

# TOSA NEWS

March 2012  
Volume 51 No.2

Price: \$2.00

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**Sunday 18th March 2:00pm**

**“In The Groove”**

**Bill Schumacher & Debbie Fitzsummons**

**Marrickville Town Hall**

**303 Marrickville, Rd., Marrickville**

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**Sunday 22nd April 2:00pm**

**“Christie Organ Fund”**

**TOSA Members play to raise funds for the  
installation of the Christie Organ**

# Directory

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**Printing** by Rob Gliddon

## From the President



Greetings,

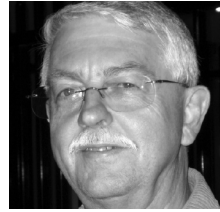
Right at the beginning I must apologise to those members who did not receive their February edition of TOSA News on time. All copies were lodged at the postal centre at the same time which allows us a small discount on postage rates. In one particular instance where two copies are forwarded to the one address, there was a difference of nineteen days between deliveries. We have referred the matter to the authorities and hope it will have been resolved before despatch of this issue. Please advise the Editor if you experience a delay so that action can be taken.

The year's events got off to a superb start with a truly professional show featuring Chris McPhee, Malcolm Ross and Malcolm's wife Rosemary Boyle. Our next show again will feature two great musicians, Bill Schumacher and Debbie Fitzsummons, both of whom are equally at home on organ and piano. Plan to be there for an afternoon "In the Groove".

With regret I advise that Mr Jack Lawson, a past President of this Society, passed away on the 15th February. On behalf of the Executive, Committee and Members I offer sincere condolences to Jack's daughter Pam and the extended family.

Happy organizing  
Geoff Brimley

## Editorial



In this issue there is an article about the Award of the MBE to well known UK Theatre Organist Len Rawle in last years New Years Honours List. This information was kindly given to TOSA member, Ian Hanson, upon his visit to see Len in August 2011.

There is also a very interesting article about the Robert Morton Unit Organ courtesy of JoAnn Evans from Seattle USA who is Editor of the Puget Sound Pipeline along with her husband Russ Evans. This publication is the voice of the Puget Sound Theatre Organ Society.

There are a number of electronic organs available to a good home either free or at a negotiable price.

TOSA again calls upon members to volunteer for additional usher positions to help place our patrons more efficiently at shows. *see details in this issue.*

We look forward to seeing you at the Bill Schumacher and Debbie Fitzsummons show.

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

Enjoy the music,  
Ernie Vale  
PO Box A2322  
SYDNEY SOUTH, NSW, 1235

# From the Mailbox...



Thanks for your responses and please continue to email or write in, telling us what you think.

Where space permits we will do our best to publish your comments, but as space is limited, the editor reserves the right to edit any submitted comments and, as always, the views expressed by any individual may not necessarily coincide with the views of TOSA NSW Div.

Please submit all comments via email to:

The Editor [editor@tosa.net.au](mailto:editor@tosa.net.au)

or in writing to:

The Editor - TOSA News (NSW Div)

PO Box A2322

SYDNEY SOUTH, NSW, 1235

## New Members

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

Richard Jordan

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*From Peter Pullar TOSA Member.*

Once again we were treated to a stunning and professional TOSA show at Campsie on Sunday. It was sooo worth the trip from Newcastle to Sydney to see Chris McPhee and Malcolm Ross. I have been waiting to see Chris McPhee for some time, but the

talent and performance of Malcolm Ross was just magnificent.... and what a huge surprise to have his wife, the lovely and talented Rosemary Boyle on stage with Chris and Malcolm. Malcolm's arrangements were brilliant, Chris was perfection on the organ, but somehow Rosemary stole the show with her professionalism and showmanship....I always knew she had a beautiful Soprano voice but she certainly knew how to captivate an audience and her facial expressions and body language while Chris and Malcolm were playing their "solo bits" was just beautiful.

I must also say how wonderful the camera work was on the "big screen". Lots of close ups, fading in and out from one scene to another and even what seemed to be some superimposing of one scene over another as they changed. Well done to those guys on the side of the theatre working in the bar area... was that a gin and tonic or scotch that I detected behind the laptop Craig ??? All jokes aside it just does not get any better than this.... I feel sorry for those who missed it....can't wait for the Marrickville show coming up. BRAVO TOSA and well done !!!

*Thanks Peter. TOSA Executive & Committee and all the technicians and volunteers who were involved in presenting the show really appreciate your feedback. (Ed)*

**To Watch Out For**  
**Sunday 18 March 2:00pm**

**Bill Schumacher &  
Debbie Fitzsummons**

**Play**

**“ In The Groove ”**

**Marrickville Town Hall**

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**Vale**

**John J. (Jack) Lawson**

Jack passed away on Wednesday 15 February after a brief battle with Cancer. Jack attended his final TOSA show at the Orion Theatre on 5 February this year thanks to his daughter Pam arranging for him to attend.

Jack & his late wife Pearl were two of the most enthusiastic members of TOSA NSW and spent many hours searching for a location to install the Orion Wurlitzer before successfully negotiating on behalf of TOSA with Canterbury Council to place it in the Orion Function Centre at Campsie.

Jack was a past President of TOSA and worked on the maintenance of the Orion Wurlitzer when it was installed in the Capitol Theatre along with other keen members of TOSA. This enabled members to enjoy Saturday morning concerts.

## **Advertising Rates in TOSA News**

For Members:

Small, Organ related ads = FREE!

For all other cases:

Small bubble = \$11.00

Quarter Page = \$24.75

Half Page = \$49.50

Full Page = \$99.00

Full Page Insert = \$125.00

### **Members' Playing Dates 2011**

**The Orion Theatre Campsie  
2nd Thursday 1:30pm -  
4:30pm**

March 8th

April 12th

Phone or SMS Craig Keller on  
0418 484 798

Players and listeners welcome.  
Please bring a plate of goodies for  
afternoon tea.

Tea/Coffee provided. Parking at  
rear off Shakespeare St.

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

March 26th

April 23rd

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

## **TOSA Needs Members to usher at our shows.**

In order to seat our patrons quickly and efficiently TOSA would appreciate more members to volunteer to perform as ushers at our shows at the Orion Theatre and Marrickville Town Hall please.

Usher duties require you to have a torch (LED is perfect). A knowledge of the seating layout at each venue will be provided by TOSA.

Currently tickets are checked and the stub removed at the entrance then each patron is directed to the appropriate aisle for best access to their seat number. This procedure will continue.

An additional usher would be located at the entrance to each aisle at the Orion Theatre (3 members required) and at Marrickville Town Hall (4 members required).

To allow for the situation where an usher cannot be at a show it is desirable that TOSA has a Team of 6-8 additional ushers to enable some flexibility. Ushers can then be rostered on by a Team Leader Usher to ensure smooth running of our shows.

**Please consider this important role to make seating of our patrons run smoothly.**

**Please contact the TOSA Secretary, Deirdre at [secretary@tosa.net.au](mailto:secretary@tosa.net.au) or phone 4878 5179**

## **TOSA MEMBERS' AFTERNOONS AT CAMPSIE December 2011 January 2012**

This summer has drawn unusually high attendance at The Orion. Perhaps because TOSA occasions at Marrickville Town Hall have been crimped over the past many weeks on account of first, the refurbishing work that has been effected in the Solo Chamber there, and then the residency of Opera Australia, the Orion meetings have gained popularity among our playing members. The Wurlitzer piano was brought up to hall level each time and attached, nowadays a simple task because of the new casters.

The Thursday, 8th December get-together drew eight players and three listeners when, as had been asked for, sundry Christmas songs and tunes were widely on offer. Those who took turns at the Wurlitzer were: **Tom Barber, Graeme Costin, Ian Georgeson, Basil Kaplan, Craig Keller, Deirdre McMullan, Walter Pearce, and John Batts.** Listeners that day were **David McMullan, Barry Tooker, and Darren Davis.**

The first Thursday meeting of the New Year, 12th January, attracted what must have been a record number of players; no-one present was able to recall a roster of eleven waiting to play. Five listeners were also on hand. The day was also unusual because we were joined by **Len Fifield**, resident organist at the Southward Museum in New Zealand, who soon made himself at home at the console. Others who played that afternoon were: **Tom Barber, Graeme Cos-**

**tin, Ian Georgeson, Ron Ivin, Basil Kaplan, Craig Keller, Theo Langenberg, Deirdre McMullan, Walter Pearce, Peter Robinson, and John Batts.** Listeners that day were **Kevin Clancy, Rob Gliddon, Colin Groves, David McMullan, and Dorothy Robinson.** Len, who wrote a note of thanks for TOSA's hospitality, was impressed by the sheer variety of music and of styles heard that afternoon.

TOSA is grateful to those who brought along some goodies to eat, and especially to **Deirdre & David** who provided not only some samples of their cooking but also some of their garden fruit. We are treated so very well by that pair.



**Len Fifield at the Orion**

"Deirdre,  
Thank you so much for initially inviting me to attend with your group and for your very generous gesture, allowing me to take your practice time. I was particularly impressed with your various members repertoires. Usually when I meet with a group they all tend to play the same and sound very similar. So to hear your members playing

was a real pleasure. Your club has obviously gone to extraordinary lengths to store and present, what I thought was a very good instrument. There is certainly more to play with on yours than there is on the Southward 260 Special.

Looking back into what history we know we learnt that there was only ever 13 of our particular model built. When it was originally installed in the Civic Theatre in Auckland, NZ it was reputedly the highest rising Wurlitzer at 33 feet, from ground level to maximum height.

We have stories of several organists having to be rescued off a mal-functioning "rise mechanism". Just out of interest.... Anne Holmes left a huge pile of recorded, reel to reel tapes which only came to light just a few years ago when her son simply walked up to me after a concert and introduced himself and his 90+ year old auntie, Anne's sister. To my knowledge the recordings are now archived with Radio NZ.

Today I was back at Southward playing to a tourist audience made up of British and Australian tourist who all appeared to have at some time in their life visited the Blackpool Tower Ballroom. I continue to be amazed as to the magic that that organ seems to cast around the world.

Once again thank you for a wonderful time with your members. If any of your members care to venture to NZ please visit [www.southwardcarmuseum.com](http://www.southwardcarmuseum.com). I would welcome the opportunity to show off the Southward Wurlitzer."

Kind regards, *Len Fifield*

## Orion Players Day February 2012

A small band of players attended the Orion Centre on Thursday 9 February for our monthly players' day. Not sure if the dodgy weather kept the numbers down or doubt about whether the lift was functional, but all was technically fine.

Players for the day were **Graham Glendenning, Deirdre McMullan, Walter Pearce, Craig Keller** and **Graeme Costin**. With such a small number of players all had a good amount of time to spend at the console. The 3/17 was in fine form having been tuned the week before prior to the recent show. Some were able to experiment with their profile settings on the Uniflex while I had a turn at recording my playing of a tune to Uniflex then playing it back while I played the piano. This is an interesting challenge and gave me some indication of what players like Tony Fenelon cope with and are also able to do without us even knowing how tricky it can be.

A special visitor was **Claudine Michael** who is also a member of the (OMSS). She was one of the attendees at a small workshop organised with **Nathan Avakian** in July 2011 at Marrickville Town Hall. At the workshop **Claudine** was able to pick up the knack of 2nd touch with no troubles as she plays counterpoint as second nature. She spent some time learning about and exploring the additional voices and functions of the 3/17 at Campsie and then played a few tunes with very impressive results. **Claudine** is kept busy most weekends playing for services at churches on the north shore. I understand she left

armed with lots of information and most importantly a membership form. We look forward to seeing her at TOSA events more often.

Of course at any players' day, listeners are important and the ever reliable **David McMullan** was there as were **Ernie Vale** and **Barry Tooker**. A great range of afternoon tea was available and thanks to all who contributed. We also were lucky to receive some fresh crisp apples from the McMullans abundant home garden.

Remember that any member is welcome to come along just for a listen on the players' days. You won't be pressured to play and you may have a chance to socialise with some of your fellow members. If you want to check if the next day is on you can phone or SMS me on 0418 484 798 one or two days before hand. *Craig Keller*

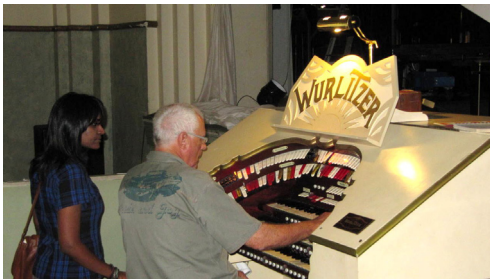


**Craig Keller - Orion**



**Graeme Costin - Orion**





**Graham Glendenning shows Claudine some registrations**



**Deirdre McMullan - Orion**



**Claudine Michael - Orion**



**Walter Pierce - Orion**

**Players day photos by Barry Tooker**

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*The hand that lifts the cup that "Cheers" should not be used to shift the gears.*

**TOSA NSW congratulate Ryan and Michelle Heggie on the birth of their second child, Orla Paige, born at Dubbo Base Hospital. She was 4.1kg and 54cm tall (or is that long).**

## **Show & Membership Prices**

The following TOSA show ticket prices now apply:

	<b>All Artists</b>
Non-members	\$27.50
Non-member Pensioner/Senior	\$25.00
TOSA Members	\$20.00
Students 17-21yrs	\$10.00
Group Booking for 10 or more Adults	\$20 per person
Group Booking for 10 or more Students	\$8 per person
Students under 17yrs	FREE!
Annual Membership Fees are now:	\$30.00 for Full membership, and \$20.00 for Concession, Country, Interstate & Overseas.

Membership enquiries Geoff Brimley (02) 6351 3122 [membership@tosa.net.au](mailto:membership@tosa.net.au)

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

**Musical Advisor to the  
London and South of England  
Chapter of the American  
Theatre Organ Society  
Len Rawle's recent award of the  
MBE for Services to Music**

*From their MBE Special Edition  
January 2011 given to our TOSA  
member Ian Hanson on his visit to  
see Len Rawle in August 2011  
Editor David Coles*

To theatre organ enthusiasts the name Len Rawle is synonymous with a gentleman of great talent, enthusiasm and wisdom as a player, preservationist and technician. To hear that Len had been awarded an MBE in Her Majesty the Queen's 2011 New Years Honours list was a great surprise, but at the same time seemed to me richly deserved.

For those not familiar with the British honours system, twice a year (at the New Year and on her official birthday) our Queen announces honours for those who have made outstanding achievements in their field of service - anything from business to politics, science to music. The MBE stands for Member of the Order of the British Empire, and is given for:

*"achievement or service in and to the community of responsible kind which is outstanding in its field or very local 'hands-on' service which stands out as an example to others".*

Each recipient receives a medal which is presented personally by Her Majesty the Queen or another high ranking member of the Royal

Family.

Len's award was given for "Services to Music", the nomination being specifically for his work in theatre organ preservation.

A group of 70 or so family, friends, organists and enthusiasts had accepted an invitation to attend a special celebration organised by Richard Moore at ATOS London & South of England Chapter's Woking venue on Sunday 9th January 2011. The celebration was a complete surprise to Len, who entered the hall to warm applause and "Congratulations" played on the Wurlitzer by Michael Wooldridge.

Richard Moore welcomed and congratulated Len and went on to describe some of the many stages in his efforts to secure an MBE for Len. Richard is Chairman of the Friends of the Rye Wurlitzer and had been impressed by Len's willingness to help and advise with the installation there, some 20 years ago. A continuing association led to a desire to see Len's lifetime of commitment to the theatre organ rewarded.

A description of the nomination process with words from Richard Moore, interspersed with music from Michael Wooldridge and tributes from those unable to attend was entertaining and informative. The application had taken some 3 years, during which time Len had no idea of the nomination, his first knowledge being at the beginning of December 2010 when a letter arrived from Admiralty Arch notifying him of the award!

The initial application in 2007 had included no less than 14 letters of support. By the end of the process Richard had collected many more and had written letters to many influential people including the Queen, the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown, the Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire and the Chief Minister of the Isle of Man asking for their support.

Many tributes were paid to Len's teaching and playing skills, as well as his ability to preserve, restore and make theatre organs work. Richard Moore described Len as a "giant" in his field. His positive enthusiasm, encouragement and willingness to share his knowledge were described as second to none.

As well as spoken tributes from Ian Ridley on behalf of the ATOS London and South of England chapter and Grant Pilcher from the Theatre Organ Club, tributes were read from fellow organists, The Cinema Organ Society and several organ societies from abroad.

Throughout the process a Powerpoint presentation scrolled - 112 pages of tributes, photographs of Len and some of the 40 or so instruments that he has been involved with, plus a substantial tribute from the Friends of the Rye Wurlitzer.

News of Len's award had crossed the pond and a special message was read from Ken Double and Mike Hartley on behalf of the ATO Board of Directors:

" The world of the theatre pipe organ has always championed, honoured, congratulated and expressed gratitude to its best and most influential individuals. Be it the Crawfords, the Wrights, the Dixons, Torch's and Foorts on the playing side - to the Simontons, the Junchens and so many more of our dedicated founders and supporters. We owe so much to those who have given so much. On behalf of the Board of Directors, the staff and all of the membership of ATOS, we wish to express our heartfelt thanks and most sincere congratulations to Len Rawle on receiving this high honour bestowed upon him, an MBE for his contribution to the world of the theatre organ. That his many years of selfless dedication to the preservation of our unique art-form should be singled out by Her Majesty, the Queen of England, is something that brings honour to ATOS the world over, and is so very richly deserved. From your friends in ATOS throughout the world, congratulations and Thank You, Len for all you have done and continue to do for the preservation and presentation of the theatre pipe organ".

Richard Moore is clearly an expert in the kitchen as Len was presented with a selection of home made jams, marmalades and chutneys and as those assembled took a break for tea; two enormous jam sponges topped with photos of Len were cut. In addition everyone attending received their own souvenir jar of jam or chutney.

*To be continued in April edition Ed.*

**The Next Show**  
**Sunday 18th March, 2012 at 2:00pm**  
**Two Very Gifted Keyboard Artists**  
**Bill Schumacher & Debbie Fitzsummons**



**Playing**

**“ In The Groove ”**

**on the Wurlitzer Unit Orchestra &  
Grand Piano**

**Marrickville Town Hall, 303 Marrickville Road**  
(Disabled access available at the entrance)

**Bookings: Theo Langenberg 0410 626 131**  
Visa & Mastercard accepted  
tickets@tosa.net.au

**You can also book on-line at [www.tosa.net.au](http://www.tosa.net.au)**

**Bill Schumacher** is one of the first members of TOSA NSW Divn and has given interstate concerts in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth. During several visits to the USA, **Bill** has played a recital for the Puget Sound Chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society. **Bill** considers himself fortunate to have visited and played some major US theatre pipe organ installations including the Seattle Paramount and Portland Paramount's San Gabriel Civic Auditorium, the Kern Residence, Detroit Fox and Portland and Denver's Organ Grinder Restaurants.

**Bill** was one of the featured artists at the T.O.S.A. NSW 50th Anniversary weekend celebrations in March 2010 where he shared the program with the outstanding pianist Bernard Walz. **Bill** also played a program in Seattle, Washington State USA in June 2010 at the A.T.O.S. Theatre Organ Convention on a Wurlitzer home installation. He was also engaged as one of the regular artists playing a **Hammond B3** organ in the Sky Lounge of the Convention Hotel on several evenings to the delight of the conventioners.

**Debbie Fitzsummons** has a wealth of experience in all areas of entertainment. Australian champion organist at the age of 15, she was a concert organist, & released a solo album at age 19, & at the time was the youngest organist (14 yrs old) to be invited to play The Christie pipe organ at Kelvin Grove.

She has worked with many great Australian & International performers: **Simon Gallaher, Debra Byrne, Julie Anthony, Max Bygraves, Phyllis Diller, Joe Longthorne, Judy Stone, Rhonda Burchmore, Johnny Tillotson, Rolf Harris, Kerri-Ann Kennerley & Gina Jefferies** to name a few. From 1990 to 2002, **Debbie** was arranger, piano/keyboard player & assistant musical director for "**The Four Kinsmen**". **Debbie** was musical director for the groups' season at the Hacienda Hotel in Las Vegas, for many of their TV appearances, including "The Midday Show", & arranged & played on The Four Kinsmen's CD's.

Since settling back on the Gold Coast, **Debbie** has reignited her love of theatre pipe organ...thanks to **Bill Schumacher**. Starting with his magnificent George Wright Allen organ in his home, then graduating to Gold Coast TOSA for an appearance or two and concert, then finally on to the Christie in Brisbane. All performances were met with great reviews.

### **Tickets to the show:**

**Members \$20; Non-Members \$27.50;**

**Student (17 – 21 Years) \$10;**

**Non Member Concession/Senior \$25**

**Students under 17 yrs FREE**

**Group booking -10 or more adults \$20 ea person**

**Group booking - 10 or more students (17-21yrs) \$8 ea person**

## **The Robert Morton Unit Organ**

*Its history as published in The Console Magazine, 1966. Part one.*

Truly one of the golden musical eras in the history of the world, theatre organs provided mass pleasure for millions of people during their relatively short and windy life span—encompassing a period roughly from 1914 to 1930—a total of only about 16 years.

But during those 16 years the medium of the motion picture was exploited to the extreme! Showmanship in its infancy was alive, dynamic, boisterous and flamboyant. Every theatre owner continually trumpeted his entertainment wares in any manner that could be dreamed up—and there were some wild dreams! Now very much sophisticated, (even most modern marquees, well lighted by fluorescent lamps, lack the glittering sparkle of the multi-colored Mazda lamps and seem dull) there seemingly is more concern over dedication to the principles of cash and candy—oh yes, and that something that is being shown on the screen this week in the auditorium.

Into this golden era the Robert-Morton unit organ arrived—about three years following the first big splurge made by Wurlitzer at the Seattle Liberty Theatre. But despite its tardy appearance, the instrument won acceptance and maintained a sales record that held it in second place throughout the remaining years that theatre organs were built and installed to provide music for silent films. This was achieved over strong competition

from competitors such as Kimball, Kilgen, Marr & Colton, etc. Wurlitzer, it is acknowledged, was first in sales throughout the entire world during this period.

Morton organs were sold almost entirely within the limits of continental United States. Foreign sales were never made on a grand scale. Morton officials either did not care to enter this field, or possibly felt there was ample business in the U.S. Consequently there were few organs sold in Canada, a larger number went to Mexico and one, according to records, was installed in Panama. It has been rumored that several were shipped to Cuba, but no records have been found to substantiate this.

The greatest number of Morton pipe organs sold outside of the continent went to the Hawaiian Islands—Consolidated Theatres chain equipped most of their theatres with Mortons.

### **The Robert Morton Pipe Organ A History of the Company The Year 1916**

In Berkeley, California, in the big building housing the American Photo Player company, business was good. Almost every new movie house across the vast American continent was installing a "Fotoplayer." True, other firms—Cremona, Seeburg, Wurlitzer, to name but a few—were also enjoying good sales, but the "Fotoplayer" undeniably was leader in its field. However, in the larger movie palaces, the theatres seating 2,000 and more, the trend to install pipe organs for film accompaniment was gaining sales for Moller, Austin and the recently



**Fotoplayers were bringing home the sounds of 'rustling paper' to American Photo Player coffers in 1916 with large installations like this one in the Odeon Theatre in New York State. Larger theatres, however, were putting in pipe organs to produce the needed sound for silent photoplays.**

**Note the large boxes on either side of the console that housed the organ pipes and percussions**

new-on-the-scene Wuritzer Company with its unusual horseshoe style console acquired when the Robert Hope-Jones Organ Company was bought out and consolidated into the North Tonawanda organization. Several large installations had been lost because the Fotoplayer was not adequate to furnish enough sound in the large auditoriums.

While this was something to think about, it wasn't really anything to get sick worrying over, there were bound to be a few large theatres opening up now and then, but most of the movie houses were the small "nickelodeon types" found in neighborhoods near homes and not downtown where the legitimate and vaudeville houses were attracting the crowds. Still, the idea of being able to offer a pipe organ had definite potential and Harry Werner made a mental note to look around for a possible organ firm that he might contract to secure an estimate on building a theatre instrument to compete with Austin, Moller and the upstart Wuritzer firms.

Harry Werner was the head of the American Photo Player Company. It was his drive and enthusiasm that had established the Fotoplayer as the leading pit organ to be found in most American movie houses.

It was to be his business acumen and the know-how of unit organ construction on the part of another man that would bring into being an instrument that soon would rank second in theatre sales throughout the United States.



**Jesse Crawford at the console of the Morton organ in Miller's California Theatre, L.A. The keydesk had tabs marked with circled figures, believed to have been Division designations.**

### **The Second Man**

In Southern California, in the newly laid out town of Van Nuys, the California Organ company was not so busy building classic and concert organs for churches and residences, and on occasion, making an installation of their instrument in a moving picture theatre. During the reign of Murray M. Harris, back in 1911 and 1912, there had been many notable installations of the classic and concert instruments in local churches and homes. Yes, and even in a great number of local theatres, Harris organs were installed for the enjoyment of early day moviegoers. A notable installation was the one made by Harris Company for Tally's Broadway Theatre, a concert instrument that all but enveloped the interior of the theatre. A four manual organ of about sixty ranks, pipework extended on either side wall of the theatre from the stage back to the entry arches into the auditorium.



The sound of this instrument was actually all around the patrons. A.E. Spencer, Harris superintendent and Stanley Williams, Harris voicer, made the installation.

Failure of the Harris company brought the Johnson Organ Company in as its successor. Johnson had been president of a San Francisco music company. He borrowed money and took over the Harris business which was then situated on Sichel Street in the eastern section of Los Angeles. It was at this time that land developers had opened much of the nearby San Fernando Valley and staked out what is now the town of Van Nuys.

To attract buyers for the land they had developed, the promoters offered tempting prizes to Los Angeles business houses to establish branch offices and factories there. They also built a large warehouse and eventually convinced the Johnson Company to move there and build its organs. This was done and many of the craftsmen moved their families out to Van Nuys and bought lots on which to build their homes.

The factory opened in 1913 in the 75,000 square-foot building. In less than one year, Johnson was ousted by the land developers, who took over operation of the organ building themselves under the name of California Organ Company.

Business was brisk for a time while the firm produced instruments that were installed in local school auditoriums, at a good discount price, and in several of the homes of the land executives. There were church installations, too, but not on the scale that Harris

organs were erected several years earlier. By 1916 the market for organs for local schools, residences and churches had been rather well saturated. The land promoter owners of the company were concerned about the future of the firm. Most of the employees had built homes in the area and this company was the largest in Van Nuys. Its weekly payroll was very important to the economic life of the community. The only possible course was to increase the production of California organs. There were several avenues to explore. One was to continue classic organ production by increasing the sales force and advertising more frequently. California organs were fine instruments; more people must hear about them. The second avenue open to the firm was to change over to the production of the "noise machines" for the motion picture theatres. Right here in the factory was a man who was capable of building a so-called 'unit' organ that could be competitive to the Wurlitzer. That man was Stanley Williams. He had learned his organ building trade under the apprenticeship system in England. And his teacher had been none other than Robert Hope-Jones, controversial figure in the British Isles' organ world since he had added wires to an organ and moved its console outside the church edifice to prove that his system was indeed flexible and a radical departure from the staid, long-unchanged organ building art.

Stanley Williams could indeed build an organ that California could use to enter the up and coming theatre field.

There was one drawback to the idea. He was A.E. Spencer, the man in charge of production at California, superintendent of the firm. A.E. wanted no part of building noise boxes for movie theatres. The classic organ was the only fit instrument for man to listen to.

At this juncture, fate, as she does so many times, stepped in and decreed that some change must be made. The opportunity for explosive expansion was there. All that was needed was something to act as a catalyst.

The catalyst was in the form of one of the self-made men of that era, who, through his extroverted personality, would not only be responsible for bringing the two companies together, but also would be responsible for a great part of the business the Robert Morton Company was to enjoy from west coast sources. This person was H.F. "Cocky" Charles.

Originally from the southern part of the state, Charles had been introduced to Harold J. Werner and offered a job with the American Photo Player firm.

He was quite successful as a salesman of the Fotoplayer pit organs and shared with Werner the interest in locating a pipe organ builder who might be able to supply an instrument suitable to be placed in theatres. It was natural then that on one of his visits in the Los Angeles area he should learn of the California organ firm in Van Nuys and the limited amount of business being done. It is assumed, according to reports by men who were employed by California Organ, that he returned to Berkeley and told

Werner about the Van Nuys facility and its potential. Whether he heard that Williams was qualified to build a unit instrument or just figured that the company was in a slack period and could be persuaded to enter the movie organ field has never been fully determined. But in either instance, Charles is credited for bringing the executives of both organizations together for what was to result in the birth of a new competitor in the relatively new business of providing a new type of pipe organ for a new entertainment medium.

Thus it was in 1916 that Harold J. Werner made the first overtures to executives of the California Organ company. The response was encouraging and a meeting was arranged. Initial sessions were somewhat stormy because A.E. Spencer, the superintendent of the California firm, was violently opposed to the proposed change. Classic instruments were still the only type he favored building. Later meetings were conducted at night after the factory had closed for the day and Spencer was not around.

*To be continued. This article was kindly provided by JoAnn Evans from the Puget Sound Theatre Organ Society Seattle USA.*

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I don't know how you feel about old age, but in my case I didn't even see it coming. It hit me from the rear.

*Phyllis Diller  
B. 1917*

# **HOME GRAND PIANO CONCERT**

**SUNDAY 25TH MARCH AT 2.00P.M.**

Vice President John Shaw will be hosting a classical Grand Piano Recital to be given by visiting Romanian Pianist,

## **ALEXANDRU NEGRIUC.**

The programme may include works by Chopin, Liszt, Beethoven and Rachmaninov.

There will be a \$10 charge which includes afternoon tea and proceeds will be donated to the Christie Organ Fund.

Bookings are essential so please phone John on 9543 3112. The address is 53 Llanberis Dr., Menai (only 10 minutes from Bankstown or Sutherland)

Don't miss out on hearing this outstanding performer whose concerts John attended in London in the last two years.



WHEN THE  
MIGHTY WURLITZER  
REIGNED IN

*The Regent*

John Thiele

Having received a copy of this publication I thoroughly recommend it to all Theatre Organ Enthusiasts (*Ed*). To obtain a copy please send a Cheque or Money Order made out to John Thiele, for \$45 + \$12.50 postage, a Total of \$57.40 to JOHN THIELE, PO BOX 1061, CAMPBELLTOWN SA 5074

## **TOSA NSW**

\* 2012 - OUR 52nd YEAR \*

Bill Schumacher & Debbie Fitzsummons

Sunday 18 March at 2:00pm

Marrickville Town Hall

Contact Theo Langenberg 0410 626 131

## **TOSA South Australia**

Tuesdays and weekends TOSA (SA) members play the  
4/29 Wurlitzer in their Capri Theatre, Goodwood Road,  
Goodwood (08) 8272 1177

## **TOSA Western Australia**

John Leckie Music Centre 3/12 Compton

Currently Members days first Sunday of the month at 2pm in the  
Dalkeith Hall using a Kawai Organ

Contact: Pat Gibbs (08) 9450 2151 patgibbs@oneseniors.com.au.

## **TOSA Gold Coast**

Club Musical Afternoon on the 3rd Sunday of each  
month (except December)

Contact: Rosa Free 5575 3295

## **TOSA Queensland**

Executive Secretary: Brett Kavanaugh 0412 879 678

## **Stirling Productions**

Karrinyup Community Centre, Perth, Western Australia

All concerts are on Sundays at 2pm. Prior bookings are  
essential with John Fuhrmann on (08) 9447 9837

Interstate TOSA Members are welcome to a 50% discount to  
concerts on presentation of their membership card

## **TOSA Victoria - mto**

Contact Margaret Sutcliffe on (03) 9891 7227

## **Warragul Theatre Organ Society**

Events Contact: Bee Mellor (03) 5122 2131

**Electronic Organs  
For Sale or  
Free to Good Home**

***For sale:***

Electronic Organ:

**Conn, Constellation Model  
No. 390**

Two manuals, each having

5 x octaves

Pedalboard 2 x octaves

Price negotiable.

Purchaser to arrange transport from near Mudgee NSW.

Call (02) 63731284

Phone Ruth M. Catchpoole  
farawayrmwc@downundertelco.net.au

If you are interested in this organ please contact *the editor TOSA News* and I will email you further information.

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***For sale: Wurlitzer electronic organ,***

fully re-conditioned, 2x61-note manuals, 32-note pedalboard, suitable for classical or theatre organ music, \$900 o.n.o.

Phone Heather Moen-Boyd 0423808991 or email heatherboyd131@hotmail.com.

***Free to good home:***

**Viscount BX10MIDI organ** from deceased estate to give away. Two manuals/pedals and rhythm box. Midi IN and OUT and Audio Out.

Perfect working order.

Contact Lionel Murray on (02) 4759 1244 or 0419 802 735.

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***For sale:***

**Kawai T3 Organ**

2 x 61 note keyboards

27 pedal notes

2 x 9 drawbar upper, and 1 x

9 drawbar lower keyboard

Complete with:

2 x Leslie Organ speakers  
Model 147 RV (FA21905 & FA28161) 250 watt, 50Hz, 13 amp.

Selling for health reasons

All offers considered

Phone Gus (Moss Vale)(02) 4868 2492

## **Members Diary**

### **March**

**Monday 5th Committee 7:30pm Burwood RSL**

**\*\* Sunday 18th 2:00pm Marrickville Town Hall\*\***

## **In The Groove show**

**with**

**Bill Schumacher & Debbie Fitzsummons**

### **April**

**Monday 2nd Committee 7:30pm Burwood RSL**

**\*\* Sunday 22nd 2:00pm Marrickville Town Hall\*\***

**Members play for**

## **The Christie Organ Fund**

Radio 2MBS-FM 102.5 "Colours of the King" (program of the Organ Music Society of Sydney) 2nd Saturday of each month, 5pm till 6 pm

### **Web Sites of Interest:**

[www.tosa.net.au](http://www.tosa.net.au)

<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/theatre/theatre-extensions-could-mean-lights-out-for-sports-store-20120126-1qjtd.html>

[www.theatreorgansaust.info](http://www.theatreorgansaust.info) (history of cinema organ installations in Australasia)  
[www.sydneyorgan.com](http://www.sydneyorgan.com) (our sister society, the Organ Music Society of Sydney OMSS)  
[www.ATOS.org](http://www.ATOS.org)

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