

Volume 26 Issue 2 Price 50¢ February 1987

TOSA NEWS

The Official Publication of the Theatre Organ Society
of Australia, N.S.W. Division
Address - Box 474 Sutherland 2232
Registered by Australia Post - Publication No. N.B.H. 1038

★ FREE CONCERT! ★

SUNDAY 1st. MARCH 1987 AT 2.00PM.

MARRICKVILLE TOWN HALL



Clinton White



Andrea Harrison



David Riley

play TOSA's magnificent
WURLITZER

DIRECTORYTHEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA (N.S.W.DIVISION)

PATRON Ian Davies

PRESIDENT Ian Somerville (476 4991)

VICE PRESIDENTS Phyllis Wilson (759 6050) Cliff Bingham (476 2363)

SECRETARY Bob McMinn (542 3937)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY Pam McMinn (542 3937)

TREASURER John Rattray (517 2247)

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY Bob McMinn (542 3937)

RESEARCH AND ARCHIVES Ian Cameron

PRACTICE CONVENOR Bob Staunton (607 8925)

COMMITTEE Bill Schumacher, Neil Palmer, Ron Wilson, Jack Lawson

Margaret Hall, John Shaw

MINUTE SECRETARY

TOSA NEWS EDITOR Ron Wilson (759 6050)

TOSA NEWS PRINTING Ron Wilson

PHOTOGRAPHY Barry Tooker

CONCERT RECORDING Bill Schumacher and Ron Wilson

CONCERT HIRING Neil Palmer (798 6742)

HOME PARTIES Andrea Harrison (520 8632)

Address all correspondence to:-

The Secretary, T.O.S.A. (N.S.W. Division)

Box 474 P.O. SUTHERLAND N.S.W. 2232

HELP WANTEDPOSITION VACANTNEW MEMBERS

January meeting.

A cordial welcome is extended to the following new members.

John Morris

Merici Loche

Mrs F Wing

Mrs Ailsa Isabelle Smith

Irene Watkinson

TOSA is seeking an enthusiastic member to take up the position of minute secretary. This position requires he or she to attend the Society's monthly committee meetings and to take down the necessary notes of the happenings. Typing would be an advantage, but not a necessity.

Your help would be greatly appreciated in filling this position.

Please contact the Secretary, Bob McMinn if you can help, or if you need further information.

PLEASE NOTE.

UNLESS YOUR MEMBERSHIP FEES HAVE BEEN PAID

THIS WILL BE YOUR LAST TOSA NEWS

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



FEBRUARY

MONDAY 2nd at 7.30pm.
COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY 18th at 7.30pm.
QUARTERLY MEMBERS MEETING
MARRICKVILLE TOWN HALL

MARCH

SUNDAY 1st at 2.00pm.
FREE CONCERT
MARRICKVILLE TOWN HALL
Featuring Clinton White, Andrea Harrison
and David Riley.

MONDAY 2nd at 7.30pm.
COMMITTEE MEETING

SUNDAY 29th at 2.00pm.
RAY THORNLEY IN CONCERT
Admission: Adults \$8 Members \$6
Concession \$5. Children under the
age of 15 admitted free.

APRIL

MONDAY 6th at 7.30pm.
COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY 8th at 7.30pm.
CLUB NIGHT
MARRICKVILLE TOWN HALL

FRIDAY 17th - MONDAY 20th
NATIONAL CONVENTION
ADELAIDE

MAY

MONDAY 4th at 7.30pm.
COMMITTEE MEETING

SATURDAY 9th at 2.30pm.
BONDI-WAVERLY RSL CLUB
GRAY STREET BONDI-JUNCTION.
Patron Ian Davies is once again inviting
members and friends to attend an
afternoon of organ and piano music.
Proceeds go to the Capitol Organ Fund.
Admission:- \$4.00.

WEDNESDAY 20th at 7.30pm.
QUARTERLY MEMBERS MEETING
MARRICKVILLE TOWN HALL

SUNDAY 24th at 2.00pm.
2CBA-FM CONCERT
MARRICKVILLE TOWN HALL
Admission Adults \$8 Members \$6
Concession \$5. Children under the
age of 15 admitted free.

FOR SALE

For Sale - Pipe Organ (Leggo Tubular
pneumatic stop and key action).

St.Marks Anglican Church
GRANVILLE

Consider selling in early 1987 - almost
complete or in parts. Bellows overhauled
1982.

Offers. (02) 631 6459 A.H.

For Sale - Organ - Conn model 552
console.

2 - 26 note keyboards - 13 pedals.
Leslie - Vibrato - Sustain.

Attack percussion - repeat percussion.

Rhythm section - stereo expression.

Chorus control - voiced fun master.

Excellent condition - \$2500 or O.N.O.

For further details, ring (02)887 4421.

For Sale - Yamaha - model B30R

2 - 44 note keyboards - 13 pedals.

This organ is in excellent condition,
and comes complete with stool and
a lot of music - ideal for student.

Price:- \$1200 or nearest offer.

For further details, ring 887 3992.

HOME PARTIES.

Members will have noticed in the past
issues of TOSA NEWS that we are
often asking members if they would
consider holding parties in their homes.

Obect:

(A) To raise funds for TOSA mainten-
ance, expansion and installations.

(B) To provide an evening of our common
interest, entertainment in which we
can make new friends and consolidate
existing relationships.

Supplied by TOSA:

(A) Cups and holders.

(B) Teapots and urns.

If you would like to host a **HOME
PARTY** in your home, please contact
Andrea Harrison for all details by
ringing 520 8632.

THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA (NSW DIVISION)

NOTICE OF SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice of a Special General Meeting of the association is hereby given as follows;

DATE: 18th February 1987.

TIME: 7.30pm

VENUE: Marrickville Town Hall
Marrickville Road
Marrickville

- AGENDA:
- (1) Apologies
 - (2) Reports
 - (i) Secretary
 - (ii) Treasurer
 - (iii) Orion Installation
 - (iv) Marrickville Maintenance
 - (v) Other
 - (3) Motions on Notice
(at the time of publication there are no motions on notice)
 - (4) General Business
 - (5) Supper - ladies please bring a plate.

BY ORDER OF THE COMMITTEE

R.J.McMinn Secretary

* * * * *

NOTES FROM THE SECRETARY

The 1987 TOSA year is now well and truly in full swing. Our first concert for 1987 is upon us and what a concert it looks like being. As well as concerts we have had a home organ, come pool party and a club night.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE. In the January issue of Tosa News we included a questionnaire and already we have many responses however we would like to ask you to keep them coming in - we need the answers. When we have done all the analysis we do intend to publish some of the results in TOSA News. Of course what we publish will only be totals and percentages as there is no way any questionnaires can identify an individual member.

FREE CONCERTS. During this year we will, of course, hold several free concerts, that is concerts where you do not have to pay to come. Members of the committee are from time to time asked "Why, when we need to keep raising funds, do we put on free concerts?" The answer is simple - our agreement with Marrickville Council, who of course provide the home for our organ, requires us to hold a number of free concerts each year for the benefit of the residents of the Municipality of Marrickville. The agreement with Canterbury Council for the Orion installation has a similar provision. With the approval of Marrickville Council we do each year charge admission fees to one of the so called free concerts and then donate the proceeds to 2CBA-FM to help them fund their activities.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS. About 40% of members have so far renewed their membership for this year. Many have taken the advantage of the 18 months offer we made in the December issue. For those of you who have not renewed for 1987 time is running out - please send along the renewal - we need the money to keep our society running and you really would not like to fall by the wayside now would you?

STOP PRESS. Just as this magazine was about to go to press I had a call from our Patron Ian Davies. Due to many requests by members to hold further Capitol Fund Raising Mini-Concerts at Bondi Junction Waverley RSL, Ian has set aside a date and for those many people who said they would prefer some time other than a night time Ian has obliged. More details will be provided in the next issue but set aside the date SATURDAY 9th May 2.00pm and you are welcome to come for lunch or stay for dinner or both in the newly renovated club dining room.

CAPITOL HAPPENINGS

ORION ORGAN INSTALLATION

PROGRESS REPORT

(By Jack Lawson)

In an endeavour to keep the membership aware of progress, it is our intention to issue a report as work proceeds.

To this time, two four rank chests are almost completely overhauled by Doug Smith and his work team, and will be fully re-assembled in two to three weeks time. This only leaves one four rank and one three rank to be done plus some offsets.

The regulators were sent to Adelaide to be rebuilt late last year, and I have received word from George Stephens, who did them, that they are now finished and ready to be shipped back.

One set of shutters has been completely resized and rebuilt by our member, Mr. Jim Crombie, and is in the solo chamber ready for installation as soon as I return from holidays in the middle of February.

The framework for the solo chests, the two four ranks previously mentioned, has been bought and cut and assembled by Mr. Ian Somerville.

Almost all of the boxes of pipes are now in at Campsie in the chambers, where a complete stocktake and damage assessment will soon take place with a view to having damaged pipes repaired.

I trust that this information will show members that work is well in hand at the Orion Centre at Campsie.

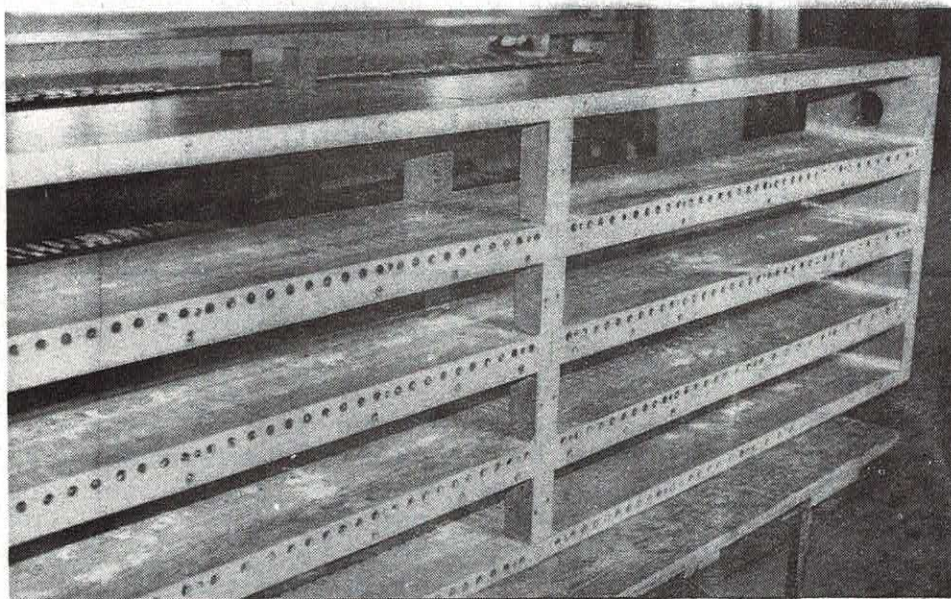


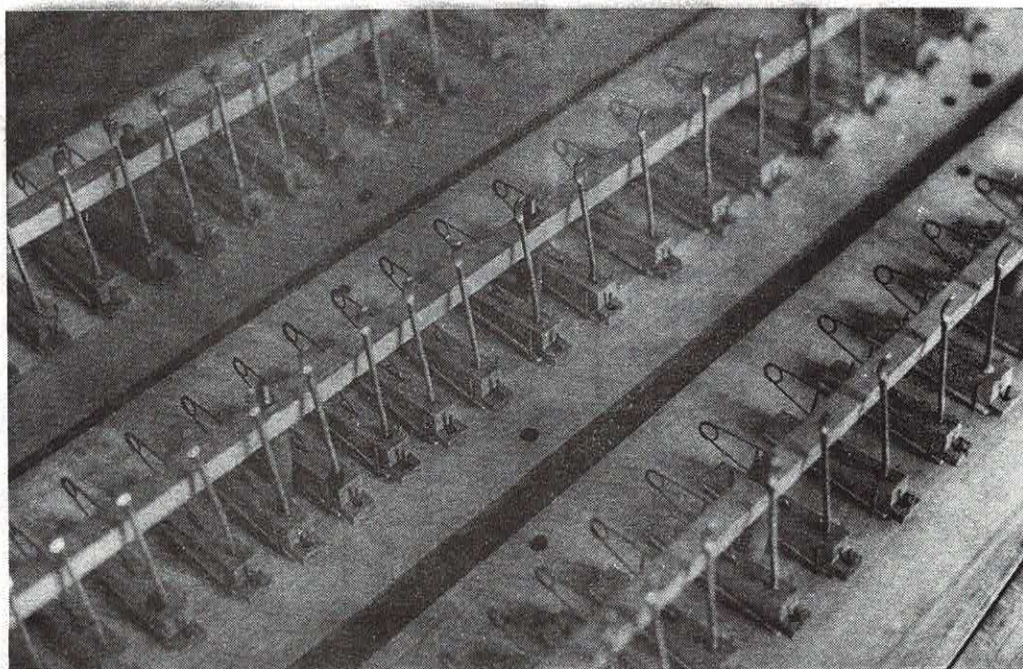
Photo at left.

Chest ready to have the motors glued in position.

Chest will consist of:-
Flute, Viol D Orchestre, Viol Celeste
and Clarinet.

Photo below.

Completed top boards with pallets in position.



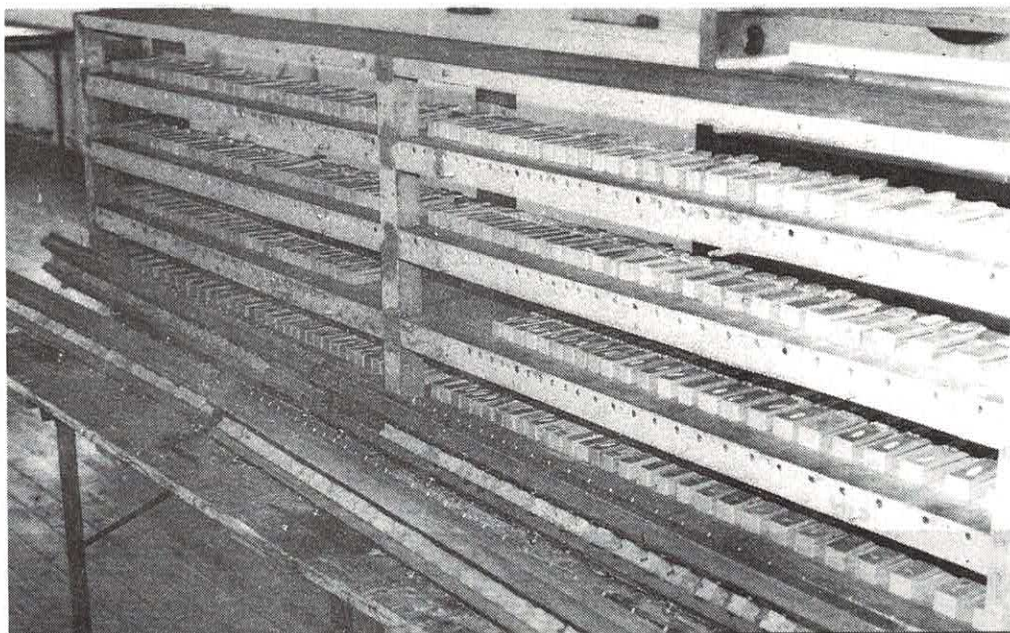


Photo above.

Completed chest ready to have the top and bottom boards fitted.

The four ranks will consist of:-
Kinura, Oboe, Solo String,
and Orchestral Oboe.

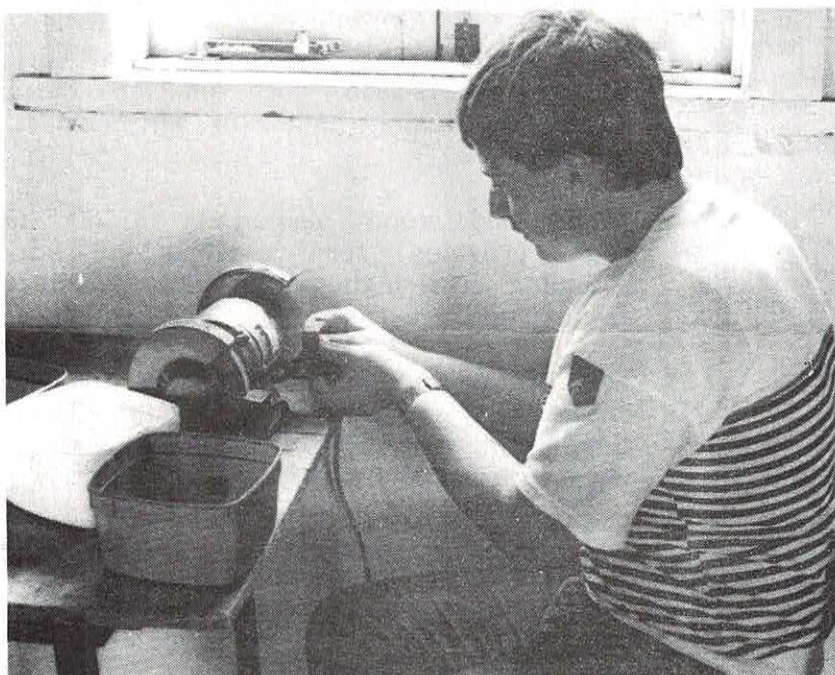
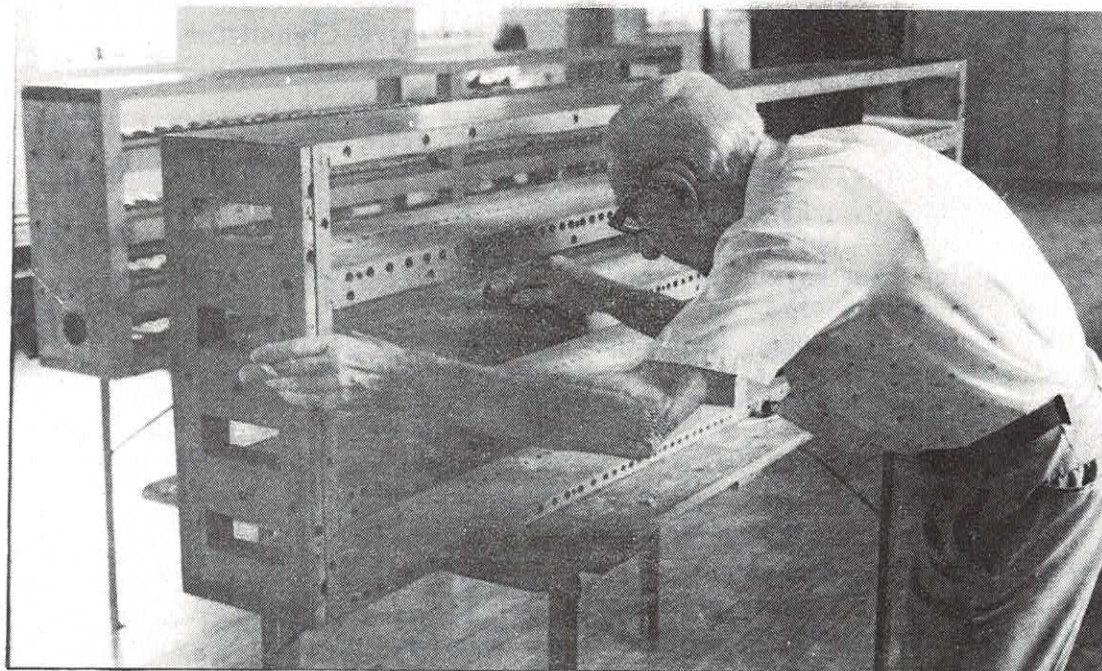


Photo at left.

John Giacchi polishing rust off steel guide pins.

Photo below.

Bill Bullock working on one of the chests.



W. A. BUYS COMPTON

TOSA WA Division has bought the 3/10 Compton theatre pipe organ owned by Bob Purvis, which became available on Mr. Purvis's sudden death earlier this year.

It is understood the purchase price was \$20,000, of which \$14,000 was paid at the signing of the contract, because some friends of theatre organ were prepared to donate cash, with the balance payable in one year. The organ has been dismantled and was to be transported to its future location over the weekend 29-30th November.

Father Jim Miller did most of his Perth practice on the Compton, because the Karrinyup was not available until late in the day before his concert. He fell in love with its bright clean sound and "punch". Father Jim rated the Perth Compton and Cinema North organs, both English instruments, as among the best he had played, being ideally suited to his style of music.

News source.. VOX, December 1986.

WORK STARTS SOON AT ST PETER'S

ADELAIDE

Tenders have been called for the re-building of the Memorial Hall at St Peter's College, Adelaide, which was destroyed by fire on 7th December 1985. It is hoped to have the hall ready for re-opening by the end of 1987.

The College's Director of Music, Mr. David Merchant says that \$60,000 will be spent on the 3/15 Wurlitzer organ, ex-Regent Theatre, Adelaide, that came close to being destroyed in the fire. This will cover moving of the console, more grille openings in the wall for better sound projection, and repairs to the console, Wurlitzer piano, trunking, shutters and pipework.

Mr. Merchant is hopeful that organ builder George Stephens will complete the organ restoration by the time the hall is ready for re-opening, but it is more likely it will not be heard until early in 1987.

\$15,000 ALLOCATION TO MOORABBIN WURLITZER

Moorabbin City Council has provided \$15,000 in its current year's budget for essential maintenance and improvements to the 4/21 Wurlitzer organ.

The major work to be paid for from this allocation will be the construction of a solid state system to replace the almost 60-year-old electrical relays and switch stacks which constantly develop faults that are increasingly difficult to trace among the thousands of wires in the cables from the console.

This means that notes can be "off", or stop keys do not function during a concert, which handicaps an organist's performance.

It is understood also that \$1500 has been provided for rejuvenation work, including restringing, of the Wurlitzer grand piano.

The work to be carried out on the organ will not affect it tonally. Everything will just work better and be virtually trouble-free.

The \$15,000 allocation resulted from a submission prepared by the Moorabbin organ maintenance team setting out what needed to be done to bring the Wurlitzer back to peak condition, which was presented to Council by the Executive Committee last May.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

(Received on 21st January)

The Weismantel family wish to thank the many members of TOSA for their expressions of sympathy on the death of Norm's sister, Mrs Nina Gray B.E.M. on the 29th December 1986.

The funeral service on New Year's Eve, drew a crowd of over 300 sympathisers.

The engagement was announced on November 22nd. 1986 of John Weismantel and Sharon Peters. Many congratulatory messages have been received from TOSA members.

SOUTH OF THE BORDER
DOWN WOLLONGONG WAY

HOME ORGAN/POOL & B.B.Q. PARTY

At the home of Bert & Joan Chamberlain.
 (Review by Andrea Harrison)

A great day was had by the 30 people who made the trip down to the scenic Mt. Warrigal for the party given by our kind hosts, Bert and Joan Chamberlain.

Amidst the talking, eating, music-making and general hilarity, some people managed to plunge into the cooling waters of the pool, and next thing we knew, it was transformed into a spa pool! (literally).

All in all, a most enjoyable day. Our thanks must go to Bert and Joan for putting in SO much effort, which resulted in a further \$156 to boost the Capitol Organ Fund.



Host, Bert Chamberlain, about to light the barbecue.



Enjoying a splash in the pool are (L - R) Jack and Pearl Lawson, Jack Stronach and Andrea Harrison. (Photos by Doug Smith).

21 YEARS OF T.O.S.A. IN S.A.

By Anthony Taylor & Bev Sawyer.

BEGINNINGS.

Love of the theatre organ is a disease for which, sadly, there is only one cure - embalming fluid!

Following the Second World War there were many people who enjoyed the Theatre Organ live, on record and through the live programmes of the A.B.C. Many theatre organ lovers felt an isolation as the classical organ lovers considered the theatre organ a heresy.

On Sunday 18th September 1960, the inaugural meeting of the Victorian Division of the Theatre Organ Society of Australia was held. The first copy of "VOX" was published in December 1960. Names like Stanfield Holliday, Gordon Hamilton, David Cross, Julien Arnold and Alan Tranter appear amongst the office bearers.

News of this spread to South Australia and by the February 1961 edition of "VOX", both Ian and Wes Johnson were members of the Victorian Division, and Wes was the Adelaide correspondent for "VOX". By June 1961, both Geoff Smith and Anthony Taylor (Vicar of Dimboola - specializing in wedding receptions!) were also members of the Victorian Division. By April 1963, A. Fenelon was named as a member.

On Saturday 15th June, 1963, at 9.00am the then manager of the Regent Theatre, Melbourne, allowed the canvas cover to be removed from the Wurlitzer console and Alan Glover, Alan Tranter, Bob Vinnard, Colin Bell, Anthony Taylor and Tony Fenelon were allowed to play. That early morning session led to the following advertisement, "Hoyts City Theatres, REGENT, Collins Street "GOLDFINGER" (X) . . .Special nightly! Tony Fenelon at the Mighty Regent Wurlitzer Organ."

Now to get back to South Australia.

During 1960 following a meeting of the Organ Music Society, Baden Pike and Geoff Smith had a conversation over a cup of tea. They discussed the need for a South Australian branch

of the Theatre Organ Society right under the classical noses!

In 1965, Geoff Smith was building a pipe organ into his Cremorne Street home, so when it was speaking, he organized a December musical evening for about a dozen people, one of whom was Brian Richardson. Once again, the desire for a South Australian Branch of T.O.S.A. was voiced, whereupon, Brian Richardson said, "A jolly good idea, we elect you, Geoff, as President - - -get it going." So Geoff did.

Baden Pike produced a Newsletter which was typewritten on foolscap paper, South Australian activities were inspired from 1963 by the annual visit, Easter, of a group of enthusiasts from Melbourne. This event was so prestigious as to command a printed, illustrated programme.

In May 1966, Knight Barnett accepted the position of Patron...The work was continued by Geoff Smith and Baden Pike until December 1966 when it was suggested that the committee be enlarged from 2 members to 4 members to share the work-load of finance, music, newsletter etc! At this meeting, the Reverend Anthony Taylor was elected Secretary-Treasurer. Brian Richardson was Vice-President and Ken Banfield joined the group of office bearers.

Meetings were held at the Regent Theatre, at Baden's home at Brooklyn Park, where a Mr Lloyd Rover was good enough to provide a Conn organ, at Garry Vanderwerp's Hillcrest home with the Allen organ, at Arnott Motteram Menz factory with Brian Richardson and a Conn, and at Geoff Smith's Thomas shop, at Saverys and Allens. A visit was made to Alf Broadbent's Foto-player at Macclesfield and at Rothman's Theatrette.

By April 1967, there were over 50 members and Geoff Smith launched what he believed would be the key to a successful future - - Own our own organ! And he was right. Reaching this goal meant a lot of hard work for the few, and many stood back stating they would join the Society when a Theatre Pipe Organ was owned and speaking.

By September 1968, the South Australian Division had a six week option of purchase on the 3/10 Christie Theatre Organ from the Roxy Theatre, Parramatta - \$3,000. This instrument was first played in 1930 by Eddie Horton. By 1968, it was installed in the home of Stan Baldwin in Sydney. By October the Theatre Pipe Organ Fund totalled \$2,700. The then instrument was withdrawn from sale.

Then Hoyts called for tenders for two Wurlitzer organs - the Regent and Plaza Theatres, Melbourne. The South Australian Division tendered. By December 1968, the Plaza Organ, Wurlitzer number 1730 became the most important organ in Australia. Removal of the instrument from the Plaza Theatre began on the night of Tuesday January 7th under the direction of Mr Penn Hughes. The instrument was crated, packed into a railway van, and transported by rail to St James' Parish Hall, Mile End, South Australia. The S.A. team was helped by Victorian T.O.S.A. members, but it was a mammoth job, and the fatigue was reflected in the photographs taken at the time, especially Alf McDonald.

Once again, there was a lot of hard work. Lots of visits inspecting sites as far apart as the Woodville Town Hall, Semaphore, Masonic Hall City, and finally Pulteney Grammar. Then on Saturday 12th December 1970 the pipes came alive as Knight Barnett and Tony Fenelon played the opening concert. On our own organ!!!

Over the next 3 years, our membership continued to grow and we went from strength to strength, with regular concerts by local, interstate and overseas artists, and fund-raising activities. During this time, many improvements were made on the 2/12.

Easter 1974 saw S.A. host their first National Convention and featured Gerald Shaw from England as the main concert artist.

On the front page of the Newsletter, dated March 1974, the following notice appeared:

"TOSA (SA) Div. buys second
Theatre Pipe Organ.

We are proud to announce the purchase of our second Theatre Pipe Organ! It is a 4 manual instrument, consisting of sixteen ranks of pipes and has been purchased from Mr Michael Pfitzner of Darwin. The organ was previously owned by Sydney theatre organist, Penn Hughes.

The instrument is actually made up of a combination of both Wurlitzer and Christie pipes. Some of the pipe-work originated from one of the first theatre organ installations in Australia, that being the Wurlitzer in the big Wintergarden Theatre, Brisbane. The large four manual Wurlitzer console which controls the organ was originally the twin (or slave) console in the huge (4000 seat) State Theatre, Melbourne (the main console and complete organ is now in the Moorabbin Town Hall, Melbourne. Once a white and gold console, it is now polished wood. Some of the other parts of the organ came from a New Zealand installation."

Members were asked to make donations or loans to help buy the organ. In November, Ted Lloyd led a team of 6 volunteers to Darwin to remove and pack our new organ, from Mike Pfitzner's residence. One of our S.A. TOSA members, Max Chadwick, who was living in Darwin, helped with the operation. After a week of hard work in Darwin's heat and humidity, plus three extra days due to an airline strike, the tired and weary workers returned home. The organ arrived in Adelaide early in December and was delivered to Spicer Memorial Church, East Adelaide, where it was stored, and most restoration work carried out.

Of course, the next step was to own our own home. Over the next 3½ years several ideas were put forward, but to no avail. The idea of installing the organ in a theatre also was discussed but there was the problem of access to the organ when we wanted it. Of course, the biggest obstacle was money. Our fundraising events continued, but that home of our own seemed out of reach until May 1978, when the Capri Theatre closed and was to be sold. A special general meeting of members was held at the Theatre on 6th June and after much discussion, it was moved that we make negotiations

to purchase the theatre. At the end of September, another special meeting was held and members were asked to either make donations or loans to help purchase the theatre. Finally in December 1978, the theatre officially became ours. It was decided to run the theatre every day for films. Several members volunteered as ushers and candy bar assistants to help raise the necessary funds for the building of the chambers and installation of the organ. Regular concerts and clubnights were still held at Wyatt Hall.

Work began on the chambers in 1981, and it was hoped that the organ would be playing by Easter 1982, for the Convention, but time and Darwin's tropical weather had taken its toll, and the full restoration of the parts was a long and slow job. The Convention was postponed for one year and as it was, we only just made it as a 4/12 with finishing touches and several teething problems still being ironed out on the day of the Inaugural Concert. An electronic organ was on stand-by 'just in case'.

Of course, many more hours and dollars have been spent on the organ since that day, and from December 1983, we have held many very successful concerts, several to "Full Houses."

In May this year, we were lucky enough to screen "Crocodile Dundee", and to say we were busy is an understatement. After six months, it is still screening. Thanks to the old "Croc", we have been able to reduce our mortgages and erect the stage and hoist for the organ.

From our humble beginning 21 years ago, T.O.S.A. (S.A.) can feel proud of their achievements. We are the only division in Australia who have had the initiative and support to take the big gambles and purchase a "A Home of Our Own". Congratulations. Well done. We are sure that "chat over a cup of tea" 21 years ago to have what we have today was merely a "PIPE" dream.

Reprinted in full from December issue of S.A. TOSA NEWS. Ed.

NEWS FROM CANBERRA THE PAST FOUR MONTHS

(By David Dunnet)

News source...TOSA ACTION

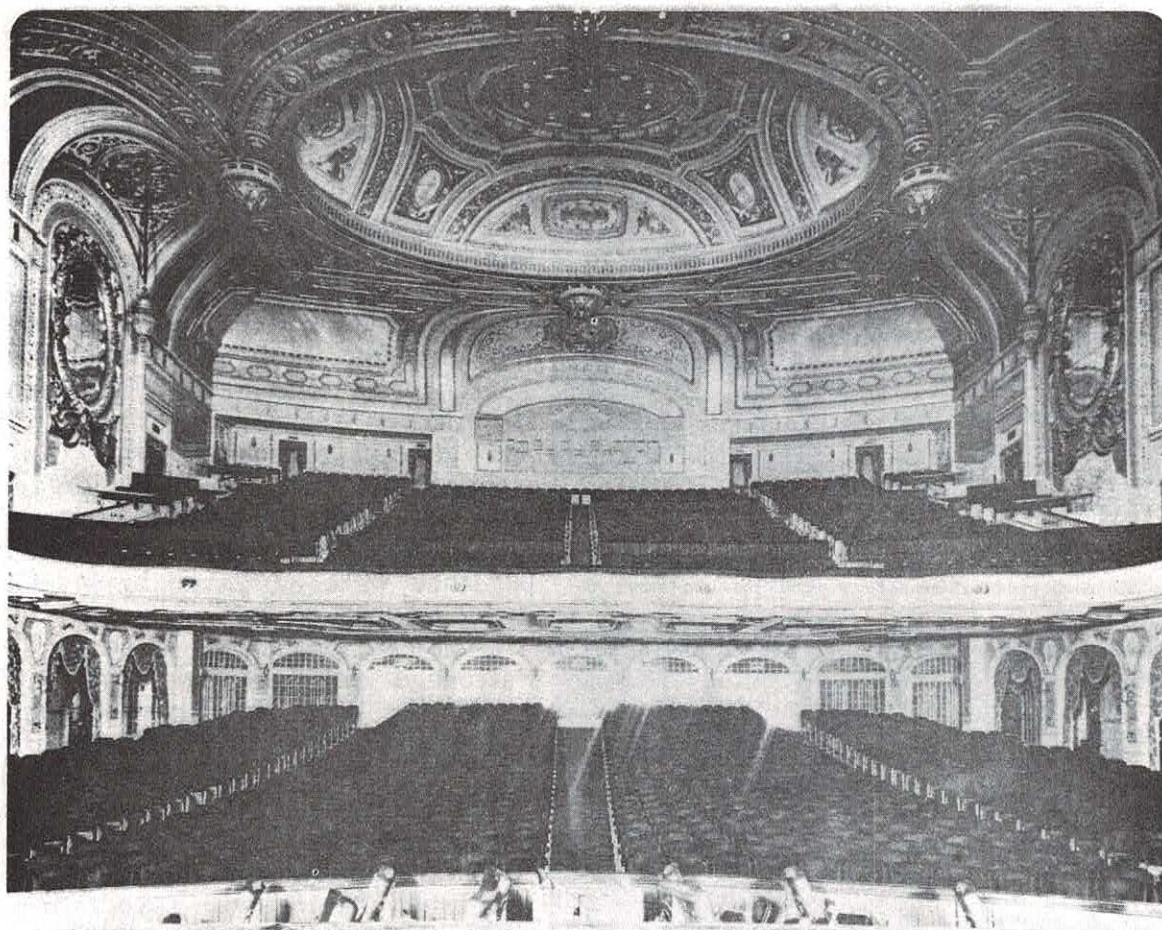
By the time this appears in print, the Compton will have been operational for close on four months and, in that short time, we have had three successful concerts, with more to come in the new year. From my point of view, it has been a most thrilling and rewarding time. The smile on Tony Fenelon's face after that first short session at the console in August said it all.

We have a sound (pardon the pun) installation which time and experience can only improve. The installation is not perfect, it requires a fair amount of adjustment and the all important tonal finishing. Tonal finishing is the careful regulation of the loudness of the notes within each rank of pipes and the balancing of each rank with the other ranks so that they all blend together in a tonal entity.

In the meantime, we have to learn how to improve the instrument and to iron out the problems. I think that we have the Vox/Krummet tremulant under control and, in learning how to adjust this was just another part of the learning curve that we have to go through.

Since the opening concert, we have at last able to get some considered criticism bucket up with constructive advice direct to the maintenance sub-committee and this has helped eliminate some of the faults. All such remarks are taken seriously and investigated. If proven, they are rectified if possible or listed for further advice and action.

Maintenance and improvements are carried out each week or weekend as access permits. I find that it is better to concentrate on one or two items rather than try to solve the whole lot together and do more damage than good. The maintenance team are learning to evaluate their work from the artist's side of the console as well as the chamber side. This can only improve their workmanship and their approach to the job of fixing and improving.



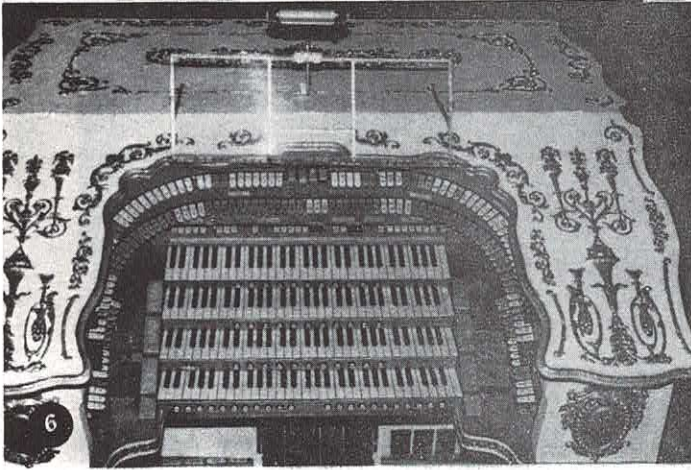
Joliet's Rialto Theatre

The Rialto Theatre, a dream of the Rubens brothers, opened on May 24, 1926. These men had been involved in this business for some time, including building the largest theatre in Joliet at the time, the Princess, which seated 813 and had a two-manual Hinners organ. But the brothers wanted more, and decided on the building of the Rialto.

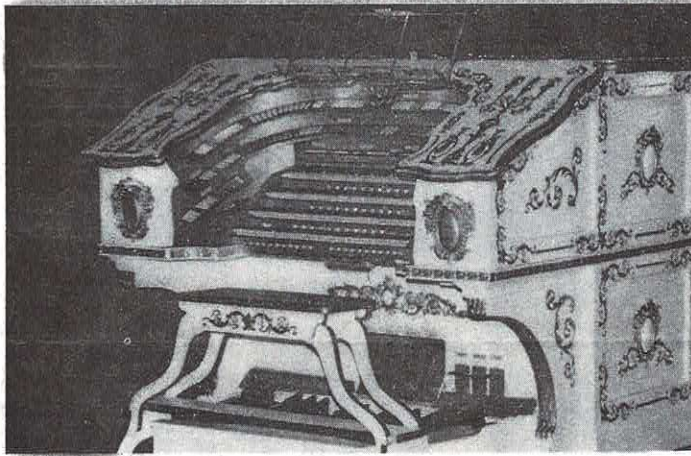
The project began in November of 1919, with the purchase of land and houses in the area. Five years later, the excavation commenced and was finished May 10, 1924. C.W. and George Rapp were commissioned to design the Rialto. They had designed many other houses including the Chicago, Uptown and Oriental theatres in Chicago. Their designs brought pleasure and escape to a whole generation of Americans who wanted to make believe.

Opening night brought people from all over the area to see Joliet's "Wonder

Theatre". The opening was the exciting conclusion of "Greater Joliet Week". People lined the streets to get in to see the theatre. The lucky 1900+ who had tickets were treated to an event they would never forget. As they entered the theatre, their eyes focused on the "Hall of Mirrors", and beautiful plaster-cast figures made by Gene Romeo, sculptor. They saw the mighty arch between the Esplanade and Rotunda areas, and the eight-arm crystal chandelier - 20 feet high with two hundred and fifty lights - in the centre of the rotunda. Patrons heard music from the lobby organ, which was operated from the Barton console in the theatre. Upon entering the auditorium, they looked at the gold and silver colours which continued from the lobby, and the beautiful proscenium arch, which was adorned with Apollo, Diana and other Greek and Roman figures.



The original 1926 console of the 4/21 Grande Barton organ in the Rialto Theatre, Joliet, Illinois.



The house lights dimmed and the show began. Organist Leo Terry played the Barton, the stage show was the "Evolution of Joliet", and the feature film was "Mlle. Modiste".

Throughout the many years, the Rialto Theatre was host to many rising stars - Bob Hope, Burns and Allen, Jack Benny, all the Big Bands and many other performers. As the times changed, so did the theatre. Out went silents, stage shows and regular organ performances. In came the fads - talkies, 3D and colour movies. The late 1950's brought the theatre a "face-lift". The house was painted, and the main floor seats were changed from the straight back to recliners.

It was about that time that the organ group "Kimbar" came into being. They kept the organ going after Joe Lyons left and revived stage shows featuring organists Kay McAbee, Larry Roux, John Muri, Don Baker and others, as well as local bands, choirs and other groups. They produced these shows several times a year.

Then in the late 1960's the downtown began its decline. Stores moved to the west side of town. The theatre began to show movies with less quality, and the audience changed. After Kimbar left in 1969, the organ usage was almost nil. For the next two years, the organ was abused by ushers and others in the theatre. But in February of 1971 JATOE was organized. The club began to work on the organ to keep it playing, and got an agreement with the theatre management to play the organ during the early evening intermissions on Saturdays. The work crew started to rebuild, but they were hampered by many factors, including lack of help.

Patronage fell off and talk of selling or tearing down the Rialto began. JATOE had an organ concert featuring the late Tony Tahlman in 1974, and Dorothy Mavrith heard of the theatre's problems. She began the campaign to "Save the Rialto", and it was through her efforts that the theatre was saved. She formed the Rialto Square Arts Association and began fund raisers to help. Several programmes were presented in an effort to raise the needed cash to purchase the theatre. With the help of the State of Illinois, the City of Joliet, and concerned citizens of the area, the theatre was saved - but the fun had just begun.

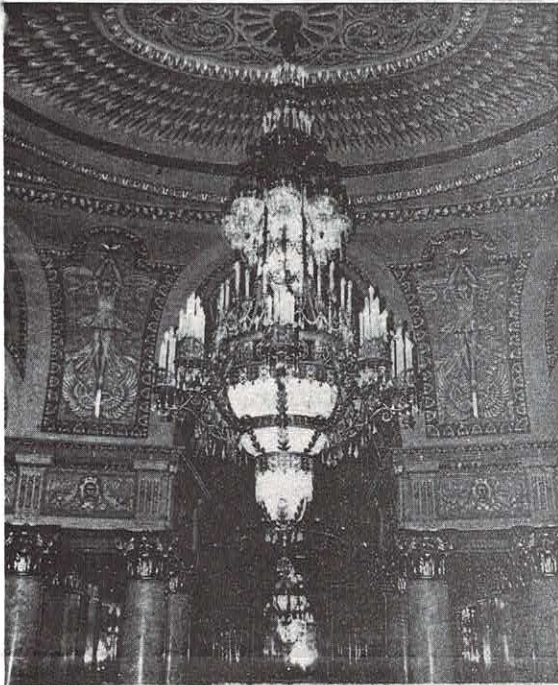
After completing a detailed analysis of the history and architecture of the Rialto Square Theatre, Conrad Schmitt Studios of New Berlin, Wisconsin began the artistic restoration of the Rialto. Colours and materials were matched to complement the theatre's elegant architecture. The restorers made every effort to transform the interior back to or surpass its original splendor. The broken plaster was repaired or replaced and the entire theatre was repainted by hand, with the final touch being the highlights of gold and silver leafing.

With the theatre closed for repairs, it was easier for the JATOE work crew to repair chests, windlines and reservoirs. The organ was beginning to return to its original sounds as repairs were completed.

Then the finishing touches were made and the theatre was ready. The "new beginning" finally occurred on November 27, 1981.

FOX THEATRE DETROIT

Since that time the theatre management has tried to keep the performances equal to the theatre's beauty. Many performers, including Victor Borge and the Chicago Pops (grand re-opening November 27, 1981), Liberace, Bobby Vinton and Andy Williams have appeared at the theatre.



The huge crystal chandelier in the rotunda of the Rialto Square Theatre. Twenty feet tall with 250 lamps, it weighs 4000 pounds.

The 4/21 Golden-Voiced Barton Grande Pipe organ is located on the right side of the theatre. The organ chambers, two on each side, have decorative, hand wrought ornamental iron fronts depicting vines and flowers in prismatic colours. The console was originally painted all gold with gold highlights, but has been changed to white with gold leaf highlights to better accept the modern lighting. Joliet Area Theatre Organ Society has updated the Barton with a computerized combination action. The computer gives the ability to have four different settings per number instead of one. Work is continuing on the second touch springs and relay which haven't worked in many years. The club has recently purchased three ranks of pipes with the help of the Will County Metropolitan Exposition and Auditorium Authority and the Cultural Arts Council. Missing ranks purchased were a Saxophone and a Kinura, and the Trumpet was replaced. The organ club has also replaced the missing pipes to fill the holes in many of the ranks. The organ will sound as it hasn't in many years.



Fox Theatre
4/36 Wurlitzer

For Detroiters and for many others across the country, the Detroit Fox Theatre is the "Ultimate" in movie palaces. It is as awe-inspiring today as it was when it opened on September 21, 1928. The opening night programme included the film "Street Angel", starring Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell; a pageant called "Evolution of Transportation", with eight inspiring episodes; two orchestral pieces performed by the "Fox Grand Orchestra of 60 soloists" (sounds like a nightmare for the conductor, doesn't it?); and a Neapolitan Festival with a cast of 100, including 32 Fox Tillerettes and the 50-voice Fox Choral Ensemble. The Detroit Fox was billed as "The Showplace of the World".

Indeed, the biggest - highest - shiniest - largest statistics about the Fox are never-ending. The original seating capacity was 5042. Facilities included numerous lounges and smoking rooms, a music library for the orchestra, a screening room with overstuffed armchairs, a nursery for children of performers, and a hospital for patrons who might have "the vapors" while visiting the Fox. In typical Fox fashion, no expense was spared in furnishing the theatre. Period photos suggest that the building was jammed with furniture, sculpture and paintings.

The Detroit Fox maintained its glamorous image and style for quite a time. Happily, the modernization "bug" never

infected the various owners (it's hypothesized that they were too busy spending all profits to bother reinvesting any money). The Fox continued hosting occasional stage shows into the 1960's. Many of the Motown stars had their start at the phenomenally popular "Motown Reviews" of the early and middle sixties.

By the 1970's, however, the Fox was definitely looking seedy. The movie fare was limited to "Kung-Fu" films, and the attendance - in terms of quality and quantity, continued to fall. A bright spot was renewed interest in the Fox pipe organs. Midnight organ maintenance crews assisted the long-time keeper of the instruments in rebuilding and refurbishing them and, on a small scale, began to have programmes. First a concert on the lobby Moller to raise much-needed funds, then several concerts on the 4-manual 36-rank Wurlitzer, including a well-attended performance of the silent film "Wings" with Dennis James at the organ.

The day-to-day business at the Fox did not improve, and things were not encouraging. Then, through a complex change of ownership, which included the City as a voice of authority, the Fox closed as a movie house and underwent a clean-up, fix-up programme which cost several hundred thousand dollars. Since its reopening in 1981, scheduled events at the Fox have been more infrequent, but the fare more select.

It includes big name talent and ranges from high school graduations to various benefits, including the first concert ever given at the theatre by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

With so many really grand theatres in Detroit no longer standing, it is particularly heartwarming that the Fox has survived. The renaissance of Detroit started on the riverfront, and appears to be spreading as far north as the Detroit Fox.

