

# New Haven Success Story

Business-like Approach and Tight Organization  
Result in a "Like New" Wurlitzer for the  
Connecticut Valley Chapter of ATOE

by EMMERICH ZILLNER

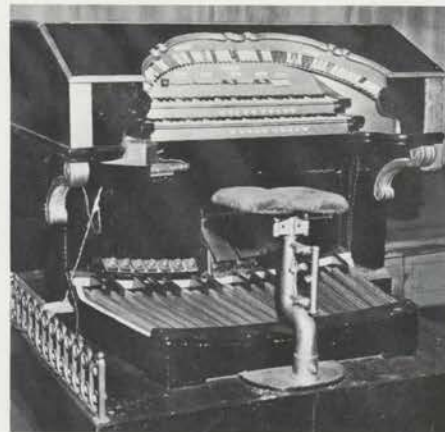
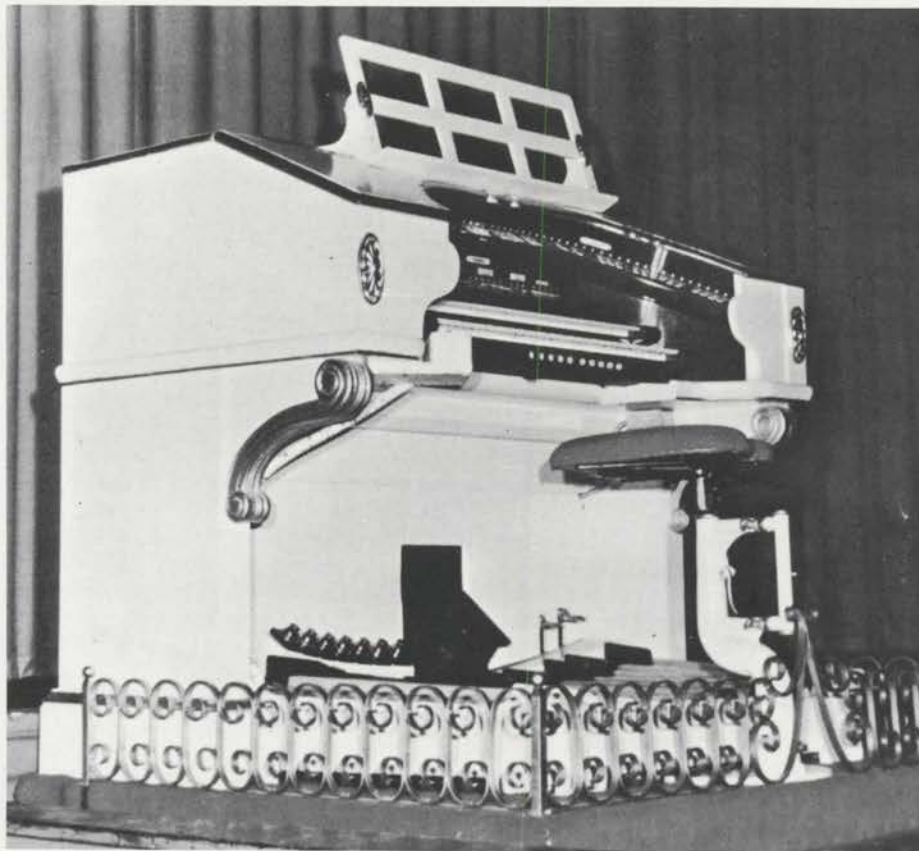
IT IS PRETTY much agreed among theatre historians that Connecticut was, on the whole, a theatre-poor state. We never had a lavish 5,000-seat vaudeville theatre. Our largest, the 4,000-seat State Theatre in Hartford, took on some resemblance to a large hall rather than a splendid palace. It's possible that Connecticut residents simply didn't appreciate movie palaces in the roaring '20s—perhaps they were too conservative. In any event, our not-too-fabulous theatres also had not-too-fabulous organs. The majority were built by Austin, Hall, Steere and Moller, and few bore resemblance to the much-tailored theatre sound of Wurlitzers, Mortons, Kimballs and Marr and Coltons. In Connecticut, Robert Morton had a few installations, as did Marr and Colton. Wurlitzer installed about eight small organs, none totalling over 10 ranks.

There was one Connecticut theatre, however, that separated the "men from

the boys"—certainly not in style or opulence, but as far as stage shows and performers go, hardly any name actor or actress missed playing the New Haven Paramount. Known until the latter part of the Twenties as the Olympia, the Paramount was a first run house of the Balaban and Katz chain. The theatre stage is still equipped for live shows of all sorts, ranging from legitimate theatre and opera to revues. In the heyday of vaudeville, Balaban and Katz put together their ideas and performers for a given bill in New York, and then sent the show, complete with scenery and costumes, for a week's run at the New Haven Paramount. Its appearance there amounted to a "shakedown cruise," and by the time it left town the rough spots had been worked out and it was ready to start its tour around the entire chain of theatres, leading off at the world-famous Times Square Paramount.

The Olympia, built in 1915, was

October, 1967: Console Up! The New Haven Paramount console after facelifting. It's white with gold leaf trim over a bright red carpet.



March, 1966

Photo: Henning-Miller

equipped with a two-manual Steere organ manufactured in New Haven. As the movie and vaudeville industry mushroomed, it became obvious that a first-run theatre like this required a more spectacular organ than the Steere. The 2-10 Wurlitzer was installed in 1927. A portion of the orchestra pit floor was removed to install an elevator for the console. In order to install the Wurlitzer pipework, it was necessary to make an opening approximately 4 feet by 5 feet in the exterior brick wall of each chamber.

The Wurlitzer was used daily until 1933 when, like most other theatres, the Paramount abandoned regular stage shows and use of an orchestra and organ. After this, the instrument was used from time to time by various individuals who played it during the non-operating hours of the theatre. This kept the ciphers out. In 1963, a severe leak in the roof (since repaired) caused sufficient damage to the main chamber to necessitate shutting down the organ.

## ENTER CONVAL CHAPTER

LOOKING for a project that would give our organization continued objectives and purpose, our executive board negotiated with the theatre chain's president in March of 1966, culminating in an agreement whereby we would rebuild the organ at no cost to the chain in return for use of the instrument and theatre for after-hours meetings and first refusal in the event of sale of the organ. To help us, we incorporated as the Connecticut Valley Theater Organ Society, Inc., and then secured an insurance policy which would cover members working on chapter projects. We consummated our agreement with the theatre in writing.

We decided to rebuild the organ with the goal of using it for future concerts,

(Continued on Page 8)

## NEW HAVEN SUCCESS STORY

(Continued from Page 6)

as we have no chapter home with a theatre organ. Damage and condition of the instrument was surveyed and work was found in every corner. Reservoirs were leaking badly in the water-damaged main chamber. Due to ciphers, the air was shut off to the diapason and clarinet, leaving only three ranks operating and these were unreliable due to water damage. The console was in rough shape and had been painted black and gold some years back (not the best color for the Paramount's interior motif). There were the usual dead black cap magnets everywhere and, of course, everything was filthy. However, the lift operated and the blower was in good condition, so away we went.

Time schedules were tight for everyone and we devised a plan whereby no one would have to work more than one Sunday per month. It went like this: The overall job was divided into four teams (Main Chamber, Solo Chamber, Console, Relays), each with its own team leader. Volunteer workers were assigned to these teams on the basis of their physical capacity and technical skill. One team in the theatre each Sunday assured the management of our continued good faith and got the job done.

The first day all crews worked and we got some 30 members to the theatre to help remove all the pipes from the manual chests and some offset chests. These were stored in specially made trays in the blower room for future washing.

John Angevine headed the main chamber crew. The chests in this chamber had been wet just enough to warp the underside of their top boards around the pallet slots. Therefore, the pipes were not ciphering at full volume, just "weeping." To correct the problem, the crew stripped the top boards of all pallets, guide pins, springs and spring rails. The boards were then put through an electric planer to restore them to perfect level. Only as the boards passed under the blades of the planer for the first time could the low spots be seen. The hardware was then replaced and the chests are now operating fine. Each pallet on the diapason and clarinet was releathered to insure continued good operation. Some pneumatics also had to be releathered. Magnets under the chests were hissing badly from dirt-clogged armatures. Some of the dirt was so thick that notes would not play. Each cap and armature was removed and cleaned. Since this chamber is very tight for space and the chests were installed in two levels, the work performed here was little short of heroic.

Frank Manion and Mike Foley shared

responsibility for the solo chamber, where the trouble consisted mainly of dead and missing magnets, leaking reservoirs and the inevitable dirt. This chamber, like the rest of the organ, was thoroughly vacuumed.

ALL PIPES were washed, which entailed disassembling and cleaning of all reeds. Members who originally wouldn't have known a trumpet from a frying pan can now talk about shallots, reeds, resonators and boots like old hands. Member Phil Stock loaned us his pipe



Cleaning the pipes—all 742 of them! Chairman Stillman Rice and Joy Zublena clean the Harmonic Tuba Rank. Picture is dark because work was done in the theatre's basement. Paramount Theatre. Photo by Michael E. Foley.

washing tank, which was a ten-foot length of 12-inch galvanized air duct with the top removed and all seams soldered to make it water-tight.

Everett Bassett took the lead in cleaning and making changes in the relay room. To install the desired couplers, the second touch eight-foot tibia and eight-foot clarinet were abandoned on the solo manual. The only remaining solo second touch tab, a 16-foot tuba, is being changed to a solo-to-pedal coupler. New electric switches were used for the couplers.

The most striking change has been the console, which is now a gleaming off-white, generously decorated with genuine 14-karat gold leaf. The console team, headed by Harold Weaver, had to strip off numerous coats of old paint and a heavy layer of gesso to get down to the bare wood; only then could the new finish be properly applied. Angelo Mastagni applied a beautiful deep, natural mahogany finish to the boards on the interior of the console, which involved a

tremendous amount of work and know-how because of the poor quality of the wood. Wally Moore cleaned and repainted the Howard seat's metal frame and Joy Zublena recovered the seat with red velvet to match the new carpeting on the elevator platform. Stillman Rice cleaned and regilded the decorative iron fence which outlines the platform. The keyboards were removed and sent to Pratt and Read for new bushings and new plastic key tops. Genuine ebony and hard white maple were obtained and Kurt Conley replaced all worn pedal tops. He also built a brand-new music rack to Wurlitzer specifications (the old one was long gone). Jerry and Marie Patzold furnished and applied the gold leaf, a job requiring knowledge, experience and infinite patience. Ray Zublena rewound more than 50 magnets, a tricky and time-consuming job. Now, there is not a dead magnet in the organ.

THE EXTREMELY important voicing and tremolo regulation is being done by Roger Davis. Roger also took on the task of reassembling and regulating the keyboards and pedalboard. The keys not only look beautiful but are regulated for excellent and proper touch response on both first and second touch. Second touch was eliminated from the pedalboard, resulting in improved depth and weight of pedal.

As this article is being written, we are fast approaching the time when we can actually say the organ is finished. Thirty-two people made up our four crews and only six had previous experience in working on a pipe organ. We feel our organization has been strengthened considerably by this project on many counts:

1. We now have a fine organ in a theatre where we can sponsor concerts which will help us financially.
2. We have proved to the head of a fairly large theatre chain, our sincerity and ability to get the job done. In the event organs in this chain's other theatres become available for sale, it is entirely possible we will be contacted.
3. We have trained and prepared more of our members for possibly owning and rebuilding a theatre organ of their own.
4. Most important, we have tied our chapter members together more closely and drawn people who were previously inactive into more active positions in our organization. All through rebuilding a Wurlitzer.

**SPECIFICATIONS OF THE NEW HAVEN PARAMOUNT 2 MANUAL 10 RANK WURLITZER PIPE ORGAN**

**SOLO**

Tuba 16'  
 Diaphone 16'  
 Tibia (Tenor C) 16'  
 Bourdon 16'  
 Viol 16'  
 Harmonic Tuba 8'  
 Diaphonic Diapason 8'  
 Tibia 8'  
 Kinura 8'  
 Orchestral Oboe 8'  
 Clarinet 8'  
 Violin 8'  
 Violin Celeste 8'  
 Vox Humana 8'  
 Concert Flute 8'  
 Clarion 4'  
 Octave 4'  
 Piccolo (Tibia) 4'  
 Viol 4'  
 Viol Celeste 4'  
 Flute 4'  
 Twelfth (Flute) 2-2/3'  
 Fifteenth (Violin) 2'  
 Piccolo (Flute) 2'  
 Tierce (Flute) 1-3/5'  
 Chimes  
 Sleigh Bells  
 Orchestral Bells  
 Glockenspiel  
 Xylophone  
 Chrysoglott  
 Solo Octave 4'  
 Solo Sub Octave 16'

**ACCOMP.**

Viol 16'  
 Vox Humana 16'  
 Tuba 8'  
 Diaphonic Diapason 8'  
 Tibia 8'  
 Kinura 8'  
 Orchestral Oboe 8'  
 Clarinet 8'  
 Violin 8'  
 Violin Celeste 8'  
 Vox Humana 8'  
 Flute 8'  
 Piccolo (Tibia) 4'  
 Viol 4'  
 Viol Celeste 4'  
 Vox Humana 4'  
 Flute 4'  
 Piccolo (flute) 2'  
 Chrysoglott  
 Castanets  
 Tambourine  
 Snare Drum  
 Tom Tom  
 Wood Block

**PEDAL**

Tuba 16'  
 Diaphone 16'  
 Bourdon 16'  
 Tuba 8'  
 Diapason 8'  
 Tibia 8'  
 Clarinet 8'  
 Cello 8'  
 Flute 8'  
 Octave 4'  
 Bass Drum  
 Bass Drum  
 Kettle Drum  
 Crash Cymbal  
 Cymbal  
 Solo to Pedal 8'

**TREMOLOS**

Main  
 Solo  
 Vox Humana  
 Tuba

**SECOND TOUCH**

Tuba 8'  
 Tibia 8'  
 Clarinet 8'  
 Chimes  
 Triangle  
 Xylophone

**BREAKDOWN OF RANKS**

Ten Pistons per manual

Seven Toe Studs

Three effect buttons on manual cheeks

**SOLO CHAMBER**

Tibia  
 Tuba  
 Kinura  
 Orchestral Oboe  
 Vox Humana  
 Xylophone  
 Xylophone  
 Chimes  
 Glockenspiel  
 Non-tonal Percussions

**MAIN CHAMBER**

Violin  
 Violin Cello  
 Flute  
 Clarinet  
 Diapason  
 Chrysoglott

**EDDIE WEAVER SET FOR CONCERT AT THE NEW HAVEN PARAMOUNT**

The Connecticut Valley Chapter presented a fall concert October 20th, played by the famed organist-entertainer Eddie Weaver, the first "big name" artist in a series planned by the ConValChaps now that they have an instrument in top shape. For Weaver it will be like "old home week." He's no stranger to the theatre or instrument.



Eddie as sketched for the cover of his current record release.

At 18, he took the New Haven Paramount's Wurlitzer by the reins and drove it for six tremendously successful years. During these years, he became the most popular theatre organist in the state. Large salaries and fancy cars were his even during the great depression and, when the bubble broke in 1933, he didn't throw in the towel. His drive, personality and talent kept him busy doing what he knew best—entertaining people through his ability at the theatre organ. Eddie is one of a handful of people in the world who still plays a theatre's pipe organ on a regular paid basis. Eddie's big spots are New Haven's Paramount and Richmond's (Virginia) Loew's and Byrd Theatres. All have Wurlitzers, and New Haven's is the smallest; but nevertheless, it provided a beginning for a fine man.

**R.S.V.P.**

ATOE members visiting in the area who wish to view and play the Paramount's Wurlitzer are requested to contact any officer of the Connecticut Valley Theater Organ Society, Inc.

**DON'T FORGET!**

**ATOE**

National dues

for 1968

will be \$7.00

from

December 31st.



On goes the new look! Jerry and Marie Patzold apply 14 carat gold leaf. Stop tabs are removed from console to be buffed clean. Paramount Theatre. Photo by Michael E. Foley.