
THEATRE
ORGANIST'S SECRETS



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Theatre Organist's Secrets

*A Collection of Successful
Imitations, Tricks and Effects
for Motion Picture Accom-
paniment on the Pipe Organ.*

Compiled and Published by

C. ROY CARTER

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA



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INTRODUCTION

The tremendous popularity of the Pipe Organ in the Moving-Picture Theatre has undoubtedly put this wonderful instrument in the first place to stay as the most perfect accompaniment to the Silent Drama. Its superiority over the orchestra for this means is undisputed, not only because of the Organs greater flexibility and range of tonal expression but because under the control of an artist it can do all and much more than a large orchestra, greatly surpassing it in power and grandeur and even variety of tone.

The importance of correct and artistic use of the effects and imitations possible on the modern theatre organ cannot be over estimated. An audience will often be more favorably impressed by the organist who takes advantage of appropriate situations for putting in some clever trick or effect than by one who might possibly be a better musician but lets these scenes pass unnoticed. Remarks like "Wasn't that a clever Banjo effect the Organist played for that Negro scene?" or "Wasn't that Rooster-crow imitation he put in, a scream?" are much more frequent than "Didn't the Organist play that Chopin Nocturne beautifully?"

It should be remembered however, that a scene or a whole picture can be just as easily ruined by the indiscrete use or overdoing of these imitations. Do not be so anxious to put in tricks and effects that the audience is annoyed instead of amused. Good judgment for knowing when and when not to use an effect is just as essential or perhaps even more so than the ability to properly perform the trick. For instance, the Snore effect can be very funny or ridiculously crude according to the scene it is used for. In the case of a fat man snoozing on the porch on a hot summer day with the flies buzzing around him it would be funny but the ludicrous effect if it were used for a scene in which the pretty young heroine is asleep in her elegant boudoir, can be imagined. It is doubtful whether any organist would live long if he or she were guilty of such a crime but there are plenty of *organists* that do things almost as bad.

THE SNORE

- I. Vox Humana 8'
 II. Piccolo 2'
 (Twelfth 2 2/3)

Tremolo

A most effective imitation of a person snoring can be produced on any organ having the above named stops, which if used with discretion will unfailingly draw considerable laughter from the average theatre audience.

A short upward and downward chromatic run of three or four notes in the lower octave of Manual I (Vox Humana 8') produces the effect.

i. e.



Play very legato, opening and closing the Swell Pedal so as to accent the held note.

Immediately after the snore effect, play the following measure on the Piccolo 2' thus imitating the whistle or wheeze usually supposed to follow a snore.



Play legato and not too rapidly. By combining the Twelfth 2 2/3' with the Piccolo 2', a better whistling effect can be produced.

If the trick is to be repeated several times, it is best to avoid monotony by playing alternately slightly higher and lower than written.

LAUGHTER

Vox Humana 8'
Tibia 8' or
St. Diap. 8'

Tremolo

The effect of a person or persons laughing will often literally "make" certain comedy scenes and it can be easily produced on most theatrical instruments.

Starting a little above Middle C, strike a "handful" of keys (all the notes between the interval of a fifth or sixth) in a crisp staccato manner with the flat of the right hand. Repeat from four to six times, striking a third or so higher each time.

i. e.



A slight crescendo with the Swell Pedal should be made simultaneously for the best result.

The difference between a man's and a woman's laughter can be readily made by playing a little lower or a little higher than we previously indicated.

A Flute 8' may be substituted for the Tibia or St. Diap. on a small instrument.

YELL or SCREAM

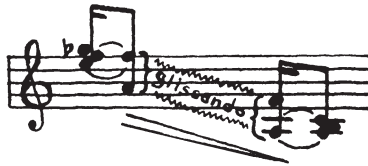
Vox Humana 8'
Tibia or St. Diap.
Flutes 8' & 4'

Tremolo

In playing comedies this effect is well-nigh indispensable and is extremely easy to execute.

With the flat of the hand, strike a "handful" of several keys in the upper register (about two octaves above middle C) and immediately slide the hand down across the keyboard in glissando fashion for about an octave. The attack should be made with a rolling motion of the hand, the idea being not to strike the whole handful down at once but rather to add more as the glissando is commenced.

i. e.



It is best to have the Swell Box entirely open but a slight decrescendo should be made simultaneously with the glissando for the best result.

This effect need not necessarily be used only in scenes where a person is shown yelling or screaming but may also be employed to good advantage accompanying comedy "falls", blows and sudden surprise or fright.

THE KISS

Bird Whistle

The success of this imitation depends largely on having a good Bird Whistle Effect on the organ and on using great discretion in the choice of scenes in which to use it. That there must be a tinge of comedy in the situation goes without saying but in many Slapstick Comedy scenes it is useless to use this imitation as the "kiss" will not be heard if the house is noisy and such is usually the case during a comedy of this sort.

To produce this effect, press the Bird Whistle piston just a little longer than enough for it to sound. The Swell pedal should be wide open and a slight pause should be made in whatever piece is being played a few seconds before producing the kiss. Do not attempt imitating a long drawn-out kiss; the effect in this case will be entirely lost.

R. R. TRAIN

Man. Snare Drum

Ped. Bass Drum

An imitation which can be made very realistic and is most useful. Scenes in which a train is shown either pulling out of or into a station are preferable for the use of this effect, although in short close-up flashes of a train in motion it may also be employed to advantage.

Clear the Pedal Organ and one manual of all stops but the Bass Drum (with out cymbal) and Snare Drum respectively and open or close the Swell Pedal according to the scene which is to be accompanied.

To imitate a train starting up, play the following measures, using a moderately staccato touch, allowing the Snare Drum to roll four or five times to each note in the first slow measures and only two or three as the tempo is accelerated:

Very Slowly

accelerando.....

For scenes in which the train is shown coming to a stop, the above would naturally be reversed, starting with the Snare Drum alone at a fast tempo and gradually decreasing the speed. Add the Pedal Bass Drum when the tempo has been sufficiently reduced as to permit it to be played precisely and evenly.

Short flashes of a train in motion may be effectively accompanied by using the Snare Drum alone.

i. e.



The accented beats in both examples may be so produced by holding these notes a trifle longer, thereby allowing the drum action to roll one or two beats more than in the unaccented notes.

It is advisable not to use any of the R. R. Train imitations for more than a short period for although most effective, they will soon pall on the listeners if overdone.

AEROPLANE

Snare Drum
Tuba 8'
(no tremolo)

An imitation which is equally useful in either Comedies or Dramatic Pictures and is most simple to perform.

The effect is produced by simply holding one of the notes in the lower octave after drawing the above named stops and making certain that the tremolo is "off".

i. e.



If the effect is needed for a short scene only, it is best to make a pause in whatever music is being played, allowing the Aeroplane imitation to stand out alone; in scenes of longer duration however, the most effective result is obtained by playing the imitation and appropriate descriptive music simultaneously. In this case a note discordant to the prevailing key should be used.

A slight crescendo or decrescendo should be made by use of the Swell Pedal for scenes showing an approaching or receding Plane.

THUNDER and RAIN STORM

Man. Strings 8' & 4'
 Ped. Bourdon 16'
 Open Diapason 16'
 or Diaphone 16'

Very frequently short flashes of rain and storm scenes occur when it is practically impossible to cue in appropriate descriptive music. These instances may be admirably covered by this imitation.

The rain effect is produced by holding down as many keys in the bass register as can be covered by the flat of the hand held lengthwise.

i. e.



The Swell Pedal should be closed but slight crescendoes should be made at intervals by quick opening and closing touches.

Only the very thin scale string stops such as the Violins 8' and 4', Viol Celest and Viol d'Orquestre should be used in the combination.

The thunder effect is easily produced by depressing several of the lowest pedal keys. Many organists simply use the Tympani Roll effect provided on some instruments but this method although easier does not result in as realistic an imitation of thunder as the method previously described.

STEAM WHISTLE

Open Diapason 8'
 Tibia 8'
 St. Diapason 8'
 Flutes 8' & 4'

Some modern theatre organs are now equipped with a special Steam Whistle effect but in many cases it is not powerful enough to be heard above an *ff* Agitato or Hurry, or during a lively comedy when the house is likely to be noisy. In such instances or when the organ entirely lacks a Steam Whistle effect, this imitation will be found very useful.

Any 7th diminished chord struck in the upper register will produce the effect.

i. e.



A slight crescendo with the Swell Pedal as indicated will help to make the imitation more realistic.

The above named stop combination is suitable but any combination of Diapason and Flute tones may be used. The tremolo should be "off".

POLICEMAN'S Or Other SHRILL WHISTLE

Flute 4'
Twelfth 2 2/3'
Piccolo 2'

This imitation is less useful than the Steam Whistle effect inasmuch as there are fewer scenes in which there may be occasion to use it.

Use the 7th diminished chord as in the previous imitation but in a slightly higher register.

i. e.



Note that only the flute tones 4' 2 2/3' and 2' pitch are employed in the stop combination.

PRIZE-FIGHT GONG

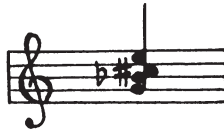
Chimes

Any picture dealing with the Prize-fight Ring almost invariably shows a flash of the Gong ringing out the start and finish of each round and this effect must be "caught" by the organist at a seconds notice.

The use of one single Chime for this effect is very unsatisfactory, it being more mindful of the solemn tones from a Cathedral tower than of the noisy clang of the Ring Gong.

The 7th diminished chord, as in the Whistle imitations but in a medium register, is most effective.

i. e.



Play the chord in a sharp precise manner so as to assure all notes being struck together. The Swell Box should be wide open.

DOG BARK

Open Diapason 8'
Flute 8'

The success or failure of this trick, aside from the fact that more than the ordinary amount of practice is necessary to acquire the knack of performing it, depends on the organ. On the rapid electric action, heavy wind pressure instruments usually found in theatres nowadays, a really good "bark" can be produced but poor results must be expected from a slow action or light wind pressure.

With the flat of the right hand, strike, or rather "slap" all the keys between the interval of a sixth or seventh, in a fairly low register (middle C should be approximately the center note). In making the attack, which must be sharp and precise, hold the hand at a slant so as to strike the upper notes slightly in advance of the rest.

i. e.



The release of the keys should be as sharp and precise as the attack, care being taken to release them all simultaneously.

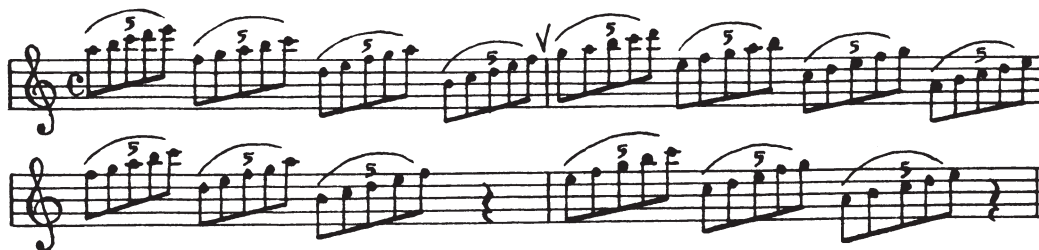
As previously stated, this trick will require a little more practice than others seemingly more complicated. The above example need not be adhered to note for note necessarily as the register in which the "bark" is most effective will vary slightly on different instruments.

DOG YELP

Open Diapason 8'
Flute 8'

In combination with the "Dog Bark" imitation previously explained, this trick can be made very effective and realistic, although with some screen situations it may also be successfully used alone.

The following measures will give the reader an approximate idea for producing the effect:



It is best to forget keyboard technique and instead of using the fingers in the ordinary manner, clinch the hand and strike the keys with a rolling motion as the notes should be well slurred and run into each other. Do not play too fast.

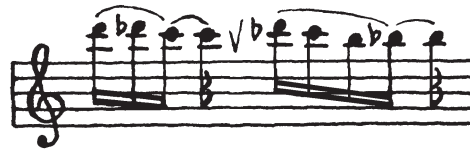
CAT MEOW

Kinura 8'
Tremolo

Although this imitation is one of the simplest to perform, it's success is largely dependent on the instrument; some Kinuras seem to be more adaptable to feline expression than others.

A short downward chromatic run of three or four notes in a high register is the essential part of the trick and a quick opening and closing touch on the Swell Pedal just as it is begun will make it most realistic.

i. e.



If repeated several times, start the runs on different notes, slightly higher and lower than in the above example, and avoid monotony. Do not play too high as the upper octave of reed stops are not usually reed pipes and consequently will not produce the same effect. This imitation when properly performed is the "cat's meow".

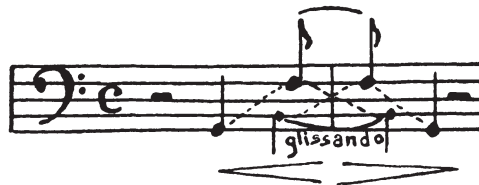
LION ROAR

Tuba 8' or
Trumpet 8'
Oboe 8'
Flute 8'

The lion has for long been one of the most frequently featured animals in slap-stick comedies and a means of imitating it's growl or roar on the organ is most necessary for an effective accompaniment.

A quick upward and downward rolling motion over the lower octave of keys with the flat of the hand accomplishes the effect. Do not play too low but experiment until the range which produces the best result is found. The lowest G is a good place to start on.

i. e.



A sudden crescendo with the Swell Pedal as indicated in the above example, is important; the best result will be obtained by opening the Swell Box from entirely closed to full open and back.

COW'S MOO

Tibia 8'
St. Diapason 8'
Flute 8'

Although opportunities for employing this imitation are not frequent, when a chance does present itself it can be made most effective and is certain to attract the attention of the audience.

Practically the same procedure as was described for the Lion Roar imitation is used for this effect. The rolling motion of the hand should be somewhat slower and the top notes held a trifle longer. It may also be advisable to play a shade higher.

i. e.



Note that the downward movement of the hand in this case should be slightly more rapid than the upward motion and that a longer pause is made on the top notes.

ROOSTER CROW

Kinura 8'
 Vox Humana 8'
 Flute 8'
 Clarinet 8'
 Twelfth 2 2/3'

This amusing imitation is useful for rare instances only but is a great laugh provoker when employed in an appropriate scene. A close-up flash of the king of the barn-yard "doing his stuff", such as often occurs in scenes depicting dawn, is practically the only occasion for which it may be used.

A little experimenting with the following example will give the reader a good idea of the procedure of the trick and by playing a little lower or higher than written the range best suited to any particular instrument will soon be found.

i. e.



The stop combination given is most effective on many instruments but on small organs not having all of these registers fair results can be obtained by simply using the Kinura, Vox Humana and Flute. The Swell Pedal should be partly open and a quick further opening touch given on the third beat so as to produce the indicated sforzando.

FIG GRUNT

Vox Humana 8'
 Oboe 8'
 Tremolo "Off"

Another comic imitation which is most amusing when used discreetly and only for close-ups which practically demand an effect of this sort. In this case, as in many of these animal imitations, it may be said that the ability to choose appropriate scenes for their use is more important than the imitations themselves.

This effect is produced by simply clinching the hand and with an upward rolling motion striking several keys in the lower octave.

i. e.



Note the crescendo marks under each group of notes.

A soft Flute 8' may be used to give the necessary body of tone in the absence of an Oboe but on a small instrument where the Flute Stop is loudly voiced for use in lieu of a Tibia, the Vox Humana may be used alone with better effect, provided the theatre is also small.

CUCKOO

Tibia 8'
Twelfth 2 2/3

This little effect has various uses and is last but not least of the animal imitations. Opportunities for using it in imitating the Bird itself are rare but close-ups showing a Cuckoo-Clock striking the hour are quite frequent.

The trick consists in playing a broken minor third in the second octave above Middle C, striking the first note more or less short and detaching it from the second in non-legato fashion.

i. e.



It is important that the tremolo be "off".

This imitation can also be employed in a most humorous way for comic scenes in which one of the characters is being pointed out or ridiculed as being "nutty" or "cuckoo". For instance: The girls are giving a "nut" the "razz"; one of them touches her finger to her forehead with a significant glance at the "Boob". By making a slight pause in the music just before this occurrence and putting in a couple of Cuckoos, it will readily be seen that the situation can be made quite funny.

Little things like this will often cause more favorable comment among an audience than the brilliant playing of a difficult piece.

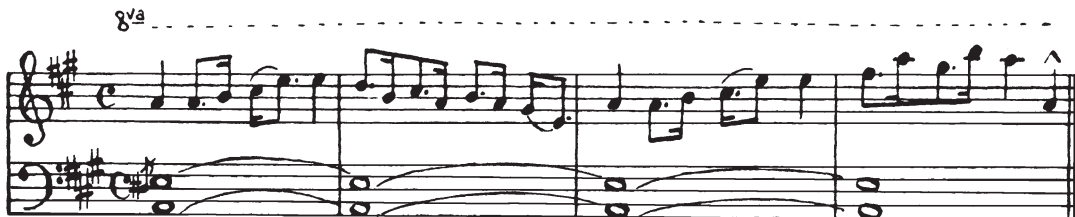
BAG PIPES

I. Oboe 8'	II. Oboe 8'
Vox Humana 8'	Clarinet 8'
Clarinet 8'	Vox Humana 8'
Open Diap. 8'	Flutes 8' & 4'
	Twelfth 2 2/3'
	Piccolo 2'

This imitation can be made very realistic on any unit organ having the above named stops and is most useful for accompanying Scotch marching scenes or for giving a tinge of atmosphere to any Scotch scene of a gay or animated character.

The drone bass, principal characteristic of the Bag-pipes is obtained by playing the tonic fifth (in the key of A this would be A and E) on manual I in the lower register. The key of A is most suitable and the most effective pitch for imitating the drone and whatever air is to be played should when possible be transposed to this key. Play the air in the upper register of manual II (one octave above the usual piano arrangements) and in case the range of the melody is so high that it sounds thin, add a 16' Flute or soft Bourdon to the combination.

The following strain is a good example of music suitable for imitating the Bag-pipes.



Other appropriate tunes are "The Campbells Are Coming", "Bonnie Doon", "Comin' Thro' the Rye" and "Larry O'Gaffe".

On a small unit instrument lacking some of the stops recommended, good results can be obtained by simply using the Diapason and Vox Humana for the Drone-bass and the Vox Humana and Flutes for the air. It is most important in either case that all tremolos be "off". If the Vox Humana, as on some instruments, controls a separate tremolo which automatically comes "on" as soon as the stop is drawn this register must not be used.

MUSIC BOX

Chrysoglott Harp

Unfortunately chances for using this little effect are not frequent as this is one imitation and it may be said the only one, which can be really called pretty. Opportunities, however, can be made by using it for accompanying Cradle, Mother and Child, or other scenes calling for music of child-like simplicity. This, aside from the fact that it makes a beautiful effect, is a decided contrast from the regular organ tone and helps to prevent monotony and keep the audience interested.

Clear one manual of all stops except the Chrysoglott and open the Swell Box. The particular scene to be accompanied will of course suggest appropriate music but as the Music Box is nearly always connected with children, a light Berceuse number will do excellently. Play with both hands in the upper register, one octave higher than written in most cases, keeping a precise mechanical rhythm. Avoid arpeggios.

Some excellent numbers for use with the Music Box effect are "Hush, My Babe", Rousseau; "Berceuse", Iljinsky; and "Cradle Song", Hauser.

BANJO

I. Kinura 8'
 Flute 8'
 String 8'
 Flute 4'

II. Ad lib.

Besides filling the bill for scenes which demand this imitation, it is in itself a different and novel style of Jazz playing and is most useful when decided contrast in the repetition of a chorus is desired.

The Kinura is the essential stop in the above combination, the flute and string stops merely being added to give more body to the tone. A snappy popular number with a well marked pulsating rhythm is also necessary. Play the accompaniment on Manual I with the left hand using chords only, striking them very crisply and staccato. Keep the chords as much as possible within the register between Tenor and Middle C as this is the most suitable pitch. If the Kinura is in a different Swell Box and is affected by a separate Tremolo than the rest of the stops in this combination, this Pedal should be entirely open and the Tremolo "off". The Swell Pedal and Tremolo affecting the Flute and String stops may be used ad lib.

The imitation can be used alone, i. e. as in the case of a Banjo playing chords only, but is much more effective and realistic when used as an accompaniment to the melody played on Manual II using for instance a Saxophone combination and playing in double notes to imitate a duet of the Alto and Tenor Saxophones of the Jazz Band. For the Saxophone effect use the Op. Diap. 8' Clarinet 8' Violin or other thin 8' string, Twelfth 2 2/3' and if possible the Quintadena. Keep the melody down low as the combination is not effective in a high register.

HAND ORGAN

Tibia 8'
Violin 8'
Flutes 8' & 4'
Twelfth 2 2/3'
Piccolo 2'

Scenes for which an imitation of this sort is a necessity are not infrequent. A very realistic Hand-Organ effect is a comparatively simple matter on even the smallest type of theatrical instrument.

Prevailing popular air of the ultra-jazzy type are preferable and suitable for most instances which call for this imitation but practically any melody can be effectively used in case of a direct cue for some old standard tune.

The essentials for obtaining the Hand-Organ effect are: leaving out the pedal bass entirely, playing both melody and harmony in the upper register (one octave higher than the average piano arrangements), and making sure that the Tremolo is "off" (this is imperative).

The following strain is an example of the style of accompaniment which is most appropriate for this imitation.



Practically any popular melody of either 3 4 or 4 4 measure can be treated in a similar manner and the same effect obtained. Play a little faster than the usual Fox-Trot or Waltz tempo.

ACCORDION-HARMONICA

Strings 8' & 4'
Flute 8'

The main factor for producing either of these effects is the proper use of the Swell Pedal. The music used must necessarily be suggested by the scene to be accompanied and practically any song or popular number will be found suitable for use with these imitations.

Play with both hands in the upper register and leave out the pedal bass as in the Hand-Organ imitation. Every melody note should be harmonized (i. e. a full chord struck for each note of the air) with tonic and dominant chords only when possible.

i. e.



Play in a very legato style and accent each chord by an exaggerated sforzando or sudden opening and closing motion of the Swell Pedal. This produces the wheezing effect characteristic of both instruments.

The above named stop-combination is for use with the Accordion Imitation only; the Harmonica or Mouth-Organ effect although performed in a similar manner is best obtained by using only two 4' thin scale string stops such as the Violin 4' and Viol Celest 4'. The Tremolo must be "off" in both cases.

TELEGRAPH-TYPEWRITER

Wood-Block

The imitation of the noise of a telegraph instrument or typewriter is a simple matter if the Traps division of the Organ is equipped with a Wood-block.

Clear the manual to be used of all other stops and strike the keys with a sharp staccato touch allowing the Wood-block action to strike only once to each beat (this in the case of a repeating action type of Wood-block only). Play a series of quarter and eighth notes without regard to any particular rhythm.

i. e.



Close the Swell Box entirely as the average Wood-block effect is too loud for an imitation of this sort. Use this imitation for close-up views of these instruments only or for situations in which they are the outstanding features. Such instances often occur in Railroad pictures and in pictures in which one of the characters is a stenographer.

Another useful effect produced by means of the Wood-block is the horse's-hoofs imitation. Although this is an old trick and practically needs no explanation as to how it is done, a suggestion for performing it in a more simple and more effective manner is not out of place. It is essential that the Wood-block action be of the repeating type, i. e. one that keeps on striking in rapid succession as long as a note is depressed. Hold a key down just long enough for the action to strike three times and immediately release it. Practice this until the knack of holding the note precisely the right

length of time and so that not two or four beats result but exactly three for each time the note is struck.

Example:



By practice this imitation can be very effectively used in combination with some Galop such as "Saddle Back", "The Ring Master", and "With the Wind", published by Walter Jacobs Inc. This makes a splendid accompaniment for Race Track scenes, etc. Careful use of the Swell Pedal in producing a gradual crescendo or decrescendo is essential for depicting approaching or receding steeds.

In conclusion it may be said that a few other imitations, though possible on some instruments, have not been described herein as they are of very little importance and usefulness and principally because they are not effective. A poor effect or imitation has no place in the accompaniment to any picture and will only bring a derisive response from the audience and make the organist a subject for just ridicule. Practically all of the imitations in this booklet, even the simplest, cannot be properly performed without some practice and experimenting on the particular instrument at the disposal of the reader. This is true especially on a large instrument having a big variety of tonal resources to draw from. In many instances an effect can be somewhat, if not greatly improved by a slight change in registration.

Notes on the Restoration

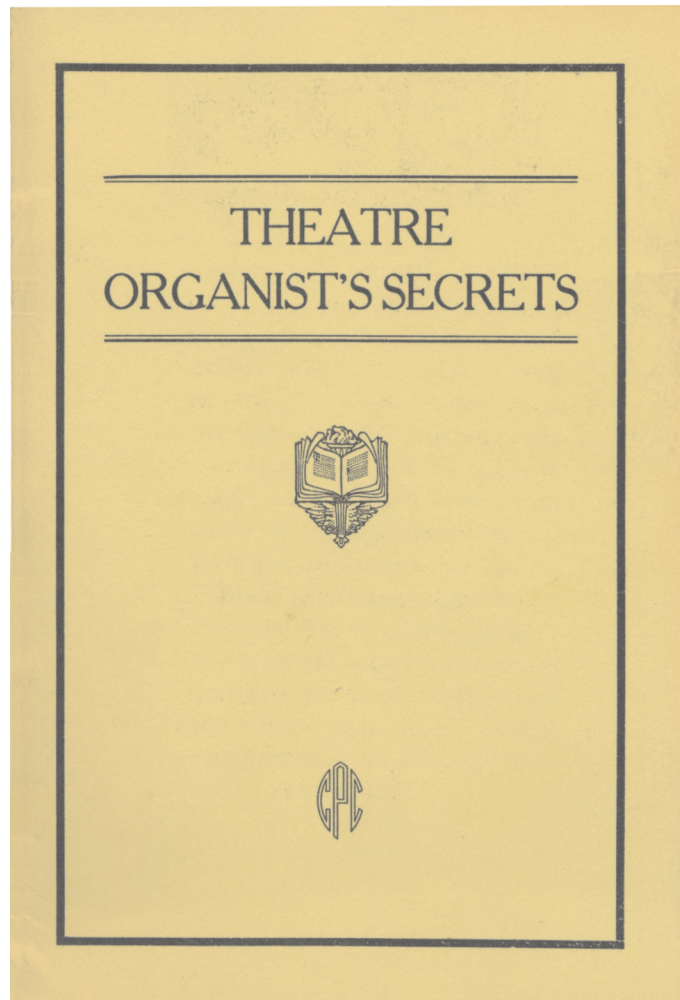
This small collection of tips and tricks of the theatre organist was gathered and published in 1926 by **C. Roy Carter** of Los Angeles, California. I have added page numbers and a Table of Contents. Not much is known of Roy Carter other than this book. Dr. John W. Landon described him as a theatre organist and teacher and played at the Highland Theatre in Los Angeles. Landon stated that “Carter billed himself as ‘Mexico City’s Premier Organist,’ but it is not known where he may have played in Mexico City.”

Theatre Organist’s Secrets has been circulated for years in various stages of quality in photocopies and scanned images and once even in pocket form. The following is from the inside cover of the pocket version:

This is a miniature version of the original manual located by LA ATOE Member Raymond Thursby, who loaned it to THE CONSOLE for publishing in this tabloid size. It is being issued to those attending the 1968 National ATOE Convention as a memento of the occasion. Though it is rather small, there are many secrets that may be uncovered by employing a magnifying glass.

In any event, we thought you might be interested seeing how the famed silent screen organists were able to “make those sounds” when accompanying silent photoplays.

Tom B’hend
Editor
The Console



(actual size)

Theatre Organist’s Secrets has been quoted extensively in articles and books about film accompaniment. Filled with practicality and brevity, this little book is useful “in the field” and also makes an interesting study of how to make effects before the age of modern recording and reproduction. It is my hope that the growing number of organists performing film accompaniment can use these “secrets” to improve the art and bring new life to great films from the past.

—Michael Johnston, 2008

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