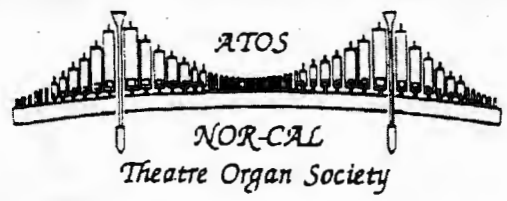


# The WINDSHEET



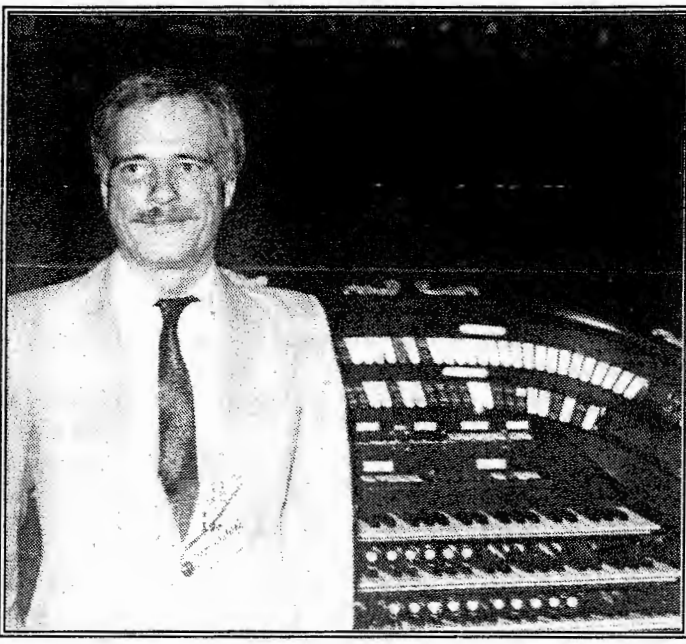
NEWSLETTER OF THE NOR-CAL THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY

NOVEMBER 1992

## ERNIE WILSON

Ernest L. Wilson — owner of the 3/13 *Wurlitzer* in the Grand Lake Theatre in Oakland — died October 10 in Seaton Hospital after a long illness.

Born March 17, 1941 in Richmond, Indiana he became interested in theatre organ in the 1960's. He moved to California in 1962. He worked for a few years starting 1968 at the Organ Center in San Mateo selling pianos and Thomas organs. He then went back east and was active in Buffalo, Rochester and Philadelphia. He bought a Marr and Colton in 1971 and installed it in a health club in Amhurst, New York.



Grand Lake and the decision was made to install the organ there instead.

pipe would drain in a short time. However, after about 3 days it was still draining and it was realized there had to be an underground leak somewhere - they were actually trying to drain Lake Merritt through the sump pump! The pipe still had a union on it which was badly rusted. This was very gingerly removed and replaced with a cap.

The original lift was inoperable. Ernie got a Barton 4-poster lift but didn't like the idea of the posts sticking up. So, the enterprising crew installed it upside down! It works fine and as far as is known it is the only one anywhere installed this way.

The organ installation was also unusual in that the chambers were reversed. That is, the Solo was on the left and the Main on the right. The console originally had a single stoprail. Ernie converted this to a double stoprail with impeccable craftsmanship.

The organ has been heard by countless theater goers and was played by David Kelsey during the 1983 ATOS National Convention. It was also presented in afterhours concerts during ATOS Conventions featuring Rob Calcaterra in 1983 and David Kelsey in 1991.

Ernie, thanks for sharing your love of the Theatre Organ with the Bay Area.

He returned to California in 1977 and worked for Robert Shaw Controls for about a half year and then was self-employed installing Burglar and Theft Alarms. He installed a computer system in Davies Symphony Hall in San Francisco to control Heating, Air Conditioning, and Security. He subsequently became a maintenance engineer at Davies Hall.

Installation in the Grand Lake was interesting to say the least. The original organ had been removed. The pit had been filled with sand and covered with concrete. The concrete had to be sawed and broken with sledge hammers and hauled away. The sand was laboriously removed - first in gunny sacks, then in 5 gallon buckets. The corroded frame for the original lift was still in the pit.

There was a water pipe which had supplied pressure to operate the hydraulic lift. It started leaking. However, there was a sump pump in the pit. This was cleared and when powered - lo and behold - it ran fine. At first the crew thought the water

He bought the basis for the *Wurlitzer* now installed in the Grand Lake Theatre in about 1975. He made arrangements with Alan Michaan to install it in Michaan's York Theatre at 24<sup>th</sup> Street and York in San Francisco. However, before the project got started, Alan bought the

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Nor-Cal Theatre Organ Society, P.O. Box 27238, Oakland, California 94602-0438

## DECEMBER EVENT

We will have our Annual Membership Meeting December 6, 1992 at the Berkeley Community Theatre starting at 2 p.m. An important part of this will be the election of officers to fill the two vacancies which will exist due to those whose terms are expiring. The nominating committee has suggested William O. Schlotter and Bob Smith. Following the meeting, **Kevin King** will play for us and we will have open console. We will then adjourn to Charlie Brown's restaurant in Emeryville for dinner (see "Holiday Dinner" announcement below).

## JANUARY CONCERT

Probably on January 17<sup>th</sup>, program to be announced.

## SIERRA REGIONAL

Sierra Chapter's regional convention offered wonderful music, talented artists, and the company of friends old and new. The organ crews had labored long hours to ready the organs for this event, and the results of their efforts were much appreciated. Friday night's concert was played on the ATOS Wurlitzer at the Towe Ford Museum, an instrument that had first spoken only 15 days earlier. After a guided tour of the museum's nearly 200 vehicles, mostly Fords spanning the years 1903-1976, we were treated to a lovely dedication concert by Clark Wilson that included a long medley from *Les Miserables*.

Saturday morning's concert for our group was at Hartzells' luxurious barn near Lodi, on their Robert Morton. The barn is located in the middle of the Hartzell's vineyard, and Bob Hartzell greeted us with urns of hot coffee and a warm welcome. Lew Williams played a delightful program of big band numbers, including Anson Weeks' theme song. Our after-

noon concert was on the Sierra Chapter's Wurlitzer in the Fair Oaks Clubhouse in nearby Fair Oaks. I'd not heard the instrument since the acquisition of the larger three manual Morton console and the addition of plywood doors over the swell shades that pivoted out to reflect the sounds into the listening area. Stan Kann played a lively program that included music by Strauss and Delibes. Rex Koury played that evening at Grant Union High School, on a Wurlitzer associated with George Wright. Rex played a wonderful program of 1920's favorites, and did a simulated radio broadcast from the era, with the announcer identifying the program as having come from the RKO Palace Theater in Albany, New York. The late night jam session at the Arden Pizza and Pipes featured Jack Moelmann, Jinny Vanore, Lew Williams and others in cameos, accompanied by pizzas of many flavors, salad and garlic bread. It was a lot of fun.

A well organized Donna Parker presented an ambitious program that included ragtime numbers and *Powerhouse* on Sunday morning at the Arden Pizza and Pipes. In the afternoon, we heard Kevin King at the Towe Ford Museum, in the best concert I've ever heard him play. It included some Duke Ellington and Harold Arlen numbers. In the past year, Kevin has become an artist who can compare with many of those more famous. The trip to the Berkeley Community Theater for the weekend's closing concert Sunday evening gave us a wonderful long sunset to watch through the bus windows as we rode along. Walt Strony played an exciting concert that included a long medley from *Porgy and Bess* and *The Burning of Rome*. Never have I heard Rome burn so intensely.

Lew Williams' concert at the Warnor's Theater in Fresno, Monday evening, October 19<sup>th</sup> functioned as an impromptu afterglow for some of us. We from the Regional comprised about 3/4 of the regrettably small audience for

this great concert that only included a couple of numbers played at Lodi. His rendition of *Chloe*, by itself, was reason enough to have made the trip. I also enjoy listening to Lew play *Elvira* on different organs, as it enables the audience to hear some of the large low pitched flue pipes seldom heard in mini-solo.



## PUBLIC CONCERT

Those absent from the Berkeley Community Theater on October 24<sup>th</sup> missed seeing a beautifully restored 1925 *Phantom of the Opera* and Dennis James' excellent accompaniment of it. It was the best print of the Phantom I've ever seen, and the two-strip Technicolor sequences were very effective and well staged.

Eerie haunted house sounds, played over the house sound system set the mood for the evening, and Dennis' spoken introduction further bridged the gap between 1992 and the days of silent films. Many in the audience had never seen a silent film in its proper environment, and a surprising number of children were in the audience. To them, this was a completely new medium. Dennis recognized this in his remarks, and I hope we're on our way to an enlarged following of silent films and theatre organ.

Dennis opened his program with Bach's *Tocatta in D minor*, then played *Danse Macabre* by Saint-Saens. Dennis generally followed the film's original score by Henry Winkler, which included a lot of 19<sup>th</sup> Century French organ music. This complemented the film very well. The appropriate music from Gounod's *Faust*, the opera being staged in the film, accompanied each of the opera scenes. From backstage, came a blood-curdling female scream, as the Phantom was unmasked. Portions of Bach's *D minor Fugue* were used in the score. *Prière a Notre-*

*Dame*, from Boellmann's *Suite Gothique* accompanied the rooftop scenes. Other parts of *Suite Gothique* were used elsewhere to good effect, and the Toccata from this work was used during the chase sequence in the exciting closing scenes.

I enjoyed Dennis' playing and his interaction with the audience more than ever, and was sorry to see the evening end. Dennis' choice of music, the additional sound effects, the organ, the excellent print, professional projection and lighting, his stage presence and well chosen remarks all combined to make this an outstanding performance.

*Evelyn*

## CHAIRMAN'S WINDLINE

We had a wonderful showing of the Phantom of the opera and I completely share Evelyn Woodworth's comments in her review (above). All we needed was more people at the showing. Attendance was up from Chris Elliott's performance, but not any higher than for Clark Wilson's concert, but then there were other 'Phantoms' performed close by in this Halloween season.

Thirty of our educational complimentary tickets were used. This time I sent 240 tickets to 60 schools in the San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley and Alameda areas. In addition, I sent stamped and addressed return post cards asking for comments on our giving them tickets for faculty or students. Only six cards were returned, but all had favorable comments. It was strange, however, that only one card matched tickets collected at the door.

In last month's column, I asked for ideas to increase attendance. One respondent suggested 'comp' tickets for all members since "they got nothing for their dues". Let's examine the economics. About 10% of our membership

bought advance sale tickets for about 14% of our attendance. In other words, excluding cash Box Office sales which we can not track, our members provided substantial revenue for the Phantom's performance. We are a tax-exempt non-profit organization so we do not expect to make money at these events, but we eventually do need to cover our modest costs and assure that there are funds to maintain our instrument. Not only do we need to increase attendance, but revenues as well, as we are not now covering our costs. Negative cash-flow is expected during start-up, but this can go on only for a limited time.

We get a lot for our modest \$15/yr (\$1.25/mo) dues. The *Windsheet* uses a significant portion even though it is compiled, published and prepared for mailing by volunteers (all Nor-Cal pays for its printing and postage). Public concert tickets are discounted to members, we have several 'members only' concerts a year (the door charge there does not make money), members have 'open console' time on our magnificent Wurlitzer and we have an opportunity for camaraderie at our monthly programs and annual picnic. *I feel I get a lot for \$15.*

The Nominating Committee has returned their nominations. Jack O'Neill will serve a second term, Bob Smith of Palo Alto has agreed to serve as well. While the Nominating Committee was trying to identify another candidate (several had declined), a petition nomination of Bill Schlotter arrived. Since no further nominations were received, we welcome Bob Smith to his first term, Jack back for a second term, and Bill back after a year off.

We must find and nurture new board member potential for the future of Nor-Cal. We need compatible and competent (preferably young) new members to demonstrate their leadership abilities on our committees. It is too bad that we need to depend so heavily on

those that have already given so generously of themselves.

Finally, many Nor-Calers attended the Sacramento Regional mini-convention. I had a good time and Evelyn's review also expresses my feelings. I didn't go to Fresno for the Lew Williams concert at the Warner's Theater following the Regional; I missed a real good program.

*Frank*

## EDITOR'S CONSOLE

Next *Windsheet* deadline is December 6<sup>th</sup>. Bring your contributions to the meeting that day.

*Bert*

## HOLIDAY DINNER

Nor-Cal members will have their annual holiday dinner at Charlie Brown's restaurant in Emeryville following the General Membership meeting, **Kevin King** concert, and open console December 6. We will sit down to eat at approximately 5:30 p.m. This has been a fun event in the past and we will have a nice banquet room to ourselves. This year we have a choice of Prime Rib or Chicken for \$15 or Fish for \$17.50. Price includes main course, salad, dessert, coffee or tea, tax and gratuities. Please reserve in advance by sending your check made out to Nor-Cal TOS to Jack O'Neill, P. O. Box 27238, Oakland, CA 94602-0438. Hope to see you there!

♪ ♪ ♪

## SAVE THE PARAMOUNT WHERE DOES IT STAND?

At the moment, it looks as if the 'Save the Paramount Committee' has achieved their goal of preventing Alan Michaan from including use of this historic theatre in his plan for building on the site next door. The following is summarized from a recent article in the Oakland Tribune:

Mr. Michaan has put his plan on the back burner and is shifting his focus to restoration of the nearby Oakland Fox Theater. According to Michaan, the boarded up Fox Theater is the Bay Area's best theater, with an auditorium and support spaces that easily outdo San Francisco's Golden Gate, Orpheum, Geary and Curran theaters. He feels that reclaiming the Fox is the real key to revitalizing downtown Oakland.

Although Michaan felt that his Paramount proposal was misunderstood, the 'Save the Paramount Committee' called the Michaan proposal oversimplified and unrealistic about the demands of a performing arts venue. Committee members state that they plan to take pro active stands to ensure the Paramount will continue its present fine arts use, and point out that the Second Paramount Ball held November 7th was an effort to obtain money to keep the marquee lights running 365 nights a year.

A committee member stated that for most people Michaan's plan for the Fox is as welcome as his plan for the Paramount was unwelcome. However, that committee member continued, the Committee has not been given information on the Fox restoration

plan, and has taken no stand on the matter.

## LOCAL ORGAN SCENE

### CONTINUING EVENTS

Berkeley Community Theatre, 1930 Allston Way, Berkeley - Call for info on work parties and jam sessions on the Nor-Cal 4/33 *WurliTzer*. 510/644-2707.

Castro Theatre, 429 Castro at Market, San Francisco, 4/21 *WurliTzer* played nightly. Call the-

## SPECIAL EVENTS

Nov 21 - The Oakland Paramount 1992-1993 six-concert season opens with **Lyn Larsen** at the *WurliTzer*. The black netting installed to protect patrons from possible falling plaster due to damage from the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake has been removed!

Nov 30 - The one remaining 1992 Board of Directors meeting will be at 7:30 p.m. at the home of **Ray and Doris Taylor** in San Mateo. Members are *welcome and encouraged* to attend. Please notify the hosts in advance so they may plan seating and refreshments. 415/343-1239.

Dec 6 - Annual Membership Meeting - See "December Event" above and "Holiday Dinner" below;

Dec 6 - *Wind-sheet* Deadline.

## NEW TO THE RANKS

Mrs. Sara Burrows  
Mr. Alan N. Hostetter

## "GONE - BUT NOT FORGOTTEN"

Last month we inadvertently listed new members Mr. & Mrs. Gail Richardson. It turns out that Gail is a Ms. and there is no Mr. Sorry for the mix-up Gail.

## ITEMS FOR SALE

(No charge. Send copy to Bert Atwood, Editor (see p. 1).)

Free - The First Baptist Church of Oakland has an Allen Model M3-S (early tube-type) free for the taking. Call 510/832-4327.

## Membership Application

NOR-CAL THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY  
A Chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society

ATOS is dedicated to promoting the tradition of the theatre pipe organ and public understanding and appreciation of the instrument and its music, and shall aid in any way possible the preservation of theatre pipe organs through rehabilitation of instruments and fostering the arts of playing, building, voicing, and maintenance.

If you would like to join, please call or write Mr. John H. O'Neill, 510/632-9177, P.O.Box 27238, Oakland, CA 94602-0438. We will need to know your name, your spouse's name, your address, and your phone number. We would also like to know your occupation. Dues are \$25 National and \$15 local (\$40 total) per year. Spouse and children under 18 living at home may be included in a family membership. We hope you will join us!



ater for times. 415/621-6120.

**Paramount Theatre**, 2025 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94612, 4/28 *WurliTzer*. Six "Pops" Concerts annually. Tickets for the 1992-1993 season on sale now. 510/465-6400

**Grand Lake Theatre**, Grand Avenue near Lake Merritt, Oakland, 3/13 *WurliTzer* played Friday - Sunday. Call theater for times. 510/465-7586.

**Stanford Theatre**, 221 University Avenue, Palo Alto, 415/324-3700. 3/21 *WurliTzer*. Played nightly - call theater for times.