

"THESE BONES SHALL..."

by Thomas Ford

The following story by Thomas Ford of Flint, Michigan, will renew the faith of many in the present generation. It is always an extra pleasure to present an article written by a member of the younger set, since their interest in theatre organs insures a prolonged life for the noblest of instruments. This interest also contradicts a good many of the sensational headlines which too often treat young adults unfairly.

Thomas Ford, now 20, has been an enthusiast since the age of 12, has taken basic lessons in music and has obtained considerable practical organ construction experience, as his story reveals.

I guess my timing was away off. Dad had hardly gotten inside the house when I told him about the Wurlitzer. He dropped both his bags and stared at me for a full ten seconds before he got himself collected. "A Wurlitzer! Tommy, you have got to be joking." Dad said it in almost a whisper, a whisper with something like a trace of patient agony laced into it.

Courageously, I said, "No joke, Dad. I've finally got myself a real Wurlitzer." I almost said "a real, *live* Wurlitzer," but that wouldn't have been exactly an honest description.

Now the patient agony seemed as though it was heating up for a bubbling. Dad started out with "Now, Thomas," and that was ominous. "Thomas" was the disciplinary tense of "Tommy." "Now, Thomas," said Dad, "you already have an electronic organ, as well as a fine piano, and in between you've got a stereo outfit, and minor things like your own TV and shortwave." He picked up his bags and stowed them into the guest closet, and then he turned again to me. "What critical void is this Wurlitzer supposed to fill?"

Mom moved in from the kitchen to rescue me. "Tom," she said, "don't get excited. It's just a fun thing and it only cost a hundred dollars." Dad is a businessman and she knows how to handle him in a business-like way. "It's a second-hand instrument. Tommy got it for almost nothing. In fact, by the time he sells the extra pipes, he'll be making money on the deal."

Dad started easing off. "Only a hundred dollars, eh? Well, I guess a hundred dollars won't scrap out the budget." By the time dinner was over, he was back to normal.



TOM FORD posing alongside his Wurlitzer Style E which he rescued from prison.

I was glad then Dad didn't pursue the Wurlitzer deal too closely. Otherwise, he would have discovered that it was over at Jackson State Penitentiary, in one big, shapeless heap, just like a prison riot had left it back in 1937. I found out about it from Mr. Arthur Donelson, who tunes and keeps in repair all the major organ installations in the Flint area. "I don't know if it's for sale," Mr. Donelson told me. "But it's been laying there for a long time and I don't think they intend to salvage it. Why don't you call the prison's music director, Mr. Don Young? He'll know the status."

Mr. Young was very kind to me. He invited me to the prison. Together, we went to the prison auditorium and he showed me the Wurlitzer. He watched my face and then he chuckled. "Tommy," he said, "this *was* an eight-rank Wurlitzer, Style E. In its day, one of the Mighty Wurlitzers."

As I looked about me, I could not help thinking, "How fallen is the Mighty!" The instrument was in an advanced stage of dismantlement. The entire solo chamber, console, parts, relays, switches, pipes, and other components were strewn about like some mastodon's prehistoric bones. The tuba and the vox humana were crushed beyond repair, as were the ophicleide pipes. How many other parts, critical and otherwise, were missing, I had no way of knowing at this particular time. What I did know was that I wanted this organ with a fierceness that surprised me. In one-half a minute I would know if the Mighty Wurlitzer could be mine. "Mr. Young," I said, "all I can offer you is a hundred dollars." I hesitated, and then made the great gamble:

"Provided I could have the main chamber and the blower (a 5-hp. Spencer)."

"It's yours, Tommy," said Mr. Young. It took about a week to gather the Wurlitzer together and truck it to our home in Flint, Michigan. Mr. Young arranged the move, using prison trucks and two inmates. These prisoners were especially helpful and without them I could not have been able to afford a commercial mover to do the job. They helped me dismantle the console, the chests, and carry the pieces into the basement. The pipes were pushed through the windows and stacked horizontally on the floor.

When the garage was filled with parts, again it was Mom who got the situation under control. She said: "It's only temporary, Tom. Tommy will have all the good parts in the basement by Monday. He has bidders for all the stuff he can't use or doesn't need. The garage will be yours again in about two weeks."

I did have the garage cleaned in two weeks. Then the real job of rejuvenating the Wurlitzer began. It was the most exacting toil I could have imagined. I cleaned the wood parts smooth to the original grain and refinished and polished them to a fine lustre.

I releathered the pneumatics, cleaned the magnets, tore out old wiring and replaced it with new, and restored the percussions. I dickered with second-hand stores, pawn shops, and other organ buffs for such missing components as drums, tambourines, cymbals, traps, pipes, and reeds. Within four months of the day that Dad came in all a-steam from the garage, I had the xylophone, all the percussions, part of the diapason, and all of the tibias.

Air is supplied by a 5-hp. Spencer Or-goblo, housed in a small, patio-type metal building shed in the back yard. The wind is channeled from the blower into the chests through a steel underground pipe. The blower did present a power problem. It required a 440-volt, three-phase supply; only 220-volt, single-phase was available. We got around this bottleneck with a Withey Phase Converter which will permit operation of this blower plus several more wherever 220-volt power is available.

I consider this installation a temporary one. Eventually, the whole instrument will be moved into a roomy A-frame structure, where theatre acoustics can be approximated. Here I will have all the pipes, including the 16-foot Ophicleide, mounted upright. Afterwards, when all ranks are restored and are operative, I plan to add controllable electronic reverberation, electric guitars playable from the console, along with kinura, harmonica, and other appropriate instruments.

The specifications of this particular instrument are as follows:

WURLITZER STYLE E SPECIAL:

RANKS:

Vox humana	61	pipes
Tibia Clausa	73	pipes
Trumpet	61	pipes
Open Diapason	61	pipes
Viol Celeste	73	pipes
Salicional	73	pipes
Stopped Flute	97	pipes
Ophicleide	12	pipes (16')

TRAPS:

Xylophone	37	notes
Glockenspiel	30	notes
Chimes	18	notes

Complete Wurlitzer toy counter.

The Mighty Wurlitzer, like a mighty oak, had a small beginning. While attending grade school in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, I had to wait in one of the hallways for my ride home after the afternoon classes. My only companion during this wait was a decrepit Baldwin piano, whose chipped and yellowed ivories attracted my fingers like a battery of powerful magnets. Soon I was "two fingering" popular songs quite creditably. My mother noted this accomplishment and showed her approval by buying me a brand new Baldwin Acrosonic. A year later we moved to Owosso, Michigan and the most interesting neighbor we had as far as I was concerned was a young man who was assembling a small pipe organ in his basement. This project fascinated me, and he kindly allowed me to help him put the various assemblies together. When one day, he allowed me to play it, I knew that, some day I would have to have a genuine pipe organ of my own.

In the meantime, I listened to all the organ recordings I could get hold of. I was especially charged-up on those by E. Power Biggs and Ray Bohr. I played each of these over and over, and each

playing honed one shade sharper my determination to search out and secure a genuine theatre pipe organ. My drive to listen to live pipe organ music led me to Flint, Mich., to hear Mr. Arthur Donelson in Flint with the Capitol Theatre's 3/11 Barton organ at a matinee.

This organ, long unused and allowed to deteriorate, had been restored to mint condition by Mr. Donelson and his vivacious and gracious wife, Ruth. I talked to Mr. Donelson after the matinee and he used his good offices in persuading the theatre manager, Mr. Earl Berry, to let me try out the Barton. After discussing the different stops of the instrument, I proceeded to practice on the Mighty Barton. I usually play it every Saturday before the noon matinee.

Now, the manager allows me to use it also for recording. Along with this practical first-hand experience with the organ itself, I did a considerable amount of homework at the Flint Public Library, where I learned the principles underlying the art of organ building, including the techniques of pneumatic control, wind pressure adjustment, voicing, re-leathering, and the proper way to lay out the organ components for best acoustics and space utilization.

At this point I apparently convinced my mentor, Mr. Donelson, of my genuine interest in organ engineering, for now he told me about the dismantled and all but buried Wurlitzer at the Jackson State Prison. And that is how it has come about that—in our overwhelmed basement—old drums are saucily snapping and rambunctiously rolling, bellows are inflating, and reservoirs are jumping, marimbas are chattering, glockenspiels are clicking, and a xylophone is singing while a bank of tremolos are making wavy the whole din.

But it must not be too terribly discordant and lusty. On their 23rd wedding anniversary last Valentine's Day, I was genuinely surprised when Dad asked me if I would play some old-time favorites with all the skill and effect I was capable of. The last thing I played, just before the party broke up, was one I had been practicing on because it sounded so beautiful on the tibias. It was "Because." When I had finished it I looked up at Dad. I guess he did not know I had finished. His eyes had a faraway look about them—real far away, like 23 years. He finally came back and he grinned at me and said, "Now Tommy, that was very fine music, very fine." And he turned and went up the basement steps. Mom followed him, but halfway up she stopped and turned around and looked down at me. She smiled and she said, "Dad is right, Tommy. It is *very fine* music, very fine." And then she followed Dad upstairs.

"QUITTING QUSSING & QUING ..."

by Lloyd G. del Castillo

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article appeared in the April 1927 issue of "Jacobs' Magazine," and was submitted by Lloyd E. Klos. Mr. del Castillo, who was well known at that time, was amply qualified to discuss any phase of the movie organ and the playing thereof. Mr. del Castillo has earned the distinction of authority by his training, experience and unquestioned success as organist in the leading motion picture theaters in this country, among them the Rialto in New York, Shea's Buffalo which he opened, and, until the opening of his organ school, the magnificent Metropolitan in Boston.

This is probably the last article which I shall write on photoplay music while still actively engaged therein, so I feel constrained to make an event of it. If my present plans prove successful, the spotlight will know me no more, save on future special occasions now only to be conjectured. Or, as my swan song at the Metropolitan Theatre (Boston) proclaimed to the tune of "Silver Threads Among the Gold":

*Now that I am growing old and gray,
I am going to quit this strife;
Just teach other birds to play like this,
While I lead the simple life.
When I come into this place again,
I'll be down there, folks, with you;
Oiling up my rusty vocal chords,
Trying to sing the way you do.*

I must admit that in giving up the theater for the studio, I have no illusions and no false regrets. When I consider some of the terrible poetry I have written, of which the above is an average sample, I am moved to wonder how I have survived to retire to the noble profession of pedagogy. It is true that I have always enjoyed the job of translating pictures into music; enjoyed it, I confess, a good deal more than the soloizing which went with it.

A theater audience is a monstrous tyrant. There it sits, implacable and ominous, waiting to devour you with silence if you have guessed wrong and failed to please it. You have got to tickle its fickle fancy every week, and the longer you feed it, the less you know what its appetites are. When you throw it a tid-bit it likes, it rewards you vociferously, but never because it remembers that you have pleased it in the past. It takes nothing on faith. In the parlance of the profession, you've got to "ring the bell" every week.