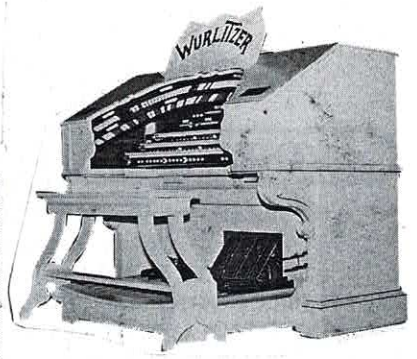


DECEMBER, 1995

TOSA NEWS



2/11 WurliTzer Theatre Pipe Organ
Marrickville Town Hall

3/17 WurliTzer Theatre Pipe Organ
Orion Centre Campsie

Season's Greetings

TONY FENELON'S 1995 Christmas Concert



On the Fabulous Orion *WurliTzer*
Sunday, 3rd December, 1995 at 2 pm

ORION CENTRE CAMPSIE

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TOSA NEWS

DECEMBER, 1995

THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA (NSW DIVISION) Inc.

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COMING EVENTS

DECEMBER

Sunday 3 at 2.00pm **Tony Fenelon's Christmas Concert**
Orion Centre Campsie
Monday 4 at 7.30pm **Committee Meeting**

JANUARY

Monday 8 at 7.30pm **Committee Meeting**

FEBRUARY

Monday 5 at 7.30pm **Committee Meeting**
Sunday 11 at 2.00pm **John Atwell Concert**
Orion Centre Campsie

MARCH

Monday 4 at 7.30pm **Committee Meeting**

APRIL

**The Fabulous 1996 Easter
National Convention
in Sydney
Friday 5th - Monday 8th April**



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

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



From The President

May I take this opportunity to thank all of you for your support of the Society's various activities, including a very successful concert season.

On behalf of your executive and committee, may I wish you a Happy and Holy Christmas, and a rewarding 1996.

Cliff Bingham
President

Welcome To New Members

TOSA is proud to welcome the following new members to our society and to wish them many happy, musical years with us :

Patricia Fallon - Chain Valley Bay
David James - Robertson

Editorial

We come to the end of a very successful year for TOSA, and for this success we have to thank all the regular concert-goers who have so faithfully attended our concerts and all the helpers who work so hard to provide a truly professional standard of service and entertainment at these events.

The executive and committee are proud to be able to present such high standard artists in such a superb production at the **Orion Centre**. It is very rewarding to know that all the efforts are appreciated by our concert-goers.

Next year is going to be a very exciting one indeed for NSW TOSA - with the **Easter Convention** being held here in Sydney AND with great artists performing for the first time in **Australia** AND interesting venues and organs to her and enjoy. Also next year will bring the long-awaited re-opening of the **MARRICKVILLE Wurlitzer**. "But there's still more!" as they

say - artists tentatively booked for concerts next year include the return of the sensational **Simon Gledhill** and **Nicholas Martin** from the UK, a first visit for **Jelani Eddington** from the USA, and the best of our world-class **Australian** organists - **Tony Fenelon**, **John Atwell**, **Margaret Hall** and **John Giacchi**. What a line-up! I can't wait for the year to get started! **TOSA** is certainly aiming to provide theatre organ lovers with a really **Happy New Year**.

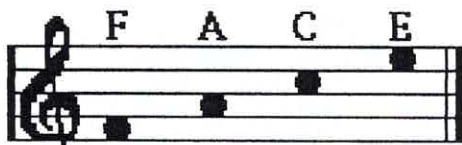
A sincere thank you to all the contributors to *TOSA News* who have brought our newsletter to new heights this year, and to those involved in the production and distribution of our monthly *TOSA News*, an unending and often unrecognised but greatly appreciated effort.

I look forward to serving you again in the New Year and I wish you and your families a wonderful Christmas season.

Best Wishes,
Colin Groves

Articles in this journal need not represent the views of the committee nor the editor

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



THE MUSIC

With Allan Tassaker

"Did you know that, at the tender age of five, I was asked to play with the Beatles?" bragged Allan.

"How come?" asked Allan's friend.

"My parents couldn't afford to give me toys!!"

Not to be outdone, Allan's friend pouted:

"So what! When I was five, I played with the Rolling Stones in my own backyard! My parents couldn't afford to buy me marbles!!!"

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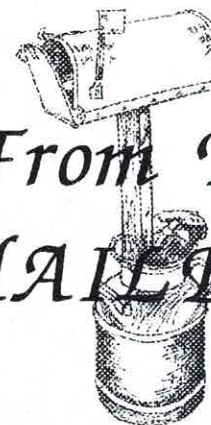
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From The MAILBOX

Bruce Hester of TOSA (Vic) writes to correct a point made in the Inner Western Suburbs Courier and reprinted the October issue of TOSA News :

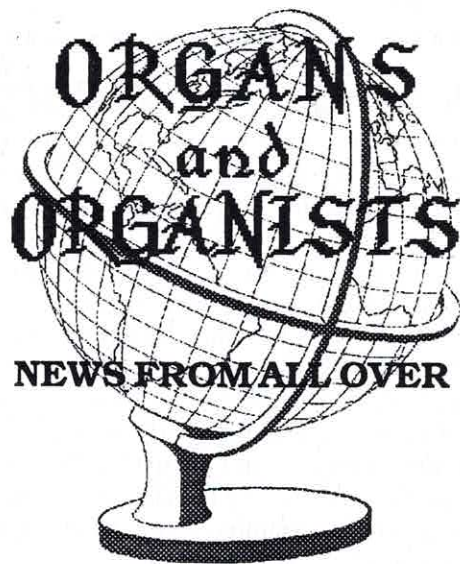
14/10/95

I am writing to you in regard to an article in your October issue of TOSA News regarding Neil Jensen, where a caption under the photo describes Neil as Australia's only Theatre Organist. I would like to correct this statement by advising you that for the past four years we have a resident Theatre Organist at the Dendy Cinema, Brighton, Victoria. He is 17 year old Heath Wooster who plays the WurliTzer to capacity cinema audiences every week. He also has the distinction of being the youngest Resident Theatre Organist in the World.

In 1994 he won the Intermediate Section of the A.T.O.S. Young Organist Competition, and was invited to play in a youth concert at the 1994 American Organ Convention. Heath also played a cameo spot at a concert by David Johnston at the Orion WurliTzer in 1993.

I am writing this to you as Editor as I feel that you are the one to write to. I realize that the Editor only prints that which is given him, but I felt I should correct that information.

Yours Sincerely,
Bruce M. Hester
Treasurer and
Dendy WurliTzer Curator
T.O.S.A. Victoria



CHATSWOOD CONCERT

Willoughby City Council is presenting a concert called *A WurliTzer Christmas*, centred on the **Chatswood WurliTzer** in the **Chatswood Town Hall** on Sunday, 17th December at 2.00pm. The concert will feature International Organist, **Margaret Hall**, with associate artists **Leslie Martin**, Soprano, and **Dean Sinclair**, Tenor.

Margaret will present a program of popular screen and stage favourites, including a Christmas selection. **Leslie** and **Dean** will perform well-known operetta solos and duets.

TOSA members and friends are being offered a special reduced price of \$10 if they book through **Ron Sinclair** on 417 2987.

The **Chatswood Town Hall** is in Victoria Avenue, **Chatswood's** main street, between Anderson and Archer Streets - about 1 minute's stroll from the Railway Station.

CREMORNE ORPHEUM

A reminder to those who might like to revisit the **Orpheum** and hear its **WurliTzer**, especially after their fabulous October concert, that there is a special Luncheon program at 11am on Wednesday, 29th November featuring **Neil Jensen** on the organ, **David Devenport** on the foyer's grand piano and the film *While You Were Sleeping*. The cost for movie, lunch, coffee and fun is only \$8.50. For reservations or further information, phone the **Orpheum** on 908 4395.

LARGEST PIPE ORGANS

Michael Laird of the USA placed on the Internet the following item about the largest pipe organs in the world. The organ in the Concert Hall of the Sydney Opera House comes in at number 14!

The largest, playable pipe organ in the world is definitely the **Wanamaker** organ in **Philadelphia**. It has been played every business day since it was installed at **Wanamakers** (now **Hecht's**) **Department Store** in 1911, although recently many parts have been unplayable at different times due to the current restoration project. Most of the divisions are working now, with the exceptions being the **Ethereal** and **Echo**.

The biggest missing piece to the instrument is the stop jambs, which have still not been installed. Thus all those ranks have to be controlled through a few blind pistons and the crescendo pedal. The organ boasts a thriving support group, "Friends of the **Wanamaker Organ**".

For those who are wondering how other famous large instruments compare to each other and to **Wanamakers**, here is a list of the 14 largest pipe organs in the world, sorted by the number of ranks each has.

The list refers to straight pipe organs, as opposed to Theatre Organs.

Pipe Organs Larger Than 200 Ranks

The list shows :

Location Manuals Ranks Builder

1. **Wanamaker's Department Store Philadelphia, PA.** 6/458 Los Angeles Art Organ Co./Wanamaker's
2. **Convention Hall, Atlantic City, NJ.** 7/455* Midmer-Losh
3. **USMA Cadet Chapel, West Point, NY.** 4/312 Moller & others
4. **Passau Cathedral, Passau, Germany.** 5/309 Eisenbarth
5. **Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, CA.** 5/273 Aeolian-Skinner/Ruffatti
6. **First Congregational Church, Los Angeles, CA.** 5/250 E.M. Skinner/Schlicker

7. **First Church of Christ Scientist, Boston, MA.** 4/238 Aeolian-Skinner

8. **First Baptist Church, Jackson, MS.** 5/231 E.M.Skinner/Casavant/Keates-Geissler

9. **St. Matthews Lutheran Church, Hanover, PA.** 4/231 Austin

10. **St. Batholomew's, New York, NY.** 5/225 Aeolian-Skinner

11. **The Riverside Church, New York, NY.** 5/216 Aeolian-Skinner

12. **The Mormon Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, UT.** 5/206 Aeolian-Skinner

13. **Calvary Church, Charlotte, NC.** 5/205 Moller, Opus 11739, 1990

14. **The Opera House, Sydney, Australia** 5/205** Sharp

Footnotes:

* This number has never been substantiated. According to an article written in *The American Organist*, only 336 ranks have been found! Due to many factors, including a flood, entire divisions sealed off because of asbestos in the chamber, etc., the organ has never been 100% operational.

** **Calvary** has more pipes than the **Opera House**, even though they both have 205 ranks.

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

Our President, **Cliff Bingham**, will be playing the **Concert Hall's Sharp Organ** for this year's *Christmas at the Opera House* shows, which will run from Saturday, 16th to Sunday, 24th December. The shows are at 6.30pm each night and also at 2.30pm on some days

This year the traditional, pantomime part of the show is called "*The Princess and The Pea*" and each performance includes **The Sydney Opera House Choir** and a **Christmas Nativity Tableau**. The musical director is **Matthew Perry**.

For any enquiries about these performances, or for bookings (which are probably essential given the usual popularity of these entertaining shows), phone the **Opera House Box Office** on 250 7777.

John Ledwon — The Organ House's 4/52 Wurlitzer:

On the Internet, John Ledwon has given details of the great 4/52 Wurlitzer he has installed in his private residence, which, for obvious reasons, he calls the "Organ House". Here is what John has to say :

The Theatre Organ, one of the few truly American musical instruments, was originally designed to accompany silent films before the advent of sound motion pictures. From about 1920 to 1930 several thousand of these instruments were produced by several manufacturers, the most prominent being the Rudolph Wurlitzer Company of North Tonawanda, New York.

My particular instrument is what is called a hybrid Wurlitzer, meaning that it is made up of parts from many different Wurlitzer theatre organs. The original instrument was from the Lyceum Theatre in Duluth, Minnesota. A major Southern California brush fire in 1978 all but decimated the pipe work from that instrument. Presently the organ contains pipe work from many instruments with the Philadelphia Mausbaum Theatre, the Chicago Avalon Theatre and the Los Angeles Metropolitan Theatre making up the largest portion.

The present instrument is the third organ installed in these premises. The first organ contained 26 ranks in three chambers and was mostly destroyed in the afore-mentioned brush fire.

The second organ consisted of 29 ranks with the same console as the first organ but with greater unification and boasted an all-electronic, multiplex relay system.

The present instrument is controlled by a new 4 manual Fox Special replica console built by Ken Crome, and consists of 52 ranks along with 32 channels of MIDI.

The instrument has been designed to provide just about every voice that was included in the original specifications of both large and small theatre

organs. In addition, 12 ranks from the 1925 Mormon Tabernacle Austin are installed along with the high pressure theatre ranks. The classical antiphonal division includes six of these ranks and is installed unenclosed above the console with a Steinway grand piano on the south wall of the living room. This division, when played with the main organ on the north end of the room, results in a sound that must be described as all-encompassing and is truly unique for any Californian residence instrument. A Trumpet-en-Chamade completes this division both tonally and visually.

When this instrument was originally installed in the 1970's, it was one of the first residence organs to use a unique installation idea of double-floored chambers. All pressure regulating and other related, noise-making equipment is installed on the lower level with a solid structural floor separating this area from the sound production area, called the chambers. A theatre organ installed in this manner suffers far less noise problems related to putting one of these massive instruments (usually meant for theatres of from 1,000 to 5000 seats) into a private residence.

This instrument is presently the largest theatre organ in the Western United States, and probably the most versatile with its 4-manual console, 418 stop keys and 96 combination pistons. In addition, the MIDI voices add the equivalent of an additional 13 ranks or percussions and are controlled by regular stop keys and combination

action. Three sampled 32' pedal extensions along with seven sampled 16' extensions combine with six acoustic 16' ranks to give a building-shaking foundation to the organ. There are 800 watts of audio power available for the pedal extensions and other sampled/synthesized voices. An extensive digital reverberation system, which gives a totally predictable and stable reverb regardless of room occupancy, completes the electronic additions to the instrument.

The organ contains 3,529 pipes in three divisions. Seven ranks extend through 2'. Included in the organ are eleven ranks of strings (thirteen if you count the Duliciana and Celeste), four ranks of Diapasons, ten ranks of orchestral reeds, six ranks of Chorus Reeds (including three Trumpets), four ranks of Flutes and three ranks of Tibias and is powered by two blowers, one of fifteen horsepower and one of two horsepower.

Visibility of the organ and its internal parts, pipes and percussions is excellent due to Plexiglas swell shades. A leaded-glass chamber door also facilitates viewing otherwise inaccessible portions of the organ. The lower level regulator rooms are easily entered to view the pressure regulating equipment. Maximum comfortable seating capacity is around 150.

In designing both the organ and its environment it was a constant compromise between the best organ installation technique and the visual aspect.

Hopefully the overall result has proven successful. An organ this size rightfully does not belong in a residence but in a large theatre. It is hoped that someday this instrument will be installed intact in a large theatre where many thousands may experience and enjoy its truly unique sound.

Visitors are always welcome, call 818-889-8894. Photos of the console and the installation are on the Internet's Theatre Organ Home Page : <http://wcbi.com/organs/>



*Nigel Ogden is one of our two visiting artists for next year's fabulous Easter Convention, right here in Sydney. For many years he has compered a weekly BBC programme called **The Organist Entertains**. Here he reminisces about his early theatre organ experiences in an article from the UK's **Cinema Organ Society's** journal **Cinema Organ**, dated Autumn 1994.*

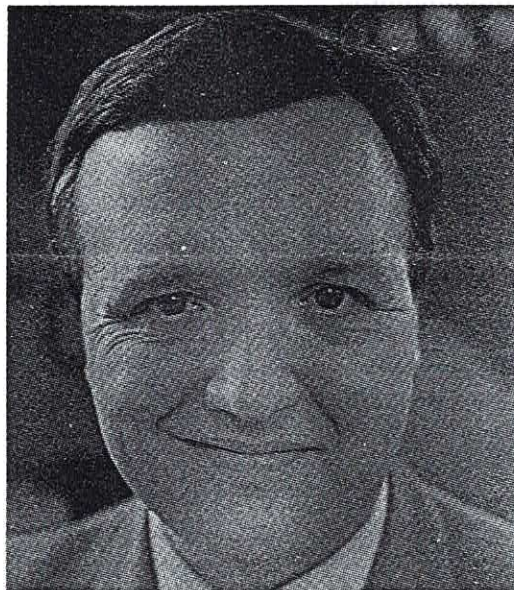
The Organist is Entertained

Nigel Ogden

As Radio 2's 'The Organist Entertains' celebrates its 25th birthday, its weekly compère takes us back to the days when the organ began to entertain him.

IT PAINS me greatly to admit this but, very shortly, it will be 25 years since I made my first public appearance playing the theatre organ — and look what's happened to the world since then!

I thought I would jot down a few memories of my early days — hardly comparable with the great theatre organ days of the 1930s, articles about which I, along with many others, have enjoyed so much over the years in this worthy periodical. Nevertheless, for my own amusement as much as anything else, these are a few personal reminiscences which some of you may find mildly interesting — and it's certainly a good way of passing one of my frequent Inter-City journeys between Manchester and London! I wonder how many people have had their first introduction to the theatre organ at the Tower Ballroom, Blackpool? I think a conservative estimate might be 'a lot', one of that lot being me. It was in the days when Reginald Dixon still had his weekly half-hour 'Beside The Seaside' broadcasts on the Light Programme and, during an autumn visit to the resort when I was 11 or 12, to see the illuminations, my father and I were members of the packed audience for one of these broadcasts.



At this point in time, the only theatre organ I had seen was the old B.B.C. Möller in Jubilee Chapel at Hoxton in London's East End when, a few years earlier, Dad took me to meet Sandy Macpherson, who was a family friend, and had, incidentally, arranged for my father to audition for broadcasting at the Odeon, Manchester in 1942 — because of the war this never happened. I still have all the original correspondence, though!

Anyway, as I say, I sat at the huge five manual Möller console at the age of eight and played goodness knows what — my repertoire was somewhat limited then! As Eric Lord put it to me in a radio interview many years later, the stops hung down like bunches of bananas! After that, I remember Sandy taking us to a Lyons Corner House (I was always intrigued by that name) and buying me a glass of orange juice which I drank to the accompaniment of someone playing an 'electric' organ, but I'm afraid I don't know who it was.

Returning to Blackpool, my father informed me that the console I was about to see was rather different to the

Möller — and, of course, he wasn't wrong! Mind you, I'd spent at least ten minutes trying to find the thing when, all of a sudden, a large, gaping hole appeared in the stage floor, followed by the most glorious sound I'd ever heard and the appearance of that famous white and gold console.

That was it — I was totally gobs-macked (although such a coarse expression didn't exist in those days!), and such was the impression the whole scene made on me it is still one of the most vivid of my childhood memories, even to the extent that my mind's eye can still see the exact colours of Reg's light grey suit and the white carnation in his button-hole. Never in my wildest dreams could I ever have imagined that I was to play that organ myself on many occasions in the future and, indeed, interview on radio the man I was now watching! Another snippet in passing: the producer of Reg's programmes at that time was Peter Pilbeam who, of course, became my first producer when I took over 'The Organist Entertains'.

Shortly after this momentous visit to Blackpool, my father casually informed me that the Odeon and

Perhaps not quite as young as eight, but this picture of Nigel takes us back a year or two



Gaumont Cinemas in our home town of Manchester both possessed these Wurlitzer things and one could go and play them on a Saturday morning for a guinea an hour — £1.05 if you don't already know! At that age, I didn't have a lot of guinea-an-hours to spare but I used to save up pocket money as often as I could and book myself in, and it was at the consoles of these two superb instruments that I had my first close encounter with tibias, tremulants and train-whistles!

Fortunately, I got to know Joyce Alldred, who was then in the middle of her 17-year residency at the Davenport Theatre, Stockport, and through the kindness of her and owner/manager, Jack Edge, I was able to have several free sessions on the six unit Compton — a different kettle of fish altogether, but a good grounding for later years. Being an understage installation, the organ really makes its point to those sitting in the front circle and, indeed, on a clear night with no wind, full organ can be heard in several adjoining counties.

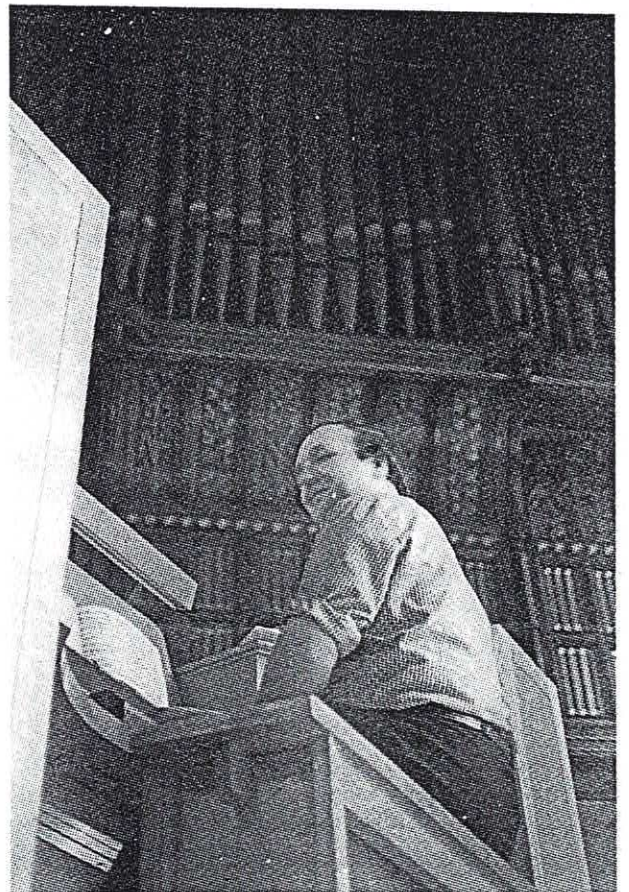
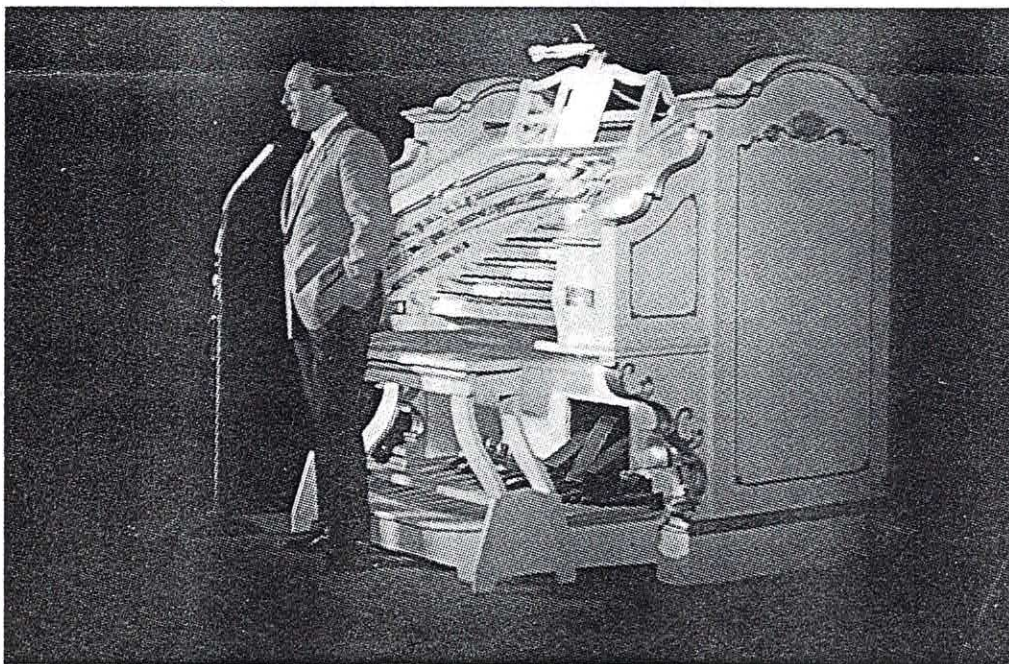
In 1969 an advertisement in the Manchester Evening News announced that the recently formed Lancastrian Theatre Organ Trust would be presenting a concert at the Odeon, Manchester on January 26th, featuring the one and only Mr Blackpool, Reginald Dixon. At that time it was a very rare thing to miss going to church on a Sunday morning but, after much persuasion, I was allowed to go.

Again the event is as clear in my mind as if it were yesterday. I arrived at the theatre in Oxford Street a good hour before before the concert, but already the queues stretched round the

building. By 10.55 the place was packed and at 11 o'clock on to the stage came Keith Phillipson, North-West Secretary of the Theatre Organ Club and L.T.O.T. committee member who compèred so superbly the many Odeon and Gaumont concerts during the next few years. The atmosphere on such occasions is often described as being 'electric' but it certainly was that morning and when the first chords of 'I Do Like to Be Beside the Seaside' emanated from the chambers, the resulting explosion of tumultuous applause was deafening. One thing which struck me immediately was the particularly slow, rather majestic speed of the console lift — it was no use rushing your signature tune on that organ or else you'd finished before you'd arrived!

I became a regular patron of those Sunday morning concerts, and I would say that the performances I saw and heard during that period had the most direct and formative influence on my own musical development as far as theatre organ playing is concerned, particularly as they provided the opportunity to hear the great names of the theatre organ world, many of whom are no longer with us — people like

Nigel in concert mode at the South Bank Wurlitzer



Nigel in informal mode at Manchester Town Hall

Reginald Porter-Brown, Robinson Cleaver, Vic Hammett and Jackie Brown, and, in 1971, the great Reginald Foort. Although, at that age, I was nowhere near fully understanding the various aspects of artistic, orchestral theatre organ playing, it was obvious to me as I listened that this was someone rather special and, as I think back, I can still hear parts of that concert very clearly.

The end of each concert at the Odeon, Manchester was followed by something of a ritual — the arrival of Ronnie Wood, hot-foot from St John's Church, Failsworth, where he was organist and choir-master at that time. Ronnie was weekend house organist at the Odeon for over 20 years and after each concert was eager to change the combination

pistons back to his own settings before opening the afternoon house at 2 o'clock. This procedure involved much frenetic movement between the bench and the setter board at the back of the console, setting a combination, running round to the front, jabbing the appropriate piston, playing a few hurried chords to check that the stops that had come on were those he'd intended, then round the back once again. With ten pistons on each of the four manuals plus ten for the pedal department this high-speed operation was repeated many times, but he usually managed to get it all done before finally settling himself on the bench and 'ringing' the Westminster chimes at 2 o'clock, which is how he always opened up.

Ronnie was a friendly, enthusiastic chap, and during the few years I was lucky enough to play weekend interludes at the Gaumont just across the road, we would often meet up for a drink and a chat. One amusing incident comes to mind — well, it was to me! It was a Saturday evening and, the film programme having got underway at the Gaumont, I potted across Oxford Street and into the Odeon to meet up

Nigel at the console of BBC Theatre Organ Number 3 during its time in the Playhouse Theatre, Manchester.



with Ronnie. He was still playing when I walked in so I stood at the back of the stalls listening and waiting for the end of the interval.

For some reason which I've now forgotten, Ronnie hadn't brought the console up to its full height that evening and a couple of minutes later, I was fascinated to see a lad of about 10 or 11 walk down the aisle towards the organ holding a tub of ice-cream, a blob of which he proceeded to flick with the end of his wooden spoon on to the back of Ronnie's dark blue suit. Inevitably, this immediately altered the appearance of the jacket as originally intended by the tailor and I awaited developments with interest. In fact, Ronnie was unaware of what had happened, but this happy state of affairs did not continue for long. About thirty seconds later, the boy's mother appeared and began to wipe the ice-cream off the jacket with her handkerchief. The sensation of an unseen hand suddenly moving up and down his back caused Ronnie to produce what I can only describe as some of the most fascinating harmonic progressions I have ever heard and, were it not for the fact that it was composed a

considerable number of years earlier, I would have strongly suspected that his performance at that moment had been the inspiration for Sullivan's 'The Lost Chord'.

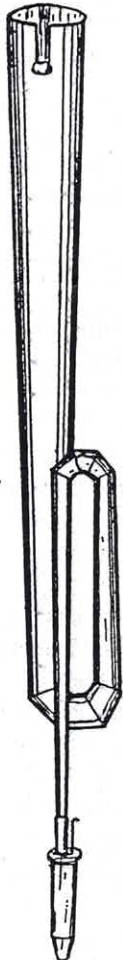
It was during this period that I began broadcasting, but before we get involved with all that, I will take a breather, and perhaps enlarge further at a later date.

Winston Loveland, a wonderful, hard-working force behind the Ballarat Theatre Organ Society and its Newsletter, has kindly consented to the re-printing of his item about large pipes in small spaces, with particular reference to their 3/9 Compton in Ballarat's historic Her Majesty's Theatre.

He calls his item Technicalities Without Tears !

HOW DOES A 32 FOOT PIPE FIT INSIDE A 12 FOOT HIGH CHAMBER ?

Theatre organists all know that organ pipes can vary in pitch from a very high 1' Piccolo to a very low 32' Tibia. The shorter the pipe, the higher its sound and vice versa. And if you take an 8' pipe as the foundation and double its length to 16 foot, it will sound an octave lower. And doubling it again to 32 foot will lower its pitch a further octave.



And when sitting at the console of our Compton, you notice that there are four ranks at 16' pitch (Trombone, Diaphone, Tibia Bass and Bourdon) and also one rank at 32' pitch (Accoustic Bass). Further, having had a look inside the two organ chambers under the floor of Her Majesty's, you noticed that they were both only twelve feet high. Where were the big pipes 16 and 32 feet long and how did they fit inside space only 12 feet high?

Elementary, my dear Watson ! There are two ways in which it is done. The first : if an organ pipe is "mitred" or bent (see illustration at left), The pipe will then sound an octave lower. Which means that if the lowest pitched pipes of an 8' rank (which easily fit inside our chambers) were mitred, they will sound an octave lower, at 16'. That gets rid of the 16 footers. Of the 681 pipes in our two organ chambers, 34 are mitred like the pipe on the left.

But how about the 32' Accoustic Bass pipes? This very low note is produced by means of the RESULTANT. When air under pressure is forced into an organ pipe, it produces vibrations in the air, known as frequencies. High frequencies are linked to high (treble) notes and low frequencies to low (bass) notes. Now, when two "sympathetic" low 16' notes are played together, they vibrate against each other to produce a note of very low frequency at an octave lower than what was played, that is, a 32' note.

Without getting too technical, the middle C note on the keyboard vibrates at 261.6 cycles per second. Some big pipe organs have a range up to 22,000 cycles (vibrations) a second (very high treble) and down to some 8 cycles per second. The 32' note on our Compton beats at 16.35 cycles per second and if we had a 64' stop, it would rumble away at only 8.17 cycles a second which you probably couldn't hear but would make your teeth and the chandeliers rattle.

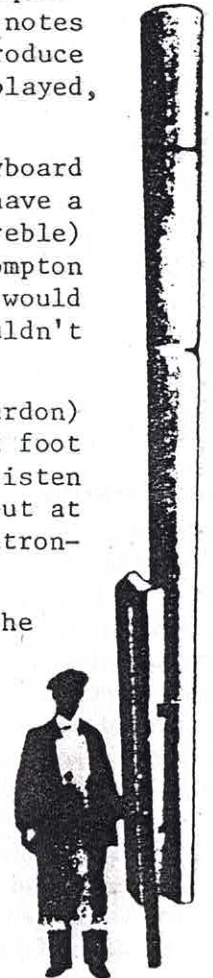
But back to the RESULTANT. If you put the 16' Diapason (or Bourdon) stop down and play the lowest C on the pedals with your left foot and at the same time play the fifth note up (G) with your right foot and listen for the surging of the 16.3 cycles per second, you would hear the note C but at an octave lower, that is, at a 32' frequency. But don't try it on your electronic organ. It works best with genuine air and in genuine pipes.

So if you are still with me after all that technical stuff, that explains the sneaky way you get a 32 foot pipe into a 12 foot high chamber. Diapason stops are the "foundation" stops of a pipe organ and produce the best Resultants. And by the way, you don't have to play two notes with your feet together on our Compton. The lower note and its fifth have been wired together electrically to both sound when you play the lower note.

A few years ago Mrs Cox took some lucky young organists down to Melbourne to see the pipes and play the huge Melbourne Town Hall pipe organ. There were 7,000 pipes in chambers 32 feet high and covering an area of almost half an acre! We had to tie a string to all the kids so that we wouldn't lose them as they wandered around inside the ranks of pipes. The largest pipe in the Melbourne Town Hall organ is made of Californian red pine and is actually 32 feet high. It just fits !

Happy pedalling !

Winston



The John Compton Organ Co., Ltd.

FIG. 10. AN OUTSIZE IN ORGAN PIPES

The bottom note of a 32 ft. reed.

TOSA ACTION, newsletter of the ACT Division of TOSA, carried the following article in July this year about the history of the Melbourne theatre where Tony Fenelon played for some years.

MELBOURNE'S REGENT THEATRE

Architecturally, socially and historically, the Regent Theatre is one of Melbourne's most important buildings, and the City of Melbourne and the Victorian Government have now recognised the theatre's significance. In a major development project, the Regent Theatre is planned to be returned to its former glory and again be available for use as a cinema and live performance venue.

The Regent Theatre was conceived by the theatrical entrepreneur Francis William Thring and erected under his supervision. The architect was Cedric H Ballantyne and the builder James Porter and Son. All plaster work was designed and constructed by Picton Hopkins and Son.

The building was constructed during the latter half of the 1920's by Hoyts Theatres Ltd and was officially opened on 15 March 1929. The feature of the opening night was the film *The Two Lovers*, with Ronald Colman and Vilma Blanky.

The theatre was built to accommodate 3500 patrons. The acoustic, sightlines and the gently sloping auditorium floors were such that each patron could see everything on the stage and hear every spoken word without amplification. This was largely due to the expert use of perforated decorative plaster work throughout the auditorium.

It was not only a cinema and picture hall, but also served as a venue for live entertainment in which live stage, orchestral and pipe organ performances were of at least equal importance to the film program. Its stage was (then) the largest in Australia with the flytower 61 feet high for screen curtains and 200 batten lights of 60,000 candle power. There were 300 footlights, 50 stage spotlights, and others in the projection gallery.

The 45 player orchestra was raised and lowered in the pit by a huge hydraulic platform, as was the console of the WurliTzer 4/21 pipe organ on its separate hydraulic lift alongside. This organ was orchestral. In addition to being a classical organ it had other pipes which closely simulated the sounds of other musical instruments eg grand piano, xylophones, glockenspiel, tower chimes and percussion instruments. Thus one person could rival the orchestra.

An ornate ceiling, painted in tempera, remains intact in the foyer. Gold leaf, rather than oily paint, was used on much of the plaster work in the foyer and auditorium. Throughout the foyer, original oils and water color paintings, bronze and marble sculptures, antique chairs and tables were displayed although most of these were sold at auction to The Old Melbourne Motor Inn.

During the 1930's and early 40's the Theatre continued to provide an important venue for film and entertainment. During the depression and war years, stage entertainments were curtailed though never eliminated, and large numbers of transient troops packed every session to see weekly changes of double feature films.

However, during the night of 29 and 30 April 1945, a fire destroyed the auditorium. All the back stage facilities were saved from destruction by the lowering of the safety

curtain. The Plaza Theatre below was flooded by a burst water main, but was able to re-open in only a matter of weeks. The cause of the fire was attributed to an electrical short circuit in the ceiling of the main auditorium.

Restoration of the theatre took 2 years due to the shortage of materials following World War 2, and the theatre was re-opened on 19 December 1947. Using the original moulds, the ornate architecture was painstakingly re-created by architect George Appleford. In addition, Hoyts Theatres appointed an expert firm of specialist plaster moulders James Lloyl and Son, who worked from the original photographs of the Theatre in 1929.

Following the re-opening, the Regent continued as the flagship of the Hoyts circuit. The first Cinemascope feature *The Robe*, was to run for 16 weeks, an all time record for the theatre and required a giant curved screen (over 50 feet wide) to be installed over the orchestra pit. To accommodate this, the organ console was moved to the left of the proscenium box, where it remained even after an advanced form of Cinemascope made the screen over the orchestra pit unnecessary.

Underneath the Regent Theatre was a large space originally intended as a cabaret and ballroom, built with side promenades and large central dance floor. In October 1929, it was announced that this area would become another smaller theatre, the Plaza theatre. It was designed to seat 1500 people.

For the last time, the huge velvet curtain of the Theatre came down on 1 July 1970. The Plaza continued to operate for a few more months, with one of its longest runs ever *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* but it also closed in November 1970. The Theatre was sold by Hoyts Theatres to concentrate its operations into the new Bourke Street Cinema Centre.

The building was bought by the City of Melbourne, as part of the proposed re-development and creation of a new City Square. Since that time, through a number of development proposals, the Theatre has remained closed to the general public.

The City of Melbourne and the Victorian State Government are working together with a development company to restore the Theatre to its former splendour. The building will be leased to an operator to again provide a venue for cinema as well as live performances. It will provide seating for around 2000 people. Much of the Theatre remains intact. Aside from restoration, additional works are required to ensure that the building meets today's standard for services and building maintenance. In addition it is necessary to provide state-of-the-art technical equipment for screening films and to stage modern productions and live entertainment.

The Plaza Theatre will be returned to its original purpose as a cabaret/ballroom venue. The Collins Street facade will be restored. It is intended that the restoration process will be completed by the end of 1995.