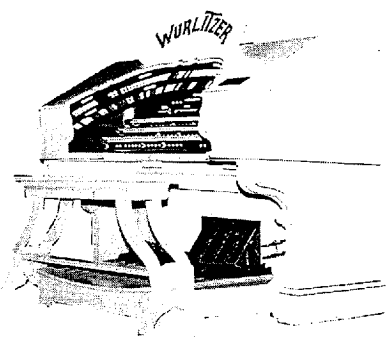


FEBRUARY, 1997

TOSA NEWS



2/11 Wurlitzer Theatre Pipe Organ
Marrickville Town Hall

3/17 Wurlitzer Theatre Pipe Organ
Orion Centre Campsie

DAVID JOHNSTON



At the Mighty *Wurlitzer* Pipe Organ
Sunday 2nd March at 2.00pm
Orion Centre Campsie

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Issue 2
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TOSA NEWS

FEBRUARY, 1997

THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA (NSW DIVISION) Inc.

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COMING EVENTS

FEBRUARY

Sunday 2 at 2.00pm Chris McPhee Concert
Orion Centre Campsie
Monday 3 at 7.30pm Committee Meeting

MARCH

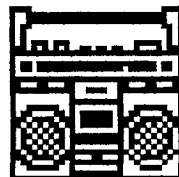
Sunday 2 at 2.00pm David Johnston Concert
Orion Centre Campsie
Monday 3 at 7.30pm Committee Meeting

28th - 31th March National Easter Convention

"Organ Pipes and Tassie Sights"
Hobart, Tasmania

APRIL

Monday 7 at 7.30pm Committee Meeting
Sunday 20 at 2.00pm Neil Jensen Concert
Orion Centre Campsie



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Editorial



Welcome To New Members

TOSA is pleased to welcome the following new members. We wish you a long and entertaining stay with our Society :

**Gail and Gregory Cunningham -
Wahroonga**

Joan and Neil Elder - Epping

Geoff Ericsson - Kogarah

Roy Wood - Sefton

As you will see by the name at the end of this column, the editor has not changed, at least, not as yet. This is because there were no volunteers for the position! This fact, coupled with the many expressions of confidence from an overwhelming number of members whose comments I value and respect, explains my continuing in the position for the time being.

Thank you to all those members and the ONE committee member who rang, wrote, faxed or e-mailed me their feelings about my work as editor. Your support was really appreciated and so overwhelmed me that I felt it would have been quite ungracious of me to abandon *TOSA News* (thus letting the membership as a whole down) when a new editor could not be found. Virtually everyone encouraged me not to let the b.....s get me down, to ignore the negative elements and to continue on, disregarding the occasional thoughtless barbs fired at me. Not an ideal situation, but for the sake of the loyal members and the Society in general, I'll take your advice and give it a go.

The minutes of the January committee meeting show that those present passed a motion to give "a vote of confidence to the editor of *TOSA News* and recognise the amount of work put in." Unfortunately, I couldn't be

present at the discussion, as I was on a previously-booked holiday with my family in **Batemans Bay**.

I'd like to repeat the two requests from last month's Editorial - namely, please approach me personally if you feel there are serious mistakes or problems with *TOSA News*, so that I can explain or change if necessary; and secondly, if there is anyone who wishes to take over the editorship, please come forward, as I feel that my recent disappointments have turned what was once a pleasant, but time-consuming, pastime into something like a never-ending chore.

This issue of *TOSA News* is likely to arrive later than usual, due not, as you might have suspected, to my reluctance to continue as editor, but to the committee's difficulties in finalising the artist and the venue for our March concert. We apologise if this lateness inconveniences you in any way, but sometimes these delays are unavoidable and cause us all a certain amount of stress. Life was not meant to be easy, as a certain Prime Minister once so memorably said.

I hope that the rest of the year is a less troubled time for all of us.


Best Wishes,
Colin Groves



After the interval of the Tony Fenelon/John Atwell December concert, the new President of TOSA (NSW), Robert Gliddon, draws the Christmas raffle, under the watchful eye of our compere and stage manager, John Parker

Articles in this journal need not represent the views of the committee or the editor

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



From The MAILBOX

Bettine Vallance comments poetically on our December concert :

8/12/96

I found it hard to put into the right words my impressions of today's magnificent concert. It was so wonderful in every way, and so moving. My friend and I shed a few tears - but music of this kind does this to me!

This poem does not seem adequate to describe the magic that was portrayed today.

Yours sincerely,
Bettine Vallance

Tony and John

The magic of music was brought to us today,

By **Tony and John** in their truly magnificent way.

It was a superb concert as always to end our year

Of talented artists, from far and near, And today's programme was outstandingly played

With the marvellous music we hold dear. This dynamic duo's presentation Is always a musical sensation.

They give their very all, With sounds to enthrall.

The magic was in the air everywhere With **Tony and John** there is none to compare.

Amy Caldwell of Mona Vale has a note of thanks for some kind helpers :

19/12/96

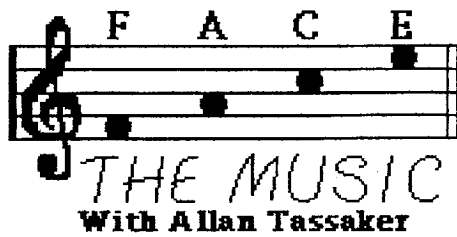
Our last concert, "Tony and John", was an outstanding success. The hall was packed and with seating almost back to the entrance doors, the ushers were kept very bust indeed.

I would like to thank **Colleen Aasa** and **Paul Roberts** who willingly stepped in and helped with the ushering when I approached them.

They were indeed a help to us on the day and particularly as it was **Colleen's** first effort. You did very well, **Colleen**.

Many thanks to you both, **Colleen** and **Paul**.

Amy Caldwell



In a circular fashion, the big organ rose slowly from the pit, with **Allan** at the controls.

But something went wrong.

It didn't stop!

It kept on spinning and spinning, and spinning.

Allan reckons he is now qualified to be a member of Rotary!

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Long-time TOSA member and pianist at the **Cremona Orpheum**, **David Devenport** has submitted the following undated outline of the history of the Theatre Organ, written as album notes by **Ben Hall**, author of *The Best Remaining Seats - The Story of the Golden Age of the Movie Palace*, as well as numerous articles on the organ.

The Story of the Organ

On a Sunday afternoon in 1892, members of **St John's Church** in **Birkenhead, England**, assembled for a strange organ recital. The organ of the church, an old instrument, had been undergoing a mysterious renovation for the past six years. **Robert Hope-Jones**, a young engineer with the **National Telephone Company**, had worked on it - chiefly at night - with the help of several men and a few choirboys, but even they were not at all certain what the eccentric **Mr Hope-Jones** wished to accomplish with all his curious wires and switches. Now the organ was ready for its first demonstration and **Hope-Jones** himself, a voluntary organist at the church in his youth, would play.

From the first moment the organ gave out a richer, brighter tone than before, and a variety of new sounds. When the recital was finished, every one turned to look up at the choir loft in the rear of the church to hail the organist, but **Robert Hope-Jones** was nowhere to be seen. Neither, in fact, was the organ console. At that moment **Hope-Jones** came striding through a side door of the church. It was only then that the secret was revealed - he had played the entire recital from the churchyard, where the organ console sat amidst the tombstones. A long cable connected the console with the pipes, which were still in their usual place behind the choir loft.

Until that time, organ pipes and their wind-chests had been linked to consoles by stretched wires or wooden rods; each key required enormous strength from the organist's fingers. Now **Hope-Jones** had devised a system of low voltage electrical contacts; these opened and closed the valves of the pipes electrically as the organist gently touched the keys.

The pipe organ had been slow to evolve before **Hope-Jones'** time. Its origins are lost in legend. Some credit old **Pan** with the invention of the pipes; but no one knows, who first got the idea of playing them by means of a key-board (or manual) with a source of wind other than the human lungs. **St Cecilia**, perhaps the world's first lady

organist, is always shown playing a little one-manual instrument. Usually she is assisted by one or more cherubs, no doubt the first organ-pumpers, the ancestors of an ancient and perspiring breed of small boys who were still doing duty at the pump-handle in village churches only a few years ago

The first mention of a pipe organ in recorded history appears about 250 BC - when a barber named **Ctesibius of Alexandria, Egypt**, invented an instrument called the "hydraulis". As its name indicates, the hydraulis used water which, when pumped into a large pottery jar, caused the displaced air to sound a set of pipes placed on top. A **Greek, Archimedes**, made refinements on the hydraulis and **Emperor Nero** (a musician usually identified with the fiddle) had one installed in one of his palaces. Other **Romans** took a fancy to the hydraulis and imported them in large numbers for use in houses, temples and theatres.

It was natural that the organ, with its inspiring tones, should become an important part of religious worship. The **Hebrew Talmud** refers to an organ (called a "magrappa") in the last temple of the **Jews in Jerusalem**, in the second century AD: "There was an organ in the temple which produced a thousand kinds of melody." The purely pneumatic organ (using bellows, instead of the water principle, to provide a steady supply of wind) did not appear until a century later, when one was shown on an obelisk at **Constantinople**. One of the first clear descriptions of a pneumatic organ comes from **St Jerome**, who about 400 AD, wrote of an organ in **Jerusalem** with 12 bronze pipes, two elephant skins and 15 blacksmith's bellows, which could be heard at the **Mount of Olives** nearly a mile away.

By the 15th century, the pipe organ had achieved more or less the external form in which we know it now - the keys, formerly several inches wide and requiring the force of a fist to operate, were reduced to their present fingerable form, and the addition of the pedal clavier made the organ a great deal

more flexible. The **Germans** became the pre-eminent organ builders; there were more than 200 organ craftsmen in **Saxony** alone, including **Gottfried Silbermann**, who built the instruments used by **Johann Sebastian Bach**.

The great technical advances in the art of organ building which are responsible for the modern instrument did not come about until the late 1800's when **Robert Hope-Jones** started his revolutionary experiment at **Birkenhead**. His remote-console, electro-pneumatic organ caused a sensation, and soon contracts for other instruments came his way. In 1895 he was called to **Worcester Cathedral** to rebuild the organ there.

Despite a substantial number of contracts, **Hope-Jones** suffered a series of financial losses, partly because his new instruments were frequently sabotaged by jealous competitors. Finally, he decided to move to the **United States**, where eventually he established his own organ company in **Elmira, New York**. It, too, failed despite a list of backers that included **Diamond Jim Brady, Mark Twain** and **Theodore N. Vail** of the **American Telephone and Telegraph Company**. But his capacity for invention flourished in **America**.

Some of **Hope-Jones'** innovations include the now familiar "Horse Shoe" theatre-organ console, with its curved rows of coloured stop tablets, (also invented by **Hope-Jones**) that replaced the less convenient draw-knobs, still used in many church or straight organ consoles today. He invented a number of new ranks of pipes for the organ, including the Diaphone, a deep-throated bass stop with a voice so stentorian that it was also adopted by the **US Coast Guard** as a fog-warning device. But his most important gift to the theatre organ was the system of pipe unification which made it possible for every set of tubes to be played on every manual, at many different octave pitches. Thus a unit organ of six ranks (six separate sets of pipes each with distinctive voicing) could be made to outshine in flexibility and tonal variety

a straight organ with more than thirty ranks.

In 1910, as organ music was beginning to assume greater importance in movie theatres, the **Hope-Jones Organ Company**, along with its founder, was absorbed by the **Wurlitzer Company of North Tonawanda, New York**, and the modern theatre organ was born. Called the **Wurlitzer Hope-Jones Unit Orchestra**, it opened a new era of music in the theatre. **Hope-Jones**, embittered over financial failure, took his own life in 1914. But his monument lies in the fact that today many of his

revolutionary inventions are incorporated in the finest church and concert organs being built.

The era of the **Mighty Wurlitzer** is over; only a relatively few of them remain in theatres today, and fewer are being played. Even the theatres that once housed these remarkable instruments (as well as those made by other organ builders such as **Kimball, Moller, Kilgen, Robert Morton, Barton and Marr & Colton**) are vanishing rapidly as tastes in entertainment change. Many of the displaced organs have been rescued by individuals who have set them up in

their own homes, and the **American Association of Theatre Organ Enthusiasts**, a society dedicated to their preservation and to the whole cult of theatre-organ music, recently celebrated its tenth anniversary with a special concert at **New York's Radio City Music Hall**.

More happily, the church and concert organ has gone through a recent renaissance, and many magnificent instruments are being built and heard in great numbers by a public whose appreciation for organ music has been heightened through the medium of recordings.

ORION ORGAN REPORT 1996

The year 1996 has been a busy one at the **Orion** - with considerable work carried out at different times on the wind supply lines and bellows regulators. Also during the year, the committee has seen fit to purchase from the **USA**, a number of pristine ranks of pipes that will eventually augment those of the former **Capitol** organ.

Work on the wind supply has seen a major improvement to the tremulant effectiveness in the Main Chamber. The construction of wind "distribution boxes", fitted to the two large pipes chests where the tremulants are conveyed off, has seen the working of the tremas improved 100%. This work was instigated as a result of a meeting between **John Parker** and **Jonas Nordwall** during his 1995 visit to **Sydney**.

Much of this work was carried out by organ builder **John Parker** and organist **Neil Jensen**. **TOSA** is indebted to **Neil** for his kind offer of assistance over a number of days, to see this work completed.

Work is still required in the Solo Chamber, and this will be tackled in the early part of 1997.

As already mentioned, a number of pipe ranks have been purchased :

Violin	8' - 4'	ex Organ Grinder Pizza, Portland, Oregon	10" wgp
Violin Celeste	8' - 4'	" " " " " "	10" wgp
Solo String	8' - 4'	" " " " " "	15" wgp
French Horn	8'	E.M. Skinner (original home unknown)	10" wgp
Horn Diapason	16' - 4'	Hope-Jones circa 1912	10" wgp

To date, the Violin and matching Celeste have been installed in the Main Chamber as replacements for the original **Viola di Orchestra** and **VDO Celeste**, which have been stored pending repairs and revoicing by pipemakers. The introduction of the larger scaled, fuller sounding Violin set has certainly enhanced the ensemble sound of the **Orion** organ, helping to blend the tonal colours into a cohesive general output.

During early 1997 the Horn Diapason and Solo String ranks will be installed in the Solo Chamber on chests specially restored for the purpose. Some rearrangement of the chamber layout will be required. The existing String Celeste (not **Wurlitzer**) will be removed, with the existing Solo String being retuned as the Celeste to the new 15" pressure String rank.

During 1996 it was decided by the committee to upgrade the **Orion's** computer relay system. Although the **Devtronix** computer has provided good service since 1988, it is now old technology and has been superseded by the new "**Uniflex 2000**" system. Conversion to the new relay is relatively cheap and only requires the replacement of the computer presently in the organ console. Such is the improvement, **TOSA** simply has to purchase a quality "Personal Computer" at a retail outlet, and, with a revised programme, this new unit will control the **Wurlitzer**.

It has been decided to install the computer-base backstage in a vandal-proof, steel cabinet - rather than in the console, as it is now. The moving of the console to and from the basement involves a certain amount of jarring and so the console is not the ideal home for a sensitive unit such as a computer. Safety will be assured with the PC housed in one solid location.

All new connections, instruction manuals and specialised equipment have arrived from the **USA** and it is now only the purchase of the PC which needs to be attended to.

I would like to extend my thanks to members, **John Giacchi, Robert Gliddon** and **Steve McDonald**, who have assisted with the tuning or general maintenance throughout the year.

John W. Parker
Organ Builder



Melbourne's Regent

On Friday, 20th December, John Atwell posted the following information on the Internet :

The 4/36 Wurlitzer (Opus 416) recently installed in the magnificently refurbished Regent Theatre Melbourne, is finally starting to make music (of sorts).

On Sunday morning December 15th, enough of the organ had been roughly tuned and tremulated to put broad smiles across the faces of the assembled organ crew as Tony Fenelon, John Giacchi and John Atwell did the honours at the console.

One of the first pieces heard was the signature tune of the late Stanfield Holliday, played by Tony Fenelon, the last resident organist at the theatre before it closed more than 25 years ago. Stan was a long time resident organist during the fifties, and an undoubted inspiration in the formative years of the mastermind behind this installation, Julien Arnold. For Julien, and other members of the crew who had known the theatre and its former organ in the old days, this was quite an emotional moment, and a most suitable link with the past.

Several crew members old enough to remember the previous organ and theatre were trying to come to grips with the fact that they were back sitting in the circle of the now refurbished theatre 25 years down the track listening to the first strains of the largest Wurlitzer to come to Australia. There were a few wet eyes and wavering voices! Doesn't happen too often in one's lifetime. I'm just glad it's happened in Melbourne, and am darn

grateful to all those who have made it happen here.

The experience for the organist, for the moment at least, is not quite so emotional, as one is required to climb into a tight corner at the side of a below-stage props room where the console is boxed in, suitably protected from damage for the duration of the *Sunset Boulevard* season. Fortunately the cable back to the Uniflex computer is just long enough.

Hearing what's happening out in the auditorium is almost impossible, even with the orchestra pit doors open, so mikes and headphones were set up that day to help the organist hear what was being played.

The previous Sunday, however, John Giacchi had no such auditory feedback, but still managed to record material on the playback system; quite an achievement. That sound was later relayed by phone line to Jonas Nordwall in Portland who recognized it as the unmistakable sound of the organ he had played for so many years on the Vollum estate.

Since the theatre's opening night back in August, as reported some time ago by Tony Fenelon, it has not been easy going for the organ crew. Two days after opening night, the *Sunset* production crew moved in, the organ wind was connected, but organ access was only available between 11pm and 5am, because of rehearsal schedules. Since the show opened in late October, all day access on Sundays has allowed the organ crew to make better progress, culminating in last Sunday's debut.

It was a fitting end to the first stage of a lot of hard work. And the crew was suitably happy to hear the fruits of their labours. Tony regaled the small audience with selections and sounds reminiscent of his previous residency at the 4/19.

I managed one selection which tied in with music presented on opening night in 1929 and 1996, before reluctantly having to leave for a rehearsal. I will concede that halfway through the piece, I realised that after years of poring over specifications, stop layouts, etc, this was THE MOMENT I had been working towards, not quite as I had envisioned it, cramped up in a corner backstage, but I admit that I also got a tad emotional at that point.

John Giacchi had turned up saying

that he was on his way to work! I think, however that he got delayed at the theatre and was eventually quite late getting to work.

How does the organ sound? Surprisingly good, considering most parts of it have only had a rough tune. Of the 16s, only the reeds have yet been tuned. The flues were quite OK. Even now the sound of 10 ranks of strings and three voxes shimmering out of four chambers (two in each side) is quite something, a great omen for the future. The sound mixes well from both sides, as much as we could determine at this stage. Overall reverb level could be down from previously, according to Tony, because of extra carpet now in the theatre. Despite that, the organ still has great presence and ambience in the auditorium. We are yet to hear it "full bore" as the shutters were not fully connected via the software till later in the day. That experience will have to wait 'til the work sessions in the new year.

This organ was the first style 285 when it was installed at the San Francisco Granada/Paramount and then at Vollum's. What has gone in to the Regent is essentially what came from the US. Most of the straight division was sold off before the organ was acquired for Australia. A Gottfried French Trumpet from that division, however, has been retained in the organ. An extra Wurlitzer Tibia is the only other addition, bringing the Tibia count to three. Originally the organ was supplied with one. Some ranks have been swapped over the years, and some ranks never made Portland from San Francisco. There are also ranks by other makers. But the ranks that characterize the instrument as a 285 such as the high pressure diaphonic diapason and tuba mirabilis are all still there.

I will post at a later date the make up of the instrument as it is now and how the ranks are distributed over the four pipe chambers.

Judging from what we have heard already, we are certain that Opus 416, the largest instrument manufactured by Wurlitzer to that date (1921) will live up to its former reputation. It will just take a little time and more hard work. Needless to say, we are all more than just a little excited.

John Atwell
Melbourne

An "Organ"-ised Travel Tale

Heather Finch of Denistone has supplied the following report of the organ events included during her recent trip to Britain. It is always a pleasure to publish these personal impressions of lucky travellers, as they are usually far more interesting and entertaining than the alternative - publishing a formal list of a certain instrument's specifications. I am sure a lot of our members who have travelled have encountered other pipe organs around the world, and if Heather's memories have reminded you of some of your own travels, I'd like to request that you please write down your impressions and send them off (with photos if possible) to TOSA News for the enjoyment of all our members. Remember, too, that if you are travelling interstate or overseas I can give you useful phone numbers and addresses for normal mail or Internet communications

With the help of my son, **David Finch**, and **Sacha Groves**, prior to our trip to **Britain** last year we communicated with **John Leeming** of the **Cinema Organ Society of the UK** through the **Internet**. While there were no concerts at an appropriate time and place, it did lead to an exciting surprise.

On the **Internet**, I noticed that there was a concert at **The Stanford Theatre in Loughborough**. We were to stay with some friends in **Loughborough**, and although the concert was not at the right time, I mentioned it in a letter to our friends.

On our final day with them, they were to drive us to **Birmingham**, but took a detour "just to show us something". It turned out that our friends' neighbour worked at the **Stanford University**, which now owns the theatre. While it is part of the **University**, it is still used as a working cinema, and for organ concerts. A poster advertised forthcoming concerts by **Nicholas Martin**, **Robert Wolfe** and others. Imagine the fun I had, playing the **Wurlitzer**, going up and down on the hoist, waving to the "audience" and generally indulging a few fantasies. Indeed, I was having so much fun making noises, that I forgot to find out anything about the organ for those technically minded people who want to know details about origins, specifications, etc. But, darn it, it was **MY** fantasy, not theirs!

We had a couple of other interesting organ experiences. On our first day in **London**, we watched the **Trooping the Colour** procession before going to **Evensong** at **Westminster Abbey**. The anthem was a number of **Psalms** in a breath-taking arrangement by **Leonard Bernstein**. We were provided with

a translation of the **Hebrew** text, which sounded wonderful with the unmistakable **Bernstein** rhythms and harmonies. We were invited to join in the final hymn, "He who would valiant be". My eyes leaked.

On our way to **Scotland**, we passed through **Blackpool**, a truly bizarre place, which should be experienced at least once in a lifetime. A number of times we were eagerly asked what we thought of the place, and were truthfully able to say it was "amazing"! We ran the gauntlet of amplified spruikers, crossed the promenade with its double-deck trams and buses swaying in the whipping wind, padded barefoot past the jingling donkeys on the wet sand, and I dipped my toes in the warm **Irish Sea**. In mock horror, our **Scottish** hotel receptionist cried, "They'll likely fall off tonight!"

We had enquired about visiting the **Tower Ballroom**. The literature and letter from the management had not really explained that it is open nearly all day, and that organ concerts are seemingly continuous, the **Wurlitzer** alternating with an electronic organ. The entry fee to the **Tower** included the **Ballroom** and was only £3 (\$6) by 7 p.m. We were thrilled to be able to

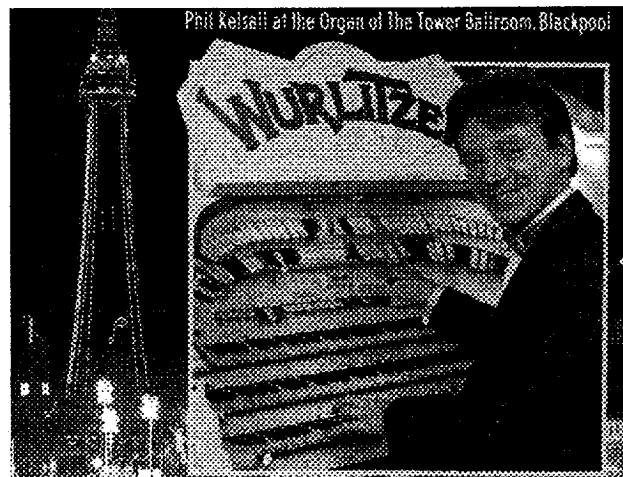
hear **Phil Kelsall**, and to **DANCE** to the sounds of the **Wurlitzer**. Our prowess on the dance floor was a poor relation to the **Very Serious** dancers who seem to come from all over **Britain**.

Photographs and videos are not permitted without the prior permission of the performing artist. Although we were assured that **Phil Kelsall** would probably allow a couple of mad **Australians** to video some of his performance, we elected to leave the **Akubra** hats and video camera in our hotel room so that we could relax and enjoy ourselves - how could you dance with a video camera hanging around your neck? After the concert, as the sun disappeared into the sea, we rode the lift to the top of the **Tower**, then bought some ice-creams and strolled the long north pier past a nightclub where **Danny la Rue** was performing.

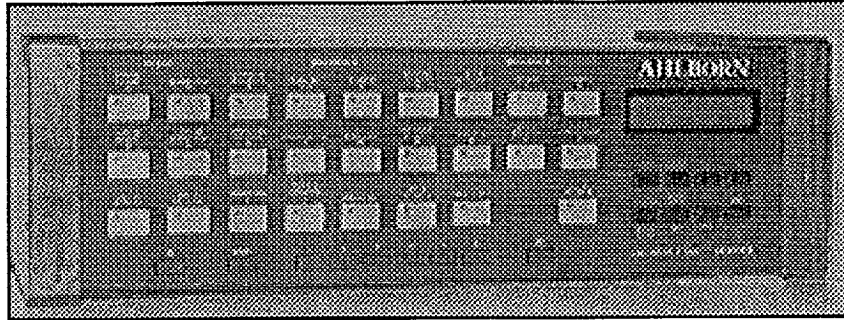
We had a wonderful holiday - my first overseas trip. We met lost relatives, including my childhood penpal. We visited the blue brick **Birmingham** terrace of **Nanna's** youth, and the tiny, grey, northern **Scottish** cottage where great-granny raised thirteen children. We travelled over the sea to **Skye** (on a bridge!), and over the mercifully calm **Pentland Firth** to the **Orkney Islands**, a very special place. The **Edinburgh** cousins even managed to cajole my **Anglo-Spanish** husband into a kilt of **Mackenzie** tartan.

We saw and did a number of things that were planned, but the unexpected things, including the visit to the **Wurlitzer**, will remain very firmly in my mind. Without the **Internet** information, we would have missed that!

Heather Finch



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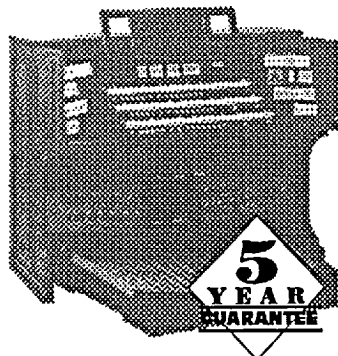
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Christie Organs in New South Wales

This report is based on the Hill, Norman & Beard (Australia) Pty Ltd chapter in a book borrowed from Burwood Library, called Historic Organs of New South Wales, a fascinating and comprehensive guide written by Graeme D. Rushworth, published in 1988, with additional material and comments supplied by TOSA members

As a result of the fire which destroyed the **Hill & Son** organ in **Melbourne Town Hall** on 1st February, 1925, a local branch of **Hill, Norman & Beard Ltd**, the only **English** organ building firm to manufacture in **Australia**, was established in 1926. The company secured contracts for the new organ for the **Melbourne Town Hall** and also for rebuilding the **T. C. Lewis** organ in **St Paul's Anglican Cathedral, Melbourne**. These were the beginnings of a successful **Australasian** business that lasted until 1974.

Many large organs were built for cathedrals, churches and town halls in **Australia** and **New Zealand**. The firm's work was increased by the installation of a number of **Christie** theatre organs, manufactured by the parent company in **England**, but with some local content in the later examples.

The agency for the firm's **Christie** theatre organs was at first held by a piano and organ agent, **W. F. Wollaston**, although installation was carried out by **HN & B**. In 1929 **HN & B** established an office in **Sydney** with **L. C. Smith** as the first manager until 1932 when **Percy S. Burraston**, a well-known theatre organist, briefly replaced him. **Lancelot Clifford Smith** ("Smithy"), a freelance organ builder and former employee of **J. E. Dodd** in **Sydney**, joined **HN & B** in 1929 and was at first engaged in supervising the installation of **Christie** theatre organs and the large organ for the **Presbyterian Assembly Hall** in **Sydney**.

Between 1928 and 1936, the work of **Hill, Norman & Beard Ltd** in **New South Wales** included the installation of eight **Christie** theatre organs.

The first **Christie** unit (or extension) organs for picture theatres appeared in 1926 with the opening of the **Elite Cinema's 2/6 Christie** at **Wimbledon, England**. The theatre organ branch of their work was named after **John Christie** who was chairman of **Wm. Hill & Son** and **Norman & Beard Ltd**. The theatre organ section was quite successful against the competition from instruments made by **Rudolph Wurlitzer** and other makers such as **John Compton**. It is generally accepted that the tonal qualities and workmanship of **Christie** organs surpassed **Wurlitzer**, but there is no disputing the fact that the

Wurlitzer instruments enjoyed far greater sales, with their name becoming synonymous with the theatre organ. **Wurlitzer** achieved the most consistent "build quality" of any theatre organs, though standardization in pipe voicing sometimes made for a "sameness" of overall sound in some of their instruments. **Christie** organs varied greatly in sound and were voiced for a particular location. Chests, regulators, percussion actions and tremulants varied greatly, sometimes even within the same organ, causing one wit to comment that "**Christie** organs appeared to be mass-produced - one at a time!"

For the technically minded, **Graeme Rushworth** explains in his book that generally flue pipes were on 178 mm of wind pressure, Tuba and Diaphone on 380 mm, and action on 254 mm. Electro-pneumatic action was employed, with connection to a detached console with a 61 note manual. Stop tablets (about 70 in number) were arranged in the familiar "horse shoe" configuration preferred for theatre organs, and were colour-coded to aid the performer in identifying tone families. Other features included second (or double) touch to manuals and/or pedals, visual indication of swell pedal position by means of moving lights in indicator tubes, and numerous thumb and toe pistons.

A great deal of publicity accompanied the installation of each **Christie** organ, and a report of the opening of the **Palatial Theatre, Burwood**, in May 1932 is typical of the extravagant (can 10 ranks be called "mammoth" when the **State Theatres** in **Sydney** and **Melbourne** had 21 ranks?) advertising copy of the era:

BURWOOD PALATIAL'S CHRISTIE ORGAN A MECHANICAL MARVEL

The mammoth Christie organ now being installed at the Burwood Palatial is a masterpiece of manufacturing technique. The perfection of electrical action has revolutionised this part of organ building. Rank upon rank of electrical apparatus filling the organ chambers suggest to the spectator the modern automatic telephone exchanges.

In keeping with this up-to-date workmanship, the console (from which the organist performs) is the acme of neatness, which statement, no doubt, would be

endorsed by thousands who have witnessed it on display in Burwood's main street.

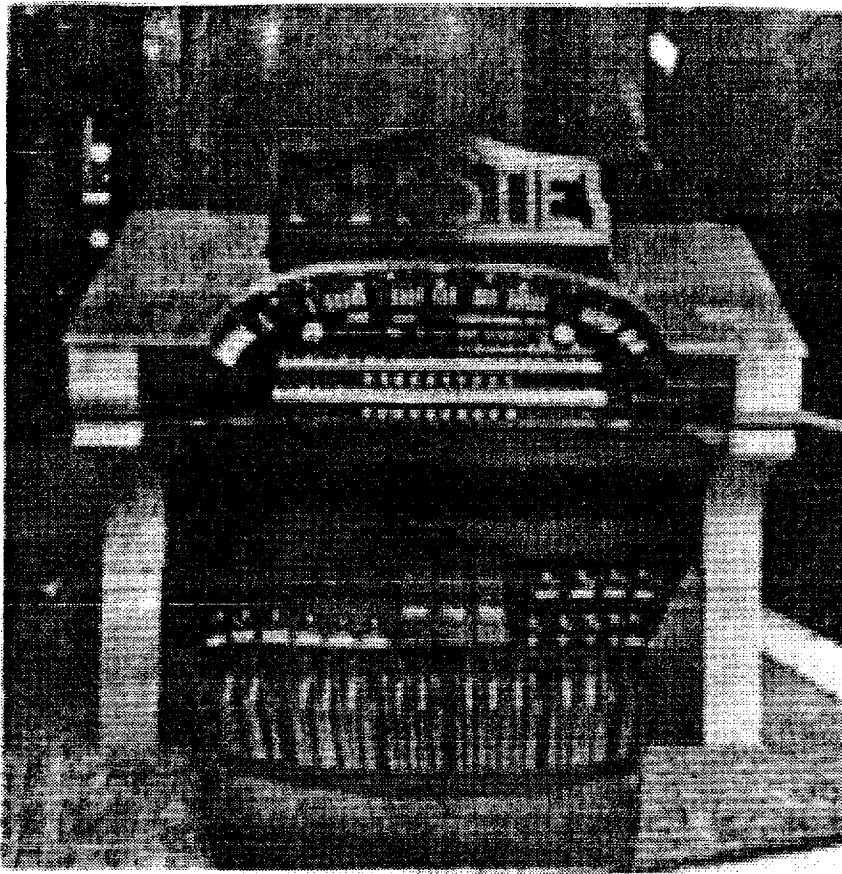
The tablet (stop) controls are arranged in semi-circles around the top of the console, and many of them are duplicated for extra convenience in a series of studs for the feet, for it must be remembered that the organist uses his feet just as much as his hands and brain to manipulate this marvel of ingenuity.

Miles of electrical wiring are used in the building, and yet the outlay of the work is so perfectly designed and installed as to be easily accessible, and any trouble which may occur easily and speedily rectified. Arrangements at the console are ideal, inasmuch as varying colours are used on the tablets for the convenience of the organist. There are at least 15,000 soldered joints in the mechanism, all of which are enclosed as a whole in dust-proof cases. There are hundreds of pipes, varying in size from a lead pencil to sixteen feet in height. On entering the chambers one beholds a veritable maze of pipes and mechanism, seemingly a chaos, but all arranged with exact precision to well laid out plans. A great assembly of pipes of all tones and pitch, drums, cymbals, harp, chimes, tambourine, castanets and many other effects which present a truly glorious ensemble.

The opening organist on the **Burwood Christie** was **Percy Burraston**, the former **Sydney** manager of **HN & B**, and "celebrated World-travelled Organist, and late Featured Organist at the Magnificent Capitol Theatre, Melbourne, who will preside at the console of Australia's Largest and most Modern Christie Organ". (In fact, the **Roxy Theatre's 3/10 Christie** was of identical size but also equipped with a piano).

It is interesting to note that the **Burwood** organ had been "repossessed" from the **Clou Concert Hall** in **Berlin, Germany**, where **HN & B's** German agent had offices in the same building. There is a distinct possibility that the organ had been only leased to the hall - a very common practice at that time. Originally, this organ was imported for installation in the new **Civic Theatre, Auckland, NZ**, but a larger **3/16 Wurlitzer** was actually installed there.

A smaller **Christie** organ (two manuals, seven ranks) was opened the same year at



the Duke of York Theatre, Eastwood, where "we have secured the services of Stan Cummins of the Civic Theatre, Auckland, NZ, who will preside at the Console". Again, a local newspaper made extravagant claims on its the opening, saying (in part):

Sydney recently celebrated the opening of a masterpiece of British engineering skill - the Harbour Bridge. On Saturday, yet another triumph of British workmanship was witnessed by a "capacity house" at the Duke of York Theatre, Eastwood, when Stan Cummins officially opened the £7,000 Christie Unit Organ. (British, yes, but mostly made in the Clifton Hill, Melbourne, plant of N H & B - chests, regulators, swell shutters and most of the pipework from Melbourne and only the console, relays and switches from England).

It is the first organ in Australia to possess a Vibraphone, an instrument giving a beautiful quality of belltones. (In fact the last original organ to be thus equipped! In 1929 the Sydney and Melbourne State Theatres, the original Melbourne Regent and the 2/10 Crowle residence demonstration organ already had Vibraphones).

It possesses, in addition to an excellent range of string

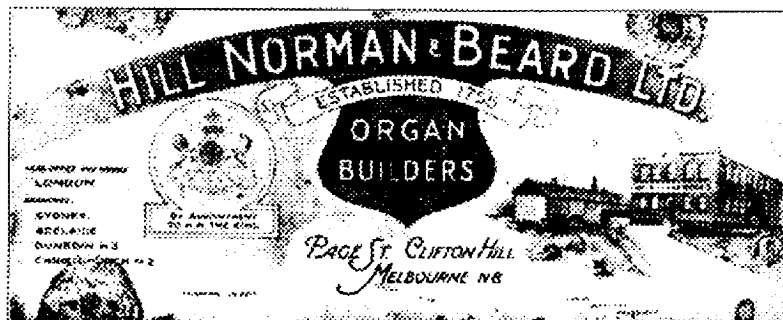
tone, a clarinet, piccolo, xylophone, orchestral bells, bass drum, triangle, castanets, Chinese block, tom-tom, cymbal and tympani... .

Mr Cummins favoured his hearers with a wide range of music, his first item being Light Cavalry Overture, which opens with the sound of trumpets, faithfully reproduced by the organ... .

His second item was Love's Old Sweet Song, during which the vibraphone was introduced to the public for the first time in Australia.

Strains from Viennese Nights was the third item for the benefit of those whose musical education does not rise to the classical, and showed that the organ is capable of producing any kind of music... .

From the 1920s to the 1950s, there were probably more people familiar with the sounds of the theatre organ than those of



H N & B letterhead showing the Melbourne factory

the church organ. Sadly, the advent of television brought a substantial decline in picture theatre attendance and by 1967, all the Christie organs, except the one in the Lyceum Theatre, Sydney, had been sold and removed from their original locations. Four found new homes and purpose in churches, but at least two were broken up. To all lovers of the theatre organ and its era, the introduction of electronic substitutes in some theatres could never equal the thrill and nostalgia aroused by the real instrument in its proper setting.

Christie organs built and installed by Hill, Norman & Beard (Aust.) Pty Ltd in New South Wales, 1928-36 :

1928: Kogarah, Victory Theatre (later renamed Mecca); 2/7 Christie; removed c. 1970, sold to A. Tranter.

1928 : Sydney, Lyceum Hall (Theatre), Pitt Street; 2/9 Christie; rebuilt and altered in 1965 by H'N & B after fire damage; now in new Wesley Theatre on same site.

1928 : Gordon, Kings Theatre; 2/8 Christie; removed c. 1958 to St Columb's Anglican Church, West Ryde; now owned by TOSA (in storage).

1930 : Parramatta, Roxy Theatre; 3/10 Christie, removed c. 1967; partly destroyed by fire in 1997.

1930: Concord, Ritz Theatre; 2/5 Christie; removed 1935 by H N & B and installed Melba Theatre, Strathfield, as a 2/8; sold to Christian Broadcasting Association Studios, Five Dock; subsequently broken up.

1932 : Eastwood, The Duke of York Theatre; 2/7 Christie; removed to Epping Baptist Church.

1932 : Burwood, Palatial Theatre; second-hand 3/10 Christie, built 1928, ex theatre in Germany; sold c. 1958 to Seventh Day Adventist Church, Wahroonga.

1936 : Parramatta, Astra Theatre; 2/5 Christie; removed and broken up — console used in organ for St Patrick's R.C. Church, Bondi; pipework used by A. Lord in residence organ.

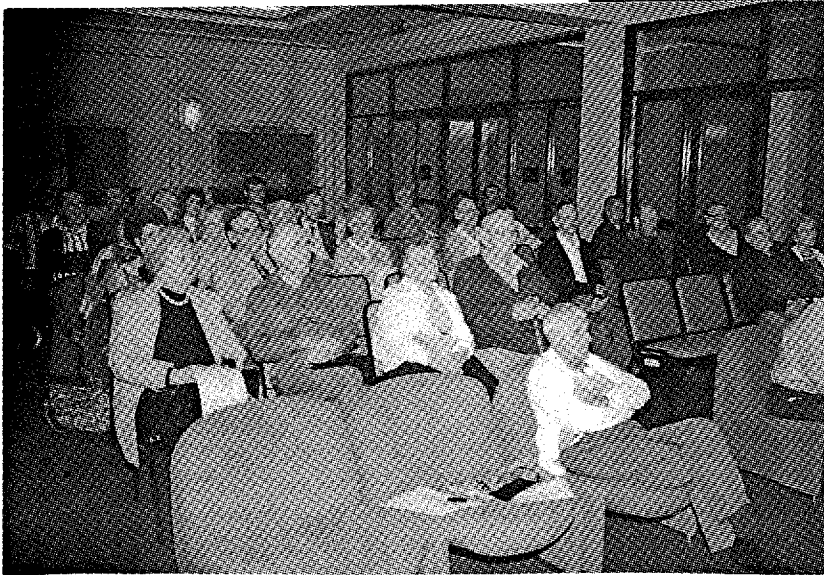
A organ missing from Graeme Rushworth's list is the 1928-built, 2/8 Enfield Savoy Christie, which in its lifetime (so far) has been installed in 7 locations, in 4 Australian states, and is now being rebuilt by the Bendigo TOSA.

OUT AND ABOUT

with **BARRY TOOKER**

Every time there is a theatre organ event **Barry Tooker** very kindly takes a few photos for possible publication. Sometimes there is not enough room for the photos to be included in the next issue of **TOSA News**. Here are his photos of a couple of events which occurred late last year, which lack of space forced out of earlier issues.

At the beginning of November most **Sydney** members received an invitation to attend the launching of 2 new theatre organ electronic organs at **Studio 19, Yagoona**. The photo shows **TOSA** member and organist, **Wendy Hambly**, trying out the new **Rodgers 360** during this afternoon's demonstrations of this instrument and the **Viscount Empire**.



On 20th November 1996, **TOSA (NSW)** held its **Annual General Meeting** in the foyer of the **Orion Centre, Campsie**. This photo shows most of the members who were present at that meeting.

At the **1996 AGM**, at the executive table, from left to right, pictured are :

Treasurer Geoff Brimley
Vice-President Neil Palmer
Retiring President Cliff Bingham
Vice-President John Shaw
Secretary Bill Schumacher.



OUR NEXT ARTIST :

DAVID JOHNSTON

Sunday, 2nd March at 2.00pm

Orion Centre Campsie

David Johnston is well-known to our regular concert-goers for his entertaining concerts, his engaging personality and his skill in providing theatre organ accompaniment for silent films. His exceptional talent as a musician, combined with a flair for showmanship, have justly earned him a reputation as being Australia's most entertaining organist.

David was born into a musical family, his father also being an accomplished organist. As a young boy it was his ambition to follow in his father's footsteps and become an organist (if he could not get a job as a train driver!)

His first appointment as an organist was at Melbourne's Dendy Theatre, later to become the home of the Theatre Organ Society's famous Capitol WurliTzer organ. He also turned his attention to Electrical Engineering studies, while continuing to work part-time as a musician. He was able to combine his musical and engineering skills by working with musical instrument companies - demonstrating, selling, managing, servicing and

repairing instruments. He worked with numerous theatrical companies and developed a skill for which he is regarded as Australia's foremost exponent - accompanying silent movies.

For 10 years David was Musical Director of Melbourne's famous "Naughty Nineties Music Hall", whilst upgrading his qualifications in Electronic Engineering and Computer Electronics - studies which are now of great value to him with the growing application of computers in musical composition, in performance and in the instruments themselves.

The demands on his talent have made David something he never intended to be - a full-time professional musician. He is the Musical Director of the "Bull 'n Bush Music Hall", "John Hancock's Music Hall", plays regularly for organ clubs and societies throughout Australia, and is organist and Musical Adviser to the Melbourne "Carols by Candlelight". David particularly enjoys working with young people and was a National Adviser to the "Youth of Australia" movement, contributing to their monthly magazine, "Keyboard World",

and is a Consultant to the Board of the Australian Guild of Music and Speech.

David was chosen to play the first-ever theatre organ concert as a part of the world renowned "Melbourne International Festival of Organ and Harpsichord", and was invited to serve on the Melbourne Town Hall Organ Restoration Committee under the direction of the American virtuoso Carlo Curley. He is a past President of the Victorian Division of TOSA and is Patron of the Western Australian Division of TOSA. In his spare time he pursues another interest, that of fully instrument rated private pilot. His love of flying has taken him to many parts of Australia and serves as a convenient means of getting from one concert location to the next.

In February 1993, David played for us in Sydney, also accompanying the Australian silent film, *The Kid Stakes*. His concert was greatly appreciated by all of the audience members and we were invited him back to entertain us again in March 1994. We welcome him again, knowing in advance what a treat he has in store for us all.

BOOKING FORM on Page 14

