Guide to the San Diego Theater Organ Group and Fox Theatre Collection MS 100

Finding aid prepared by Jennifer Ho
Collection processed as part of grant project supported by the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) with generous funding from The Andrew Mellon Foundation.
San Diego History Center Document Collection
1649 El Prado, Suite 3
San Diego, CA, 92101
619-232-6203
August 24, 2011
**Title:** San Diego Theater Organ Group and Fox Theatre Collection  
**Identifier/Call Number:** MS 100  
**Contributing Institution:** San Diego History Center Document Collection  
**Language of Material:** English  
**Physical Description:** 2.75 Linear feet (4 boxes)  
**Date (inclusive):** 1909-1997  
**Abstract:** This collection pertains to the San Diego Theater Organ Group and their restoration and revival of the Robert Morton Theater Organ at the Fox Theatre in San Diego.  
**creator:** San Diego Theater Organ Group  

**Scope and Content**  
The collection consists of items pertaining to the San Diego Theater Organ Group, who performed all organ restoration work and subsequent organ concert administration of the Robert Morton organ at the Fox Theatre in San Diego. The collection includes information on the Group and Theatre, organ repair information, promotional documents, business items, correspondence, and artist information. Highlights include photographs of the organ and its repair, repair notes, official group documents, news releases, performance flyers (from the Fox and other theaters), correspondence from organ fans, and organ-related publications. There is also a scrapbook containing photographs of artist performances at the Fox, as well as autographed performance flyers. Also included are reel-to-reel recordings and a vinyl record of various artists, most of whom performed at the Fox Theatre (not all recordings are from the Fox Theatre).  

**Arrangement**  
Items in the collection are arranged into four series:  
Series I: San Diego Theater Organ Group  
Series II: Fox Theatre Organ Artists and Performances  
Series III: Scrapbooks  
Series IV: Photographs and Audio Recordings  
Items in Series I are arranged by subject. Items in Series II and IV are arranged alphabetically by artist name.  

**Preferred Citation**  
San Diego Theater Organ Group and the Fox Theatre Collection, MS 100, San Diego History Center Document Collection, San Diego, CA.  

**Processing Information**  
Collection processed by Jennifer Ho on August 24, 2011.  
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**Conditions Governing Access**  
This collection is open for research.  

**Conditions Governing Use**  
The San Diego History Center (SDHC) holds the copyright to any unpublished materials. SDHC Library regulations do apply.  

**Immediate Source of Acquisition**  
Accession number 2002.102 and 840117B.  

**Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements**  
Scrapbook pages are brittle. (August 24, 2011)  

**Biographical / Historical Notes**  
The Fox Theatre opened in San Diego on November 8, 1929, one week after the stock market crash of “Black Friday.” The 3,000 seat theater was the third largest on the Pacific coast, and brought glamour along with silent films to San Diego. Four downtown blocks had to be roped off in order to accommodate the approximately 100,000 people who attended its opening. The films were accompanied by the $50,000 4-manual/32-rank Robert Morton Theater Organ, which contained 3,000 pipes. Its primary organist was Edith Ducker Steele, who played accompanying music while comedy, chases, drama and romance filled the screen. When “talking pictures” established their dominance in 1936, the organ was moved to the back of the stage and forgotten. It was rediscovered by theater manager William Mauck thirty years later, blanketed in dust and inhabited by mice. In August 1967, seven men came together, all amateur organists and industrial engineers, to form the San Diego Organ Enthusiasts Guild, later known as the San Diego Theater Organ Group, Inc. For the next two years,
they would be dedicated to restoring the organ at no cost to the Fox Theatre. These men were Carter “Bob” Lewis, D.P. Snowden, Irving Pinkerton, Paul Cawthorn, Wayne Guthrie, Archie Ellsworth and Bob Wright. After the restoration was finally complete, Edith Ducker Steele, the original organist, tested the instrument and declared it “good as new.”

After the restoration work was done, the San Diego Theater Organ Group brought renowned organist Gaylord Carter to play the premiere concert on the newly-restored organ. For the next several years, the group continued to bring many locally- and nationally-known organists to perform on the Morton, including Helen Dell, Bob Ralston and Korla Pandit. Concertgoers were charged only $1 or $2, all of which went to the continued maintenance of the organ. The Fox Theatre became the city’s second official civic theater. In 1984, the Theatre was acquired by the San Diego Symphony, and years later after a major renovation became Copley Symphony Hall.

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Alder, Bob
Alexander, Mildred
American Association of Theatre Organ Enthusiasts.
Baker, Don, 1903-1989
Carter, Gaylord
Castillo, Del
Cawthorn, Paul
Copley Symphony Hall.
Creel, Cheryl
Dell, Helen
Ellsworth, Archie
Erwin, Lee
Fox Theatre.
Fox, Virgil, 1912-1980
Guthrie, Wayne
Hazelton, Tom
James, Dennis, 1950-
James, Heidi, 1950-
Kann, Stan, organist
Koury, Rex
Kumagai, Maria
Larsen, Lyn
Leaf, Ann
Lewis, Carter
Lights, Pablo
Mauck, William
Nordwall, Jonas
Pandit, Korla
Pinkerton, Irving
Ralston, Bob
Rhode, Ron
Roseveare, Jim
San Diego Theater Organ Group.
Seppala, Wayne
Shepherd, David
Snowden, D.P.
Steele, Edith Ducker
Thompson, Don
Thomson, Bill, organist
Series I: San Diego Theater Organ Group

Box-folder 1:1 Organ Group general information, 1967-1970 and undated
Includes:
Member information, 1969
Constitution and by-laws, 1970

Box-folder 1:2 Fox Theatre general information, 1929-1999 and undated
Includes:
News articles about grand opening

Box-folder 1:3 Agreement between Fox Theatre and San Diego Theater Organ Group, 1967 July 23-1969 June 26 and undated

Box-folder 1:4 Organ repair information and diagrams, 1968 July 24-1971 March 1 and undated
Includes:
Notes regarding organ specifications
Organ diagrams

Box-folder 1:5 Organ repair news reports, 1970 January 25 and undated

Box-folder 1:6 Promotion and outreach, 1969 January 30-June 30, 1970
Includes:
News releases regarding concerts
Correspondence

Box-folder 1:7 Promotion and outreach, 1970 August 3-1973 June 20 and undated
Includes:
News releases regarding concerts
Correspondence
Mailing list signup postcards

Box-folder 1:8 Meeting minutes, 1971 February 4-1972 July 6

Box-folder 1:9 Finances, 1969 June 25-1971 March 8 and undated
Includes:
Insurance quote, 1970

Box-folder 1:10 Correspondence, 1968 October 30-1977 January 20 and undated
Includes:
Correspondence from local and non-local enthusiasts
Donation letter, 1970
Box-folder 1:11  “Theater Organ Bombarde” magazine issues, 1966-1970
Box-folder 1:12  "The Console" magazine issues, 1969-1976 and undated
Box-folder 1:13  Miscellanea, 1910 June-1998 May 30 and undated
                   Includes:
                   Postcard from Selective Service, 1942
                   Newsletter, American Theatre Organ Enthusiasts, Los Angeles Chapter, 1968
                   Informational brochure regarding: the Wurlitzer Pipe Organ, undated
                   Concert flyers for artists who did not perform at the Fox Theatre
                   Invitations to grand openings of Southland Music Center
                   Theater Organ Society of San Diego directory
                   Handwritten notes

Series II:  Fox Theatre Organ Artists and Performances

Box-folder 2:1  General artist information, 1969-1976 and undated
                   Includes:
                   Artist performance listing with dates, 1969-1976
                   Unidentified set lists
                   Art contract form, undated

Box-folder 2:2  Bob Alder, 1970-1973
Box-folder 2:3  Mildred Alexander, 1972 and undated
Box-folder 2:4  Don Baker, 1971 and undated
Box-folder 2:5  Gaylord Carter, 1969-1972 and undated
Box-folder 2:6  Del Castillo, 1965-1973 and undated
Box-folder 2:7  Cheryl Creel (with Wayne Seppala), 1973-1976
Box-folder 2:8  Helen Dell, 1969-1972 and undated
Box-folder 2:9  Lee Erwin, 1973-1976 and undated
Box-folder 2:10 Virgil Fox (with Pablo Lights), 1971 and undated
Box-folder 2:11 Tom Hazelton, 1969-1975 and undated
Box-folder 2:12 Dennis (and Heidi) James, 1969-1975 and undated
Box-folder 2:13 Stan Kann, 1972 and undated
Box-folder 2:14 Rex Koury, 1972 and undated
Box-folder 2:15 Maria Kumagai, 1975
Box-folder 2:16 Lyn Larsen, 1960-1971 and undated
Box-folder 2:17 Ann Leaf, 1970-1976 and undated
Box-folder 2:18 James Nordwall, 1968-1971 and undated
Box-folder 2:19 Korla Pandit, 1965-1971 and undated
Box-folder 2:20 Bob Ralston, 1969-1972 and undated
Box-folder 2:21 Ron Rhode, 1974
Box-folder 2:22 Jim Roseveare, 1971
Box-folder 2:23 David Shepherd, 1975
Box-folder 2:24 Edith Ducker Steele, 1909-1969 and undated
Box-folder 2:25 Don Thompson, 1970 and undated
Box-folder 2:26 Bill Thomson, 1969-1971 and undated
Box-folder 2:27 Ralph Wolf, 1971 and undated

Series III: Scrapbooks
### Series III: Scrapbooks

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<td>Concert notes</td>
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<td>Photographs</td>
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<td>Newspaper articles</td>
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<td>Concert flyers</td>
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<td>Newspaper articles</td>
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<th>Box-folder 3:3</th>
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<td>&quot;The Console&quot; (magazine), 1979</td>
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<th><strong>Scrapbook 2, 1971-1973 and undated</strong></th>
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<td>Autographed performance flyers</td>
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### Series IV: Photographs and Audio Recordings

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<th><strong>Photographs - organ, 1969-1971 and undated</strong></th>
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<td>Box-folder 2:30</td>
<td><strong>Photographs - Theatre and performances, 1969-1970 and undated</strong></td>
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<td>Box-folder 2:31</td>
<td><strong>Audio recording - Harry Bleile, 4/16 Robert Morton Theater Pipe Organ (7-inch record), undated</strong></td>
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<td>Box 4 (located in Cold Room K)</td>
<td><strong>Audio recordings - reel-to-reel recordings, 1969 March 25-1975 May 18 and undated</strong></td>
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- Classical Music for People Who Hate Classical Music, Gaylord Carter, 1969 March 25
- Eddy Dunster, 1970 March 17
- Virgil Fox, John Wanamaker Organ, Philadelphia, undated
- Dennis James, undated
- Dennis James, 1973 May 20
- Dennis and Heidi James, 1974 May 25
- Dennis and Heidi James, 1975 May 18
- Stan Kann, 1972 February 20
- Rex Koury, undated
- Bob Lewis and Bob Adler, circa 1969
- Jonas Nordwall, 1971 February 21
- Jonas Nordwall, Portland Paramount Theater, undated
- Korla Pandit and Bob Ralston, undated
- Korla Pandit, 1971 June 15
- George Wright, not recorded on Fox Theatre organ, undated