

T.O.S.A. NEWS

INCORPORATING *The Diaphone*

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA, N.S.W. DIVISION

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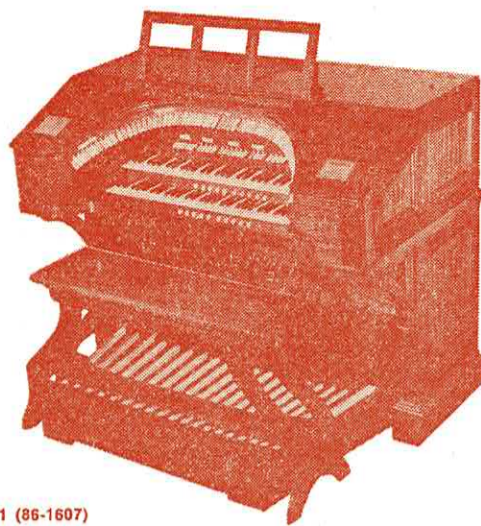
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40c



VOLUME 11 NUMBER 5

MAY 1972

"The CHRYSOGLOTT"

Too many dumb notes? Only three letters - all detrimental, so back to the stodge!
In other words, the Mixture as before. Very rank. Ugh!'. Although well shaken
only sentiment was stirred up - not sediment.

The Merry Month of May.

6th. Wilbur Kentwell at Chatswood Town Hall. The event will be advertised as:

"FROM STRAUSS TO BROADWAY with WILBUR KENTWELL"

The concert will commence at 8 p. m. and the doors will open at 7 p. m. A block of 200 tickets will be retained for TOSA Members until 7.30 ONLY priced \$1.50. After this time any unsold tickets will be on sale to the general public at \$2. A packed house is expected and it will be a case of first come, first served. Be early and avoid disappointment. Interest is running very high and N. O. S. have booked a coach.

15th. MINI ORGAN EXPOSITION 8 p. m. Leigh Memorial Hall, Macquarrie Street, Parramatta. Presented by Wadsworth-Stamford, this will be a free night of informal organ music and fun. Coffee will be served during the evening. All welcome.

19th. Neville Wright's Organ party.
Location: 67 Clarke Street, Peakhurst (cnr. Clarke/Evans Streets).
Organ: Conn 543 Minuet
Guest Organist: Bill Schumacher
Time: 8 p. m.

IMPORTANT In order to be admitted guests should have the following:-

- (a) \$1 each (for Capitol Organ Fund)
- (b) a large appetite

A phone call (533 5516) a few days before the night would be appreciated as accommodation is limited to about 40.

24th. WADSWORTH-STAMFORD ORGAN SPECTACULAR and YAMAHA PLAYING CONTEST

Ryde Civic Hall. Commencing at 6 p. m. Admission 50 cents. Children free. Guest organist will be Miss Yuri Nishimura from Japan featured on the Yamaha EX 42 model. Wadsworth-Stamford offer free practise facilities to contestants, and advice, so contact them NOW for details. Phone Parramatta 635 6037 : Chatswood 419 2158 or 412 3948, Bankstown 709 6760.

Thanks

TOSA is grateful to Music Maker magazine for providing the programmes at Cecil Cranfield's "Sentimental Journey" evening at Marrickville on April 14th, As mentioned in the "Chrysoglott" last month "Music Maker" ran an article on Registration by Don Kingston as well as other news of general musical interest. The annual subscription to this well-produced magazine is only \$3, 60 from Box 4526, GPO Sydney, 2001, or 30 cents for individual copies. It is on sale at most music stores, too.

Sympathy

MRS. DOREEN GROVES, well known to many readers was killed in a car accident last month. Her husband, PETER GROVES, wishes to thank all TOSA members who sent letters of sympathy on hearing of the tragedy.

Profit

The special evening at the Burning Log restaurant on March 27th made a profit of \$75 which has been donated to the Capitol Organ Fund. Joh. Congert played a varied programme on the unique WurliTzer electronic installation to a packed house.

Some constructive criticism was passed which should result in improvements to the speaker system. A good time was had by all and we are grateful to Mr. Congert for playing and Mr. & Mrs. Creighton the proprietors of the restaurant for making the event possible.

Regret

It is with great regret that the executive committee announce the resignation of ROD BLACKMORE. Few people have done more for the Society than Rod and he has certainly not lost interest but as he is moving to Newcastle he will be unable to attend committee meetings. Good luck to you Rod - Sydney's loss is Newcastle's gain.

Our member HEATHER MOEN is one of the ten organists to be invited to perform in a series of recitals at Sydney Town Hall later this year. Congratulations, Heather.

Hurstville Municipal Council are investigating the possibility of installing the ex-Capitol organ in their Amaroo Hall. This is just one of several proposals put to TOSA and all are being carefully considered.

Reginald Porter-Brown.

Reginald Porter-Brown's recital at Sydney Town Hall on 16th July 1972 marks the opening of his tour. Seats will be available from Mitchell's and David Jones nearer the time and will be sold for \$2. 50 and \$1. 75 - the majority of tickets will be in the higher price range. However tickets will be made available to TOSA members for \$2 (best seats only); members wishing to take advantage of this offer should send their requirements together with payments to TOSA Secretary. Tickets will not be available for issue until July. This offer will remain open until 15th June - this final date is necessary so that the booking agencies can be informed of the numbers of tickets left for them to sell.

There will be no acknowledgement of orders - just wait until the tickets arrive!

TOSA MEMBER OFF AROUND THE WORLD (AGAIN).

Colin Tringham, a long-time TOSA member is leaving Australia in early May for another trip to the United States and Europe. Although he will not be able to attend the American Theatre Organ Society convention this year, he hopes to meet and hear as many Organists as possible in his eight week trip. Colin will be visiting Seattle, New York, Boston, London, and will be working in Holland and Germany before returning to Australia in June, Colin's main assignment while overseas is to work for an American Computer Manufacturer on their stand at a big exhibition in Germany.

CAPITOL ORGAN PURCHASE FUND

Our Treasurer reports that to date of printing, the following members have contributed to the fund by way of donations and interest free loans and these are here gratefully acknowledged.

DONATIONS: F. Wallis \$100

C. Tringham and R. Thornley \$20 each

The following members \$10 each:

W. Leeder, J. & R. Weismantel, P. Irwin, D. Fakes,
I. Somerville, P. Tooker, J. Lawson, P. Held, O. Moen,
R. Findlay, N. Read, R. Willis, C. Haynes, S. Holland,
S. McKern, A. Nelson, B. Dowse, G. Thompson,
F. Thornley, P. Rowe, M. MacKay, W. Schumacher,
R. Garnett, W. MacKenzie, C. Callinan, E. Heath,
W. Richards, W. Cook.

The following \$5 each:

F. Walker, P. Lawson, A. Mandelberg and W. Turnbull \$2

In addition, two functions held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. David Parsons, produced \$74 and Joh. Congert's evening at the "Burning Log" produced \$75.

LOANS

Interest free loans were provided by the following members:

Frank Ellis, T. Halloran, R. Blackmore ... \$200 each

H. Duffell \$50. W. Richards \$20.

L. Wells and A. Holmes \$10 each.

The Committee would like to point out to the total membership that individual response to the fund came almost exclusively from those present at the annual meeting and we feel that as a matter of urgency, an appeal should be directed to ALL members to participate in liquidating our bank loan of \$500 and interest free loans of \$690 from members.

SURELY NOT??????

A report from England states that Associated British Cinemas, a major chain, has sold ALL their cinema organs ... even the famous ex Regal, Kingston-upon-Thames.

SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY, AN EVENING TO REMEMBER

Marrickville Town Hall, now decorated with new lighting, was the venue for this memorable and most enjoyable evening of musical entertainment.

Compere James Dibble was appearing for the first time for TOSA since being awarded his M. B. E. In welcoming those in attendance he spoke briefly of the worthiness of the causes which the proceeds of the evening would support - the Children's Medical Research Foundation, and to a lesser extent, TOSA's Capitol Organ Appeal Fund.

Cecil Cranfield, widely known and highly respected in organ circles has had a long association with the A. B. C. The pipes have responded to his touch in such suburban theatres as the Victory, Kogarah, the Civic, Auburn, the King's, Gordon, Savoy, Hurstville and the Arcadia, Chatswood.

The opening selection of Schubert Favourites made one feel that the evening's enjoyment would slip by all too quickly. It did.

In the supplementary number from the Student Prince, "I'll walk with God", which Cecil explained was specially included in the film for Mario Lanza's voice, tuba and trumpet stops were used with full richness of sound against a well-chosen accompaniment. Latin-American numbers followed a little later in the programme, these being presented with unique variations and arpeggios, interesting and varied percussion and a delightful tuba solo on the pedals.

Supporting artist, also introduced by Jim Dibble, was trumpeter John Robertson. From the very first note his trumpet was recognised as a very fine instrument in the hands of a most competent musician. As the compere stated we were now listening to a man who had travelled with the famous Boston Pops Orchestra, is currently first trumpeter with the Sydney Brass Quintet and the Willoughby Municipal Orchestra and is, for good measure, Professor of Trumpet at the N. S. W. Conservatorium of Music. The two artists teamed splendidly; the numbers chosen including "Trumpet Voluntary" and "Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring" being ideally suited to this instrumental combination.

On his own again Cec. presented selections from "The Desert Song", "Gems from Verdi" and Hits from past decades ranging from the '60's to the '20s. His own arrangement of "Granada" had a refreshing appeal and the programme concluded with a bracket of "Au Revoir" numbers, nostalgically played, including "Goodbye" (White Horse Inn), "Auf Weidersehn" and "Wish Me Luck".

It was late in the programme when a lonely high-pitched cipher developed, persisting for some two minutes or so. Deservedly Bill Richards was warmly applauded when, as Jim Dibble said, he "broke the code".

Much earlier, however, there had been another little matter of which few, and not even the organist, had been aware. Some of the keen TOSA team advised that "clicks" were coming through the sound system in tempo with the organ. For a time this mystifying phenomenon had the crew worried as such effects just don't belong to any variety of pipe organ. It so happened that the microphone cable had run for some distance parallel to the main cable of the organ console. The main offenders were pedal notes, the effect resembling that produced sometimes in a radio when a light switch is used elsewhere in the house.

One last word about the organist. Due to the association of the charter members with Cecil Cranfield was it possible for the pioneering group of some ten years ago to establish itself as an organ society. On several occasions Cec. was approached by that small band and not once did he ever fail to make available, readily, a sizeable Hammond Organ, either in Paling's concert hall or when elsewhere the installation and removal were effected at no charge to the Society. For that we are surely all indebted to him. It so happens that your reporter first heard a modern organ concert presented some eight years ago by TOSA in the old Willoughby Town Hall, and on that occasion the organist was Cec. Cranfield.

Kinura.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

At the 1972 AGM of TOSA NSW Division members voted Mr. Alan Kitley into the position of TOSA News Editor unopposed.

Our new Editor made two points in the February issue:

- (1) " it is the function of the Editor to edit submitted material"
- (2) " I am amazed at the output of former Editors'"

These points in their context indicated the Editor's concept of his task, and also that considerable support was expected from members.

The March issue should not be judged as a normal issue due to extreme pressure at Chatswood. The Editor hinted that potential contributors were no doubt actively involved at the Capitol.

The April issue introduced an experimental new format and the deliberately provocative Editorial invited comment.

Despite disappointment freely voiced between members only two letters had been received by the Editor at a recent date.

Do you approve of the "concise and journalistic" style?

Do you prefer the "chatty prose" of previous dedicated Editors?

The Editor has pleaded for comment.

LET HIM HAVE IT !!

For the immediate future we are committed to the existing form of TOSA News for mainly economic reasons, but a Sub-Committee has been formed to investigate means of improving "TOSA News" production.

Three reporters have been appointed to cover functions.

The important point I wish to make in this message is that the success of "TOSA News" in the present circumstances will largely depend on TOSA members.

If the Editor receives no reaction, adverse or otherwise, he could be led to believe that members are apathetic.

This is an appeal to members to provide the Editor with material in the form of letters, contributions, items of interest or gossip, or to twist someone's arm to do this.

Surely the Editor's attempts to arouse members have not fallen on barren ground? I know that each one of us has limits to what we can do and we all have been apt to leave active participation to a few involved people but there is an urgent need for more people to become involved.

For instance we are urgently in need of a minute secretary following the resignation of Mrs. Shirley Nott. A shorthand typist is preferred but this is not absolutely necessary.

Please contact any member of the Executive Committee if you would like to be Minute Secretary or know of someone who would be suitable. Committee Meetings are normally held at St. Anne's Church hall, Strathfield on the first Monday in each month, and are inclined to finish very late !!

A. T. HALLORAN

GETTING IT TAPED

By special arrangement with EMI Ray Garrett is able to supply high quality blank tapes at bargain prices. All tape is of professional quality, low noise, high output type. Available from stock:

<u>Double play</u>		
2400 ft (7" reel)		\$6.00
1200 ft (5" reel)		\$3.50
<u>Extended play</u>		
1800 ft 7" reel		\$4.50
<u>Cassettes</u>		
C 120 (60 minutes each side)		\$3.00
C 90 (45 minutes each side)		\$2.40

All complete in rectangular library pack. Phone Ray after hours (869 7247) or contact him at any TOSA function.

RECORDINGS OF TOSA FUNCTIONS

Arrangements are in hand to reproduce recordings made at the Final performance in the Capitol Theatre. Details will appear in TOSA News when known.

No private tape recorders will be permitted at Wilbur Kentwell's Chatswood concert partly due to Wilbur's recording contracts.

An official recording is made of all TOSA events for the Society's archives. When it is possible a dubbing session will be held as announced in TOSA News. The Society reserves the right to forbid the use of tape recorders by private individuals. However members may apply for permission to use their machines. Application should be made in writing to the Secretary well in advance of the proposed concert so that it can be considered at a Committee Meeting.

PIPE ORGAN FOR SALE

Four rank tracker action single manual organ (no pedals). Case 9' x 6'6" by 2'7". Metal show pipes across front. Complete with electric blower, and in good working condition. Casework is not quite complete but the instrument has potential as a small home organ. Ranks are Open Diapason 8, Leiblich Gedakt 8, Stopped Flute 8 and Open Flute 4. Tremulant. Organ has been assembled from various ranks and components of several long since dismantled instruments. The asking price is a ridiculous \$400. Ring 634 4602 for inspection. (A.H.)

TOSA Matrimonial Bureau

Your Past Editor, Ian Griggs has just announced his engagement to Miss Elizabeth Bailey, who he met at David Parson's concert on 27th April 1971 at Marrickville Town Hall. Just goes to show you never can tell what will happen at a TOSA function.

Congratulations Ian and Elizabeth !

The Diaphone

SECTION

EDITOR : ROD BLACKMORE

A CAPITOL PERFORMANCE

by John Gardiner

While memories remain of the final recital by the Capitol's "Mighty Wurlitzer" on the morning of Saturday 5 February 1972, I submit this survey of the Capitol Theatre as a sincere tribute to - Cliff Bingham, Lance Wells, Denis Palmistra, David Parsons, Alan Tranter, Ray Thornley, Bill Schumacher, Peter Held, Eric Smith and Ian Davies; to former Capitol organists who played their way through good and bad times since 1928; to Capitol Theatre Manager Alf Shaw; and particularly to the Executive and Members of the N.S.W. Division of the Theatre Organ Society of Australia who have had the doubtful pleasure of knowing me since November 1969.

Personally, my main concern has been centred around the Capitol Theatre's position as a place of entertainment and with the many colourful personalities that have made up its chequered life. I also held the belief that the organ's removal would bring about the destruction of the theatre's very soul, but I accept the fact that the life of the Capitol, as a cinema, appears to have drawn to a close although in many ways it died a natural death forty years ago.

However, before its final death knell sounded there unexpectedly arose the absolute necessity of saving the theatre's soul and in their own inimitable way the Theatre Organ Society did simply just that and a vital part of the Capitol Theatre lives on.

Gentlemen, I raise my hat to you for not only enabling the Capitol Wurlitzer to one day speak its mind again, but for the quiet efficient way you went about its removal. I feel proud to have been associated with your activities.

Now - on with the show.

While the Capitol's exterior conjures up memories to a much older generation of Wirth's Hippodrome and the days when the circus came to town, the interior was transformed into a smaller replica of the Capitol Theatre Chicago during the early months of 1928 by Sydney architect Henry White in collaboration with American theatre architect John Eberson.

The Capitol became Australia's first complete atmospheric theatre, but only remained a prestige theatre for less than five years, the curtain being lowered on elaborate stage presentations and pit orchestras by the end of 1932.

The birth of the Capitol theatre took place on "Sydney's Great Bright Way" on the morning of Easter Saturday 7 April 1928 when the \$42,000 Wurlitzer organ was played for the first time by Australian organist Leslie Waldron as he accompanied the silent film "His Lady"

At 8 p.m. that night the event was officially proclaimed by a roll of drums from the orchestra pit heralding the first appearance of American conductor Ted Henkel as he rose into view on the elevated orchestral stage directing a thirty piece orchestra in a performance of Ponchielli's "Dance of the Hours", while at the organ console was seen the tall massive frame of American organist Fred Scholl, his thick rimmed spectacles glistening in the spotlight.

(THE "DIAPHONE" SECTION)

Although not classified as a brilliant organist, Fred Scholl, like Ted Henkel was an astute showman with a shrewd sense of what the public wanted, and a capacity for contorting his rotund face into peculiar shapes during the presentation of some novelty item when the Wurlitzer would produce the wierdest sounds from his masterly touch.

For the next eighteen months both Ted and Fred made a remarkable impression on Sydney audiences and were largely responsible for establishing the Capitol as the city's foremost movie palace.

Among the patrons who frequented the Capitol during its vintage years was a fourteen year old boy from Summer Hill who would sit in the first row of the front stalls nearest the organ pit and gaze in awe at the sight of Fred Scholl who no doubt gave this interested viewer - destined to become a popular versatile organist in his own right, - a quizzical wink of encouragement from behind his spectacles. Tragically enough, this particular youth's name happened to be Ray Chaffer.

During November 1928 Leslie Waldron left the Capitol for the Ambassadors Theatre Perth, and was succeeded by popular Arnold Coleman from the Capitol Theatre Melbourne, who presented the Wurlitzer at the morning and intermediate sessions until January 1929 when he returned to Melbourne to join American organist Frank Lanterman at the State Theatre.

By the middle of 1929 Ted Henkel and Fred Scholl had accepted an offer to open in New Zealand at the Civic Theatre Auckland. Following an official exchange of batons with British conductor Horace Sheldon, Ted Henkel concluded his Sydney season on 19 October while Fred Scholl stayed on until 15 November.

On 16 November the Capitol presented "Australia's First Featured Organist" - J. Knight Barnett whose first appearance as star organist coincided with the theatre's new policy of extended seasons that now replaced the regular weekly changes.

Until then Knight Barnett had only been observed during the morning and intermediate sessions and he now emerged from the pit to say "How do You Do, Everybody" in the friendly sophisticated manner that was to make him a firm favourite with cinema audiences for the next forty years.

After a three months season, Knight Barnett left the Capitol on 14 February 1930 for the Victory Theatre Kogarah, and was succeeded the following day by Mannie Aarons, former musical director at the old Lyceum Theatre in Pitt Street. After leaving the Capitol on 26 March 1930, Mannie returned to conducting cinema orchestras until he ultimately moved into the State Theatre in July 1932.

The position of featured organist was now given to assistant organist Billy Dick who had joined the Capitol staff on 11 January 1930 and became identified with the Wurlitzer until 14 August 1930.

During this particular year, Price Dunlavy from the State Theatre appeared at the Capitol Theatre between 10-16 May, 30 May - 6 June, and 27 September - 31 October.

But despite this galaxy of organists, box office receipts fell off to such a degree that arrangements were made to bring Ted Henkel and Fred Scholl back from New Zealand.

Backed up by the biggest publicity campaign ever accorded two musicians at the time and built around the phrase - "TED AND FRED ARE COMING BACK" - Union Theatres rolled out the red carpet on 5 August 1930 and a large table top truck festooned with streamers, balloons, ballet girls, and the Capitol Stage Band playing "Happy Days Are Here Again" met the ocean liner "Maunganui" at Darling

(THE "DIAPHONE" SECTION)

Harbour and escorted the car bearing Ted Henkel and Fred Scholl back to the theatre where outgoing Musical Director Horace Sheldon stood waiting at the stage door.

As the motorcade pulled into Hay Street before an enthusiastic crowd of admirers and theatre staff Horace Sheldon stepped forward and systematically burst every balloon within reach. This rather senseless act immediately evoked the wrath of Presentations Director O.G. Perry (whose position at the Capitol Theatre was soon to be allocated to American Stage Director Clyde Hood) and his normally placid nature gave way to sharp expressions of contempt and disapproval beneath the Capitol's brightly painted awning.

Amid all this confusion Ted and Fred were whisked away to the Cinesound film studios at Bondi Junction where against the backdrop of a ship, made realistic by appropriate sound effects, they were among the first personalities to be filmed and recorded by the new sound system that was about to make itself heard on Australian news-reels.

Back at the Capitol, their opening performance on 15 August being celebrated by a special midnight matinee, Ted Henkel and Fred School somehow failed to recapture their former popularity and with the eventual expiration of their respective contracts Fred left Sydney on 14 February 1931 and returned to the United States following a brief stayover in Honolulu while Ted was signed up for a season at the Capitol Theatre Melbourne where he opened on 14 March, eventually leaving Australia early in 1932.

With the departures of these two vivid personalities, the most colourful epoch in the life of Sydney's Capitol Theatre came to an end and there was ushered in a series of misfortunes that were to lower the pre-eminent position of this atmospheric movie palace now felling the effects of the depression and a pronounced loss of patronage to the State Theatre.

Early in January 1931, a Christmas Pantomime "Jack and the Beanstalk", which began hopefully and was expected to run for at least a month was taken off after a season of barely two weeks.

On 27 February, Bert Howell from the Ambassadors Theatre Perth came to the Capitol and was forced to contend with an orchestra suffering from the effects of a reduction in strength due to the dismissal of ten musicians.

On 21 March, Clyde Hood who had guided the destinies of stage presentations at both the State and Capitol Theatres became one of the ill-fated passengers aboard the tri-motored aircraft "Southern Cloud" which crashed in foul weather near Cabramurra in the Snowy Mountains district.

By 15 July Bert Howell and the orchestra had given their last Capitol performance and were transferred to the State Theatre to supplement the organ interludes of Horace Weber. In the absence of a regular pit orchestra a series of stage presentations featuring Ivan Varanoff and his Russian Balalaika Orchestra, Dave Grouse's Band, and the Capitol Revellers, came and went from the Capitol Theatre between 22 July and 30 November.

All through this period of transition Billy Dick remained at the organ until 13 November when his place was taken by Leslie Waldron who moved from the console into the orchestra pit on 4 December to conduct the Capitol Augmented Orchestra which had evolved from the earlier combination led by Dave Grouse.

The year 1932 brought O.G. Perry back to the Capitol with what came to be known as "The New Idea" in stage presentations which were nothing more than modest tableaux constructed to blend in with the orchestral overture and entr'acte.

(THE "DIAPHONE" SECTION)

The curtain rose on the first of these "New Ideas" on 1 January 1932 and introduced "Master Personality Conductor" Charles Smith, the New Capitol Symphony Orchestra, and organist Leslie Waldron.

By early February Billy Dick was back at the organ console until 24 November 1932 when the Capitol was forced to close its doors as the result of a film shortage which had developed from a series of disagreements between exhibitors and the film companies.

The "New Idea" was abandoned, the orchestra pit was vacated permanently (some of the musicians joining Hamilton Webber at the State Theatre), Billy Dick was stood down until further notice, O.G. Perry was appointed General Manager of the State Theatre, and the stars at the Capitol never regained their former lustre.

After standing idle for almost five months the Capitol Theatre solemnised its fifth anniversary on 7 April 1933 by re-opening as "The Home of your Happy Hours" for the residents of Sydney's inner suburbs. Along with double features, serials, weekly amateur trials and an occasional vaudeville act, the voice of the "Mighty Wurlitzer" in the hands of Billy Dick endeavoured to make itself heard above the clamour of a rowdy element, who, attracted by a much reduced admission charge cared little or nothing for the once respected atmospheric surroundings and what it offered.

Over the next seven years when Billy Dick was absent on annual leave or relieving at the State Theatre, the Capitol organ was prevented from gathering dust by Denis Palmistra (May-June 1934), the late Stanfield Holliday (June 1935; January-March 1936), New Zealand's Reg. Maddams (July 1939), and Jim Williams (July 1940), all of whom were destined to leave a distinct impression on the theatre organ world for many years to come.

Sometime in June 1942 Billy Dick stepped down from the console to join the Civil Construction Corps, and in his place came Renee Lees the wife of former Presentations Director O.G. Perry who was to die in 1950 completely forgotten by the industry he helped to create.

Throughout four dark gloomy years, Renee Lees attempted to maintain some colour amidst drab surroundings. In 1928 she had appeared on the Capitol stage as solo pianist with Ted Henkel's Orchestra in a performance of "Rhapsody in Blue", but the predominant colour was now khaki and the once popular vogue of stage presentations seemed rather remote as vast numbers of American Servicemen queued up in a continuous line around the block on Anzac Day 1944 when the occasion was marked by the screening of a patriotic film.

At the time there stood on duty in the foyer a young trainee manager who twenty three years later became the Capitol's permanent manager and a good helpful friend to the Theatre Organ Society and to others who have had the pleasure of knowing genial Alf Shaw.

After closing to allow for a general clean up, the Capitol opened on 31 March 1945 as a first release theatre. Quantities of white paint were applied to the exterior of the building and it is possible to assume that the original dark polished wood of the Wurlitzer Console received its first facelift at the same time, with poor results.

Walter Aliffe from the Prince Edward Theatre was engaged as organist and given prominent publicity on one of the large display hoardings facing Parker Street.

With the war over Billy Dick came in through the stage door on 3 November 1945 to face a succession of cynical audiences who now regarded the Wurlitzer as an intrusion on their thoughts and conversation while irresponsible impertinent children balanced precariously on the edge of the orchestra rail in their efforts to gain a ride as the console made its appearance from the pit.

In this atmosphere where the stars no longer shone, Billy Dick gave his final recital on 30 January 1947 and a link with the Capitol's halcyon days was broken.

Renee Lees returned to feature the organ until October 1947 when electricity restrictions imposed a ban upon its use.

After lapsing into silence the "Mighty Wurlitzer" made a brief comeback in January 1948 before sinking to the bottom of the well until December 1952 when it was used in conjunction with a six piece orchestra for the pantomime "Mother Goose", the organist again being Renee Lees.

On 3 February 1954 Mannie Aarons returned to the Capitol after an absence of twenty four years, and tried to coax some life back into a sadly neglected instrument that sounded in particularly bad shape to the most untrained ear. Added to this, the hydraulic lift gave constant trouble and Mannie soon hastened back to his more reliable niche at the State Theatre.

Jean Penhall became the last official Capitol organist in April 1954 and despite a general lack of maintenance the organ put up a brave show until 29 June 1957 when it disappeared from public view altogether - at least until it was resurrected by the N.S.W. Division of the Theatre Organ Society of Australia.

Upon being restored the Capitol Wurlitzer appeared before receptive audiences attending T.O.S.A. conventions and at occasional morning and evening film sessions when it was played by various T.O.S.A. members.

On 26 August 1967 Arnold Coleman renewed his association with Sydney's Capitol Theatre when he gave a recital for T.O.S.A., this being the only occasion when the organ was again heard in the hands of one of its original masters.

The following month Joh Congert gave a memorable performance when a large teenage audience showed their enthusiasm and appreciation by a warm round of applause, proving that the Wurlitzer could quite ably compete with the film image of Elvis Presley.

Broadcasting played its part in the history of the Capitol Theatre from as far back as 1929 when the studios of the nearly formed Australian Broadcasting Company were located in the since demolished Her Majesty's Theatre building in Market Street.

On a certain night of the week Fred School would be heard taking part in the overture with Ted Henkel's orchestra while later in the evening the stage presentation would be relayed out into the ether to find its way into numerous drawing rooms where a radio receiver complete with its ornate loudspeaker horn would become the focal point of attention in an atmosphere of dark blue floral wallpaper offset by silk fringed light shades, Persian patterned carpets, velvet cushions, and a forsaken gramophone or pianola.

After all, this was a genuine Capitol performance which could not always be found on scratchy sounding phonograph records or perforated paper player rolls.

Throughout the nineteen thirties the air waves were full of organ recitals from various suburban cinemas that now featured former Capitol organists, but by the late nineteen forties the Capitol Wurlitzer was restored to broadcasting status by Renee Lees and Fenn Hughes.

(THE "DIAPHONE" SECTION)

To write an appropriate epitaph for a dead movie palace is not a simple undertaking, but from the printed programme of a recent symphony concert I quote an extract from a description of the final movement to Respighi's Symphonic Poem: The Pines of Rome -

"To the poet's phantasy appears a vision of past glories; trumpets blare, and the army of the consul advances brilliantly in the grandeur of a newly-risen sun toward the sacred way, mounting in triumph the Capitoline Hill."

And as the past glories of the Capitol Theatre fade into oblivion, I am reminded of two rather profound statements that were uttered by my nine year old son who stood by my side on the stage of the Capitol Theatre on the afternoon of Sunday 13 February. His first comment, as a group of us gazed into the depths of a now empty organ well, was that it reminded him of a funeral.

The second occasion was when the waggon containing the dismantled console and piano attachment pulled away from the kerb, and Bill was heard quietly remarking - "There goes a piece of history".

I had to admit that even this was indeed a Capitol performance.

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The Diaphone

SECTION

.... ALSO NEEDS YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS

- FEATURE ARTICLES
- THEATRE ORGAN HISTORY
- TECHNICAL ARTICLES
- PHOTOGRAPHS

CARE & RETURN OF ALL MATERIAL GUARANTEED

(Please don't confuse with NEWS articles which are to be submitted to the Editor of "TOSA NEWS")

SEND TO: The "Diaphone" Editor
(Rod Blackmore)
Court House,
MAITLAND 2320