

OTTAWA  
VALLEY  
THEATRE  
ORGAN  
SOCIETY Inc.  
OVTOS INC. NEWSLETTER  
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**Patron:** Arlene Johnson

**President:** Ross Robinson

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Contents; Editorial; President Ordered to Slow; In Chambers; DVD Defies Easy Completion; O'Brien Film Group's New Season; Winnipeg Theatres Under Threat; Speedy Recovery; Katherine Kelsey; Theatre Organ Magic; Wurlitzer for Sale; Imperial Warren; Familiar UK Visitors; Oddity Corner; Ritz, Kincumber; The Roar Agent; New Email Address for Editor. OVTOS Addresses & Information.

**EDITORIAL** As many readers will be aware, your latest edition is somewhat late again – for which apologies from afar. I am still in New South Wales and my Ottawa pied-a-terre is not available until next northern Spring. Moreover, my life was further complicated in the late summer by a filial visit to the UK which took me away for almost two months. So keeping track of things has proved trickier than expected. Having been away from the centre of the universe for two years has left me very reliant on contributions from the membership. I regret to say that communications have been attenuated, even though I am still contactable for a local stamp by mail and for nothing by email. Happily, our President has been the best and most faithful correspondent, but over the past summer months I gather that not a great deal has been happening with the O'Brien Theatre's organ. The result is a less than full edition of the *Newsletter*. Keep the material coming please; contributions from first-timers are always welcome.

**PRESIDENT ORDERED TO SLOW** Our worthy President, **Ross Robinson**, has been under medic's orders of late, and has been bothered by a relative lack of mobility. We hope his situation will

improve soon, but clearly Ross may not be able to lead as valiantly as he has done in the past decade. I suspect that he would like to be relieved of the Presidency for the benefit of his own health as well as for the future of the Society. In the short term, he and Gee are hoping to escape some of the Canadian cold and enjoy some warmth in the US over the worst winter months.

**IN CHAMBERS** During what appears to have been an intense hot, stormy summer in the Valley, working at the O'Brien Theatre has been less easy. To update, I asked Ross what had been accomplished to date. He replied: "We finished the wind lines last spring; very few small leaks now remain. There are still connections to be made to the five non-existent tremulants, and two non-existent regulators. I had hoped to build these last winter but never got to it, and it looks like I may not do so this winter. The organ mostly plays, there are still some "dead" effects in the toy counter—probably dirt in the magnets. And the lower half of the chrysoglott has a bad connector that needs replacing; it is there waiting to be done. Roy Ellis has just about completed making all the special pins and wires for the valve conversion. We have 450 valves finished and tested at the theatre, and another 450 re-leathered valves stored in the containers which need their caps installed and then tested. Three of the chests have been converted, leaving 10 to do. The difficulty is that one has to take down the pipes to do this, but there is little storage space on site, and probably some of the pipes should be repaired while they are down in order to avoid handling them twice. However, I can't really do this; in fact, I feel my active involvement in anything much more than a supervisory capacity is limited. That said, all of the Warren organ is there, safely stored. So the conservation phase is completed and it can remain there for years without deteriorating. In fact, my primary goal of saving the Warren has been accomplished, until (if) someone else comes along to carry on so much the better. There is a great deal of documentation on the project in a thick binder in my office to pass on to my successors."

**DVD DEFIES EASY COMPLETION** The DVD being made by OVTOS is still not quite picture or text perfect. This is the item which will allow the tourist groups visiting the O'Brien to learn something about the theatre organ and to hear the instrument being played "remotely." There is still a bit of encoding of the organ commands yet to be completed. Industrious member **Dave Milton**, busier than ever with his OPUS TWO electronic control-system business for organs in the meantime, will be needed for this to be effected

whenever some free time comes his way. Ross writes: "It is really quite magical to watch the pictures of the organ while it is being played by the DVD player, in perfect sync'."

#### **O'BRIEN FILM GROUP'S NEW SEASON**

Last month, O'Brien owner/manager Murray Adolph used the Large Screen Video Projector for his film group to show a 17-minute VCR tape which looked good on the big screen in the preview, perhaps not quite as bright as his big machine but quite acceptable.

#### **WINNIPEG THEATRES UNDER THREAT**

Thanks to Prairie member, **Terry Smythe**, the *Newsletter* is aware of further shrinking in the number of theatres in once-proud Winnipeg. The Warren instrument which forms the basis of the Herbert Park Memorial organ installed in Renfrew was once the boast of the Portage Avenue's Capitol Theatre. OVTOS also possesses ranks and parts from the old Starland and Regent Theatres in Winnipeg. So little wonder we find ourselves sympathetic when the inner-city landmarks of the prairie city decline. An article in the *Winnipeg Free Press* (10 Sept, 2005) was headlined "Don't let heritage theatres fade away." The Lyceum has been demolished; the Capitol, starved of heat and funds was condemned to the wrecker's ball; the Allen Theatre (now Metropolitan) stands unused and un-repaired. The 1400-seat, city-owned Pantages and the Walker Theatre (now the Burton Cummings Theatre) are both threatened by red ink, while citizens care more about pot-holes than heritage theatres. The article concludes that "it would be idiotic to let these last two theatres fade away." In Ottawa we are all too aware of what can happen to that which was once great, despite the best of intentions.

**SPEEDY RECOVERY** Our sometime Treasurer, **Liz Evans**, also the wife of founder-member David Evans, has been in hospital in Ottawa, but I understand she is well on the way to wellness. All of us in the Society wish her well for a speedy recovery and continued enjoyment of retirement life in Kanata. David continues to flourish.

**KATHERINE KELSEY** I was sorry to learn that Katherine Kelsey, wife of Brian Kelsey, has also had a lengthy spell in hospital. Happily, she too is now in better health. Katherine was much involved with preparation of the OVTOS DVD as the camera person and video editor.

**"THEATRE ORGAN MAGIC"** This imposing phrase is the program title of an hour-long

programme that airs monthly on an FM-radio station in Sydney. Its coverage is not city-wide, but is within reach of almost two million potential listeners. You may be tempted to conclude that the devil finds work for idle hands! But having taken over the presentations of this compilation of recorded (mostly CD) music, at least until the end of the year, I have been stimulated to much renewed listening of our favourite musical instrument. The fare is international: theatre organs and organists in Australia form the basis, of course, but I've been able to include many artists and organs from the US and the UK. None, regrettably from Canada as yet, though I am not quite convinced that I really miss CBC's recording of Patrick Wedd playing at the Wurlitzer in Vancouver's Orpheum, should that still be in the Record/CD catalogues. Perhaps someone can inform me if Clark Wilson has released a CD using the Kingston Kimball; I should be grateful.

**WURLITZER FOR SALE** Well, an electronic version, that is. Vic Chapman has a Wurlitzer 575T organ that he is prepared to part with. Please contact Vic directly in Ottawa, or by email at: [www3.sympatico.ca/vicottawa/](http://www3.sympatico.ca/vicottawa/)

**IMPERIAL WARREN** One of the largest Warren theatre organs, a 4-27, was installed in the Imperial (ex-Pantages) theatre. **Jim Leworthy** was one of those working on the restoration of that instrument, but under poor leadership. He recalls wryly: "All the actions were stripped for re-leathering and we were instructed to place a fibre washer on the inside of the pouch to keep the spring centred. Of course, we novii didn't know that was a problem until a real builder, Rolly Webb, demonstrated the "castanet" sound of the fibre clicking against the action housing. Everything had to be stripped again (what a waste of new leather!). A few friends and I made a midnight visit to the Montreal Capitol, where a nearly identical 4/28 organ was installed, and (with only the caretaker's permission) liberated its relays and actions for use at the Imperial. We got one division playing to demonstrate to the management that it could be done, but they balked at spending more money and changed the locks on us. One of the crew somehow removed the organ to the "CNE," where he planned to install it in the Coliseum. That never happened, so it went back to the tunnel under the link to the Pantages Theatre where, I'm told, most if not all was lost in a fire."

**FAMILIAR UK VISITORS** Formerly of Ottawa, members **Brian** and **Louise Keith**, are scheduled to be in Ontario again, if only briefly, after their year-long working stint in Trinidad. Brian is a former OVTOS Treasurer and now enthusiastic theatre-

organist, having performed publicly at concerts in England and Scotland prior to taking up a non-musical appointment in the Caribbean.

**ODDITY CORNER** Do you happen to know which English theatre organ has the distinction of being the very last theatre pipe organ to be installed in a UK cinema? This 2-5 Compton (+ Melotone) opened the day before war was declared (2/9/1939) in the Plaza Cinema, Crosby. The Compton works in London were bombed during hostilities. But the happy note is that the instrument (Compton's #A516) still plays, but now in the home of organist Dave Redfern.

**RITZ CINEMA, KINCUMBER** In case you are wondering about the Editor's continued interest in playing the theatre organ, I can report some activity in recent weeks: in September I appeared at the Wurlitzer in Marrickville Town Hall publicly as part of the Marrickville Festival. Two of us, TOSA (NSW) members, were involved in playing the instrument for almost five hours non-stop during a heritage-oriented display! The picture (below) also displays a nostalgic trip in early October to the 190-seat Ritz, Kincumber, a community in the city of Gosford, about 130k north of Sydney, where he was able to play with the scent of pop-corn in his nostrils—almost like the O'Brien, though there was no three-manual instrument.



**THE ROAR AGENT** As a result of poor editing, the headline "The Roaring Agent" appeared instead of "The Roar Agent" as anagram for Theatre Organ in the last issue. Whatever the cause and despite the invitation, no submissions were made by members for suitable and similar anagrams pertaining to the theatre organ world. The appeal is still open, of course, and suitable anagrams will be published in these columns.

**MEMO: EDITOR'S NEW EMAIL ADDRESS**

Please notice that the Editor has a new email address, having shifted from Hotmail to Yahoo, a

move dictated by difficulties in accessing the former account.. So for those of you who wish to contact me by email, it is now: <js\_batts@yahoo.com>. And by the time you read this I am once more in New South Wales at telephone (61)-2-9389-8659.

Founded as OTOS, Ottawa Valley Theatre Organ Society Inc. is a non-profit, Canadian charity: No. 0820019-22. Write to The President & Treasurer c/o OVTOS, The Historic O'Brien Theatre, 334 Raglan Street South, Renfrew, Ontario, K7V 1R5; or by e-mail: <restorer@ncf.ca>. Notice that OVTOS Inc. Newsletter does not necessarily express official views of the Society or its members. It exists as a disseminator of information, a forum for ideas and discussion, and always welcomes contributions from OVTOS members. The Editor may still be reached c/o: English Dept, University of Ottawa, Box 450 Stn A, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1N 6N5; or more quickly by e-mail: <js\_batts@yahoo.com>.