





Coming to America...

and the 2020 ATOS Convention!

BY TIM WAGNER

It's New Year's Eve 1934...

...and the 2,800 guests who have packed Glasgow's newest cinema are reveling in the excitement of the Paramount Theatre's premiere. Rising above the intersection of Renfield and West Regent Streets, the Art Deco cinema's five-story, curving white granite façade is sensational at night; one of the first buildings in the city to be fitted with neon outlining and floodlighting. Occupying half a city block, the cinema's sumptuous interior includes a tearoom and restaurant overlooking the main foyer, and a café yet above. Debuting on the screen, Paramount Pictures' new romantic comedy *She Loves Me Not*, starring Bing Crosby, is not the only entertainment at the Paramount this gala evening. Canadian star Teddy Joyce and his band are playing for your dancing pleasure high above the foyer.

As patrons admire the copper, green, and silver décor of the vast cinema auditorium, they enjoy the spirited and melodious sounds of another Paramount musical feature, the mighty Compton theatre organ. Commanded by Mr. Henry Croudson, solo organist, and comprised of 10 ranks, unified over four manuals and pedal, this instrument embodies all the verve and tone-colour of a full symphony orchestra, all the lilting rhythm of a modern dance band, and all the grandeur of a mighty cathedral organ. This organ is a feast to the eyes as well as the ear; in the orchestra pit, on a revolving lift is the magnificent console, specially designed in silver with the most luxurious coloured decoration. The opening night Programme expounds further, "Perhaps the most striking novelty is the entirely new tone colour called the "Solo Cello," which Compton's have recently developed, and which is not available in organs of any other make. The tone of this new stop is of the most appealing beauty; it is produced by a real vibrating string and is played from the organ keyboard in the same way as the other stops, with which it blends exquisitely." The organ's novelty Melotone unit is not even mentioned.

Some four years after opening, the Paramount Theatre was sold to Odeon Theatres Ltd., in 1939 and successfully operated as the Odeon Cinema for three decades, hosting occasional high-profile live concerts. In September 1969, the Odeon Cinema was closed for extensive remodeling into a triple-screen cinema. The Compton theatre organ was removed and placed in storage. Following its purchase and installation in a private residence, it was sold again and placed in storage, awaiting its next home.

(Photos courtesy of the author)

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By January 2004, the console was being housed at the Summerlee Heritage Museum, about 9 miles east of Glasgow city center. Six years later and some 3,753 miles southwest from Glasgow, events began to unfold which would lead to a new home for the Glasgow Paramount Compton Theatre Organ.

Over in the USA, Acme, Indiana resident John Rust had long been enamored of pipe organs. When his family's church decided to discard its 5-rank Reuter unit organ (Opus 822), John acquired it and installed it in his home. As a member of the Luther League youth organization, John's dad helped sell sweet corn in Indianapolis to finance the purchase of the organ in 1948.

At the end of December 2010, John was among a group of Americans who travelled to the UK to tour pipe organs. Their first stop, St. John Vianney Church at Clayhall, northeast London, introduced John to his first Compton organ. Built for the Ritz Cinema in Nuneaton (northern Warwickshire) in 1937, the 3-manual, 6-rank Compton with Melotone was installed in the church in 1968. In John's words, "Wow, what an earthshaking experience that was...to hear such a "small" organ in an ideal acoustic. We were entertained by Richard Hills on this organ and immediately were swept away by its power and beauty, not just for "theatre organ" music, but also for classical. The way a Compton organ handles classical music immediately stuck in my mind. At this point I was in the planning stages for a large addition to my home in Acme, Indiana to better house a growing classical organ and it immediately struck me that combining the Compton pipework with my classical organ would be a perfect musical fit! So the seed was planted!"

In an upcoming issue of Theatre Organ, read about the end result of John Rust's first encounter with a Compton. Better yet, come to the 2020 ATOS Indianapolis Convention and enjoy the musical artistry of UK organist Kevin Grunill as he leads you on your encounter with the only Compton Cinema Organ in America!



