

## Old High School Piano Gets Called on by Artist

By CHRIS KOWITZ, JR.

This is the story of a piano, the kids who loved it, and an artist who brought it out of hiding to enrapture an audience with masterful tones from its old, battered frame.

Backstage at Salem high school stands an upright piano of about 1900 vintage, bearing scars of constant, hard use by hundreds of high school students.

For many years—no one remembers just how many—that piano has faithfully stood up under the terrific barrage of adolescent fingers pounding it during leisure hours.

That piano has brought joy to Salem High students down through the years. Uncountable business and professional men in Salem can remember their days in high school, and the times they plunked away on that old piano, or tried to drown it out by loud singing in school pep rallies.

It has been abused far more than a musical instrument should. But it has always been ready for another kid to strike its keys.

It has outlasted the school's desks, chair and tables. It has even outlasted one high school building.

Today, no one remembers just when or how the instrument first came to the school, but it is thought that the piano was donated to the school by some individual who had received all the use from it he wanted. During the last few years, it has been carefully preserved by stagehands who respect its age.

That aged instrument has stood by backstage while the school's grand piano has been used for all stage attractions. Whenever a program is conducted at the school, or a guest musician appears, the grand piano has taken its glorious place on the stage to thrill audiences, while the old, battered upright, so well-loved by the kids, has been wheeled off to a dusty corner.

And if that old piano could talk, it would probably say that it was content to stand by and let the mighty grand take all the glory. The old piano would know that it was serving its purpose just being there for the kids to pound on.

Wednesday night the old instrument was wheeled out of the way once again, back to its dusty corner, while the grand piano was placed at midstage for a

chance" on the stage.

The big, black grand piano was pushed to the rear of the stage, while the old upright creaked and groaned its way to the center of the stage. Some members of the crowd wondered if Solito de Solis would even attempt to bring music from "old faithful."

Those who attended the concert Wednesday night will testify that Solito de Solis did bring music from "the box."

The artist awed his audience with his ability to play the most delicate to the most feverish music on a piano that should have been retired years ago.

Gale Page, the movie star who appeared as vocalist with de Solis Wednesday, likewise kept the audience in a state of awe. She sang a wide variety of numbers, and was just as effective on "cute" songs like "His Majesty the Baby," as she was on deep, powerful songs like "Stormy Weather."

And as Solito de Solis and Miss Page were onstage during their concert, many ex-Salem High students in the audience recognized the old piano the artists were using, and couldn't help feeling sentimental about the old box of wood, ivory and strings.

Gale Page, Solito de Solis and the old, battered piano... three great troupers.

concert with Gale Page and Solito de Solis, a vocalist-pianist duo.

Solito de Solis was to open the program with a concerto solo. He took his place at the keyboard of the majestic grand piano, which had been tuned especially for the occasion, and proceeded to open the program.

The audience of music-lovers immediately were enthralled by the magic touch of the master.

Solito de Solis was playing "Pastorale and Capriccio" by Alessandro Scarlatti, as his opening number. Just as the artist was swinging into a forceful section of the composition, he had to stop suddenly. The damper key on the grand piano had stuck, making it impossible for the musician to continue.

But the artist continued his concert—not on the grand piano, but on the benten and battered upright which came out of its dark corner for its "big

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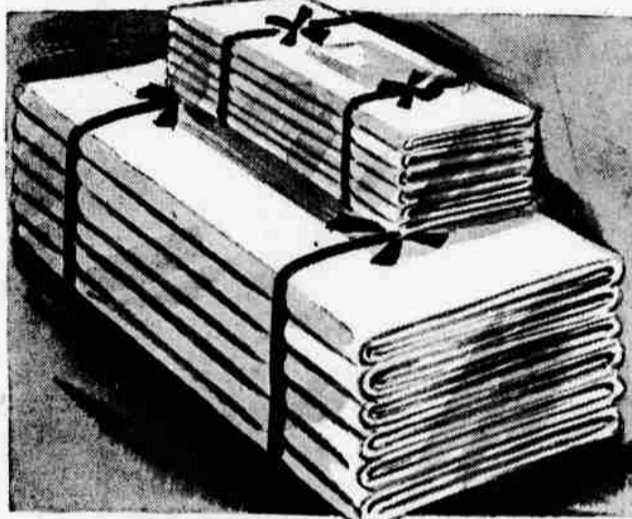
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