

THE ORGAN AND THE THEATER

A Series of Organ Talks for
Ledger Readers

By EDWARD
BENEDICT

Organist at Rialto Theater

IN recent years a permanent partnership has been formed between the motion picture theater and the organ. Why and how the "King of Instruments" wandered so far from its original habitat, the church, I will try to explain in a few short talks to the readers of The Ledger.

As the photodrama is of its very nature a silent performance, the pioneer exhibitors soon found that something had to be done to enliven the deadly silence which prevailed during the showing of the pictures. Pianos, either automatic or played by a "piano player," were the first instruments commanded to drown out the noise of the picture machine grinding out the film, the squalling of babies and the tramp of feet on the hard board floors.

The better class of theaters ran several acts of vaudeville with the pictures requiring the addition of a drummer to the "orchestra." "Piano and drums," as the combination was known, really made an attempt to follow the pictures. The drummer's duty was to imitate as near as possible the various noises suggested by the action on the screen. Usually he was over-enthusiastic and drove the auditors wild by the slamming of doors, the galloping of horses (often miles in the distance), and worst of all by the "swish-swish" of the water imitator.

The stillest mill-pond swished madly in the drummer's imagination, and I verily believe that the appearance of a man suffering from water-on-the-knee would have brought forth a bevy of swish-swishes.

Of course this combination was atrocious musically, so far-seeing managers added a violin and other instruments until a real orchestra supplied music for the film dramas. Perfection was still far away, however, for it must be remembered that the picture orchestra was not the efficient institution it is today. There was no movie literature, and the men simply played an overture or a selection for the first part of the picture, leaving the last part to the tender mercies of the pianist. This



Edward Benedict

worthy usually faked some music generally in waltz time, dominated constantly by the thought that had his selection of an instrument been fiddle or clarinet he would be downstairs smoking a cigaret instead of alone in the pit.

Thus the demand rose for an instrument having the variety of tone color of an orchestra and yet which would play without pauses between numbers and cue the picture.

Managers turned to the church organ for relief and in the last six years thousands have been installed in theaters all over the country.

(In The Ledger next Sunday I will trace the development of the modern orchestral theater organ.)

THE ORGAN AND THE THEATER

A Series of Organ Talks for
Ledger Readers

By EDWARD
BENEDICT

Organist at Rialto Theater

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODERN THEATRICAL ORGAN

NO. 2

IN MY first talk I showed how the church organ was selected as the best means of producing music suitable for the motion picture. I will now point out the modifications to that instrument which were necessary that something had to be done to brighten up the instrument and to do away as much as possible with the somber tones which are so characteristic of the church organ. These modifications were worked out by the organ builders along two distinct lines. Established organ firms installed their regular instruments with the addition of chimes, sleigh-bells, glockenspiel, xylophone, drums and often a roll device to play automatically. Other manufacturers used the piano as a basis, adding thereto stops of small compass, trills and effects. The church organs were very satisfactory for the rendition of classical, semi-classical and ballad forms of music. The piano instruments excelled in popular music and producing picture-effects.

About this time Robert Hope-Jones, the brilliant English organ builder, had perfected his Unit Orchestra, which was an organ specially designed and voiced for the playing of secular music. Through an arrangement with the Wurlitzer Company, manufacturers of musical instruments, Mr. Hope-Jones developed a modified form of the Unit Orchestra adapted for moving picture theaters, lodges, hotels, etc.

This instrument was designed to combine the best features of the two styles of instruments then being used in theaters. In other words, the inventor claimed that it would render artistically anything from fugues to ragtime and in addition produce effects for the pictures. Like all other innovations the Unit Orchestra was not received with the utmost cordiality. Organists especially turned the cold shoulder to such an unconventional "machine" as they termed it.

After a bitter struggle lasting several years, during which many refinements were added, the Unit Orchestra became firmly established. The success which followed the installation of these instruments throughout the United States and Canada has proven beyond a doubt that this instrument is the best for the motion picture thea-



Edward Benedict

ter. Further proof is found in the fact that almost every builder of theater organs has a model similar to the Hope-Jones instrument along similar lines. It was my good fortune to become associated with Mr. Hope-Jones about a year after his first theatrical instrument was installed and to receive training from him in the rendition of secular music on this new instrument. The magnificent organ that I am now playing at the Rialto Theater is the concrete fulfillment of his dreams, but, like many other dreamers, he did not live to see his dream-children grow up.

In my next talk in next Sunday's Ledger I will explain just what the term "Unit Orchestra" means and wherein it varies from conventional organ construction.

THE ORGAN AND THE THEATER

A Series of Organ Talks for
Ledger Readers

By EDWARD
BENEDICT

Organist at Rialto Theater

The Unit Orchestra

NO. 3

IN MY preceding talks I showed how the Unit Orchestra came to be accepted as the logical instrument for motion picture theaters by reason of its ability to render all kinds of varieties of music.

Before describing the Unit Orchestra it would be well to mention that the general principals of the unit system and the double touch are not primarily inventions of Mr. Robert Hope-Jones, but have been known for many years. Mr. Hope-Jones was, however, the first builder to employ them extensively. Since the Unit Orchestra has proved the soundness of these principals they are now being utilized in the latest theatrical organs of almost every builder.

The term Unit in the name Unit Orchestra refers to the "unit system" employed in its construction. This system is a shining example of modern efficiency methods applied to organ building. Let us take the flute stop for example. In older organs it would appear as a bourdon 16 foot, concert flute 8 foot, harmonic flue 4 foot and piccolo 2 foot. Each of these stops would consist of a separate group of pipes, although the tone quality would be practically the same.

The unit system makes the whole stop one group of pipes running continuously from the deepest 16 foot pipe to the top note of the piccolo, using in all about 100 actual pipes. It is a simple matter of mechanics to make a 16, 8, 4, 2 and 2 2-3 foot drawing, so that the single unit of flute pipes appears as five distinct stops on the console. Tuba, diapason, string and other stops can be treated the same way. The stops are made to draw on any or all manuals, incidentally doing away with the need for sub and super couplers to a great extent.

The practice of "borrowing" so common in modern organ building is a partial application of the unit system.

The advantages of this system are a great saving in pipes and space (a big item in theatrical construction) and an almost ideal arrangement of stops at the console. The disadvantage is the loss of distinctive tone quality which the separate stops possess when they are voiced individually. Of course this system can be abused. I have seen organ specifications crowded with stops of high register drawn from very beautiful basic stops, which, however,



Edward Benedict

were nothing more than speaks or shrieks when actually played upon. A very good showing is made on paper by these myriads of falsetto stop, many of them having fantastic names which would put a Pullman sleeping-car to shame, but the buyer is often grievously disappointed when his instrument is installed.

So much for the word "unit." The word "Orchestra" should not be taken too literally. As far as the solo stops are concerned, they imitate the corresponding instruments in the orchestra to a marked degree. In a test with a Unit Orchestra and orchestral instruments, a group of theatrical managers and musicians were unable to tell when the violin, flute or clarinet began and the organ left off. The main idea Mr. Hope-Jones had in mind, however, was that the Unit Orchestra can play things in the bright snappy manner of the orchestra, although it does not exactly sound like one.

In my talk in The Ledger next Sunday I will try to explain the mysteries of the double-touch.

THE ORGAN AND THE THEATER

A Series of Organ Talks for
Ledger Readers

By EDWARD
BENEDICT
Organist at Rialto Theater

No. 4—Mysteries of the "Double-Touch"

THE next important part of the unit orchestra to discuss is the double touch. This is an ingenious arrangement whereby a little added pressure to a key at its regular point of depression brings on stops which were previously silent. Anyone who has played organ can readily visualize the possibilities of this device. For those who have not I will try to explain by a simple illustration.

Suppose we equip an automobile with double touch. First touch on the brake pedal would apply the service brake, second touch would bring on the emergency brake; first touch on the accelerator would give a maximum speed of 30 miles per hour; second touch would increase the speed and open the cut-out at the same time; first touch would sound the horn, second touch would sound a much larger horn for emergencies, and so on. You will probably admit that such a car would be easier to handle, provided the driver did not get rattled and did not apply too much pressure on the devices at the wrong time. Organists said the same thing about the double touch system when it was introduced by Mr. Hope-Jones. They pointed out the calamity which would occur should a player press too hard while playing a soft passage on the vox humana, bringing on a thundering tuba note. They also called attention to the fact that for generations organists had gotten along very nicely without it. Others declared that, while it was good theoretically, it would probably turn out to be more or less of a nuisance in actual practice.

A few more or less adventurous players, however, were persuaded to try it out and since that time I have yet to meet the organist who, having played a double touch instrument, does not say that it is almost indispensable.

It is surprising how quickly the fingers become accustomed to stopping when the resistance of the first touch is felt. I have had pupils play successfully a melody and accompaniment with one hand, half an hour after sitting down to the instrument for the first time.

For augmenting the effectiveness of the left hand, the double touch is invaluable. The countless phrases in horn, tenor or cello parts which occur in every composition stand out in exquisite relief when played on the double touch without, however, sacrificing the rhythmic afterbeats. As



Edward Benedict

mentioned before, a melody and accompaniment can be played with the left hand, leaving the right hand free for variations or counter-melodies.

The double touch system also extends to the pedals. The drums, cymbals and other percussions can thus be played at any time by simply giving the pedal note an extra kick. This is a great advantage to the picture player.

It must be admitted the double touch gives the organist more to think about and extreme care must be used in applying the proper pressure. Once it is mastered, however, the double touch adds another keyboard and an extra pair of hands to the organist's resources.

In next Sunday's Ledger I will take up the pizzicato touch, the sforzando touch and the swell system.

THE ORGAN AND THE THEATER

A Series of Organ Talks for
Ledger Readers

By EDWARD
BENEDICT

Organist at Rialto Theater

NO. 5—THE PIZZICATO AND SFORZENDO TOUCH

IN ADDITION to the double-touch the Unit Orchestra has two other unique features in the pizzicato touch and the sforzendo touch. The pizzicato touch is an arrangement which causes the tone to be shut off immediately after the note is sounded, even though the key continues to be depressed. Surprising effects can be produced with this device. It is used principally to give a snappy accompaniment, and in combination with a flute stop to add to the effectiveness of the harp. The sforzendo touch opens one swell shutter when the note is pressed. The shutter then closes automatically, giving an accent to the first note of a phrase. It will not open again until the hand is raised entirely from the keyboard.

You will notice I refer to the opening of one swell shutter. This arrangement is the famous Hope-Jones System, which operates in a very different manner from the old system. Instead of all the shutters opening gradually, the Unit Orchestra shutters open consecutively, each one being thrown wide open as the swell pedal makes the contact. Each shutter is operated by a separate motor. The most powerful stops have a double row of shutters, making possible a magnificent crescendo.

The action of the Unit Orchestra is specially designed to give speed and positiveness of sound production. No matter how staccato the key may be struck, each pipe responds with its normal pitch and power.

Thus we have the Unit Orchestra played by the single, double, pizzicato and sforzendo touches. The most important touch of all, however, is the touch the player must develop to perform properly on the instrument. The utmost degree of lightness is required for the first touch and the heaviest kind of a legato for the second touch. The deft hand of the pickpocket is clumsy compared to the digital delicacy developed by the Unit player.

It is the happy combination of these touches, together with constant accenting with the swell pedal, which the life and dash into Unit music. Any organist with theatrical experience knows how impossible it is to turn a deaf ear to requests for syncopated numbers. They simply must be played, and it is equally painful for the audience and the performer if he is playing on an organ of conventional design.

The light, snappy touch of the Unit,



Edward Benedict

the responsive percussions and traps and the specially voiced stops enable the player to rival the modern jazz orchestra.

When America entered the world war and her soldiers were marching fighting and drilling, the motion picture "weeklies" which present these various activities to theater-goers became one of the most interesting and important parts of the program. In providing appropriate music for these films, the Unit Orchestra gained new laurels. As our boys marched off to the fighting front, the brass band, the fife and drum or bugle was imitated to a startling degree. The rapid variation from one National air to the other is easily accomplished and a martial atmosphere is created which adds greatly to the employment of the picture.

In The Ledger next Sunday I will explain the Hope-Jones system of stops which makes these wonderful effects possible.

THE ORGAN AND THE THEATER

A Series of Organ Talks for
Ledger Readers

By EDWARD
BENEDICT

Organist at Rialto Theater

NO. 6—"STOPS OF THE UNIT ORCHESTRA"

AN ORGANIST sitting down to a Unit Orchestra for the first time is at once struck by the unfamiliar names on the stop tablets and by the more unfamiliar tones which greet his ears when he plays them. Mr. Hope-Jones had original ideas in christening his stops as well as everything else, often coining words from Greek, Latin or Hebrew roots, to properly express their characteristics.

A flute of the Stopped Diapason type is called a Tibia Clausa. His Tuba is a powerful but very smooth reed which is called Ophecleide at 166 foot; Tuba at 8 foot and Clarion at 4 foot. His steel-bar harp is called a Chrysoiote. The peculiar reed stops he invented are called Kinura and Krumet. The Open Diapason becomes the Diaphonic Diapason. All the other stops bear conventional names.

I think the outstanding feature of Hope-Jones voicing is the smoothness of the reeds. That scratchy tone, predominating in ordinary reeds, is entirely absent from the reeds of the Unit. Instead, is a velvety smoothness which admits of use in the softest combinations and chords. The Oboe Horn, which is somewhat like an Oboe d'Amour, has such a soft, mellow tone that it does not sound like a reed at all.

The Kinura is perhaps the most unique reed ever produced. It is of peculiar construction and gives a tone which has been described as a "cross between the hum of a mosquito and a Turkish Musette." In certain combinations it gives the effect of muted brass in the orchestra and it is used to great advantage in Oriental effects.

The Krumet is a Kinura on a slightly larger scale and is used to give the "zip" to the 'cello effect as well as in Oriental music. The 16 foot drawing is imitative of the bassoon.

The Hope-Jones strings are built on a very thin scale and are decidedly sharp or "stringy." They give a solo violin effect that is truly remarkable.

Another remarkable stop is the Diaphonic Diapason. This runs from 32 foot to 4 foot in register. In the two lowest octaves the tone is produced by means of a vibrator. This gives a clear and distinct tone on the lowest notes, quite different from the ambiguous rumbling we have been accustomed to associate with 32 foot stops.

Although the stops of the Unit Orchestra are voiced for brilliant orchestral work, combinations can be drawn



Edward Benedict

which will give precisely the same effect as a cathedral organ. The Unit Orchestra can be used for a church service without anyone but the organist knowing that it is not a legitimate church instrument.

As to percussions, we know that organ firms buy practically all of their bells, xylophones, chimes, etc., from the same manufacturer. Installing a practical action, however, is another matter. The Unit Orchestra has a remarkable action on every percussion. The chime action, which is usually so slow that the player must depress the key a beat ahead of time, is as rapid as any stop in the instrument.

When we recognize the fact that to many people "rhythm" and "music" are synonymous, we see how important it is to have a good set of percussions and traps in an instrument.

In The Ledger next Sunday I will describe some of the wonderful effects that can be produced.

manifested at the rehearsals. The orchestra services. The following is the

THE ORGAN AND THE THEATER

A Series of Organ Talks for
Ledger Readers

By EDWARD
BENEDICT

Organist at Rialto Theater

Effects That Can Be Produced on the Unit Orchestra—No. 7.

THE Unit Orchestra is provided with a full complement of drums, traps and effects which are familiar to every theatergoer. There are other effects which are produced entirely by combining the stops themselves, and it is of these I wish to speak.

Starting with the tibia or flute, we find a great variety of effects which can be produced on this stop alone. A two-hand roll on the lowest octaves gives a realistic imitation of a lion-roar. The big tibia gives the steamboat whistle and calliope, while the small flute imitates birds, whistling, locomotive whistle and the barrel organ. The voxhumana, which is ordinarily called upon to imitate the singing of celestial choirs, gives us the pig grunt, snore and the high pitched noises of quarreling women.

In addition to Chinese instruments, the Kinura produces monkey chatter, buzzing of mosquitoes, flies and bees, the plaintive tremolo of the nanny-goat and the duck quack. It is also the predominating ingredient of the bag-pipe imitation.

The tuba is responsible for the dog-bark, fog-horn and thunder rolls, while the trumpet imitates a bugle-call, auto-horn, and when combined with the xylophone, the yelping of an injured dog.

The strings are used to imitate falling rain and the mewling of a cat. The howling of wind is produced by means of special thunder-pedals which bring on a group of the lowest notes of the tuba, diaphone and tibia.

The train effect starts with the ring-chimes to imitate the engine bell. The exhaust is produced by taking a hand full of notes on eight-foot stops, with the snare drum and beating thereon staccato with *molto accelerando e diminuendo* as the train goes around the curve and off of the picture sheet.

The combination of oboe, kinura and oboe horn gives the bag-pipe effect, while oboe, oboe horn and quintadena gives a realistic imitation of a banjo when played on the pizzicato touch.

These are a few of the effects that can be produced on the Unit Orchestra. The entire list has never been tabulated, but if they were, I am sure it would be found that every sound or effect which is suggested by the action on the screen can be imitated on the Unit.

There appears to be no limit to the ingenuity of the player especially in



Edward Benedict

making the instrument talk. The vox humana is the stop usually used for this work and it lives up to its name, but the tuba or kinura and tibia will also imitate talking. I have heard "Cornelius," "come kitty," "extra! all about the big murder," "help, help!" and other exclamations produced on the Unit with such remarkable effect that the audience was thrown into an uproar.

It would seem to be a difficult task to learn all these imitations and effects, especially since on each instrument the combinations must be modified to suit individual conditions of acoustics and voicing. There is a fascination about it, however, that keeps the player constantly on the lookout for new effects and improving the old ones, thus making Unit playing a most interesting vocation.

In The Ledger next Sunday I will describe the method used in playing the Unit Orchestra.

THE ORGAN AND THE THEATER

A Series of Organ Talks for
Ledger Readers

By EDWARD
BENEDICT
Organist at Rialto Theater

No. 8—Method of Playing the Unit Orchestra

THE most disappointing musical performance I know of is the rendition of a Victor record with the Edison attachment on any phonograph. There is only one thing which could possibly be more disappointing, and that is to hear an old school organist, using old school methods, play a Unit Orchestra.

To the average manager or musician, anything with stops and pedals is an organ, and it is the most natural thing in the world to think so. A short acquaintance with a Unit Orchestra, however, is enough to prove the answer to the riddle, "When is an organ not an organ?" "When it is a Unit Orchestra!"

The first thing a player must do when taking up the study of the instrument is to discard as useless all that he has ever learned about organ playing. Some of it can be used later, but at the beginning the more he forgets the better it is.

He first learns that there is no more "two-foot" pedal. He immediately remembers the scathing remarks his teacher used to make anent "one-legged" organists and proceeds to do with a clear conscience what in his student days he had done surreptitiously. The fact that in Unit playing the pedal notes are seldom sustained makes this practice allowable.

The right foot stays on the swell pedals constantly to produce the accents. Many passages which were formerly played on the pedals with both feet are now played on 16-foot stops drawn on the double touch.

The next radical departure he will notice is the staccato touch employed by the left hand. This is because he must strive to imitate the second violin and viola of the orchestra. Another reason is that the particular combination of string and flute stops used for accompaniments loses effectiveness when played legato.

The combining of stops is, of course, radically different from conventional practice, as has been noted before. Orchestral effects are sought at every opportunity.

In playing staccato chords, the right hand enjoys a freedom which is only equaled when playing on the piano. The careful, smooth legato touch we spent months in acquiring is very seldom used. The nearest approach to it is in using the double-touch.

There are two principles which must



Edward Benedict

be kept in mind constantly when playing the Unit. One is to scrupulously observe every phrase and accent; the other is to keep the melody in one voice whenever possible. As most of the literature for the Unit is in piano or orchestral form, the latter causes considerable difficulty. It naturally follows that both hands should not play on the same manual unless the double-touch is being used.

Occasionally the player can consider the instrument as a straight organ, and play it as such. If he is careful not to use the orchestral stops, the effect will be very satisfactory.

When it is once understood how great the difference is between Unit Orchestra and conventional playing, it is easy to perceive how the most talented church and concert organists fail when attempting to play the instrument without sufficient preparation.

In The Ledger next Sunday I will tell of my student days on the Unit.

THE ORGAN AND THE THEATER

A Series of Organ Talks for
Ledger Readers

By EDWARD
BENEDICT

Organist at Rialto Theater

Student Days on the Unit Orchestra—No. 9

About four and a half years ago I had my first view of a Hope-Jones Unit Orchestra. It was in the old salesroom of the Wurlitzer Company on West 32d street, New York. The console sat in the window for exhibition purposes.

Having played a church organ in a theater for some time, I was very much interested in this new development. It looked harmless, but I was assured by the salesman and the instructor that it was very difficult to play.

It seemed that the average of players who made good was about one in ten, but highly remunerative salaries awaited successful aspirants. I heard the instrument demonstrated and straightway informed them that a couple of hours' practice would suffice for me to master it.

The next day I had an opportunity to make good my boast. I set up a combination which I thought would be effective and started to play. In less time than it takes to tell my confidence had completely vanished and my visions of a high-salaried position was fading in the distance. It was like a nightmare. Everything I did was wrong; nothing sounded right. I finally hit upon something which gave my instructor hope that I might make good some time and was told to come again.

The chagrin I felt after my first attempt was soon replaced by a grim determination to learn to play the unit no matter what the cost and I started to work in earnest. Conditions could hardly be called ideal for practice. The store was small and crowded with instruments of all kinds, automatics being mixed in with church organs, pianos and small theater instruments. I had to get to the store at 8 a. m., but even at that hour I was constantly interrupted. Every time the telephone rang I had to observe a "grand pause," whether it was written in the music or not. Every time an automatic instrument was being demonstrated, tested or repaired, I was compelled to stop, as the clashing of sounds in that small room was terrible.

After having obtained about an hour's good practice in two weeks' time I was told that the instrument had been sold and would presently be removed from the store to the theater. I was also informed that I had been selected as the organist.

The problem of practice now assumed terrifying proportions. The Cort Theater had a nice instrument and I stole in two mornings and practiced a little, but nowhere near enough to fit



Edward Benedict

me for the position I was to assume. I still retained my position playing the church organ and by imagining that it was a unit I could make some progress.

Under the circumstances it was little wonder that I dreaded the opening of my first position on a unit. In the show business a person is judged entirely by his first performance and I knew that my new manager would give scant consideration to my plea of lack of opportunity to practice. The Wurlitzer Company assured me that I would at least have a chance to get in a little practice prior to my opening, but as is so often the case, the workmen were still busy when the people started down the aisles for the opening matinee.

In The Ledger next Sunday I will tell of my first public performance on a unit.

THE ORGAN AND THE THEATER

A Series of Organ Talks for
Ledger Readers

By EDWARD
BENEDICT

Organist at Rialto Theater

NO. 10. MY FIRST APPEARANCE ON THE UNIT ORCHESTRA

After several delays the opening of my first unit orchestra position was definitely announced. Bright and early I went to the theater, which was in the Bronx district in New York, with my mind thoroughly made up to demand at least an hour to try out the instrument and set up my combinations. When I arrived I found pipes still scattered around the stage and there was nothing to be done but let the workmen use every minute to get the instrument ready for the opening. It seems that something had happened to the motor during the night which put them behind hours in their work.

About noontime the manager of the theater came down and suggested that I play a solo number to show off the instrument and selected William Tell Overture as being suitable for the purpose. I had never played this number on the organ and there was no chance to try it on the Unit, nevertheless I went next door bought a copy and resolved to do my best. Two o'clock came and with it the audience. In the meantime I had just 10 minutes to get my "bearings." The show started and I was soon lousy exploiting what little I knew about the Unit orchestra. I was nervous, confused and bewildered while playing for the pictures, but my feelings were beyond description when they flashed on the screen that Edward Benedict Arnold would play the William Tell overture on the Hope-Jones Unit orchestra!

I felt like the school boy who, unprepared, sat down to his examination papers, knowing that the only thing that would save him would be to have the school burn down. In my case "the school did burn down." I had only played the opening bars of the overture when the lights went out, the motor stopped and the organ died with a groan. It seems that the motor had been wired onto the lighting instead of the power circuit, with the result that there was not enough current to blow the organ. I breathed a deep sigh of relief, for I knew I was saved for the time being at least. I found, however, that the worst was yet to come. It was operative day and I had to accompany the singers on a strange instrument, with no rehearsal, reading at sight. Somehow or other I managed to "stumble" through and the afternoon was finally ended. By the evening performance I had settled down somewhat and I began to feel at home on the instrument to some extent. "Good night" was finally flashed on the screen and I went home feeling that I had passed through the most trying ordeal of my career.

Then followed days of hard work.



Edward Benedict

The motor did not generate enough power to blow the organ and it would "die" at various inopportune times during the performance. This meant a hasty trip to the cellar. I would pull on the belt until the motor started again, rush back to the organ and play until the next time. The insufficient wind pressure also caused ciphers which gave me great annoyance. One night the middle A on the tuba horn stuck. I went up the ladder to fix it, but try as hard as I could I was unable to find the pipe. The sound filled the organ chamber and it seemed to come from all directions. The audience had started to applaud, stamp and whistle by this time, and in disgust I turned off the motor and finished up on the piano.

The next day I found the instrument disconnected and a lawsuit started, which was not settled until the following summer, when I reopened the organ with more success.

In The Ledger next Sunday I will sketch the career of a few of my fellow organists who have taken up this work.

THE ORGAN AND THE THEATER

A Series of Organ Talks for
Ledger Readers

By EDWARD
BENEDICT

Organist at Rialto Theater

NO. 11—SUCCESSFUL UNIT PLAYERS

I REGRET exceedingly that I am not personally acquainted with the careers of all the successful Unit players, so I can only talk of those whom I have known personally. The first player who took up this work was Frank White of New York city. Mr. White had been a successful organist and director, but he gave up his entire career to learn to play the Unit orchestra, under the personal instruction of Mr. Hope-Jones. It was the hardest kind of pioneer work which he undertook and for many months he gave up all remuneration in order to devote his entire time to study. When he finally became proficient he was chosen to open all of the new Units as fast as they were installed. This work took him to most of the largest cities and everywhere he made a deep impression with his scholarly work. After the death of Hope-Jones, Mr. White founded a company of his own to manufacture orchestral organs. Handicapped by lack of funds it was not very successful from a business standpoint and was finally dissolved. Mr. White has since gone back to organ playing and will no doubt be heard from soon in a big position.

Clarence Reynolds, another of the pioneers, made his reputation playing the Hope-Jones instrument in Ocean Grove, N. J. He is now presiding over the big municipal Unit in Denver. The late W. C. MacClymont, who played at the California Theater and later at the local Strand Theater until his death last spring, was one of the first players to follow White into the game. Another was Dr. Rouffort, a celebrated French organist. These men had both made their reputations as legitimate church organists before taking up the Unit. Walter Simon, on the other hand, was just a vaudeville pianist and had never touched his foot to an organ pedal. It did not take him long to catch on, however, and he developed into the company's premier demonstrator. Simon was the discoverer or inventor of many of the tricks and effects now used by the players. Otto Beck was another vaudeville man who "picked up" the organ and later made a big name for himself in Montreal. The most spectacular career was that of Henry B. Murtagh, who opened the big Unit in Portland, Ore. Mr. Murtagh came to the Wurlitzer Company with concert and vaudeville experience as a pianist and was put to work on a style "H" (a pedalless instrument of limited scope), at \$32.50 per week. When Frank White accepted the Vitagraph position there was a rush of applicants to succeed him at the Pitt Theater, Pittsburgh. For one reason



Edward Benedict

or other, none filled the bill, and Murtagh was sent for. Although ignorant of the use of the organ pedals, he mastered the big four manual instrument and was playing in public less than a week. He has since made a wonderful success in Seattle and Denver, and he pays a greater income tax than many a bank president.

I have never had the pleasure of hearing Oliver Wallace of the Liberty Theater, Seattle, play, but those who have speak of his work in the highest terms of praise. He also rose from the ranks of "piano players" as theater pianists are called. These are a few of the men who have been successful in this line of work. Many others have started, but have "fallen by the wayside" at the first hard knock. Those who have been successful have passed through many experiences similar to the one related in my last talk, and by virtue of grit and determination have gained for themselves pedestals in the Movie-Organists' Hall of Fame.

In The Ledger next Sunday, in my final talk of the series, I will analyze the qualifications of a successful Unit player.

THE ORGAN AND THE THEATER

A Series of Organ Talks for
Ledger Readers

By EDWARD
BENEDICT
Organist at Rialto Theater

No. 12—Qualifications of a Successful Unit Player

It has always been a question in my mind as to who make the better Unit orchestra players—church organists or theatrical pianists. The ideal combination is to find a capable vaudeville man with church organ experience, or a wide-awake church organist who has done theatrical work.

As enumerated in my last talk, I think the palm would go to the pianists for bona fide popular success in playing the Unit. It seems strange that the more success a church or concert organist has attained, the less chance he has of succeeding on the Unit. This is because it is so difficult for him to discard the ways of playing which he knows have brought him success.

Many organists playing Units today are being held back artistically and financially simply because they insist on treating the instrument as a church organ. The pianist, on the other hand, is bound to approach the instrument with humility, and, having nothing to unlearn, makes progress from the start. If the player, who has been an organist, is clever enough to grasp the "Unit idea," as we call it, his organ experience will eventually give him resources which the ex-pianist can never command.

The one great quality which makes successful Unit players is "cleverness," and all that it implies. By this I mean a beautiful disregard of tradition, ability to work out new lines of action and the power and imagination to utilize the resources of the instrument, regardless of whether it has ever been done that particular way before. And yet I know players who, having all the above qualifications, fail because they do not have the second great quality, which is judgment. By this I mean the sense which tells us when the new idea we have worked out is pleasing and effective, or otherwise.

The third qualification is experience. We must bear in mind that the Unit player in a theater must watch the picture, his music and control the instrument simultaneously. Some one of the three must be done subconsciously, and this is where experience comes in. After playing for hundreds of features, the mind memorizes the sequence of the scenes readily, and thus anticipates the next change of music. The same situations come up again and again, enabling the organist to have "stock" cues to fit them, just as the doctor carries pills in his black case for all ordinary ailments. Experience teaches the player to register properly at sight without study, or experimentation. Experience gives the



Edward Benedict

player an immense repertoire of memorized pieces, which can be played almost without thinking; therefore, experience must be gained before success can be attained.

It goes without saying that musicianship is a prime essential of the successful player. Unless one is thoroughly grounded in the classics, theory and harmony, success will always be limited. Organists or pianists who possess these qualifications would make no mistake in taking up the Unit orchestra playing. The work is pleasant, and the remuneration exceedingly ample. However, opportunities to practice are limited by the lack of display instruments in the various branches. Theater organs are operated so many hours a day that practice by others than the regular organists' is frowned on by the managers.

It must be remembered that the demand for capable Unit players far exceeds the supply, and a player who can properly prepare himself for the work under these discouraging conditions will in a short time be able to look

forward to a long succession of desirable engagements, which will be a positive guarantee for a prosperous future.