

Phoenix Festival '89

Valley of the Sun Chapter
Regional Convention
American Theatre Organ Society
November 24 - 26, 1989

“You’re a long way from home,” called a familiar voice over the rumble of suitcases circling carousels and the hub-bub of folks coming and going through Skyharbor Airport. It was Tom Tibia, a familiar figure at American Theatre Organ Society events and a knowledgeable one about the festival to take place here in Phoenix.

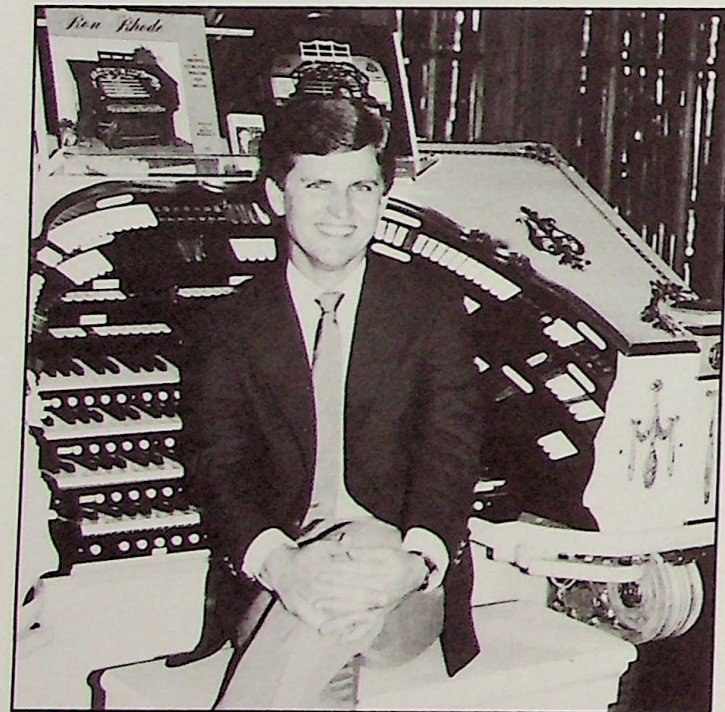
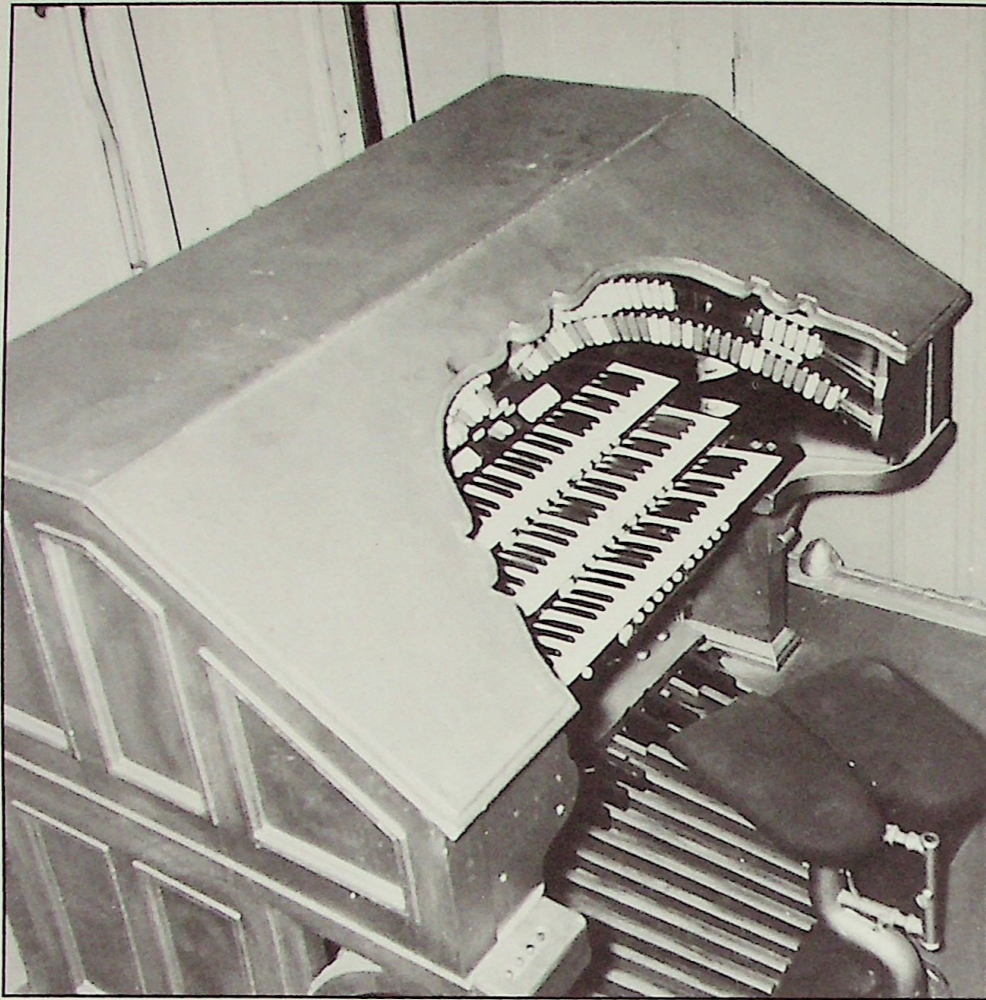
“The Valley of the Sun is today a special place for us because it is home to some special pipe organs and some special organists,” reminded Tom, “but Phoenix was typical of small cities everywhere in the Twenties when it came to theatre organs.”

So he told me something of the past. The first “palace” in Phoenix which was home to a pipe organ was the 1918 Rialto Theatre, which had a 2/9 Wurlitzer. Deluxe theatres arrived with the Orpheum in 1929 (later called the Paramount, then the Palace, soon to be restored as the Orpheum) with its unusual Meisel and Sullivan 3/11, removed long ago. The last movie palace to open was the 1931 art deco Fox Theatre. Its organ was also a 2/9 Wurlitzer, this one transplanted from its original home in a west coast theatre. If you arrive in Phoenix by Greyhound bus you stop right where the console used to sit in the orchestra pit.



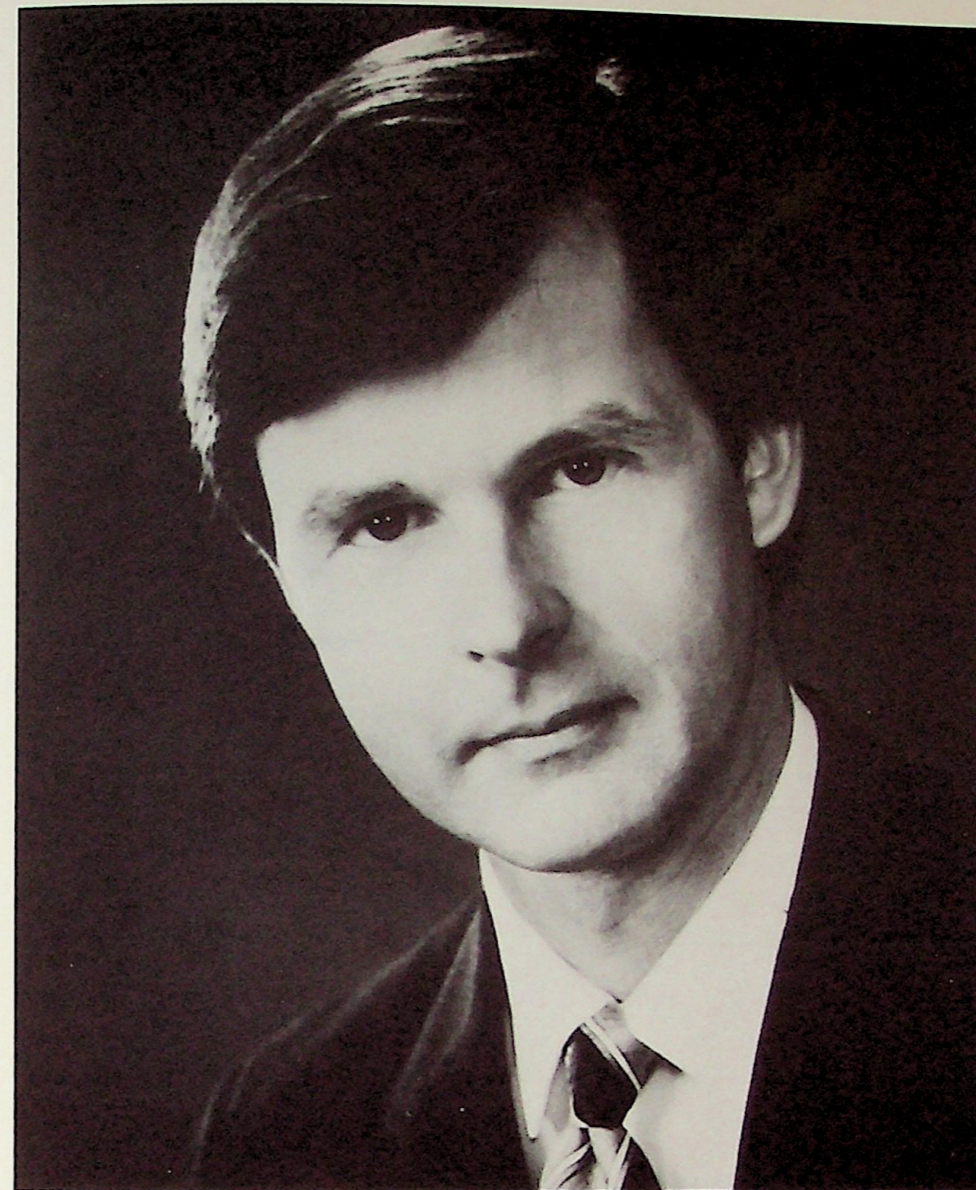
But what of Phoenix today, I wondered? How is it that five of the finest organists reside here and have some of the finest, most fussed-over theatre organs ever installed to play? “Let’s go on some little journeys to the homes of the organs and the organists,” said Tom. And so we began.

Our starting place is in Mesa, though we might just as well spell it Mecca for organ enthusiasts, the Organ Stop Pizza Restaurant. A journey here reveals that this is home to an organ which started as a 3/15 in the Denver Theatre in Denver. This was certainly not a showy installation in those days, as can be seen from the painted, plain-side console. Mesa's Nile Theatre yielded a 2/4 Wurlitzer which was combined to provide the basis for the entertainment extravaganza seen today. Thousands of patrons enjoy themselves here in the second jewel (after the now demolished 7th Street Organ Stop back in Phoenix) in Bill Brown's crown of pizza establishments. Though this organ has grown to be far larger than it was as originally installed, Mr. Brown's idea of combining rooms, organs and organists of the finest quality remains intact.



From 1973 to 1986 this was home base for Ron Rhode, the longest tenure of any of the Phoenix area pizza house organists. Just a few blocks' journey from Organ Stop is a ranchette with an acre of space for horses, dogs and cats. Here you'll find the home of Ron Rhode. An unassuming house on the outside, the interior is slowly being redone. Walls have been rearranged to form a huge living-dining space with a corner fireplace. A new kitchen gets a work-out when Ron has time to pursue baking wonderful pastries. Out back is a covered car port which shelters the chests, pipes, and paraphernalia for a major home installation, a long dreamed of prize for the 1989 ATOS Organist of the Year.

"The playing talent which found its way to the Valley of the Sun isn't only adept at theatre organ," Tom Tibia ventured.



A trip to the First United Methodist Church to hear Lew Williams proved that to be true.

The southwest has a lot of churches, brought here by the migration of older people with traditional religious values. Some of the church buildings reflect that tradition but others try newer things, such as drive-in services. A visit to affluent North Central Phoenix brings us to a more traditional congregation housed in a building of modern design. The quiet in the sanctuary is enhanced by the jewel-like colors of some notable stained glass windows. That quiet can be enhanced by the Casavant organ or it can be replaced by the roar and thunder of this King of Instruments. This 3/58 was built in 1958 and has been enlarged several times by Casavant. This is a fine setting for recitals, something which our friends in the American Guild of Organists often hold here. This program marks a first classic effort for ATOS by Lew Williams, the man who is the most quali-

fied by degrees and training to do so from the Phoenix Five.

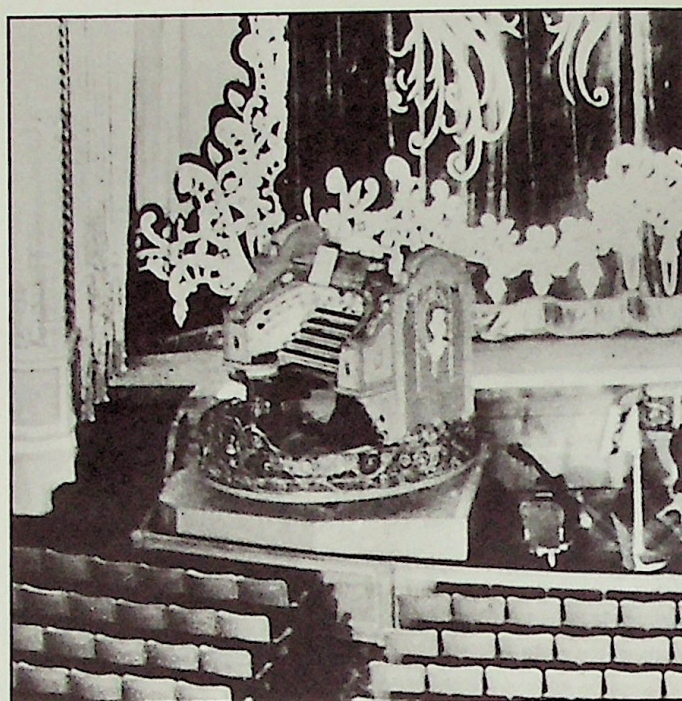
A visit to Lew Williams' home in Scottsdale takes us to an enclave of single story condominium buildings on winding streets which overlook a greenbelt park and a small lake which sometimes grows when filled with stormwater. Beyond are found apartment towers and the towering Camelback Mountain. But it is inside that we find the inward turning ATOS Organist of the Year 1988 — the quiet man not seen in public performance. Here we find spaces filled with music and memorabilia, all of it neatly indexed, filed, and organized. Two organs are in the house, a vintage console model and a newer three manual Rodgers classic. The house reflects music and professionalism. It is a great place to enjoy obscure recordings on a rainy "winter" afternoon such as might be found in the Valley this time of year.

Hearing vintage George Wright recordings brought to mind the Richard Vaughan recording studio organ and how that organ found its way to Phoenix.

"The Vaughan organ helped popularize theatre organ. How fitting," Tom said, "for us to be invited to the home of Bill and Barbara Brown to hear it."

That was already clear to me as we settled into our seats in the Browns' living room. This place is yet another shrine for ATOS created by Bill Brown, the man who is the godfather of all we are hearing on this weekend. It was the commitment by Bill Brown to excellence which made it possible for fine organs and fine organists to be united in a place where they could make a living. That is the heritage we are enjoying.

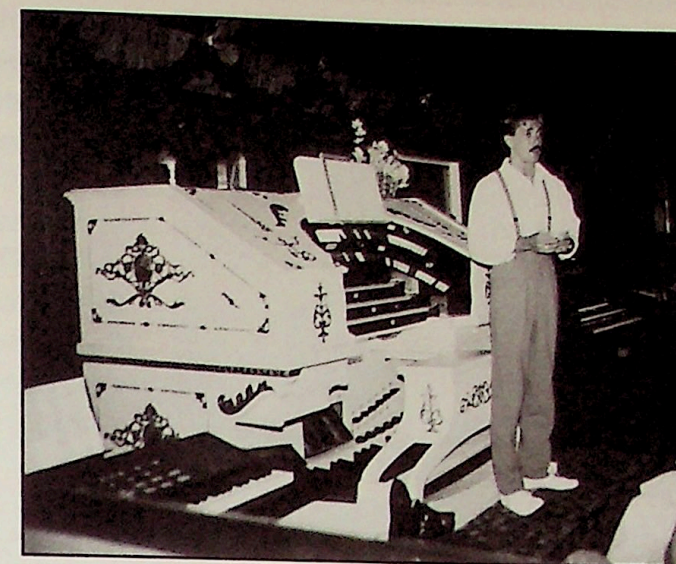
Originally having 21 ranks when this 5 manual Wurlitzer was first at home in Chicago's Paradise Theatre — where it was complete with cupids and waterfall sides — it now boasts 28 ranks. It first went to the Richard Vaughan recording studio in California where many Hi-Fi label records were cut. It came to Phoenix in 1962. Installation started in this house in 1964 with completion in 1968. A total rebuild has just been finished including a Devtronix-Wilcox computer relay.



Three separate programs by Walt Strony will allow all of us to hear this treasure. Walt has come a long way since his days at the piano in a Lane Tech High School music class in Chicago, his original home.

Walt Strony's home in the Encanto District is in one of Phoenix's few old neighborhoods. Here, winding streets are lined with small homes in a variety of styles from the Thirties. A small pale pink (tastefully pale) art deco one hides some surprises — behind is a new two story addition housing family room, office, and master suite. The yard now has a pool in which to relax, and orange trees provide fruit for very fresh juice each spring. December 12 will mark the 15th anniversary of Walt's concert debut. The passing hours in his wonderful career are now being marked by his collection of art deco clocks. A related collection of Roseville pottery continues to grow as restoration of this home nears completion.

"The older, well established things are often complemented by the newer," Tom explained as we arrived at the First Christian Church. I soon knew what he was talking about.

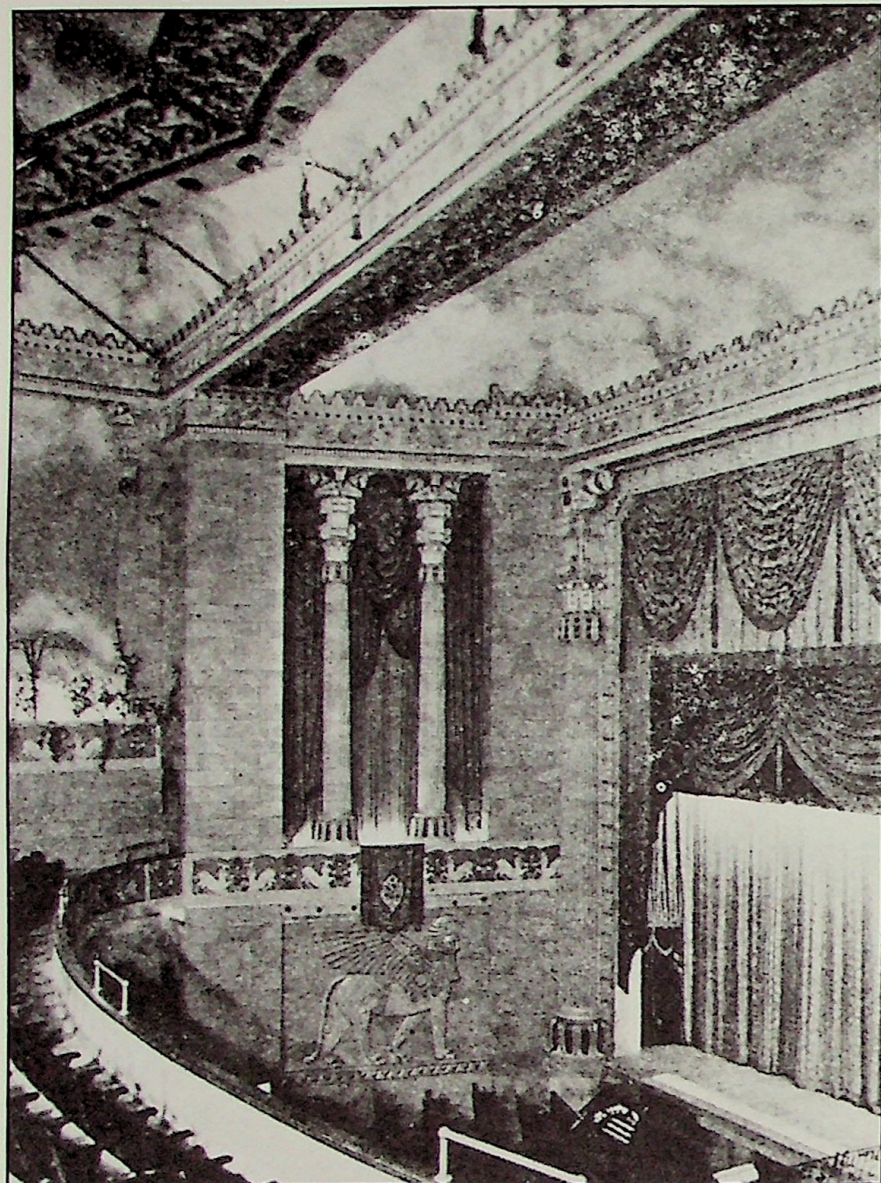


What he meant was that the newest addition to the Phoenix Five is Rob Richards. Originally at home in Fargo, North Dakota, Rob grew up musically in southwestern Michigan. It was there that he became an exponent of fusion — the combination of theatre organ and technologically advanced things like synthesizers and digital samplers which will be an alternative way of taking us into the 1990's. Rob now leads the musical staff at Organ Stop. It's taken a couple years for him to settle in to life here, including some moving around. His roots are now better established since his latest move into a townhouse in Mesa. The contemporary southwestern decor accentuates his contemporary approach to music. There is a huge screen TV which probably rivals in size those found in the first local movie palaces, but this magic silver screen has moving shadows that recreate Laurel and Hardy or Judy Garland films. A Nautilus machine keeps pizza pounds from work at bay.

The journey to First Christian Church, where Rob will also play for three groups, takes us again to North Central Phoenix. The associates of Taliesen West designed this space under the watchful eye of that school's founder, Frank Lloyd Wright. We go to the fellowship hall, a later addition with acoustics that are much brighter than in the well-carpeted sanctuary. Here we find a 2/11 Wurlitzer which is a hybrid of parts from all over the country. It is here thanks to the generosity of J.B. Nethercutt, the man who also brought us the Merle Norman Tower of Beauty with its large organ in San Sylmar, California. This organ has associations with Phoenix, both past and present. The two string ranks are from the Meisel and Sullivan organ originally in the Orpheum Theatre. Presently the organ is a project of Valley of the Sun Chapter which sees to its care and maintenance. It gets use by a church group which presents musicals as well as for local chapter events.

"Wait until we go to the Valley of the Sun Center," remarked Tom in a very nonchalant voice. "It's not like any church you've ever been in."

And, indeed, the Valley of the Sun Religious Science Center is unlike anything we know in the usual Christian way, if only because few churches use a 3/17 Wurlitzer. That fixture is ear-opening. The doctrine



is eye and mind opening. Since there will be no preaching from the console during this program you will have to return some Sunday to hear Rev. Bob and the way Lyn Larsen's music adds to a worship setting.

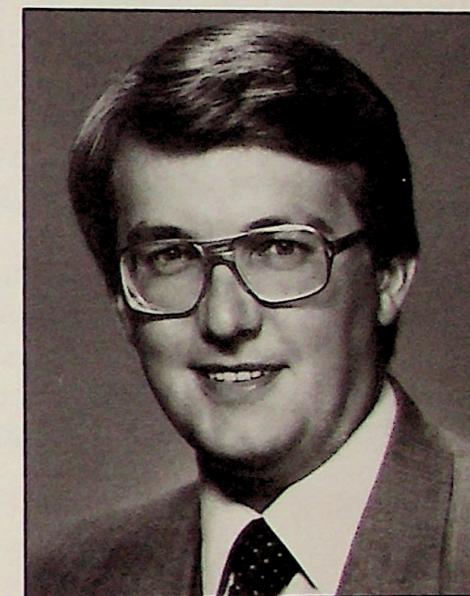
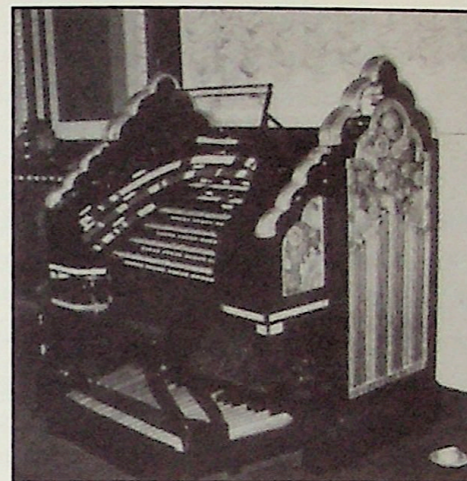
The basic organ in this new Scottsdale facility started as a 3/11 in the Missouri Theatre, St. Joseph, Mo. which also seems to have been a unique place if that winged lion is proof. It was the gift of Marian (Mrs. John Brown) Cook. A new Devtronix-Wilcox computer relay allows Lyn to merge 1927 and 1989 — things like the Kurzweil Synthesizer are playable directly through the organ keys via a MIDI system. That blend will be heard during the program. We will also hear the organ blend with the authentic sounds of 1930's bands as Jack Bethards journeys from San Francisco to lead a lively group through original charts in his vast collection.

Lots of hair, piled on top, was fashionable in 1964 when Lyn made his playing debut. Lyn has been observing his silver anniversary this year, as has Tom Tibia. The latter only has silver hair to show for his enthusiasm.

Lyn is right at home with silver — it fits well into the decor scheme of his guest house which is done in high art deco style, usually watched over by Doris Dog, a basset who always looks sadder than she needs to, especially now that she has a new labrador girlfriend to play with. Lyn's main house is old by Phoenix reckoning. It is in a tract from the 50's and has a unique open floor plan. This is as a result of the removal of the pipe organ which Al Young had installed here. A wall came down so the organ could be moved to its new Chicago home. The house is about to undergo remodelling including a new kitchen. Lyn can make good use of that for his gourmet cooking and dessert making skills. A treasure from the Fifties will be truly missed, the original built-in oven in a wonderful turquoise color. "Even though you want to stay in the Fifties with General Eisenhower, early Elvis, and car fins, it's time to go back to Mesa," said Tom, somewhat exasperated.



Mesa Organ Stop today is among the last of the breed dating from the high point of organ equipped pizza restaurants. Many smaller such places have closed but others such as this one, and those in Portland, Indianapolis, and Grand Rapids continue to thrive giving wide exposure to the unique sound of pipes. When ATOS last visited here in 1985 the organ was but half this size. While it rose to solo position it did not turn to allow views of the spectacular reproduction Wurlitzer console. Now 42 ranks, the Organ Stop Wurlitzer is the pride of Mike Everitt, who bought this place from Bill Brown and who has overseen work on the organ. He clings to the high standards of workmanship and musicianship that were instituted by Bill Brown. Jonas Nordwall has extensive playing time on a similar size installation in his home town of Portland so musical fireworks are expected when he brings that wonderful console up.



Our ATOS Organist of the Year 1987 comes to join the musical Phoenix Five from his hillside home in Portland. The house has more of a view of the surrounding hills than of the city but this is such a busy place that Jonas and his family probably have little time to look at the view. And this is a musical household. Jonas' Rodgers organ and upright piano could be joined by his wife's violin, his daughter's cello, and his son's trumpet. This is a house with the bustle of coming and going, not just because Dad always seems to be packing a suitcase to go on the road for his theatre organ, church, classic, or orchestral programs or his work with Rodgers Organ Co. but also because those two children are now teenagers.

"I'll have some pizza here, then dash to the airport to get home," lamented Tom. "You can go on to enjoy Yesterday's Restaurant with David Lindsay providing organ music for that show with the serving staff." We parted company after a great three days in the desert getting to know the Phoenix Five Plus One and the Valley of the Sun Chapter at home. And we knew that we would see each other and you for another great time in Indianapolis next August.

AFTERWORD

Dear Friends,

As you depart to make your way home we would like to tell you that it has been quite a treat to have all of you visit us. Usually it's the other way around. We certainly hope that you've enjoyed your journey to our home. Thanks for coming!

I would also like to thank all those people who have helped to make this Phoenix Festival a success. We have been dependent upon the efforts of some very dedicated people to make this all happen. Your pleasure has been their reward so I hope you thank them also.

Thanks, too, from my playing colleagues for having opened your homes and theatres as we visited your organs.

We hope you look forward to more good theatre organ — both organs and music. We certainly do, either here or at your place.

Thanks again and best wishes.

Walter Strony
Chairman

ORGAN STOP PIZZA

Mesa, Arizona

4/42

Wurlitzer Pipe Organ

MAIN CHAMBER

- 8' English Post Horn
- 16' Horn Diapason
- 4' Horn Diapason Celeste
- 32' Tuba Horn
- 8' Tibia Clausa
- 16' Concert Flute
- 4' Flute Celeste
- 16' Solo Gamba
- 8' Solo Gamba Celeste
- 8' Diaphonic Diapason
- 4' Solo String
- 4' Solo String Celeste
- 8' Krumet
- 8' D Trumpet
- 8' Viol d'Orchestre
- 8' Viol Celeste
- 16' Clarinet
- 16' Oboe Horn
- 4' Lieblich Flute
- 8' Vox Humana
- 4' Harmonic Flute
- Marimba Harp
- Glockenspiel
- Chimes

SOLO CHAMBER

- 8' Brass Saxophone
- 8' Brass Trumpet
- 32' Tibia Clausa
- 16' Cello Violone
- 8' Cello Celeste
- 8' Orchestral Oboe
- 8' Musette
- 8' Kinura
- 8' Vox Humana
- 16' English Post Horn
- 8' Quintadena
- 8' Violin
- 8' Viol Celeste
- 8' Tuba Mirabilis
- 16' Open Diapason
- 8' Cor Anglais
- 8' Muted Viol
- 8' Muted Viol Celeste
- 8' String Bass
- Xylophone

UNENCLOSED

- 8' Brass Trumpet Enchamade
- 8' Tibia Clausa
- Grand Piano
- Glockenspiel
- Glockenspiel Celeste
- Chrysoglott
- Vibraharp
- Marimba Harp
- Chimes
- Master Xylophone
- Xylophone
- Tuned Sleigh Bells

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Phoenix, Arizona

2/11

Wurlitzer Pipe Organ

MAIN CHAMBER

- 8' Clarinet
- 8' Viol d'Orchestra
- 16' Diapason
- 4' Viol d'Orchestra celeste
- 16' Flute

SOLO CHAMBER

- 8' Vox Humana
- 8' Post Horn
- 16' Tibia Clausa
- 8' Salicional
- 8' Orchestral Oboe
- 16' Tuba Trumpet

EXPOSED PERCUSSION

- Chrysoglott 37 notes
- Chimes 18 notes
- Glockenspiel 30 notes
- Xylophone 37 notes
- Traps

WILLIAM P. BROWN RESIDENCE 5/28
Phoenix, Arizona

Wurlitzer Pipe Organ

MAIN CHAMBER

16' Tuba Horn
16' Bourdon - Flute
16' Diaphonic Diapason
8' Flute Celeste
8' Clarinet
8' Dulciana
8' Quintadena
8' Viol d'Orchestra
8' Viol Celeste
8' Tibia Clausa
8' Solo String
8' Dolce
8' Dolce Celeste
8' Gamba
8' Gamba Celeste
8' Musette
8' Vox Humana
Marimba Harp

SOLO CHAMBER

16' Tibia Clausa
16' English Horn
16' Solo String
16' Oboe Horn
8' Kinura
8' Orchestral Oboe
8' Brass Trumpet
8' Brass Saxophone
8' Vox Humana
8' Krumet
8' Tuba Mirabilis
Xylophone
Tower Chimes

EXPOSED

Vibraharp
Master Xylophone
Chimes
Piano
Sleigh Bells
Toy Counter

VALLEY OF THE SUN
RELIGIOUS SCIENCE CENTER
Scottsdale, Arizona

3/18

Wurlitzer Pipe Organ

MAIN CHAMBER

16' Oboe horn
32' Concert flute
16' Open Diapason
8' Viol d'Orchestra
8' Viol d'Orchestra celeste
8' Trumpet
8' Horn Diapason
8' Quintadena

SOLO CHAMBER

32' Tuba horn
8' Vox humana
16' Tibia clausa
8' Post horn
8' Violin
8' Violin celeste
8' Clarinet
8' Kinura
8' Orchestral oboe
8' Hooded military trumpet

THANK YOU!

Bill and Barbara Brown
First Christian Church
First Methodist Church, Keith Reas, Music Director
Organ Stop Mesa and Mike Everitt
Valley of the Sun Religious Science Center, Dr. Robert Henderson, Minister
Yesterday's Restaurant and David Lindsay

Vintage photos courtesy of the Theatre Historical Society Archives Center, Chicago, William Benedict, administrator. Joseph DuciBella, president. Other photos by Jim Koller, courtesy Windy City Organ Club.

Brochure by Richard Sklenar, with apologies to Elbert Hubbard.
Brochure preparation by Steven Alter and Tim Welch at not just copies.....™

Volunteers from Valley of the Sun Chapter, Ray Danford, Chapter Chairman.
Alden Stockebrand, Transportation Coordinator.
Timothy Needler, ATOS Convention Coordinator.

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ASSOCIATES**

in conjunction with

ALLEN ORGAN COMPANY

proudly present

CHARLIE BALOGH

playing the Allen 4600 Theatre Organ

Three Performances

*Saturday, November 25, 1989
10:00 AM*

*Saturday, November 25, 1989
1:00 PM*

*Sunday, November 26, 1989
2:00 PM*

SANTA CRUZ ROOM

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2630 E. Camelback Road, Phoenix**