

OTTAWA VALLEY THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY Inc.

OVTOS INC. NEWSLETTER
Vol. XIX No. 2 (Spring 2006)

Patron: Arlene Johnson

President: Ross Robinson

Editor: John S. Batts

Contents: AGM; Agenda; Editorial; President Back in Ottawa; Subscription Reminder; Reminder: Theatre Organ Summer Camp; Ex-Ottawa Members Move Again; Karn Advertisements; Early Theatre Organists in Canada; When Ignorance is not Bliss I & II; Vancouver Capitol No More; BCTA Visits Australia; Passing Note: Ashley Miller; Passing Note: Tom Hazelton; The Swaffield Collection; Piano Rolls Midified; OVTOS Addresses & Information.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING The OVTOS AGM will take place at 10.00 a.m. on Saturday, 27th May, at the O'Brien Theatre, Raglan Street South, Renfrew, Ontario (by kind permission of **Murray Adolph**). Please make an effort to attend this meeting and thereby guarantee a quorum for business. Various reports need to be accepted by the meeting. Furthermore, you may voice your own concerns under "Other Business." Proxy votes may be granted to the Chairman or Treasurer but should be made in writing.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AGENDA:

1. **Approval of the Minutes of 2005 AGM**
2. **Business Arising**
3. **President/Chairman's Report**
4. **Treasurer's Report**
5. **Secretary's Report**
6. **Election of Society Officers/Directors (Nominations may be made from the floor)**
7. **Other Business.**

EDITORIAL As many readers will be aware, I am still in New South Wales. I even almost met one of our OVTOS members in Sydney, NSW (see below "British Cinema Theatre Association Visits Australia"). Having been away for a considerable while, I still need to remind you to send me material of interest to the theatre organ world, particularly of events in the Valley. In the last issue I voiced concern that the character of this *Newsletter* was becoming more international than I had ever intended. So, please keep the local material coming —and don't forget that contributions from first-timers are always welcome. May spring unlock any writer's block! Full details of several means of contact are given at the end of this *Newsletter*.

PRESIDENT BACK IN OTTAWA Our worthy President, **Ross Robinson** and his wife **Gee**, having cheerfully wintered in the South West, based in California, have arrived safely back in Ottawa. Ross sent me an email within two hours of his reaching Harvard Avenue—impressive loyalty to the Society and to your Editor. Both Robinsons seem to have had stimulating travels while away; I received delightful, droll accounts of their peregrinations. Best of all, there were no medical alarms for either of them down south.

SUBSCRIPTION REMINDER Just in case it slipped your mind—or perhaps not so much the mind as it temporarily became the "failed-to-do" item in your life—it's that time of year again when OVTOS politely asks all its members (and anyone who sees this on the website), to support the work and achievements of the Society. We are still a charitable society in terms of the Tax Act. A basic and still unchanged sum of **\$15.00** will continue your membership in the Society, will support the on-going efforts made on your behalf (such as are described in the *Newsletter*), and generally will serve to encourage those members who continue to give freely of their time, energies, and skills to ensure that the sounds of the pipe theatre organ will intrigue and thrill future generations of Canadians. Please consider making a donation over and above the \$15.00, for which tax relief will normally be accorded. You may send renewals to the OVTOS **Treasurer**, c/o The Historic O'Brien Theatre, Raglan Street South, Renfrew, Ontario, K7V 1R5.

REMINDER: THEATRE ORGAN SUMMER CAMP This inaugural project sponsored by ATOS and co-hosted by the Central Indiana Chapter, will provide a unique opportunity for younger generations to learn and experience the art of the theatre organ. Distinguished guest lecturers and experienced faculty will cover both the technical

and performance aspects of this wonderful instrument. The event, held June 23-26, 2006, is open to anyone ages 13-30. Please contact Michael Cierski at cierski@atos.org or 708/785-4985. Please type “TOSC2006” in the subject line of any email.

EX-OTTAWA MEMBERS MOVE AGAIN

Formerly of Ottawa, members **Brian** and **Louise Keith**, after their year-long working stint in Trinidad, and a brief sojourn on the south coast of England, are leaving for a post in Denmark. Brian, an ATOS award-winning organist, should be able to report eventually on the state of the theatre organ in that country. The former Palladium Theatre in Copenhagen, near the Tivoli Gardens, had a Wurlitzer at its former site; when I called in two years ago, I was assured that it had been “saved” and reinstalled elsewhere. But where? Over to you, Brian, for some precise information.

KARN ADVERTISEMENTS Warren Organs were eventually taken over by D.W. Karn of Woodstock, Ontario; for a while in the 1920s the name-plates on their organs were “Karn-Warren”. Browsing on the internet I came across this pair of advertisements for the Karn Company:



Both “ads” are undated but appear to be late Victorian or perhaps turn-of-century.

EARLY THEATRE ORGANISTS IN CANADA

In writing about the Canada Post stamps celebrating jazz pianist **Oscar Peterson** in the last issue, I closed by wondering aloud about theatre organists from Canada and mentioned Harold Ramsay (Calgary), Sandy MacPherson (Hamilton), Stuart Barrie, Don Baker before inviting your suggestions of others. Recent eclectic reading in *The Canadian Encyclopedia of Music* has come up with the following (many of which are new to me): Among them were **Paul Michelin** and **Hanley Wells** in Victoria, BC; **Julian Hayward** and **Sydney Kelland** in Vancouver; **Cyril Godwin** in Calgary; **Charles Peaker** in Regina; **Allan Caron**, **Agnes Forsythe**, and **Ted Walker** in Winnipeg; **Al Bolington** (sic), **Colin Corbett**, **Ernest Dainty**, **Horace Lapp**, **Quentin Maclean**, **Ronnie Padgett**, **Kathleen Stokes**, and **Roland Todd** in Toronto; **Mack White** in Montreal; and **Harry Thomas** in Halifax. Can any reader tell me more about the non-Toronto organists? Charles Peaker subsequently had a distinguished career as a church organist in Toronto; long time since I met his younger brother—himself a dance-band member in Saskatoon in the Thirties—playing an electronic organ in a Victoria (B.C.) restaurant. Funny old world! Additionally, who was **Ivy Evans**, organist at the Vancouver Capitol? Further reflection tells me there was no TPO in Halifax, (possibly one of four built by Casavant ?) though there was one in St. John (N.B.). But what of Winnipeg’s mentioned threesome? Were any of them associated with the Capitol, whose organ now resides in Renfrew? Any answers?

WHEN IGNORANCE IS NOT BLISS – I

Many years ago as I was emigrating to Canada by ship, as one did in days of yore, I met someone aboard from Ottawa who said that she recalled hearing an organ in the Capitol Theatre in Bank Street. Within months of landing I visited the Capitol to be told “No, there was never an organ here.” I repeated the query many months later, and probably asked a different member of management, but the answer was still negative. Yet, as we now all know, there had been an instrument installed in the Capitol in the 1920s, though it was not the organ that had originally been ordered, namely a four-manual Warren. Instead, a smaller two-manual Warren of eight or nine ranks had been installed high on the left of the proscenium; on the other side a chamber originally incorporated into the design remained empty. Soon after the coming of Talkies and alternating electrical current (ca. 1928), the organ fell into disuse. Presumably it was never the commanding kind of mighty organ that had been installed at leading Montreal and Toronto theatres,

but one that could usefully supplement the orchestra in the pit. Latterly with the demolition of the Bank Street super cinema, one learned that air-conditioning duct-work had been put through the one chamber devastating the pipe-work within. My informant was the late Bob Laverty, who had tried in vain to save the organ at the time of wrecking; he rescued the console and some sheet music and letters which had lain collecting the dust of decades beneath the wooden flooring. It's strange to think that in the Sixties I had a front seat for several seasons of Montreal Symphony concerts held at the old Capitol, never knowing that not far beneath my feet was a theatre-organ console! In retrospect it is probably too easy to blame Capitol management for not knowing that there was an organ on the premises, but I remain surprised that there was not at least a veteran employee who could have personally recalled or recalled being told what had happened thirty or so years before. Sigh!

WHEN IGNORANCE IS NOT BLISS – II You may well have wondered what triggered the recollection of the above story. I have a serious motive, of course. Browsing through an on-line *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, as one does (!), a brief account of the organ and organists in Canada included a segment on the theatre organ—the old-style kind of huffy stuff noting that it possessed stops that “warbled like canaries” [=tremms, geddit!] and that movie houses across the land installed such instruments “which became a strong attraction for audiences who enjoyed pop-music recitals”—[code for “incomprehensibly popular”; hands up if you sense a sneer!] Then follows a section noting organists who had made a profession from such employ: “Some organists made careers of the specialized and tolerant virtuosity of the movie-house repertoire [*the bad guys*]; others kept their work as church organists central and supplemented their incomes with a little or a lot of theatre work. Some achieved wide reputations as popular entertainers” [*Pass the smelling salts!*]. Then it cites some famous players from west to east (see preceding item). Almost a dozen of these cited are new to me, but it's worth knowing. However, if one puts aside the notion of achieving wide reputations as a yardstick, my point is why there are no Ottawa (or Edmonton, or even Saint John) mentions? Ottawa at one time had at least five theatre organs. Who played them? Does anyone know? Can anyone find out before it's too late for useful recollection? This looks like a task for an OVTOS member. For a start, the name **Booth** was on some of the surviving sheet music from the Ottawa Capitol. Furthermore, “**Champ**” **Champagne's** father was known to have played at the now

demolished Regent on Bank Street (N-W corner of the intersection with Sparks Street, I think). The rest, as the saying goes, is blank. Cannot this be filled in? Ottawa City Archives and-or the National Library have local newspapers on microfilm. Those should make an excellent point of departure for a little gentle (but needful) research after a glance at: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia>. And meantime, apart from the organists listed who either possessed international reputations (Ramsay, Bollington, Maclean, Macpherson) or are known figures in Canada (“Charlie” Peaker, Horace Lapp, Kathleen Stokes), cannot more be found out about the other Canadian theatre organists? I'll print your findings, should fame be the spur!

VANCOUVER CAPITOL NO MORE One of the original grand theatres of Vancouver's downtown Granville Street and once flagship of the Famous Players' chain is no more. On Oct. 18, 1928 the Capitol had premiered *Mother Knows Best*, the first talking picture to come to Vancouver. But beyond the speech of the first “talkies” there was much to be heard, such as the 3-14 Wurlitzer organ, which often played accompaniment to the films. *The Vancouver Courier* (on April 12, 2005) quoted Ron Watt, now of Oakville, who recalled “unforgettable memories of Ivy Evans playing the Wurlitzer theatre organ during intermissions. When the film concluded, a spotlight would be directed to centre stage, the organ would begin playing, and the console, with Ivy at the keyboard would arise from below the stage. She played for about half an hour, then the films would begin again. As a small boy, I sometimes enjoyed the organ even better than the films.” The original Capitol (with about 2500 seats) which had opened with much flair in March, 1921, had been converted to a 6-screen multiplex cinema back in 1974. Prior to that, the Wurlitzer organ had found its way to Burnaby. Jim Tarling, then aged 20, purchased the organ with his father in 1965: “Nobody cared about it back then,” Tarling says from the organ bench at his home. It took three months of taking the organ apart and cleaning decades of dust before it was re-erected in a specially built addition in his house. “I would have liked to have put it somewhere more publicly, but I'm glad I have it. It's a piece of history.” At least he possesses something tangible of that which was once great. (Acknowledgment to Aaron Chapman, “The End,” in *The Vancouver Courier*.)

BRITISH CINEMA/THEATRE ASSOCIATION VISITS AUSTRALIA The British Cinema Theatre Association spent a busy ten days in Sydney as part of an extensive Down Under tour, visiting cinemas ancient and modern in Australia and New Zealand. In NSW their itinerary included

excursions to the Capitol and State Theatres, and the art-deco Hayden Orpheum Picture Palace in Cremorne, where Neil Jensen played the Wurlitzer. At full strength the group numbered almost six dozen and included a couple of Australians, some Americans, and one Canadian couple (OVTOS members, **Jim Leworthy** and his wife). Clearly there was at least a secondary interest in organs because members also visited Sydney Town Hall to meet the Civic Organist, and Neil Jensen also played for them at the TOSA Wurlitzer in Marrickville Town Hall. For the other TOSA venue your editor tried to keep them happy at the Orion, Campsie with a short programme (see illustration below). Afterwards I also fielded questions about the Wurlitzer. One odd moment for me was meeting an Englishman from the Reading area among their number who claimed he had heard me playing at the Regal, Henley-on-Thames, over 30 years ago! Even stranger was mutual non-recognition between organist (me) and keen Toronto photographer (Jim). We both claimed to be very preoccupied, of course, but regret not meeting in person for the very first time.



**Wurlitzer of the Orion, Campsie,
Sydney NSW [photo by Jim
Leworthy]**

PASSING NOTE: ASHLEY MILLER Well remembered for his theatre-organ recordings at New York's Radio City Music Hall, **Ashley Miller** passed away March 20, 2006 at home in New Jersey. He had opened the Kingston Kimball at the Church of the Redeemer in the early 1980s and regularly returned to give concerts there. One of his best-known recordings was of Chopin's "Fantasie-Impromptu" at the RCMH Wurlitzer. The Miller family are reported to be setting up a Scholarship Fund in his name.

PASSING NOTE: TOM HAZELTON West-coast organist **Tom Hazleton** passed away on March 13, 2006 at Oceanside, California; he was only 63. Having held various church appointments in his teens, Tom studied at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, San Francisco State University, and the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. He enjoyed a world-wide reputation as a classical pipe organist and choir director as well as theatre organist. He had formerly been named Organist of the Year by ATOS and had recorded over 60 LPs, cassettes and CDs. Tom had a reputation for taking an instrument on its own terms and not trying to impose his own 'sounds' on the instrument; moreover, he was a renowned improviser at the console. In short, Tom was an organist's organist.

THE SWAFFIELD COLLECTION We still need a volunteer to organize for OVTOS the recent donation by **Patsy Swaffield** of records and tapes reported in a previous *Newsletter*. Her late husband, Bill, the founding Vice-President of OTOS had an extensive collection of theatre-organ music. **Ross** has made a preliminary sort, but he would be delighted (and relieved) if someone could catalogue the records, cassettes, and CD's. When properly organized, these items should form the basis of a wonderful lending library for members.

PIANO ROLLS MIDIFIED Member **Terry Smythe** in Winnipeg advises that his Batch 23 of midified piano rolls have now been uploaded. The list of music titles and artists may be seen at: <http://members.shaw.ca/paud122/batch23.htm> The files themselves may be downloaded from: <http://members.shaw.ca/paud122/batch23.ZIP>

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 and/or jsbatts@gmail.com