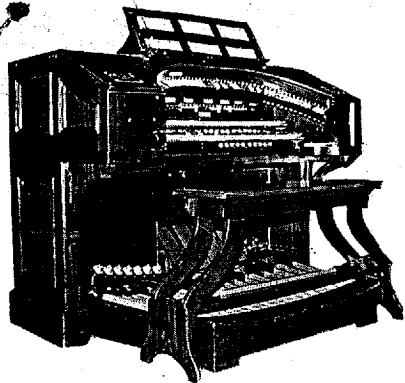
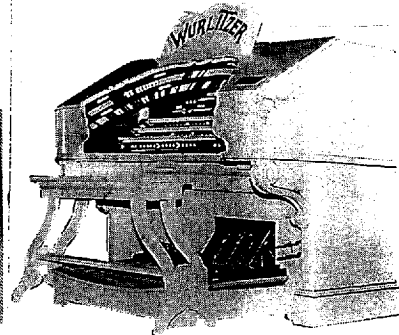


DECEMBER, 1998



TOSA NEWS



2/11 Wurlitzer Theatre Pipe Organ
Marrickville Town Hall

3/17 Wurlitzer Theatre Pipe Organ
Orion Centre Campsie

Happy Christmas



to
all
TOSA
Members

And a
Happy
New Year

Volume 37
Issue 11
PRINTED BY TOSA

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TOSA NEWS

DECEMBER, 1998

THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA (NSW DIVISION) Inc.

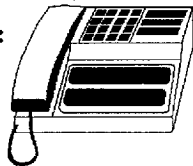
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WORLD WIDE WEB HOME PAGE - TOSA (NSW)

<http://www-personal.usyd.edu.au/~sgroves/tosa/home.html>

DECEMBER

Sunday 6 at 2.00pm Tony Fenelon and
John Atwell's
Duo Christmas Concert
Orion Centre Campsie

Monday 7 at 7.30pm Committee Meeting

JANUARY, 1999

Monday 4 at 7.30pm Committee Meeting

FEBRUARY

Monday 1 at 7.30pm Committee Meeting

MARCH

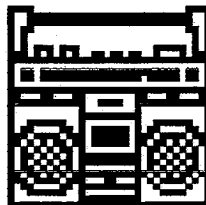
Monday 1 at 7.30pm Committee Meeting

Sunday 21 at 2.00pm John Atwell Concert
Orion Centre Campsie

APRIL

Friday 2nd - Monday 5th
27th National Convention
Melbourne

Monday 12 at 7.30pm Committee Meeting



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2CBA FM - 103.2

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

Season's Greetings



From The President

Hello there - and Seasons Greetings!

Well, our **Annual General Meeting** was held on Sunday 15th November, at the **Service City Showroom** of the **Antique Mechanical Music Museum** - an admirable venue, and I certainly enjoyed the demonstrations that **Margaret** and **Robert Nelsan** turned on for us. Everything from a full-size "Merry-go-round" down through the original **Luna Park** organ, and on to a **Steinway** reproducing piano. If you haven't been, you must go some day - phone (02) 9584 2353 for a look.

And there was lots of floor space for the meeting, at which we had twice the number needed for a quorum!! And what a happy and helpful group of people.

In response to **Margaret's** comments during the meeting, she was persuaded to take on the vacant position on the **Committee**. **Amy Caldwell** was with us too, as she takes her place on the committee. So - welcome the two ladies! And wev won't forget **Ross Adams** who also takes a place on the committee, bringing us back to full strength.

But I won't ramble on any further here, for elsewhere in this edition you will find the **Secretary** and **President's Reports** which I think you will find tell it all.

Until next year.

Walter Pearce

Editorial

Another year gone already - and what a great time it was for **TOSA** members who took advantage of **TOSA's** programme of events - the first-time visits of outstanding overseas theatre organists **Russell Holmes** and **Ken Double**; the excellent performances by our local organists **Margaret Hall**, **Neil Jensen** and **John Giacchi**; the interstate visits of the top-class, home-grown artists like **Chris McPhee**, **Ryan Heggie**, **Tony Fenelon**, **John Atwell** and **Ray Thornley**; two afternoons with **Ian Davies** at **Bondi Junction** and one afternoon at the **Selwyn Theatre**; and 3 **Members' Playing Nights** each at the **Orion** and **Marrickville**. What a great line-up! The committee has certainly done its job in providing opportunities for members and friends to indulge their interest in theatre organs.

Next year promises to be just as exciting, if a little less busy, because of rising costs and lack of numbers at some events. The current committee has some new members and already there are plans for visits by **Simon Gledhill** and **Richard Hills** from the **UK** and there will certainly be return performances from **Tony Fenelon**,

John Atwell and others. All **TOSA** needs is the audience to make all this effort worthwhile.

Please try to support the **TOSA** events as theatre organ is an expensive interest to maintain and none of us want the playing of these fabulous organs to become literally a "dying art" through lack of attendance at our **TOSA** events, which incidentally provide fabulous entertainment as well as being, of necessity, money-raising ventures.

A couple of people have expressed annoyance at the fact that the last page of **TOSA News** has a cut-out booking form which leaves a hole in page 13 when used. As editor, I chose to use this page 13 space so as to provide as much information as possible to members, rather than leaving the space as an uninformative blank. There are two solutions for those who see this as a problem - one is to order your tickets with hand-written information; and the other is to use one of the many means of electronically copying the back page.

From **TOSA** I'm pleased to wish you all a **Happy and Holy Christmas**, with a bright and prosperous **New Year** to follow.

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

Advertising in **TOSA News**

For members:

Small, organ-related
advertisement = FREE

For non-members :

Full page = \$80

Half page = \$40

Quarter page = \$20

Small bubble = \$10



TOSA Queensland's Christie

The organ was shipped to **Australia** from the **Granada Cinema** in **Kent, England**, in 1968 and it was installed in the auditorium of the **Kelvin Grove State High School**, in the suburbs of **Brisbane**

The **Christie** is on its second restoration and this time around another three ranks (Clarinet, Orchestral Oboe and Solo String) are being added to make the organ a three manual, eleven rank instrument. Later the console of the **Christie** will be removed for a total rebuild, adding a new horseshoe stop-rail with a complete set of new tabs.

The **Queensland Division** of **TOSA** is hoping that the **Christie** will be re-commissioned during 1999.

Robin Richmond

One of **Britain's** best-known and best-loved organists, **Robin Richmond**, died on 27th July at the age of 85. **Robin** was the first organist to bring the **Hammond** organ to **Britain**, with his signature tune "*When The Red, Red Robin*".

He produced and presented "*The Organist Entertains*" for 10 years and, through this U.K. radio programme, he was largely responsible for the big surge of interest in the theatre organ in the early 1970's.

He was a much respected and active President of **The Cinema Organ Society of Britain** for the past three years and was one of the longest serving Vice Presidents of the **Lancastrian Theatre Organ Trust**.

ATOS Convention '99

The **American Theatre Organ Society's Convention** for next year is to be held, not in the **USA** as is more usual, but exceptionally, in the **UK**.

Amongst the organists invited to play at this prestigious event you will notice the name of **Australia's** own **Chris McPhee** - congratulations to **Chris** for this well-deserved honour.

The full programme of the **Convention** is as follows:

Saturday, 3rd July

a.m.: St.Martins School, Solihull - **Nigel Ogden** (*Compton 3/11*)
p.m.: Motor Cycle Museum, Solihull - **Keith Tomlin** (*Wurlitzer 3/27*)
evening: as above - **Chris McPhee**

Sunday 4th July

a.m.: State, Kilburn - **Richard Hills** (*Wurlitzer 4/16*)
p.m.: B.B.C. Broadcasting House (*Compton*)
evening: Woking Leisure Centre - **Young Organists** (*Wurlitzer 3/16*)

Monday 5th July

a.m.: Abingdon Abbey Hall - **Arnold Loxam** (*Compton 4/14*)
p.m.: Blenheim Palace - **Thomas Trotter** (*Willis*)

Tuesday 6th July

a.m.: Odeon, Leicester Square - **Donald MacKenzie** (*Compton 5/17*)
p.m.: Clayhall St.John Vianney - **Michaels Maine & Wooldridge** (*Compton 3/6*)
evening: St.Albans Organ Museum - **John Mann** (*Rutt 3/7 & Wurlitzer 3/10*)

Wednesday 7th July

a.m.: Southampton Guildhall - **David Shepherd** (*Compton 4/50*)
p.m.: Woking Leisure Centre - **Len Rawle** (*Wurlitzer 3/16*)
evening: Dinner Cruise - **Russell Holmes & Byron Jones** (*WersilPiano*)

Thursday 8th July

a.m.: Turners, Northampton - **Nicholas Martin** (*Wurlitzer 3/19*)
p.m.: Thursford Collection - **Robert Wolfe** (*Wurlitzer 3/19*)

For the really ardent fans there is to be a Manchester 'Follow-up Weekend' from 9th to 11th July to complete the feast of theatre organ entertainment.

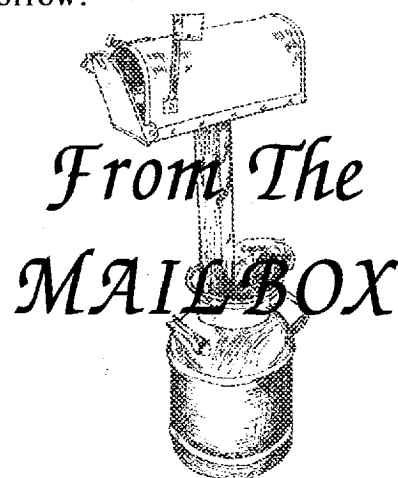
In Sympathy

All **TOSA** members will be saddened to learn of the deaths of two of our number.

Well-known **TOSA** helper and new committee member, **Amy Caldwell**, lost her husband, **John**, on 12th October, whilst on the **Gold Coast**.

Also, **TOSA** member **Don McDonald** passed away on 1st November.

TOSA's sincere sympathy goes to **Amy Caldwell** and **Kathy McDonald** in their time of sorrow.



Bettine Vallance has sent us her thoughts in poetic form about TOSA's Neil Jensen concert with guest artist, Helen Zerefos, at Marrickville Town Hall :

Neil and Helen

Neil and Helen are a wonderful team, Their performance was so beautiful together,

It was an afternoon of sheer musical pleasure.

Their programme was such a delightful choice,

And lovely Helen, as always, was in exceptionally fine voice.

For the first of November, it was a cold windy day,

But weather was forgotten, When these two superb artists came our way.

It was entertainment plus for us all to see and hear,

And the memories of it, I will hold dear.

1998 Annual General Meeting Reports

President's Report

I've only been a member of **TOSA** for around five years, and have been on the committee for about half that. But it has really come home to me how much we owe those early members who spent countless hours pulling apart, repairing, and putting together again the wonderful instruments we have at **Campsie** and **Marrickville**. There are still enthusiasts who get in and get their hands dirty, but we have to face the fact that **TOSA** is, like its members, getting older and is changing. Not that change is necessarily a bad thing. It's just we have to re-think some of our priorities, and look to other sources of labour and membership.

The other thing that hits me is how many capable people are on the Committee or otherwise involved in **TOSA** work. If we had to pay for the Public Relations, Secretarial, Publishing, Financial, Signwriting, Photographic, Legal, Catering and Organ-building skills that are freely given, it would cost us the earth.

I should mention that **Rob Gliddon** has now pulled off the committee due to pressure of other commitments, but he is still our hard working printer, and we thank him for his long service to **TOSA**.

Ex-president **Cliff Bingham** has now taken on the leadership of a committee planning the year **2000 TOSA Convention in Sydney**. He is working, together with several other capable members, so we can reckon the job is in good hands.

This year has seen the re-start of **Members' Playing Evenings** at **Marrickville**, and individual members have also been making good use of the Thursdays which have been allocated to us by Council at no charge. The organ sounds good and is working well. Thank you, **Neil Palmer**.

As to the **Orion**, members will know that we have had a year or more of problems with the high price we have to pay to use the hall. However, I'm glad to be able to say that our finance report still shows an over-all small trading profit. Bookings for weddings and celebrations at the **Orion Centre** are becoming quite heavy, so access for concerts and rehearsals is getting tighter. We have had to cancel a

proposed February 1999 concert because of this, but we don't intend rolling over and playing dead. For the moment we have increased the proportion of concerts at **Marrickville** where the rental is half the price.

It is hoped that in the new year we will be able to have regular **Members' Playing Afternoons** at the **Orion**, for a nominal fee.

The other problem at the **Orion** - known to all readers of **TOSA News** - has been the need to get a new computer and operating system (called **Uniflex**) up and running. Thanks to some recent hard work by **Ron Sullivan** and **John Andrews** the new **Orion** computer upgrade is on the way. Last Thursday a large and weighty hole-drilling gentleman came to the **Orion** for us and he diamond-drilled from the **Orion** stage through six inches of re-inforced concrete into the main chamber. It was an exciting moment - we had measured to the right spot! This means the cabling can be pulled through next week.

Unfortunately the computer (now two years old) is not acting as it should, and **Ron** has had to order a new card and program from **USA**. But if any pair can get it up and running, I reckon it'll be these two.

With regret we must inform members that we have had to part company with our sometimes-honorary, sometimes-paid professional carer for the **Orion Wurlitzer**. We are grateful for good work done over the years, but due to problems in dealing in a business-like manner with the committee and in meeting committee requirements, the end has come for now. This does not preclude future work on a casual contract basis.

We have been pleased with the success of the "Free ticket vouchers" in **TOSA News** which, thanks to our members, have brought in a good number of first-time people. It is hoped these can be persuaded to become members, because after an all-time high around 1995 and 1996 our numbers have tapered off somewhat.

On behalf of the committee, thank you for your attendance and interest today. **Jenny** and I wish you a happy Christmas and a healthy and musical New Year.

Walter Pearce

Secretary's Report

This year's **AGM** is a big change for our **Society** - moving the meeting to an afternoon. The Committee thought that this would be a good move, so as to enable our members who do not like going out at night to attend this meeting. Please thank **Margaret** and **Robert Nelson** for making this interesting venue available to **TOSA** for this afternoon's meeting.

We have staged some great concerts during the year on the **Marrickville** and **Orion Wurlitzers**. The year started out well with **Russell Holmes** playing to a great audience at the **Orion** but some of the later concerts with falling attendances have been a worry for the Committee. Maybe we have too many concerts? With that in mind it has been decided to stage fewer concerts in 1999. The high cost of hiring the **Orion Centre** still remains something we have to live with. If members have any comments or suggestions about our concerts please talk to your Committee members.

During 1999 we will have a welcome return visit from **Simon Gledhill**. **Simon** is always a crowd-pleaser and his return is long overdue. We will also be featuring the brilliant young seventeen-year-old **Richard Hills** from the **UK**. I personally heard **Richard** perform at the **ATOS Convention in Detroit, Michigan**, when he was only fourteen. This kid "has to be heard to be believed". It will be another concert not to be missed.

I must again thank our many helpers. To **Mary** and **Arthur Hall** for their great effort in handling the folding and posting of **TOSA News** each month and have done so for many years. To **Jean Newell** for handling our concert bookings and **Carl Zipsen** for his help with ticket sales on concert days. To **Ruth Brimley** for organising the afternoon refreshments with her many helpers. To **Edith** and **Frank Rohanek** for their many years of help on concert days. Things just wouldn't get done without these people. Thanks also to all the un-named members who volunteer their help to make our concerts a success.

The festive season is almost here again. I take this opportunity to wish one and all a happy time and look forward to your support of the **Society** during 1999.

Bill Schumacher

Young Theatre Organists

An interesting item from the August South Australian TOSA NEWS, written by Gail Ward.

This year has seen a noticeable upsurge in the numbers and performance level of young theatre organists both in Australia and overseas.

Natural abilities and hard work by young musicians, combined with outside encouragement from families and friends, is showing results, some of them quite extraordinary. It is a privilege to be one of those involved with the young organists here and a joy to hear the results of all their hard work at the keyboard.

During Easter four young people presented one of the convention concerts in **Adelaide**. Eleven entrants from three states applied for a place in the concert and all were worthy applicants, with the four concert artists selected being **Jeffrey Andrews**, **Elizabeth Hanton**, **Mathew Loeser** and **Heath Wooster**.

Jeffrey and **Elizabeth** both live in the **Ballarat** area and learn organ from **Myrtle Cox**. **Jeffrey** was obviously thrilled to be performing at the **Capri** organ and presented a selection of tunes that highlighted his bright personality and accuracy at the keyboard. He showed skill and an infectious enthusiasm at both the console and the microphone.

Elizabeth is developing a strong theatre style backed by sound keyboard technique, both of which clearly showed in her performance of music that included a rousing **Malaguena**. Her involvement with school orchestras is giving **Elizabeth** a solid understanding of the colours of individual instruments in an ensemble and she used the ranks of the **Capri** organ wisely and effectively.

Mathew Loeser was the youngest of the artists, but this was no disadvantage. He was taught by **Pat Telford** in **Victor Harbor** and, more recently, takes lessons with **Helen Blakebrough** in **Adelaide**. **Mathew's** hard work and attention to detail is becoming more evident each time he plays. The range of music in his convention tunes showed his ability and willingness to widen the scope of his presentation, and he was the only artist of the whole convention to perform a song that he had composed.

The final artist was **Heath Wooster**

whose teacher is **Addam Stobbs**. **Heath's** selection included the **Titanic** theme, **My Heart Will Go On**. All his music was played well and with a confidence gained from regular performances before theatre and concert audiences in **Melbourne** and **Australasia**.

In the last decade a number of **Australian** organists have gained encouragement through their participation in the **American Theatre Organ Society's** annual **Young Theatre Organist** competition. Our country has sponsored **John Giacchi**, **Chris McPhee**, **Sean Henderson**, **Kylie Mallett**, **Heath Wooster** and **Ryan Heggie** as winners in the contest. These musicians are all making a name for themselves in the world of the theatre organ, with several of them already being invited for return engagements.

Chris McPhee is the latest to be asked to perform overseas, with the announcement last month in **San Francisco** that he will be the only overseas artist to perform a concert at the **1998 ATOS Convention** which will be held in **London** next July. Congratulations, **Chris!**

Six **Adelaide TOSA** members attended the **1998 ATOS Convention** in **San Francisco** - **Peter Beames**, **Katrina**, **Ron** and **Ryan Heggie**, and **Gail** and **Graham Ward**. Two of the concerts included young people aged from fourteen to twenty, with two **Australians** amongst them.

The annual **Young Theatre Organists** concert this year featured the **1998** section winners and the **1997** overall winner, **Ryan Heggie**, playing the majority of the concert. The instrument for the concert was the **4/33 WurliTzer** in the **Berkeley Community Centre**, a 3,000 seat auditorium.

Ryan Heggie played the first half of the concert and the final moments, featuring some tunes from his known repertoire, plus quite a few new ones prepared for this event. He included old favourites like the **Typewriter Song**, **Wind Blows from the Lake Narcissus** and **Lover Man**, plus a beautiful, haunting **Meditation** and other music that I hope he will perform at the **Capri** in coming months. **Ryan** managed the

large instrument well and we were all very proud of him for his fine presentation.

The section winners were **Robert Sudall** (14 years, **England**), **Ron Reseigh** (16 years, **USA**) and **Heath Wooster** (20 years, **Australia**). All three winners played for ten minutes each and were judged for overall winner by a panel of artists in the audience. The three young men played extremely well and could all be proud of their performances. The overall winner for **1998** is **Ron Reseigh**, who will go on to anchor the **1999** concert in **London** next July.

The other young person to perform at the convention was **Richard Hills**, a seventeen year old **English** organist who is already at the top of the theatre organ world. **Richard** was the overall winner of the **ATOS** contest three years ago and he has literally taken the theatre organ world by storm. His presentation at the organ and the microphone is so brilliant that it is hard to believe he is so young - he hasn't been alive long enough to be so mature!

I had heard a lot about **Richard** before hearing his concert at the **4/26 WurliTzer** at the **Oakland Paramount Theatre**, a beautiful instrument in a stunning 3,000 seat auditorium. Before he had finished the opening number it was clear his is a special talent. **Richard** had the audience in the palm of his hand from the opening chords and even well known organists at the top of their profession were in awe of his authority at the console. Despite being in total command of the whole performance **Richard** was not elitist. He communicated well with the audience and was totally confident without arrogance. The standing ovation at the end of the concert was well earned and I hope you will remember **Richard's** name, for he is a young man going places! We hope to have him in **Australia** before he is twenty - long before then if possible.

It has been a joy to hear so many young people making their musical progress with the theatre organ - and we are only halfway through **1998!** Whatever the future holds for them and all the other promising young players in our midst, I am confident that the theatre organ is in good hands for the next generation.

TONY FENELON AT CHATSWOOD

with

THE TWO TENORS

DEAN SINCLAIR *and* ROY WEISSENSTEINER

and SOPRANO LESLIE MARTIN

FRIDAY 19th FEBRUARY 1999

at 8pm

TOSA MEMBERS' PRICE : \$12

ADVANCE BOOKINGS NOW BEING ACCEPTED

BY PHONING : 9417 2987

From ATOS International News June 1998

THE ADELAIDE CAPRI

The Capri Theatre in suburban Goodwood in Adelaide, South Australia, did not have an organ when built in 1940. When the South Australian Division of the Theatre Organ Society of Australia [TOSA(SA)] bought it as a home for our organ, the seating was reduced from 1250 to 865, and the organ was constructed in front of the original stage on the Stalls (Orchestra) floor in place of the removed seats. It occupies two chambers on either side of the large screen.

The theatre is equipped for all wide screen formats and 3D film projection with state of the art sound. The current film *Titanic* has been shaking the floor for several weeks now.

There is a screen curtain, and another much larger one in front of it which can be drawn back from the screen for films, and further to reveal the chambers when the organ is playing the overture, or for the regular organ concerts which have featured most of the world's finest theatre organists. The chambers are fronted by large panes of centimetre thick glass, with the shutters above them, speaking directly into the auditorium.

The four manual 273 stop tab *Wurlitzer* console is on a lift at centre stage, so that organists can hear each chamber in correct balance, and the presence of the organ in the theatre is so direct that it is easily possible to hear where the ranks in use are situated, while at the same time the ensemble is very full and satisfying with the small "just right" amount of reverberation that the theatre has.

Both the console and the chambers can be lit with an array of changing colours, and this includes; the reservoirs, tremulants and wind lines in the sub-chambers which are in both timber and PVC. So far from the latter being cheap and nasty, it is by far the most neatly satisfactory of all trunking and it catches the lighting in a most decorative fashion. One of the secrets of the success of this organ which is generally acknowledged to be one of the finest of its kind in the world is the very careful attention which was given to optimum winding and tremulation.

Each chamber has its own blower. Two of the 30 actual ranks, the 16' Tibia I extension and the Diaphonic Diapason are unenclosed behind the screen, as is the Marimba Harp. All other percussions except the chimes are unenclosed in front of the chambers so that they can be seen working

when in use.

The large apron-stage in front of the screen is able to accommodate large bands and choral groups which are frequently featured with the organ, as well as a grand piano and the organ's own piano, which can be seen on opposite sides of the stage at all times without being in any way obtrusive during film presentations.

We believe that this organ is the only one in an operating cinema anywhere in the world where the organ can be seen by the audience as are the several fine pizza parlor instruments in the USA, and we are very proud of it.

The cinema is, apart from a small core management and projection staff, operated by unpaid volunteers. As one of them (and I'm a licensed projectionist of 57 years experience as well), this retired teacher greatly enjoys showing visitors our theatre and organ, and giving them information about the other organs in Adelaide and in other Australian cities.

The Capri 4/29 Theatre Organ, Adelaide, South Australia, contains pipes and percussions from Christie, Dodd, Kimball, Meyer & Sons, Stephens, Trivo, Wangerin, and Wurlitzer.

Brian Pearson

Sounds of the Mighty Wurlitzer

TOSA member, John Atkins, has found two great articles on theatre organs in a UK publication called Best of British. This is the first one, and comes from the July issue this year, and the other article is on Reginald Dixon and will be included in a future issue of TOSA News.

Allan Warburton traces the rise and fall of one of the most magical musical instruments ever made - the theatre organ

When we of the older generation look back to the days of our youth in the 1920s and 30s we think of our simple pleasures and pursuits. One of the most enjoyable was cinema-going, and in the days before television we often went three or four times a week, usually with a pal or girl friend. One of the highlights, for me at any rate, was hearing and seeing the magnificent *Wurlitzer* organs installed in the larger picture palaces.

Before 1927 films were all silent, and to alleviate the monotony every picture house had its musicians in some form or other to provide background music. It usually consisted of a lone pianist, trio or even small orchestra watching the screen intently and playing suitable music for each scene.

America led the way into building the super-cinemas with ornate auditoria and plush reception halls. It was also decided that something had to be done to improve cinema music accompanying the silent films. A lone pianist was obviously inadequate for a large cinema, straight organs were not considered versatile enough for the purpose, so the powers-that-were decided to install a new type of organ, complete with sound effects, in their cinemas.

It was left to a New York organ firm headed by **Rudolph Wurlitzer**, together with a brilliant English inventor named **Robert Hope-Jones**, to produce a modern, super organ. **Hope-Jones** set to work revolutionising the instrument, and his collaboration with **Wurlitzer** produced an organ called '*The Wurlitzer-Hope-Jones Unit Orchestra*', soon to be shortened to '*The Mighty Wurlitzer*'.

The traditional console with cumbersome drawknobs was replaced by a horseshoe-shaped one. The drawknobs were replaced by tabs, which were really

switches using low-voltage electricity, doing away with the previous system of mechanical linkage of rods and wires. The tabs could be flipped up and down easily to control the various sections of the organ. With this new system the organ console could be placed at virtually any distance from the organ pipes themselves, connected by an electric cable. This enabled it to be placed on a lift so that the organist could be seen during solo work and descend from the stage to accompany films.

The ranks of pipes were placed in chambers either above or at the side of the stage. Shutters controlled the volume, so that when the organist depressed a swell pedal at the console the shutters opened, thereby increasing the sound. The tremulants were refined dramatically to result in the special theatre organ sound which characterised the *Wurlitzer* organs. The most important innovations were the sound effects such as drums, cymbals, marimba, bells, chimes, castanets, wood block, sleigh bells, bird whistles and even a grand piano! All could be controlled from the organ keyboards.

The new *Wurlitzers* were sensational, and cinema companies were falling over themselves to have the new organs installed in their picture houses, no matter what it cost. There was great rivalry between theatre owners as to who had the mightiest and most ornate models. There was also the benefit that only one musician, the organist, had to be paid. Cinema organists were the new stars on the musical scene and were very popular, becoming a feature of cinema programme in own their right.

Alas, the fate of the new cinema and theatre organs was sealed in 1927 when **Al Jolson** burst on to the scene in the first 'talkie' film, *The Jazz Singer*. At a stroke, the face of the whole film business was changed when soundtracks were added. The 'film musical' was born, and huge sound-stages were built on the studios to cater for the demand as the public flocked to see the famous **Busby Berkeley** spectaculars of the 1930s such as the *Gold Diggers* series. Theatre organs were redundant.

The cinema companies had invested a lot of money in their organs, and hastily used them as separate features providing a musical interlude between films. This

proved to be quite a good move, and retained the popularity of the star organists who were now broadcasting frequently from the cinemas.

The undisputed king of the *Wurlitzer* in this country was the late **Reginald Dixon**, who entertained holiday makers in the **Tower Ballroom, Blackpool**. He remained there for more than 40 years becoming one of the resort's major attractions, and eventually was christened "*Mr Blackpool*". To see him in action seated at the organ console reeling off the popular tunes of the day was all education in itself.

As the years went by and television made its presence felt, picture houses were forced to cut costs as a result of declining audiences. One of the first casualties was the organ, which took up a lot of valuable space and was costly to maintain. They were dismantled and sold off, some to clubs and pubs, and others to private individuals. Some enthusiasts with money to spare installed organs in their homes, many having to practically rebuild their houses to accommodate their acquisition.

The organists also went. Some took up cinema management, and others switched to the *Hammond* organ to play in clubs and the like. On a visit to **London** in the 1950s I found a famous cinema organ playing in a pub!

Theatre organ preservation societies have played a large part in rescuing these magnificent instruments and keeping their memory alive. These societies consist of amateur enthusiasts who give up their spare time to restore cinema organs which otherwise would finish up on the scrapheap.

Although not a professional, I have played many theatre organs in years gone by, including the largest in **Europe** at the **Granada, Tooting** - and what a thrill that was!

Initially the *Hammond* organ replaced the cinema organ, being more portable. The modern electronic organ can reproduce faithfully the sounds made by its big brother, along with rhythms and accompaniments. I have an electronic piano which has an organ built into it.

Sadly, the age of the *Mighty Wurlitzer* has gone, but the memory lingers on.

Allan Warburton

LESSER SLESSOR?

by John S. Batts

John Batts is a TOSA (NSW) member from Canada who is currently in Sydney as an Hon. Visiting Fellow in the English Faculty of the University of New South Wales. He has sent us the results of some interesting discoveries he has made about theatre organs references in literature. For professional reasons he needs to keep copyright, but has kindly offered his thoughts free for publication in TOSA News.

National Poetry Day (1 September) passed without too much impact on the nation, despite ABC radio's "Australia's Favourite Poem" and a TV tribute to **Les Murray**. **Andrea Stratton** of ABC assured *The Sydney Morning Herald's Don Anderson* ("Behind the Lines" 3 October, p.11) that thousands voted for **Kenneth Slessor's** "Five Bells", dutifully read on TV by **Lucy Bell**. TOSA members may recall journalist and war correspondent **Slessor** (1901-1971) as a poet, especially his 1938 elegy for **Joe Lynch** accidentally drowned in **Sydney Harbour** in 1926. Nevertheless, can you name any of his collections of verses? Entirely new to me, *Backless Betty from Bondi* (Angus and Robertson, 1983) has claim to a moment of exposure (I almost said "fame"!) before readers sharing enthusiasm for the T.O.

Most of us know that over the centuries literature generally has made use of organ references. If pressed, we can perhaps draw on a **Shakespeare** allusion to playing on stops or a seventeenth-century **Milton** referring to the grandeur of organ music. Later there are other poets and some novelists who use images from the king of instruments. What, though, of that twentieth-century pipe cousin, the theatre organ? How has it fared in the annals of contemporary literature? To my knowledge, not widely and not very well.

There are, by contrast, films by the dozen which have used (?misused) theatre organs as passing references or even passing sights. Few enough TV programmes have emulated the episodes of the UK's drama series, *Lipstick on Your Collar*, which made use of a tacky theatre organist with big dreams - it featured **The State**, **Grays** (Essex) 3/6 **Compton** with illuminated console. However, mainstream authors reflecting this not insignificant part of popular history in earlier decades of this century are rare.

Maybe a good example is novelist **Graham Greene** writing in the 1950s about how his **English** hero in **Africa** tuned in to the **BBC** and could make out over the airwaves the groaning of the **Orpheum**, **Clapham**. I have always assumed that phrase a veiled tribute to the **Granada**, **Clapham's** 3/8 **WurliTzer!** In addition, if theatre organs can "talk", they can certainly groan, being excellent instruments for conveying a wide range of human emotions. However, I suggest that many readers of

Graham Greene may take that **Orpheum** reference to be unflattering.

Which brings me back to the **Australian** scene and to **Slessor's** *Backless Betty*. **Kenneth Slessor's** light verses, adorned with illustrations, originally appeared from 1928 onwards in *Smith's Weekly*, which he edited. A selection called *Darlinghurst Nights* was published in 1933. In *Backless Betty from Bondi*, a collection of pieces written between 1928 and 1933, the subjects for his effusions are very much of the everyday surface, such as "Underwood Ann", a secretary-typist who "runs the whole show," or the charms of a daring pre-**Gable Betty** who displayed her curves to beach-worshippers.

As occasional film-reviewer during the 1930s, **Slessor** must have visited organ-equipped cinemas of downtown **Sydney**. Since the name "**WurliTzer**" is popularly generic for theatre organs, it could be that **Slessor's** exposure to these musical instruments was actually to **Christies** as well. Moreover, it could even be that **Slessor** was really thinking of those small **American Fotoplayer**s, examples of which were once to be found at the **Haymarket** and **Crystal Palace Theatres**, and even at entertainment spots of his youth like **The Princess**, **Majestic**, **Lyceum**, **Hoyt's Picture Palace**, and the old **Opera House**. I gather the **Embassy**, **Manly**, may also have had what was a **Fotoplayer**, sometimes called a "**Seeburg Music Machine**".

If **WurliTzers** are intended, then on chronological grounds we can exclude the **Plaza's** small two manual installed in 1938; perhaps, also, two private installations in **Rose Bay** and **Blakehurst** are unlikely provocations. That still leaves other **WurliTzers** opened in the twenties that **Slessor** may well have heard on his rounds of film-reviewing. One cannot exclude the **Arcadia**, **Chatswood** (Op.1167) and its 2/10 either, because **Slessor** grew up there. Other possible public "mighties" include (chronologically by date of installation): **The Wintergarden** (1920), the **Prince Edward** (1924: Op.875), the **New** (1927), and the wonderful crop of 1928, the **Regent** (Op.?1808), **Capitol** (Op.1813), and **King's Cross Theatre** (Op.1868) - the same year that talking pictures came to town at the **Lyceum**. Probably **Slessor's** views were already formed by the time **The State** (Op.2005) plus magnificent 4/

21 opened in 1929.

However intriguing the speculation, we shall now never really know. Yet somewhere in the stalls or upper circle he must have encountered inspirations like "The Girl in the Gods" who retained "her dreaming in **Rialtos** / When she's really in the train." The writer can also enthuse about the "Little Theatre Girl" in the manner of **Gilbert**, if not **Sullivan**: "Your brews are not so dizzy / But SHE can make them whirl / That pretty little busy little / Little Theatre Girl." Girls of the early thirties clearly fascinated him, whether shop-assistants at Christmas ("Extra Hand"), gate-openers, a girl on the corner, or "Backless Betty" herself.

Clearly, **Slessor's** persona was in love with cinema usherettes, to whom he dedicates "*Firefly*" - "I've fallen in love with a firefly, / Two legs and a flambeau complete, / A heavenly smile as she runs down the aisle, / And a laugh as she bangs down the seat." This is the poem that refers to the theatre organ. Alas, it appears in a catalogue of cinema features that fade in comparison with the anonymous, idealised usherette. The poetic voice cannot adore **Mae West** or even **Greta Garbo**. For culminating effect, our besotted speaker claims to dislike cinema decor and (wait for it!):

"The statues can rust in a thicket
The **WurliTzer** gives me a pain;
If it wasn't a firefly who gazed on
my ticket,

I wouldn't have come here again."

Ah, well, love's powers have ever played havoc with human judgement! Light verses like these, anyway, do not make the emotional impression of "*Five Bells*". So, happily, this verse did not make the TV-radio airwaves last month. More generally, however, are there some positive images of the theatre organ in literature? Do let me and TOSA readers know!

Further Reading:

Davis, Abe. *A Day Before Yesterday: Good Old Sydney Town.*

Rushworth, Graeme D. *Historical Organs of New South Wales: The Instruments, Their Makers and Players, 1791-1940.*

Kenneth Slessor. *Backless Betty from Bondi*, illustrated by **Virgil Reilly**, **Frank Dunne**, and **Joan Morrison**; ed. **Julian Croft**. Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1983.

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The designer and operator of the lighting for TOSA's Orion concerts, Miles Perry, has been displaying another facet of his many talents by appearing in the Miranda Musical Society's production of "Me and My Girl".

This is an article from The St George and Sutherland Shire Leader newspaper, 17th September.

Miles of smiles in Me And My Girl

WITH his cheeky grin and dry sense of English humour, Miles Perry has become one of the stalwarts of live theatre in the southern suburbs.

You could argue that the role of Bill in Me And My Girl was made for Miles.

It gives this versatile young actor the chance to really shine on stage as it combines singing, dancing and plenty of the humorous patter which Miles is so good at delivering.

Me And My Girl is being presented by Miranda Musical Society from September 23 at Sutherland Entertainment Centre.

The Perry family migrated to Australia from England in 1981 and through a friendly and encouraging neighbour all joined Sutherland Light Opera Company.

Miles first appeared on stage at the age of 11 as Kurt in The Sound of Music.

Two of his sisters were also cast as members of the Von Trapp family.

Miles has since gone on to star in productions for Ashfield, Engadine

and Rockdale musical societies, Hurstville Light Opera Company, The Regals, and Sutherland Theatre Company, among others.

Miles is also known for his technical prowess.

He has designed and operated lighting for many productions and is the resident lighting and design operator for the Theatre Organ Society of Australia.

The leading lady in Me And My Girl is Leonie Johnson as Sally Johnson.

Following teachers' college, Leonie joined the Metro Theatre Company where she performed in two productions before joining Miranda Musical Society for the chorus of Damn Yankees in 1989.

Some career highlights include the role of Anita in West Side Story, Hope in Anything Goes, Irene in the musical Irene, Fontine in Les Miserables and Fanny Bryce in Funny Girl.

Leonie has also performed with Canterbury Theatre Guild in Chess.

Thanks to Margaret Hall for the cutting



From the TOSA Committee

Ritchie Willis' Concert for TOSA

Many thanks to Ritchie and Norm for opening their home once again for the annual TOSA Benefit Concert. Also TOSA would like to thank ALL the artists who donated their services for the concert.

A generous donation was also received, bringing the total amount raised to well over \$400. A greatly appreciated effort from Ritchie and Norm and their artists.

Raffle Prize Donations

Many thanks to Mrs R. Cant, to the Hambly family and to Robert Gliddon for their kind donations of raffle prizes. The goods were most attractive and were very much appreciated.

Cash Donation

Thanks to Mr David Devenport for his generous donation to TOSA funds, handed in at the Ritchie Willis' Home Party.

- *Globe-trotting TOSA member, Jim Coupland, of Elanora Heights, found this interesting item in the Mercury newspaper, whilst staying with his sister in Greenwich, London :*

Organ fans pull out stops to hear Compton classic again

ORGAN enthusiasts are looking for donors to breath some life back into one of the world's rarest cinema organs.

The Compton organ in Lewisham Theatre has entertained patrons since 1932 - but for the last 15 years it has remained dormant due to the vast overheads of keeping its 900 pipes in tune.

But now members of the Theatre Organ Preservation Society want to raise the £4,000 needed to restore it to its former glory and put on a series of six concerts.

Member Alan Pautard said: "This organ is unique. It is one of only two in the world where the solo is played on the bottom keyboard and the accompaniment is on the top. Usually it is the other way round.

"All we need is £4,000 to maintain it for a year and give six concerts. The more it is played the more it is kept in tune."

The organ, now protected by a preservation order, was

by Jay Bowers

built with the theatre in 1932 and came equipped with all the sounds necessary to accompany the silent movies.

Alan said: "It has all the effects including fog horns, horse hoofs and sleigh bells - and one of the pipes is a proper steam whistle."

With the start of the talkies, the organ was then played as a solo instrument between films by the theatre's organist Keith Hurford.

But it made its last performance in 1983 in the

Sand Song Symphony.

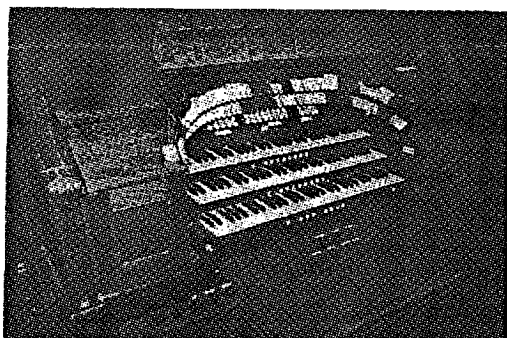
Lewisham Theatre co-manager Chris Hare said: "It is a wonderful thing and part of cinema heritage, but we know it would be a loss leader for us to do on our own. I just hope that the initial interest will hold up, and more ideas will come forward to keep it in working order.

"We were earmarked some money from the council to re-tune it but sadly it fell through."

To make a donation or for more information ring co-founder of the Theatre Organ Preservation Society, David Pawlyn on 01296 489847. (in the UK, of course!)



ORGAN FANS: Alan Pautard (left) with Chris Hare.



***** **Lyn Larsen** ***** to play

at TOSA's 1999 Easter Convention in Melbourne

The grand opening concert on the 4/36 Mighty Wurlitzer in the Regent Theatre will feature *not only* Tony Fenelon *but also* the legendary US organist, Lyn Larsen !!

NEIL JENSEN *in Concert*

Report by John Shaw

Marrickville Town Hall Sunday 31st October 1998

A fine day saw a crowd of 300 strong turn out to hear Neil's return to the **Marrickville Wurlitzer**. *It's All Right With Me*, *Another Openin' Another Show*, all performed with ease and panache. *Wunderbar* followed with contrasting soft registrations and the lilting rhythm in 3/4 time. *So In Love* was introduced with strings and expressively performed with the beguine rhythm punctuated with the tambourine. *From This Moment On*, although a difficult song, sounded laid-back in a sophisticated style and led into *So In Love* and a reprise of *Another Openin' Another Show*.

In complete contrast Neil's next choice was *My Heart Will Go On* from the recent movie *Titanic*. A romantic ballad which, like most new tunes, sounds better at each hearing. No doubt this song will be around for some years to come. Next we heard an up-tempo, jazzy arrangement of *Something's Gotta Give*. The **Wurlitzer** however, certainly did not give under Neil's expert control and once again this particular instrument sounded especially responsive and perfectly attuned to jazz.

This programme included a special treat with **Helen Zerefos** as Neil's associate artist. As always, the ever stunning **Helen**, dressed in a gold and silver gown, sang crowd-pleasers and had the audience in the palm



of her hand. Songs included show-stoppers such as *Climb Every Mountain*, *You'll Never Walk Alone*, *I Could Have Danced All Night*, *I Dreamed a Dream*, and finishing with the aria *Sempre Libera degg'io* from *La Traviata*.

Neil again entertained with selections from **Jerome Kern's Showboat** which has been playing at the **Lyric Theatre** for some months. An impressive introduction, which included phrases of *Old Man River* in different keys (or maybe quays?), segued into phrases of several other songs. The musical, written in 1927, has stood the test of time with every melody in the show a hit song. This medley was needless to say most popular with the audience.

Bojangles of Harlem followed, punctuated by the Chinese block and the bluesy ballad *Can't Help Lovin' dat Man* played in tempo with a percussive beat and chimes on the closing chords. A long varied arrangement of *The Way You Look Tonight* was most interesting and *Waltz In Springtime* produced an expressive rendition going from *pp* to *ff*.

The immortal *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes* followed and Neil selected registrations not unlike a *Hammond* sound. A nice key modulation from E flat into G, I think, enhanced the arrangement. The song, *Who*, preceded a reprise of *Old Man River* which closed the first half.

A speedy, rousing *Knightsbridge March* introduced the second half and was followed by a moving arrangement of *What a Wonderful World* (made famous by *Satchmo*) The jazzy phrasing suited this ballad.

Rossini's *The Italian Girl in Algiers* was probably the pièce de résistance in the second half and Neil's arrangement took advantage of everything a Theatre Organ has to offer. Heavy applause expressed the audience's appreciation.

Cry Me a River once again exemplified Neil's ability to play a jazz ballad and the instrument's ability to sound like a jazz band. Of course, modern harmonies with handfuls of flatted 5ths, 9ths, 13ths, etc., were accompanied by a superbly controlled tap cymbal and played in tempo throughout.



The re-appearance of Helen Zerefos in yet another stunning gown caused some jocular remarks from Neil. Helen sang the *Phantom of the Opera* overture, then another Lloyd Webber "hit", *Memory* from *Cats*. *Don't Cry For Me Argentina* followed. The next song, normally associated with tenors, was chosen by Helen who explained that it had been sung by Deanna Durban in a film - *Nessan Dorma*, from *Turandot*.

Helen's personality and humour of course was a lot of fun and the two artists have worked together for many years and are able to interchange humorous remarks and taunts to the

amusement of the audience.

Neil introduced his next bracket to honour the centenary of the birth of that great Broadway composer George Gershwin. From threads of *Someone To Watch Over Me* into *Fascinating Rhythm*, *Of Thee I Sing*, a *Rhapsody in Blue* segment, *But Not For Me* and the rare 3/4 time *By Strauss*. An Al Jolson arrangement of *Swanee* preceded the

smooth sophisticated and interesting version of *Someone To Watch Over Me*, with colourful chord progressions. Threads of the *Rhapsody In Blue* ended the bracket.

The Barcelona Olympic song, *Friends For Life*, complete with tambourines, concluded the concert.

It was evident from the beginning that Neil was enjoying himself immensely at the Marrickville console and I think the audience were quick to share his and Helen's enthusiasm in a musically correct and fun afternoon. Neil assures us that he is looking forward to returning in the not too distant future.



Photos
by
Barry
Tooker



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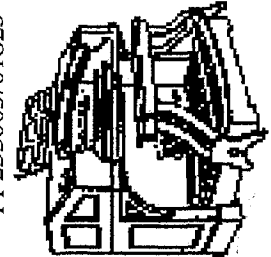
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