wheel, and most (including me) gave up well before a complete tune had been played. Obviously for anyone wanting to develop shoulders and chests, the organ would beat an exercise machine hands down! It was extremely difficult to keep the handle turning at a constant speed as various registers were changed (varying the amount of wind required) to enhance the sound.

As a spectacular finale, the very large **Rodgers Century Theatre Organ** was played by **Margaret Hall**,



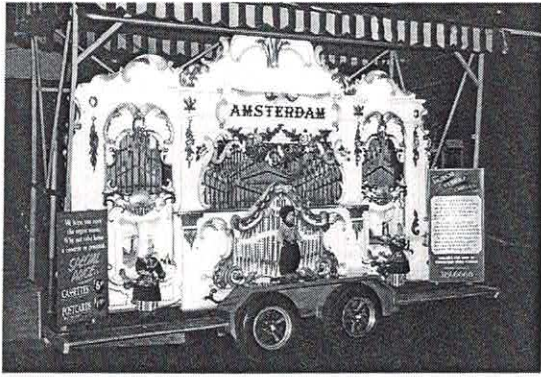
whose playing skills incredibly get better and better. An error-free programme included the title track from her cassette "**Kitten On The Keys**" and a sing-along - the words having been distributed among the tables. The sound was excellent (especially if you moved to a position in front of the loudspeakers - the sound was a little muffled where the chairs and tables had been placed). The **Rodgers Organ** produced a sound very close to a real pipe organ.

This was the first time this private museum had been opened to the public. It will continue to be available by appointment only, so prior bookings are essential. Only large bus groups can be accommodated during the week, but on weekends regular tours will be given. Further details can be obtained by ringing 319 6666. On the weekends when no-one else is in the complex, parking is easy and the organs can be played without any fear of annoying the neighbours (there aren't any). To me it would seem an ideal stop on a tour of **Sydney** for bus-loads of tourists.

**Nick Lang** was an excellent host of the informative and entertaining afternoon.

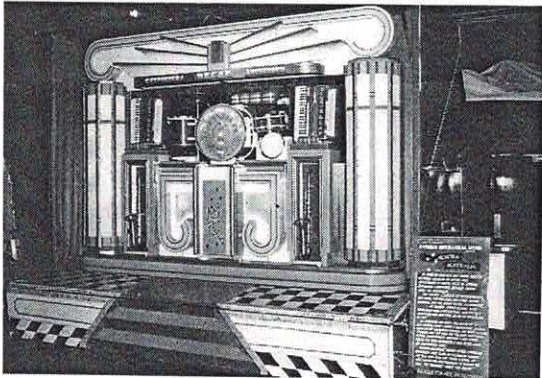
## Technical Details, etc.

**The Amsterdam Street Organ** - built in 1904 by **Remond**



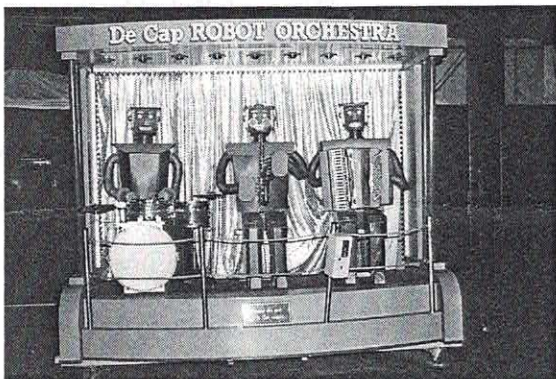
**Duwyn**; subsequently modified to make it a little smaller; plays book-music, using 72 keys and has 400 pipes.

**The Decap Dance Organ** - the coloured lights are operated



by the various registers in the unit, so that yellow lights accompany the accordion, etc.; operates from 13" wide books with 92 keys; made in 1945.

**The Decap Robot Orchestra** - the sound is largely electronic, using a **Werzi Organ**, but this supplemented by the Percussionist (who has 3 positions so that he plays 6 instruments in all), and a real Piano Accordion; pneumatics

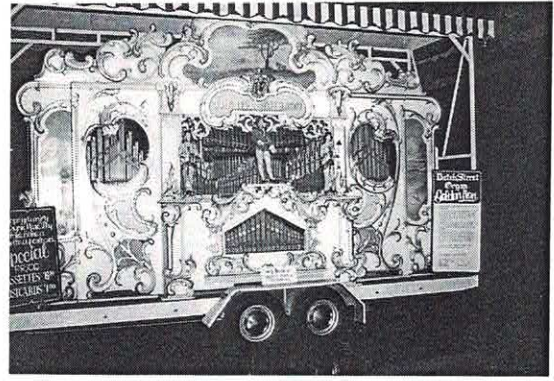


operate the motions of the Robots and the Accordion; the sound is generated by book-music, measuring 13" wide, and with 92 keys.

**The Mills Violin Virtuoso** - is operated by electrical contacts which brush against the 10-tune roll; all these contacts carry 100 volts, with considerable amperage, so loading or changing a roll with the power on is a bit hazardous; although many people operate these units using an electronic power converter, the original rotary converter had the peculiarity that, at switch on, the terminals could be either polarity, i.e. the negative lead this time could be the positive lead the next time - this simple ploy ensured that the magnets which operate the violin fingers and the piano were not saturated

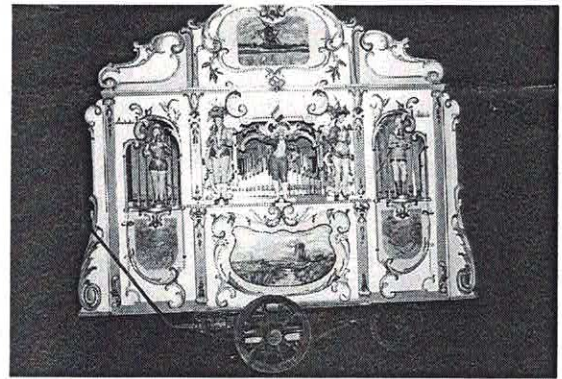
by passing current constantly in the one direction.

**The Golden Lion** - this has 450 pipes and plays book-music



on 56 keys; it has both a Glockenspiel and a Xylophone (unusual); the ornate facade has been partially restored.

**De Klok** - the smallest of the organs and built by **Carl Frei**;



plays from book-music on 56 keys; has a rare sensing unit which actually uses metal fingers to pop up through the music sheets to operate the unit; the other units use a pneumatic system rather like a player piano, but whereas a piano operates on vacuum these organs operate on pressures ranging from 6" to 15".

**The Carousel Organ** - has 500 pipes and was built in 1905



in **Paris** by **Gavioli**; it is an 89 key model and came from **Luna Park**, where it performed for many years as part of the carousel there.

**The Carousel Horses** - have been magnificently restored to their original colours, some of which are not what they seem - the deep-lustered gold areas are actually silver paint covered by coat after coat of orange Shellac.

**Craig** is considering having the entire roof of this complex raised by 10 feet so that the **Carousel** can actually operate - a major and very expensive project. I hope there will be many opportunities to re-visit this wonderful display which must contain the world's largest collection of book-playing organs in the one location.

**Colin Tringham**, with technical details from **Nick Lang**

# A Report on CHRIS McPHEE's CONCERT

Sunday 27th February

by Amy Caldwell



Well! What can one say, after the performance on Sunday. No sooner had Vice President, **Frank Ellis**, announced "**Chris McPhee**" than the audience was applauding. As the **Orion** console appeared, the audience started cheering as well, then settled down to hear an excellent programme.

**Chris** opened with *When You're Smiling* and later told us he was thinking of making this his signature tune. An old ballad, which I remember well, *If*, was the next item, using the lovely lush sounds of the Tibias. The soft mauve and pink lighting used enhanced the mood and highlighted **Chris'** natural colouring.

Another old favourite next, the bright and bouncy *Walkin' My Baby Back Home*. I think this used to be sung by **Johnny Ray**.

**Cole Porter's** *From This Moment On* was **Chris'** next item. He told us that this was his other choice for the opening number. Personally, I think *When You're Smiling* was a good choice - it sums him up so well.

Following this, we had a most delightful *I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles*. I'm sure there were many singing along quietly to themselves during this number, which was followed by a bright and brassy *Alabama Jubilee*.

Another lush ballad, *Easy To Love*, by **Cole Porter** followed. **Chris** told us how he enjoyed showing off the nice harmonies, beautiful Strings and Tibias of the **Orion Wurlitzer** with this piece, also using the Glockenspiel and Chrysoglott. Plenty of variety in this programme, the next piece buzzing in with the title of *Honey Bees*. A **Lyn Larsen** composition was next, *Lover Come Back To Sorrento*.

Rag-time and music from the 20's and 30's are favourites with **Chris**, so then he

gave us a bright and bouncy *Rag Doll*, this time including piano and percussion. Back to the beautiful melodies of **Gershwin**, this time *Soon*.

For the unfortunate few who may have missed this concert, **Chris** wore a crisp white shirt with his black suit, complemented by a deep satin waist coat

and matching bow-tie. Of course we must mention the socks - **Chris** is very proud of his socks! These were white with something buzzing round them - I think they were honey bees. All this, with **Chris'** engaging personality, bright smile and lovely auburn hair, plus the music, gave us a most enjoyable afternoon. The tempo then moved up, with the *Ben Hur Chariot Race March*, featuring a rousing pedal solo. Lots of pinks, reds and orange lighting during this, was most effective.

The final item before interval was the lovely music from **Walt Disney's** *Beauty and The Beast*, again highlighted by the lighting effects. Having already seen this film, I could see the characters come alive as **Chris** played, and I certainly enjoyed listening to **Chris'** arrangement.

THE THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY  
PRESENTS  
**CHRIS McPHEE**  
AT THE  
*Mighty Wurlitzer Theatre Organ*  
HERE ON  
**SUN. 27<sup>TH</sup> FEB. '94**  
AT 2PM  
ENQUIRIES & PHONE BOOKINGS 750 0362

*When Your Smiling* announced the return of **Chris McPhee** at the **Wurlitzer** after interval. *Bring Him Home* from *Les Misérables* was then played in a sensitive and haunting style, quite a lovely melody.

**Chris** then told us of his recent visit to **Hollywood**, and played for us *Hooray For Hollywood* in true cinema style.

Following the traditional theatre style, **Chris** next played **Jesse Crawford's** *Broken Rosary*. Another of the bright and bouncy older melodies favoured by **Chris** was next, and one we all remember, *Oh Johnny*, followed by the **Vera Lynn**



favourite, *A Nightingale Sang In Berkeley Square*.

*Button Up Your Overcoat* next, then in total contrast, we had the sad and moving **Elton John** composition, *The Last Song*. Making use of the **Wurlitzer** piano this time, and inspired by the **Palm Court Orchestra** recording, **Chris** presented *Putin' On The Ritz*.

Following this we had the ballad *When Day Is Done*, based on the arrangement with contrasting moods by **Ron Rhode**.

*Butterflies In The Rain* came next, making use of the Strings without tremos - a tune I was familiar with, but whose name I had not known, until now. A nice catchy little tune which was probably used for the silent movies.

This was followed by the music that seems to suit **Chris** so well, *I Wanna Be Like You* from **Walt Disney's** *Jungle Book* - a most enjoyable arrangement.

A well known song from **Romberg's** *Student Prince* was *Serenade* which captured the mood of the story.

Before the final item, **Chris** told us how much he had enjoyed his magic weekend in **Sydney**, and thanked all concerned.

*In A Persian Market* by **Ketelby** was then played in an exciting style, and was a delightful finish to a most entertaining afternoon.

We were treated to an encore, with **Chris'** own beautiful arrangement of *Waltzing Matilda*.

Thank you **Chris McPhee** for a great afternoon. Please come back soon!

Amy Caldwell

Photography by Barry Tooker

# OUR NEXT ARTISTS

## Cliff Bingham

**Cliff Bingham** began classical organ studies in 1962 at St Matthew's Anglican Church, **Manly**. In 1964, his last year at school, he was featured organ soloist at the **Festival of School Instrumental Music** in the **Sydney Town Hall**, the first of many occasions on which he would feature at the magnificent 5-manual **William Hill Organ**.

**Cliff** joined the **NSW Division of TOSA** in 1962 and, with a natural flair for rhythm and registration, was soon featured at Society meetings at the **State and Capitol Theatres'** organs. Since then, he has played numerous concerts for TOSA in all **Australian States**, on both pipe and electronic organs.

In more recent years, **Cliff** has acted as consultant on several church pipe

organ rebuilds in **Sydney**, the most notable being the fine 26-rank organ in the **East Lindfield Baptist Church**, where he was organist for 12 years. He was also involved in the restoration of the beautiful **Christie organ** in **Epping Baptist Church**, playing at its re-opening during the 1985 **TOSA National Convention** and at an afternoon recital for the official re-dedication several months later.

In December 1981, **Cliff** was appointed organist for the annual "**Christmas at the Opera House**" thus succeeding the late **Wilbur Kentwell**. He was also the first organist to feature the **Opera House organ** on record when he recorded music for the soundtrack of the film, "**Breaker Morant**". He has also played many popular lunch-time recitals at the **Sydney Opera**

**House**.

**Cliff** is the manager of the church organ division of one of **Australia's** leading musical importers. He is married with four children and, apart from his music, he enjoys water skiing and motor racing, the latter strictly as a spectator.

In recent times **Cliff** has played, amongst others, **ACT TOSA's Compton** in **Albert Hall, Canberra**, **Perth's Karrinyup Centre WurliTzer**, **Auckland's Hollywood Theatre's WurliTzer**, and, most recently, was part of **Adelaide's National Convention** last year when he played the newly-installed **Walker organ** in the **Adelaide Town Hall**. Last year **Cliff** was elected President of the **NSW Division of TOSA**.

## Bill Schumacher

From a young age, **Bill** had the ability to play tunes on the keyboard "by ear". When he was 7 years old **Bill** had piano accordion lessons for a 2 year period.

On leaving school **Bill** studied modern piano techniques for some 4 years. Noted **Sydney organist and teacher, Eric Smith** was **Bill's** tutor for popular and classical organ for 5 years.

Twice, **Bill** has won the popular organ section of the **City of Sydney Eisteddfod**. More recently **Bill** has completed a course by correspondence with the **Dick Grove Modern Harmony School** in **Los Angeles**.

The **Hammond Organ Club** was formed in **Sydney** during the 1960's and **Bill** was one of the foundation members, also serving several terms as Musical Director. During this time the first all-**Gershwin** programme ever played in **Australia** was presented in the **Concert Hall** at the **NSW State**

**Conservatorium** and **Bill** was one of the featured artists.

**Bill** is well known for both piano and organ playing in restaurants. He was organist at the **Hawkesbury Inn** for some 10 years and had a 4 year season at the **Burning Log Restaurant** in **Dural**. During this engagement at the **Burning Log** **Bill** worked as a soloist and also as part of the resident band. Many notable personalities appeared at the **Burning Log**, including **Toni Lammond, Gordon Boyd, and Neil Williams**, all working there to **Bill's** stylish accompaniment.

Shortly after the formation of the **NSW Division of TOSA**, **Bill** became a member of the Society and has appeared in concert many times for **TOSA** on the **WurliTzers** in **Sydney's State Theatre, Prince Edward Theatre, and Capitol Theatre**, and also at the relocated organs in the **Orion Centre** and in **Marrickville Town Hall**.

He has also given interstate concerts

at the **Dendy Theatre, Melbourne**, and the **Capri Theatre, Adelaide**.

During several visits to the **USA**, **Bill** has played a recital for the **Puget Sound Chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society**, and has been guest artist at the **Pizza and Pipes Restaurant** in **Seattle**.

**Bill** considers himself fortunate to have visited and played some major **US** theatre pipe organ installations, including **Seattle and Portland Paramount, San Gabriel Civic Auditorium, the Kern residence, Detroit Fox** and both **Portland and Denver's Organ Grinder Restaurants**.

Every **TOSA** concert usually finds **Bill** working indefatigably for many hours on the technical side of things - controlling the setting up of the live sound system and the tape-recording of each concert. This time we will have the pleasure of appreciating his other talents - his musical entertainment skills at the console.