

Leslie Edward Waldron

Who was Leslie Edward Waldron?

Imagine yourself as a Perth resident in 1928. Just before Al Jolson sang his famous Mammy and inaugurated the talkie film era at Sir Thomas Coombe's Prince of Wales Theatre, Coombe also opened the 1993 seat Ambassadors Theatre on September 29th. It was the ultimate in theatres. Inside was an elaborate Florentine Garden with bits of renaissance architecture and with a domed blue ceiling and twinkling lights (stars).

A Wurlitzer organ was installed at the then staggering cost of \$45,000 and a noted organist Les Waldron from the Capital Theatre Sydney was engaged to play it. In the pretentious billings of the day he was referred to as "the great Waldron" and was never anywhere but at the console.

The Ambassadors 3 manual 15 rank Wurlitzer had the following chamber and rank disposition:

Main Chamber:

Tuba Horn
Diapason
Clarinet
Viol
Céleste
Flute
Vox Humana
Chrysoglott

Solo Chamber:

Trumpet (brass)
Tibia Clausa
String
Orchestral Oboe
Kinura
Oboe Horn

Quintadena
Saxophone (brass)
Marimba Harp
Xylophone
Glockenspiel
Chimes
Sleigh Bells
Traps.

Unenclosed:

Piano

Tremulants: 5

The opening night programme lists Waldron as playing with Bert Howells Orchestra and performing organ solos which included "The Lost Chord", "Selections from Cavalleria Rusticana" and the novelty number "Aint that a Grand and Glorious Feeling".

Army records show Waldron was born in Adelaide on 25th November 1901 and enlisted in Perth on 30th June 1941 serving as a Northam army camp signalman before being discharged on 30th October 1945. He continued to play the Ambassadors Wurlitzer when on leave.



State Library of Western Australia

In the picture on the previous page the Ambassadors Wurlitzer Organ is down in the pit on the left of the orchestra lift under the vase. The main chamber organ grill is between the left rotunda and proscenium. The Ambassadors organ was enlarged and relocated to a burnt out but rebuilt Regent Theatre Melbourne in 1945. Hoyts Theatres sold it in 1972 to Alan Tranter, a Melbourne collector of pipe organs and it has never been re-installed. Records show that Waldron was organist at the Capitol Theatre, Sydney (1928, 13/11/31-2/32); opened the Ambassador's Theatre, Perth (29/12/28 -10/31); Ritz Theatre, Concord (1933); Prince Edward Theatre, Sydney (5/33-7/4/39); Plaza Theatre, Sydney (5/39-9/40). These dates are interesting given his decision to return to Perth to enlist.

The NSW TOSA News of May 1976 reports Les Waldron as opening a Hammond Organ in the Double Bay Vogue Theatre on May 13th 1938 noting that he was pianist organist and choir-master at the age of 15, having mastered the pipe organ at age nine and was considered a keyboard prodigy.

With the Ambassadors organ removed Waldron returned to Sydney after WW2 and recommenced his role as a theatre organist in a relieving capacity on the Sydney City and suburban organ circuits for Union Theatres. When not playing organ he played with a dance band playing mainly for old time dances. This was also a love of his in Perth where he was pianist for the Melvinians Dance Band.

A 1966 (unofficial visit) to the Ambassadors Theatre Music Library revealed music scores and band orchestrations

written by Waldron including Butterflies in the Rain, and one original composition beautifully written in ink called "Pals of the Pacific", which is treasured by the author.



Les Waldron at the console of the Ambassadors Wurlitzer organ

An October 2010 telephone interview with 90 year old Sydney organist Cecil Cranfield confirmed he met and talked to Waldron when selling a Hammond Organ to the Lidcombe Home for Men. The 1971 NSW Births and Deaths Register lists Les Waldron as passing at the Home.

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