



Play it again: Organist John Ledwon and Shriner Past Potentate Davis B. Leonard, at the console.

# PIPE DREAM

Even 'Man of La Mancha' sounds hip on the Shrine Auditorium's restored organ

It's a beautiful Sunday, and I'm sitting in a one-third-filled auditorium with a bunch of guys in fezzes, waiting for the pipe-organ recital to begin. I must be the oldest 35-year-old I know.

Not that I don't get a secret thrill every time I walk into the Shrine Temple, *my* Shrine Temple, where I've had more or less free access since becoming a bona fide Shriner with about 600 other, well, mostly quite older men. But that's not the point. The point is that this building—which has the largest fixed-seating theater with the biggest proscenium stage in the world (despite what the Guinness Book of World Records says), host to the Oscars and big enough to hold the annual Shrine Circus—is so damn cool and incredible that, if I indeed end up being the last Shriner, I call first dibs on it. I *already* get free parking.

Today's recital is about another piece of the Shrine I'm bequesting to myself: the restored Möller Opus 4446 organ, originally installed in 1926, the year of the Al Malaikah Shrine Temple's completion south of downtown. It is 67 ranks high and has four chambers in two lofts, with 4,485 pipes. The smallest is no bigger than a pencil; the largest could swallow a potbellied Shriner. The organ can also approximate the sounds of tom-toms, sleigh bells, a marimba, a xylophone, orchestra bells, thunder, tweeting birds

and the human voice. Until this afternoon, it hadn't been heard in a formal concert for nearly 40 years.

"Because of money being needed in other parts of this temple," Past Potentate Davis B. Leonard—the Shriners' equivalent of a grand pooh-bah—told me later, "the organ's been neglected. In 1991, I set about to raise \$200,000 to bring it back to its original state.

"Over the years," he added, in what could be viewed as a metaphor for men's fraternal societies in general, "a lot of the parts have been disconnected or dismantled when they became inactive."

No more. A state-of-the-art computerized box has replaced the old mechanical and pneumatic parts, though the tones produced are still acoustic—amply illustrated when concert organist John Ledwon demonstrates one of the bass pipes, which reverberates like an idling diesel truck. But listening to a concert's worth of Scott Joplin rags, "Man of La Mancha" favorites and even a medley from "Phantom of the Opera" is to be transported to the birth of the film industry, when every movie house featured just such melodious accompaniment to Pauline's perils and Harold Lloyd's silent pratfalls.

Dolby be damned. *This* is entertainment.

—A. Grey Le Cuyer