

Silent Film Organs Wheezing Back To Life

Tuesday, October 24, beginning at 8 p.m., ticket holders will be able to witness theatre organ accompaniment of a famous silent film of 1920, "The Mark of Zorro."

The distinguished television, radio, recording and touring theatre organist Gaylord Carter will provide the pipe organ effects for Douglas Fairbanks' swashbuckling screen heroics.

PRECEDING the full-length silent film classic, Carter will present specially arranged selections on the Redford theatre organ a three-keyboard, multi-stop, ten-rank Barton fully restored by the Motor City chapter of American Theatre Organ Enthusiasts.

The Redford Theatre has one of the few Detroit Area pipe organs capable of full range accompaniment, and is the only one now available for public performances, according to Albert T. Mason of Livonia, chapter president.

His group of Enthusiasts re-

stored the Redford Theatre organ, sponsor the Friday night intermission interludes and is sponsoring Carter's "The Mark of Zorro" appearance.

Tickets are available at J.L. Hudson's stores, the box office or by mail from Chapter ticket chairman Harry Bunnell, 16842 Ferguson, Detroit.

It is the intent of the Theatre Organ Enthusiasts that performance such as these will help preserve and promote the art of Theatre Organ music.

"We think that the unit or-

chestra is the most important instrument there is," said

Mason. "It can play everything from horses hooves on up."

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THE THEATRE ORGAN is so

important to insurance sales-

man Mason's life that although

cannot play a single time

he has installed one in his home.

In fact, he built his home in

Livonia around it.

His wife plays it, records

the sounds on a built-in tape

recorder and helps with club activities. Together they and the nearly 350 other Theatre Organ Enthusiasts in the Detroit area have restored, rescued and performed on dozens in the country.

To accommodate their pipe organ at home, with its 768 pipes ranging from one size to sixteen-feet long and 10 inches across, the builder's plans were altered to allow two 30 by 30-foot sub-basement rooms to one side of their house-depth family room.

Here the pipes in lead and tin, brass, chrome and wood march neatly in place interspersed by drums, claxson and vibras. In the L-shaped utility room around the noise-dampened pipe chambers Mason has shoeboxed in the necessary air pressure chamber and electrical play boards.

Their three manual (three

keyboard) playing console centers in the family room, which

opens at one end onto a sunken

patio and on the other into

Mason's workshop and recording studio.

BESIDE THE THEATRE organ console sits a player piano, which will soon be wired into the organ console for playing on the lighter's keyboard. The piano keys will move just the same as they do when a role is playing it, says Mrs. Mason. It's been done before and they know they can do it again.

Mrs. Mason and her friendly compatriot enthusiast have replaced every single miniature bellows in the console which attach to the flip stops and start the chain reaction that alters its tones so remarkably.

Mason and his men friends have designed the pipe chambers, mounted, tuned and dressed up the ten ranks of pipes.

A rank, he explained, is a series of pipes containing a full range of high and low notes of a single pitch. Each rank is named and roughly corresponds to a particular orchestral instrument.

His and the Redford Theatre's organ are ten-rank varieties. The largest range known to exist in this country is a 54-rank organ in Radio City Music Hall, New York City. Many 10, 12 and 17-rank organs are used in performances elsewhere in the country.

REDFORD'S ORGAN is believed to be the furthest one out from Detroit.

It was installed in 1928, a banner year and one of the last of the heydays for the versatile instruments, according to Mason.

They were thriving from 1916 to 1929. The advent of talking movies, the depression and then musician's union rules requiring standby orchestras wherever they were used led to their demise.

Luckily, Mason noted, many of the old masters are still around. "We want to provide them an opportunity to educate the modern public in what they'll do and teach youngsters how to play."

Detroit's Don Miller, now 71, is considered one of the most outstanding in the theatre field. It was at one of his performances that power gave out in mid-movie. And the audience never noticed, so expertly had he been able to wrap their emotions into the movie's action.

Dave Brewer, Dearborn, and Dave Vodyanoff, Royal Oak, have 3-10 organs in their homes. Brewer is considered an outstanding organ technician and helped Mason extensively with his installation. Vodyanoff took charge of the Redford Theatre restoration project.

STAN ALBERTSON of Burton Heights, Livonia, is another close by who has a 3-8 in his home. Bill Hayes, Rochester has a 2-6.

Other Motor City Chapter Enthusiasts include Don Lockwood, Highland Park artist, chapter secretary and poster maker; Holly Prim, treasurer; Carl Schluster of Redford and Don Wigent—a blind piano tuner who has crawled unassisted in the pipe lots of the Redford Theatre to help with restoration.

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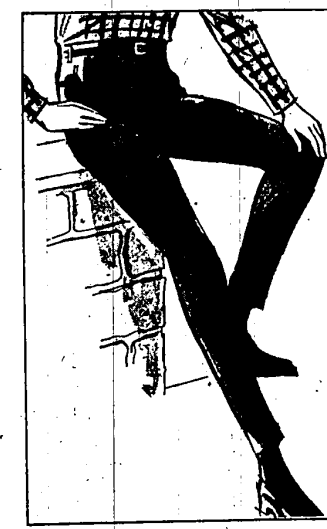
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HAPPINESS IS owning a theatre organ in his home for Alex Mason of Livonia, president of the Motor City Chapter of American Theatre Organ Enthusiasts. Just a small portion of the organ's pipes which he has installed in two 30 by 30-foot chambers are visible here, with a drum above.

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