

OTTAWA
VALLEY
THEATRE
ORGAN
SOCIETY Inc.
OVTOS INC. NEWSLETTER
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Contents; Editorial; President On the Road Again; In the Burnstown "Chambers"; Subscription Time; DVD Still Hanging Fire; Continued Recovery; Where Are They Now?; Where are they Now- UK?; Theatre Organ Summer Camp; Theatre Organ Magic; Ex-Ottawa Members Back in UK; Egyptian Theatre Organ?; Theatre Organists Wanted; Wurlitzer for Sale; Theatre Stomps!; Theatre Organs & Dance Bands; Theatre Organs in BC; Passing Note: Nalle; Moog No More; Swaffield Collection Update: New Email Address for Editor. OVTOS Addresses & Information.

EDITORIAL As many readers will be aware, I am still in New South Wales. Ground-hog Day has passed with hints of good news from Wiarion Willie, and I write this as Winterlude approaches. Having been away from the Valley for well over two years has left me very reliant on contributions from the membership. And despite an appeal for contributions last issue, I regret to say that little has come to hand; so I should like to remind you all that I am still contactable for a local stamp by mail and for nothing by email. Happily, our President, whose is currently eyeing me across the Pacific waves from San Diego has continued to be my most faithful correspondent over the past many months. The upshot is an edition of the *Newsletter* more international in substance than desirable. So keep the material coming please; and don't forget contributions from first-timers are always welcome. Full details are given at the end of this *Newsletter*.

PRESIDENT ON THE ROAD AGAIN Our worthy President, **Ross Robinson**, and his wife **Gee** have been wintering in the South West, based

in California, and appear to have kept the medics away. He is expected to return to Ottawa in March.

IN THE BURNSTOWN "CHAMBERS" I should probably and more accurately said containers. Over the past two years **Ross** has been working with the pipework of the small Robert-Morton theatre organ which was kindly given to the Society by Jim Leworthy. I have been waiting quite some time to acknowledge our President's work on this trove. Much sorting has been achieved and crates have been examined and contents sorted. Ross then erected all of the pipes on the main and solo chests. His rank-by-rank assessment is as follows:

1. The **Concert Flute** is complete, from 8 ft up.
2. The **String** is complete from 4 ft up (except for the top C, and I found a replacement in the spare pipes). Here I have made a support rack for the lower 2 octaves so they do not bend under their weight.

3. The **Open Diapason** is complete from 4 ft up; the 8 ft is outside racked up. Some of the 8ft need ears replaced, otherwise it is OK. I have the chest and rack boards for the 8 ft octave in the container.

4. The **Vox** is complete from 8 ft up, but has some strange breaks to Harmonic, missing top C again, but I've found a replacement in the spares.

5. The **Tuba** is a Wurlitzer, of a scale slightly smaller than my #2020 Wurlitzer in the other container. One reed boot seems to be missing, in the third octave up. The 8 ft octave of the tuba is complete, on a separate offset, and I have the racking. I have made a rack to support the lowest two octaves.

6. The **Tibia** is complete from 8 ft for 5 octaves. The bottom four pipes are on a small offset. Both Tibia and Tuba have a small common offset for the top octave. Also, the **Tibia** was missing some pipes, I found a note to this effect tied to the wiring. I found a set of replacements among the spare pipes.

So the organ is essentially complete.

7. We have all 61 notes of the **Clarinet**; 5 were broken and have been repaired, and all were rolled to get out the dents. As well they were cleaned. A new 61 note Carlsted chest was made, with support racking, the magnets are salvaged Wurlitzer black caps from the W2020 console

8. The 8 ft octave of the string was badly damaged; also there is no chest for it. The pipes were repaired and six were re-voiced. A new offset chest was made, with racking, using standard chest valves and Wurlitzer offset control boxes, in this way it is possible to easily service the valves in the chests.

We have three complete percussions and a 20 note chime with a new action I made with parts salvaged

from the Guillemette collection, and many traps. There are shades for a single chamber installation, and a blower and ductwork. This organ is ready for a new home. Any suggestions ??.

SUBSCRIPTION TIME It's that time of year again when OVTOS asks all its members (and anyone who sees this on the website), to support the work and achievements of the Society. We are a charitable society in terms of the Tax Act; a basic \$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 preceding news item, 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.

DVD STILL HANGING FIRE The DVD being made by OVTOS is still not quite picture or text perfect. This is the device 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.

CONTINUED RECOVERY I am happy to report that two OVTOS members, **Liz Evans**, wife of founder-member David, and **Katherine Kelsey**, wife of Brian Kelsey, have both continued to mend after their spells in hospital. May this continue.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW? In many ways it is tempting, thanks mainly to Wurlitzer and Hope-Jones to regard the US as the natural home of the theatre organ. More were made and installed south of our border than anywhere else in the world. Yet as we begin to get accustomed to the Twenty-first century, one may wonder if it is becoming an endangered species. Of the more than 7,000 theatre organs installed in theatres of USA between 1915 and 1932, only about 40 remain in their original homes. The "rescue rate" however, is impressive for there have been many, many transplants into public halls as well as an important number of home installations. Larger Wurlitzers especially

have shown a liking for California where these may be located:

Bay Theatre, Seal Beach 4/43
 Dollinger Residence, Palos Verde Estates 4/42
 Dresser Residence, Malibu 4/22
 Founders Church, Los Angeles 4/28?
 Fullerton HS 4/28
 Hostetter Residence, Pasadena 4/28
 Ledwon Residence, Agoura 4/52
 Old Town Music Hall, El Segundo 4/24?
 Roosevelt Park, Torrance 4/17
 San Francisco Fox (In storage) 4/36
 San Sylmar, Sylmar 4/37
 Sargent & Stark Residence, Hollywood 4/28?
 Simonton Residence, Toluca Lake 4/36
 Wright Residence, Hollywood 4/33

In Canada the attrition rate has been more severe, and only the Vancouver Orpheum can claim to have its original Wurlitzer. And in the Ottawa Valley we think that the historic O'Brien Theatre is unique in having a theatre organ installed in its native habitat.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW? – UK The total of unit organs in the UK probably peaked at about 450, including dual purpose organs in civic buildings, theatre organs built for residences, those in studios, ballrooms and restaurants and Foort's travelling Moller organ. Some installations may have been non-unit organs, but that figure also includes Compton and LaFleur electronic organs in theatres (as in the Capitol, Cardiff). Few enough Wurlitzers exist in their original cinemas; both Granadas in Tooting and Harrow possess their instruments, but the building's functions have changed. Notwithstanding all which, a recent poll on the UK Cinema Organs E-list calculated that there were 16 theatre organs in the London area, including the Odeon, Leicester Square, the 5-17 Compton (+ Melotone) affectionately known as "The Duchess."

THEATRE ORGAN SUMMER CAMP ANNOUNCED 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.

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

that airs monthly on an FM-radio station in Sydney, and has been presented by your **Editor** for the past five months. Its broadcast coverage is not city-wide, but is within reach of almost two million potential listeners. The reality, of course, may be that listeners at noon on the first Sunday of each month may probably be measured in the hundreds rather than the thousands. Careful preparation of a script to support the chosen music, however, makes the same demands whatever the size of the listening audience. If Radio Renfrew would like to make use of a copy of the master-tape to play a one-hour program monthly, I think such might be arranged. Email me!

EX-OTTAWA MEMBERS BACK IN UK

Formerly of Ottawa, members **Brian** and **Louise Keith**, after their year-long working stint in Trinidad and late Fall visit to Ontario, are now back in England and living on the South Coast.

EGYPTIAN THEATRE ORGAN? Though this news is not quite in the same league as recent tomb-finds in the Valley of the Kings, I did learn to my surprise that there was once a theatre pipe organ made by Compton in the Rivoli, Cairo, which was opened in February, 1948, by English organist **Gerald Shaw**. Ian McIver (in Brisbane but formerly a London resident), writes that Shaw "had a photo album in his dressing room at the Odeon, Leicester Square, that he showed me, which contained pictures of the console as new. It had ten ranks but no Electrone. I can't recall whether the console was illuminated – but it was certainly an elaborate affair." The organ was not to last long, however. During a political riot in January, 1952, while **Tommy Dando** (once of the Theatre Royal and Savoy in Dublin) was organist there, the building, owned by the British Arthur Rank chain, was damaged and one of the organ chambers suffered. The Rank organisation sold the place soon afterwards, and the pipe-work was reportedly removed for scrap in approx 1953.

"THEATRE ORGANISTS WANTED!" Not that one sees such an appeal very often, but ... though this may be several months old, it makes for interesting reading. The Peery's Egyptian Theater at 2415 Washington Blvd. in Ogden, Utah is a fine old 835-seat movie palace, now restored to its original glory, complete with a newly installed 3m23r Wurlitzer. The theater management has put the instrument in the forefront of its programming. A roster of organists is being prepared. Besides the scheduled silent film series, organists will give pre-show performances on the Mighty Wurlitzer, then at the intermission and then play after the show. In Ogden and Salt Lake City, Utah, a formal academic

course, "The Silent Movie Accompanist Center for the Performing Arts," is preparing theatre organists to restore our almost lost art forms. In Salt Lake City, at the Organ Loft (5m-36 Wurlitzer), and at Peery's Egyptian Theater, annual live-accompanied silent film series are flourishing. Ballet West and the Ririe-Woodbury Repertory Dance Co. both require the Capitol Theater's 2m-11 Wurlitzer to be demonstrated to the dozen's of bus-loads of students arriving to see the art of the dance in their traditional 'out-reach to schools' program. For more information contact Blaine Gale (801) 571-9261, or Narlene Mathie, at Peery's Egyptian Theater (801)935-3222, or The Organ Loft, (801) 485-9265.

WURLITZER FOR SALE In the last issue, an incorrect email was printed for the vendor. So I should re-run the note and remind readers what is involved. It is a Wurlitzer 575T electronic organ. Thought to be in the Ottawa area, please contact: Victor Chapman at: vicottawa@sympatico.ca or Victor.chapman@sympatico.ca.

PETERSON STOMPS! This 2005 Fall Canada Post has again celebrated a renowned keyboard artist. A depiction of jazz pianist **Oscar Peterson** adorned a 50c. stamp, showing the great man smiling across the top of what must be a grand piano; an angled keyboard is superimposed above him. It was at least twenty years ago since we have seen organ keyboards on a stamp, when, if memory serves me well enough, organist composer Healey Willan was depicted at a 4-manual console. Canada in the last century produced several theatre organists of international note, including Harold Ramsay, Sandy MacPherson, Stuart Barrie, Don Baker. Who have I missed, I wonder? Email your suggestions (see below).

THEATRE ORGANS WITH DANCE BANDS

There are many recordings around of theatre organs with various dance bands and the like, for example, The Orchestra Mascotte. The best-known and most prolific in the UK was Billy Thorburn's "Organ Dance Band and Me" combination, which featured the EMI Compton and often Hammond organ with a variety of musicians during WW2 and for a few years thereafter. Most times it was Robinson Cleaver at the organ, but other organists were used from time to time. Ian MacIver reminds everyone that recordings featuring Cleaver and Andrew Fenner can be heard on his Virtual Radiogram (the UK recordings page) on the web, <http://theatreorgans.com/southerncross/Radiogram/radiogramtitle.htm>.

THEATRE ORGANS IN BC Over the years I have been fortunate enough to play a number of theatre organs in British Columbia (Wurlitzers, Kimball, and Robert-Morton), but I had no idea quite how popular they once were in Canada's most western province. Now the Puget Sound chapter website has put on the web a full listing of known instruments and their theatres since the first decades of the past century:

Mission ■ [Mission Theatre](#) - 2/3 Robert Morton

Nanaimo: ■ [Bijou \(Strand\) Theatre](#) - 2/8 Kimball

New Westminster ■ [Columbia Theatre](#) - 2/? Warren

Powell River: ■ [Powell River Theatre](#) - 2/4 Robert Morton

Trail: ■ [Royal Theatre](#) - 2/? Robert Morton

■

Vancouver:

- [Alma Theatre](#) - ?/? Casavant
- [Capitol Theatre](#) - 3/15 Wurlitzer
- [Columbia Theatre](#) - 3/9 Warren
- Court Theatre (1907) - 1/7 Estey
- Grand Theatre (1914) - 2/? Kimball
- [Grandview Theatre](#) - 2/4 Robert Morton
- [Kerrisdale Theatre](#) - 2/14 Casavant
- [Kitsilano Theatre](#) - 2/4 Wicks Robert-Morton
- [Maple Leaf Theatre](#) - 2/3 Robert Morton
- [Orpheum Theatre](#) - 3/13 Wurlitzer **REMOVED**
- [Pantages \(Odeon, Beacon\) Theatre](#) - 2/14 Robert Morton
- [Princess Theatre](#) - 2/7 Kimball
- [Rex Theatre](#) - 2/12 Karn & Warren
- [Strand Theatre](#) - ?/? Kimball
- [Windsor Theatre](#) - ?/? Casavant

Victoria

- [Bijou Theatre](#) - ?/? Kimball
- [Butchart Gardens](#) - 2/? Aeolian
- [Plaza \(Fox\) Theatre](#) - 2/4 Robert Morton
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PASSING NOTE: BILLY NALLE (1921-2005)



Theatre organist Billy Nalle of Ft. Myers, Fl, died last summer. Known for his individual stylings, Nalle studied at the Julliard Music School in New York where his teachers included jazz pianist, Teddy Wilson. He served in the US Navy 1943-46, with its Entertainment Unit and toured Pacific bases with

fellow serviceman, Bob Fosse. Then followed a 26-year career of music in New York City with radio and TV networks. In 1975 he moved to Wichita, Kansas, as artist in residence for the former NY Paramount organ in the Century complex, until retirement in 1995, to his Florida hometown.

MOOG NO MORE The man who brought electronic music to the masses, Robert Moog (b. 1934), died aged 71 last Fall at his North Carolina home. As an engineer he turned electric currents into musical instruments, the self-named synthesizers which—and this I learn posthumously—was officially pronounced to rhyme with “vogue”. The eerie sounds, which personally I have always thought owed a great deal to the Melotone units of Compton theatre organs, owed much of their popularity to being used by the Beatles in their 1969 album, Abbey Road. You may also recall Walter Carlos’ “Switched on Bach” (1968), using the Moog as an orchestra (of sorts). Latterly, his synthesizers helped groups like Pearl Jam, Pink Floyd, and Manfred Mann. Having been early fascinated by Theremins, Moog developed his first synthesizer module while a doctoral student in engineering physics at Cornell University. He had not long since retired as research professor of music at UNC, Asheville, and was running the new instrument business, Moog Music.

MEMO: EDITOR'S NEW EMAIL ADDRESS

Please notice again that the Editor has a new email address. Only three OVTOS members so far have been in touch by this medium. Don't forget to send me some Newsletter material, or even just say “hello”!

THE SWAFFIELD COLLECTION. Following up on the recent donation of records and tapes by Patsy Swaffield reported in a previous Newsletter, the President has sorted through the roughly 800 records. There were 470 T.O. and classical organ records, 150 cassettes, 60 CD's. 350 records were donated to the Salvation Army.

We are now looking for someone to catalogue the collection so we can start a lending library. Any one interested??

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

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