NEWS FROM
THE Stearns
COLLECTION OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

EXTRA!

The Return of the Green Hornet

All purveyors of injustice and corruption, beware! No longer will you be able to spread your malaise throughout our nation, for THE GREEN HORNET HAS RETURNED!

On Sunday, April 24 at 2:00 p.m., in the Recital Hall of the School of Music, The Stearns will proudly sponsor the gala celebration, "An Afternoon with The Green Hornet," in honor of the Friends of The Stearns Collection. This famous super-hero was introduced on the radio drama bearing his name, a show created and produced by Detroit radio station WXYZ from 1936 until 1952. The Stearns has assembled some of the original Green Hornet staff to help make the afternoon a memorable one.

Among the presenters of the afternoon's festivities will be Mr. Dick Osgood, a former writer, actor, announcer, and studio manager of WXYZ who was involved in the station throughout the Green Hornet years. Osgood will be signing copies of his book WXYE Wonderland, a chronicle of the history of the Detroit station, on behalf of The Stearns.

Members of the Friends will receive, if they wish, one or two tickets to the presentation, where they will learn about how the show was produced from a member of the original production staff, witness a reenactment of an actual episode of the show, and attend a champagne reception with the actors immediately following the presentation. At that time, Friends and their guests can even try out the theremin themselves!

What connection does The Stearns have with an old-time radio show? Among the over 2000 instruments in the collection, The Stearns is the proud owner of a theremin, one of the first electronic instruments, and the sound of the Green Hornet (see Vol. 2, No. 1 of News from The Stearns for an in-depth look at this fascinating instrument). The afternoon's festivities will also include a demonstration of the Stearns theremin, believed to be the very instrument used for the WXYZ broadcasts.

For a membership of $30 or more, a Friend of The Stearns will participate in this exciting event, but membership is the key to much more. Friends of The Stearns also have these privileges:

- direct mailing of News from The Stearns, the official publication of The Stearns Collection;

- advance notification of all Stearns 2 + 2 + 2 lectures and other events (2 + 2 + 2 means the second Sunday of the first two months of each University term at 2:00 p.m.);

- voting rights in determining the future of The Stearns, an important collection of over two thousand musical instruments (and always growing);

- inclusion in an organization committed to the continued exhibition, preservation, and study of important historical musical instruments, as well as their presentation to the public through lectures, performances, tours, and publications.

General admission tickets for the show only, without the reception, are available for $12.50. For information, call The Stearns at (313) 763-4589, and leave a message. Don't miss this once-in-a-lifetime event!

Mr. Dick Osgood, longtime WXYZ on-air personality, will autograph copies of his book WXYE Wonderland on behalf of The Stearns.
Not exactly “Positiv”? Historical marvel hoards answers

Stearns Italian positiv organ has fascinating story

Many of the instruments in The Stearns collection have fascinating stories behind them that contribute to their interest. However, some of the most remarkable items in the collection are intriguing precisely because their story is not known: from where did they come, how were they used, how old are they? One of these mysteries of The Stearns is the Italian positiv organ, and its puzzle is still to be solved.

The instrument was part of the original donations of Frederick Stearns to the university, and was among the items on display when the collection was housed in Hill Auditorium. When local organ restorer Dana Hull was commissioned by the organ department at the School of Music to restore the organ for The Stearns, she became excited at the prospect of working on what had become an old friend. In fact, Hull remembered the organ clearly when she attended concerts at Hill.

“I used to walk up to it and just look,” she says, smiling. “I never thought that I would actually get a chance to work on it, or that it would ever be playable.”

After the collection left Hill, the organ was on display in the Stearns Building before it was put into storage, where pipes were removed and placed in boxes, and it sat in need of attention for quite some time. After Hull was asked to work on the restoration, she contacted Umberto Pineschi, a music professor at an academy in Pistoia, Italy, who was an expert on this type of instrument.

“I arranged to meet him [Pineschi] in Boston, where he was lecturing at the Boston Conservatory. At that meeting, I showed him photos and a detailed description of the organ: I had to find out if it was really worth fixing. He was extremely positive about my proposal. I feel that I owe him a debt of gratitude; he insisted that I come to Italy to see similar instruments, and after I arrived, he showed me many of them.”

The Stearns Italian positiv organ is currently on display in The Stearns galleries, Margaret Dow Towsley Wing, School of Music.

So Hull packed up the photos of the Stearns positiv and headed to Italy. Probably the most important part of her visit was her meeting with an Italian restorer who had many ideas about the origins of the instrument.

“Mr. Donati [the restorer] looked at my photos for quite a while with a magnifying glass. He was very interested in the instrument, and was definitely of the opinion that it had been modified a number of times in its lifetime,” she remembers.

Donati felt that the organ in its present form dated from the early 1800’s. While he stated that some major work had probably been completed in the late nineteenth century, he also said that many of the components were much older. In fact, one set of pipes on the Stearns positiv was practically identical to a set that he had dating from the 1500’s.

While there have been other organs of a similar style built according to period specifications, it is thought that the Stearns Italian positiv is the only antique instrument of its type in the United States. It is different than many organs in that its basic pitch level is at four-foot level, sounding an octave higher than common; this is possibly due to its size, although similar instruments may have had eight-foot capabilities. Its bellows are notable for their action, which resembles the opening of a book. Instead of raising from both sides, they are hinged at the side, with a weight on top to balance the intake of air. In addition, they have seven folds, instead of the five or six common in most Italian organs of the period.

The pedal board is merely attached to the bottom octave of the keyboard by ribbons, so that stepping on a pedal activates the corresponding key. Characteristic of organs of this region, the bottom octave is a “short octave”. This means that instead of twelve pitches, only eight are included, possibly for harmonic reasons in the music of the time.

While the Stearns positiv has much in common with other Italian organs of its period, it does not have the divided keyboard found in many similar Italian instruments. Notes below a certain pitch level on a divided keyboard produce a totally different pitch than that heard above the division point. While this may not seem important, Hull feels that the lack of the divided keyboard on the Stearns organ is an additional clue to the mysterious and varied history of the instrument.

The organ is actually in two parts, a lower section containing the bellows and pump handle, and an upper section which holds the keyboard and pipes. It is considered a “positiv” organ because of its size; smaller, “portativ” instruments were able to be easily carried. There are handles attached to the case of the upper section, indicating that the instrument could be transported from place to place. However, the Stearns positiv is much larger than most portable organs of the era, and such transport would have undoubtedly been unwieldy at best.

Hull believes that the bottom section was added at a later date, and that the older top section was originally a portativ organ. This would explain the handles, and some other unusual aspects of the instrument as well.

When she was stripping the layers of paint that had covered the organ over the years, Hull found a diagonal cut across the panel of the top section. Without this added wood, the shape of the top would have resembled the style of portative organ often shown in paintings of St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music, dating from this era. In addition, two

New Exhibits on Display at Stearns

Instruments featured from North America, around the world

With over two thousand instruments at its disposal, it is easy for The Stearns to provide the public with constantly changing exhibits on a variety of topics. The latest displays once again showcase some of the most fascinating Stearns Instruments and artifacts from around the world.

Some of the newest exhibits were influenced by recent Stearns 2+2+2 lecture speakers and their topics of interest. Professor Lois Anderson’s February lecture inspired the “Instruments of Africa” display: one highlight of the exhibit is a group of instruments fashioned from elephant tusks. When Professor David McAlister spoke in January, The Stearns mounted a display of the Kurath Native American Instrument Collection. Most of the Native American instruments and related artifacts in this display were recently donated to The Stearns by Gertrude Kurath, a renowned expert on Native American music and dance.

Another unique display currently being shown is “Making a case for music,” featuring an assortment of beautiful instrument cases from around the world. Two show-cases house this exhibit: in the music library, one can view instrument holders from non-Western cultures, while one of the two windows in the School of Music lobby features Western cases. This is truly a beautiful and unusual idea, and the result is a wonderful display.

Outside the Stearns office on the third floor of the School of Music, clarinets will soon be featured in a new exhibit. In addition, the permanent displays in the main galleries of The Stearns are in the process of being changed. Different pieces from each of the four categories of musical instruments (chordophone, idiophone, mem-branophone, and aerophone) are being organized, so that visitors to the collection will have an entirely new look at the wonders of The Stearns.

Gallery hours are Thursday and Friday from 10-5, and Saturday and Sunday from 1-6, but lobby and music library cases are accessible for viewing whenever the School of Music and music library are open. For information, call (313) 763-4389.

continued on page 3
Italian Positiv Organ

continued from page 2

dists (the flat areas upon which the pipes sit) were used to hold only three sets of pipes, an unusual extravagance. Noting that one chest was obviously considerably older than the other, Hull feels that the second was added when the instrument was "expanded" at a later date, and the lack of a divided keyboard also points to a smaller organ than the current positiv.

Professor Marilyn Mason of the organ department stated that the department was extremely pleased with both the positiv and the work that has been done to restore it. Hull began her work in January, 1986, and was finished by the beginning of July, when the organ was first heard at the national convention of the American Guild of Organists. Necessary funding was provided by donations.

"The blackened (dirt of the ages) keyboard which we thought would have to be changed was left intact; it was only carefully cleaned," stated Mason, describing some of the restoration process. "The layers of paint on the case were stripped as well. All of the action was removed, cleaned, and refinished. Little of it had to be changed, and very little replaced."

As can be imagined, there were many problems in the restoration process. After carefully removing the old paint, Hull found the case to be cracked and gougged in many places, and the wood was full of holes from woodworms. She did patch and repair work, and injected the wood with a special chemical to protect against further worm damage.

"The chemical was rather toxic, so we had to treat the case outdoors," Hull recalls. "Even so, I could only use it for a short while before I had to walk away and work on something else. That process alone took a couple of weeks."

Apparently some of the paneling used for the case was taken from another item. On one of the rear panels, an uneven spot that looked like the result of mending turned out to be an ancient lock of some sort. The organ had no need of a lock, indicating that the panel had belonged to an earlier item before becoming a part of the organ.

Another puzzle occurred when Hull tried to remove the two chests.

"I wondered how in the world I would get the chests out of there; they had to be removed so that one could work on them."

Finally, Hull found the solution. On each side of the case where the chest was attached, the wood was thinly sanded. Acting upon a hunch, Hull slowly chipped away at the spots, which turned out to be filler. Underneath, she found two screws on each side recessed into the wood, holding the chests. All problems were not that difficult to solve, however. The keys, which looked somewhat corroded and decayed, were revealed as beautiful honey-colored boxwood and ebony after simply being wiped with a damp cloth.

There were also some pieces that just didn't fit. Whoever had done the last work before Hull had apparently added some extra pipes in the back of the instrument.

When she discovered that they weren't original, she decided to leave them out of the restored organ.

John Lyon and Charles Ruggles helped Hull with the restoration. Lyon, a Michigan harpsichord builder, duplicated a defective section of one of the chests. Ruggles, an organ builder and restorer from Cleveland, helped with the chest repairs, and also repaired damaged pipes, which were probably in the worst shape of any part of the organ. In addition, he designed new pipes to replace those that were missing.

"We are committed to the music of Italy, and to mechanical action organs such as this one," states Professor Mason. "It is extremely fortunate that this Italian positiv was acquired by The Stearns. It is a very important and unique addition to the collection."

Hull concurs; she feels that the age of the organ is of historical interest, and that the varied additions over the ages represent the changing needs and aesthetics of each era.

The organ department uses the Stearns positiv as a supplement to its own varied programs. One related event planned for this May is a tour of the historic organs of Italy. The Itinerary is available; anyone who is interested can contact Pat Tucker of Domino's Destinations at 1-800-826-8165.

Although the organ is now playable, a minor miracle in itself, Hull does not feel that it is quite completed. She painted it light blue to match a color she found on her way down to the bare wood, but "Italian

continued on page 4

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Be A Friend to The Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments

Enrich your life — Join the Friends of the Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments.

Ensure the growth and maintenance of the University's internationally recognized and respected musical instrument collection.

Enjoy your commitment to the cultural community. With your help, additional instruments may be restored, played, displayed and appreciated by the musical public.

By becoming a Friend, you will receive News from the Stearns, invitations to the new 2+2+2 lecture series and announcements of new exhibits and performances. Your contribution will help support all activities of the Stearns Collection.

Membership in the Friends of the Stearns Collection is available in the following categories:

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I (We) want to support the Stearns Collection. Make your check payable to The University of Michigan Stearns Collection.

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Please circle title(s) and print your name above as you wish it to appear on donor lists.

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Please mail this form with your check to Friends of the Stearns Collection, The University of Michigan School of Music, Moore Building, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109.
The Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments is located in the new Margaret Dow Towsley wing at the south end of the Earl V. Moore School of Music on Baits Dr. in the University of Michigan North campus area. Enter through the doors nearest to the parking lot. The McIntosh Vocal Arts Center is just across the hall and to the right of the entrance. The Stearns galleries are down the stairs at the end of the hall to the right.

**Admission:** Free at all times.

**Exhibit hours:** Thursday and Friday 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Saturday and Sunday 1 p.m.-8 p.m.

**Group visits and tours:** To arrange for group visits or guided tours by members of The Stearns collection staff, please call (313) 763-4389.

**Parking:** Metered parking is available south of the entrance doors.

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**News from The Stearns Vol. 2, No. 3**

**The Stearns**

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