

A Challenge for Space . . .

THE SMALL ORGAN



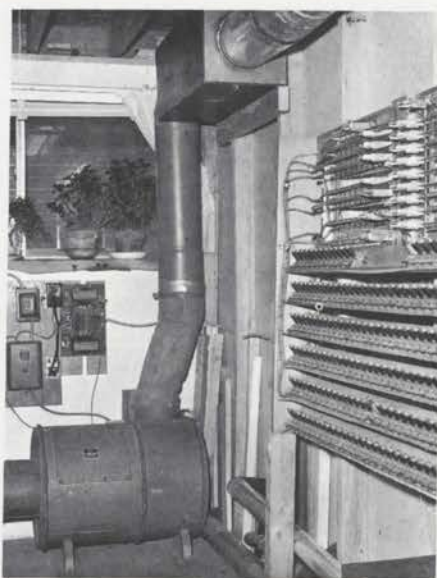
by Ray Brubacher

In the last few issues of *THEATRE ORGAN BOMBARDE*, there have appeared many exciting and informative narratives of how several large theatre pipe organs have been rescued from eventual oblivion by devoted theatre organ enthusiasts and how these instruments have been installed, often at considerable expense, in their homes. I would like to take the opportunity to take up the case of the organ enthusiast whose income may be modest, and whose residence may be a shade smaller than some of the fifty-room-plus mansions these large instruments have been fitted into, but nevertheless would desire a pipe organ installation. I would like to use myself as that person of modest income, and my own two-manual, four-rank instrument as an example of what can be done in the confines of a small home, in hopes that it might spur others in the same situation to enjoy the real thing, so to speak, for less than the cost of a medium-priced spinet model electronic.

Being 27, single, and living at home immediately tends to press great odds against having a pipe organ. Having already a large electronic in the recreation room, I had spent four years of fruitless effort trying to convince the powers that be, namely my parents, that a pipe organ could fit into the house. Any efforts towards this purpose had been nullified by their visiting area theatre pipe organ residence installations and seeing for themselves just how much room a sizeable instrument did take. And tales of local organ owners cutting large holes in their living room floors to permit the sound to rise from the sub-basement pipe chambers did much to quickly quench the fires of hope of my getting my own instrument. As everyone knows, theatre organ pipe scalings run far larger than

their church counterparts, and even examples of small instruments in the area took up more space than was present in the confines of our home. Therefore, I had about abandoned the idea of pipe ownership until a member of our local Hammond Organ Society casually informed me that the small chapel in his church complex was going to be converted into an educational wing and that the small pipe organ in it was to be sold. Now being a church organist with a soft spot for the genus Hope-Jones, and having been taught that you cannot play theatre organ on a church organ, I was immediately prone to disregard the instrument and to not even bother to check. However, upon consultation with two very good friends — Mr. Gil White and his son Paul, who were veterans of the art, having installed a three-manual, 11-rank theatre organ in their own home, and son Paul who at 17 is responsible for the 2-9 Moller in WPIK Congressional Plaza radio studio — I was advised to waste no time in inspecting the instrument.

At this time, I would like to emphasize **POINT ONE** for the prospective organ owner. Always consult someone, not a professional organ builder but someone who has already done what you are planning on doing. Professionals have one thing in mind, that is, church work where there is far more space available than in the average residence.



KINETIC BLOWER and relay share precious space in this small organ with potted plants behind the pipe chamber.



PAUL WHITE, age 17 and already a veteran organ technician, is here seen at work in the immaculate chamber.

Upon looking at the instrument, a four-ranker, I immediately noticed that though the instrument was built for average church use, the scalings of the pipework were not the typical narrow scalings being employed within the last few years, but that there might be a possibility for dual usage. Wind pressure was four inches, admittedly a far cry from the usual ten to fifteen inches of a theatre organ. The one tremulant was of the meager beater type which produced hardly a flutter. In addition, the organ chamber was some twelve feet in height, and all chests were on five-foot-high supports. I was, at that point, ready to abandon the entire project but my organ builders still insisted that the instrument would fit into a chamber seven feet deep, thirteen feet wide by seven and one-half feet high, which was the measurement I had taken and had planned to ask for as it represented half the space available in a room behind our recreation room. I had in years past managed to secure three of the seven feet for a chamber to house the hi-fi speakers and Leslie organ speaker which spoke into the recreation room through a grillework, so I secretly patted myself on the back for having had the foresight to ask for this, as an additional four feet if granted would not look as bad as an initial seven.

Having now tried the instrument, I found that the tone was very beautiful and the instrument ranks blended beautifully for a good ensemble—which shall be **POINT TWO** for the prospective organ purchaser. Since we are considering a small instrument, of not over five ranks, it is vitally important that *ensemble* be considered of paramount importance. One cannot afford any rank of solo quality which will not blend with

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SMALL ORGAN (continued)

others when used together. This is a luxury which, alas, must be left to those with the larger installations but by no means should hamper feeling toward smaller instruments.

Still unbelieving of the fact that this instrument could go into my allotted space, we looked at the blower which was of the Moller round kinetic type, running off of the 110-volt main. It was fairly quiet, not of the "corn shucker" variety which graces so many furnace rooms, and needed no soundproofing. The relay was of the direct electric Reiser type, so altogether, things were starting to add up to the remote possibility that there might be hope. At this point both Gil and Paul were prodding me to make an offer for the instrument, which I was somewhat reluctant to do, since my parents knew nothing whatsoever of my intentions. However, being reckless, I made a very modest offer to the organist of the church who was handling the disposition of the instrument, and from the look on his face, I pretty well calculated that my offer would be laughed right out of the next board meeting.

Having mustered the courage to inform my parents, Gil and Paul adroitly withdrew to let me go into the ring by myself. I dropped the bomb, the first reaction being nothing short of having me committed to an institution; however, after much pleading, begging, and promising, the necessary permission was finally granted. A few days later, a telephone call from the organist confirmed the fact that the organ was mine. I would like here to state POINT THREE of this lesson. Prices for organs of the church variety run far less than prices for theatre organs. There is no reason why a well-voiced rank of pipes on lower wind pressure than the theatre organ counterparts should not answer for average home use. Wind pressure doth not the theatre organ make, in terms of volume — especially when consideration is being given for home use. I continually observe ridiculous prices being asked and realized for inferior ranks of pipes, mass-produced by the big theatre organ builders, while many truly well-voiced ranks on lower wind pressures wind up in the scrap bin for want of ownership. Speech of a pipe in regards to rapidity so necessary for theatre organ playing is determined to a great degree by chest action. Therefore a hint to prospective buyers: make very reasonable offers. It will cost the church or hall from which you are purchasing the instrument often far more to have the organ disposed of, and in my area, the professional organ companies will often haul the instruments away for nothing. The church treasury still stands to gain, regardless of

what offer is made.

Removal of the instrument began on August 5, 1967. Beginning operations, I was thankful, and am so even to this day, that I managed to persuade my parents not to come to see the instrument in its original home. I am sure that if they had seen the instrument at that stage, their reaction would have spelled *finis* in no uncertain terms. With Paul supervising operations, the two of us managed to have the instrument disassembled in three days.

SPECIFICATIONS:

BRUBACHER 2-4 PIPE ORGAN

Built by Newcomer Pipe Organ Co.,
Washington, D. C. 1947

Reinstalled by Paul G. White 1967

| PEDAL | SWELL | | |
|------------------|--------------------------|--|--|
| 16' Bourdon | 16' Bourdon | | |
| 8' Open Diapason | 8' Flute | | |
| 8' Flute | 8' Viole | | |
| 8' Viole | 4' Flute | | |
| 4' Flute | 2½' Flute 12th | | |
| 8' Oboe Horn | 2' Piccolo | | |
| Great to Pedal | 8' Oboe | | |
| Swell to Pedal | Sw 16 | | |
| Swell to Pedal 4 | Sw 4 | | |
| | Unison Off | | |
| GREAT | | | |
| 8' Open Diapason | Tremulant (theatre type) | | |
| 8' Concert Flute | | | |
| 8' Viole | | | |
| 4' Octave | | | |
| 4' Flute | | | |
| 4' Violina | | | |
| 8' Oboe Horn | | | |
| Gt 16 | Open Diapason 85 pipes | | |
| Gt 4 | Flute 97 pipes | | |
| Sw to Gt 16 | String 85 pipes | | |
| Sw to Gt 8 | Oboe 73 pipes | | |
| Sw to Gt 4 | | | |
| Unison Off | | | |

ANALYSIS

| | |
|---------------|----------|
| Open Diapason | 85 pipes |
| Flute | 97 pipes |
| String | 85 pipes |
| Oboe | 73 pipes |

NOTES

- 1) Wind pressure: 4 inches. Tremulant does not affect low octaves of flute, string, diapason, and reed.
- 2) Stop tablets: Diapasons and Flutes, WHITE; Reeds, RED; Strings, BLUE; Couplers, BLACK; Unison Offs, GREEN; Tremulant, YELLOW.

Plans were drawn up for the chamber and the necessary materials were ordered. Being retired, my father was able to aid in the construction of the chamber.

When the first load of material arrived home the fact that a pipe organ was actually coming into the sanctity of our happy home seemed to hit like an atom bomb, rather than the condition that all the basement area was in for the next few weeks while assembly took place.

One of the promises I had made prior to being granted permission for the instrument to live with us was that I would waste no time in getting it playing. Having inspected all chests, which are of the Kilgen type, we found leather in excellent shape, but decided at that point to rewire everything except the relay itself. New color-coded cable was donated by a friend of the cause, which made the installation job a great deal simpler, so that when everything was installed, we had only four wiring errors in the entire instrument. So that no mitering of metal

pipes would be necessary, the bass extensions of the Viole and Diapason were mounted at sixty-degree angles on the back wall of the chamber. It was necessary to miter the four lowest bourdon pipes. The manual chests were of the individual unit type, and were installed on a platform twenty inches high, leaving enough space underneath for maintenance. In addition, all chest cables terminated into fifty connector plugs from the relay, making removal of any one component extremely easy. The swell shades were placed over the original grillework mentioned earlier and are operated from a single-bellows type motor which gives a slightly slower but very smooth swell, not of the step variety. At this point, I learned how to handle a propane torch, acid and solder, for there was much windline to connect. Both reservoirs were placed as close to the pipes as possible, but windline from the small reservoir which feeds the offsets and bass flute extension was run back outside the chamber in order to keep the floor in the chamber free to walk. At this point another tremulant was found, one of the theatre type, which upon trial proved successful beyond our farthest dreams.

The instrument was turned on for the first time the third week in October. Since that time, finishing operations have been in effect. The volume of the string was increased; the oboe has been improved. Alterations have been made to the console, providing more versatility, both for the playing of theatre and classical music. If I have any feelings of guilt or misgivings, it is because I dared to doubt the word of two experts in the field, the other being that I kept one devoted high school senior working many an hour originally allotted to homework.

The instrument was dedicated during Christmas week, and since that time everyone who has played or heard the instrument has been genuinely impressed with its ability to do justice to all forms of music. Perhaps I may add a harp or a vox humana as there is room in the chamber for two more ranks, but for the present I am content in the fact that for an expenditure including cost of the organ, of less than nine hundred dollars, I have an instrument which even when played full is livable within the confines of our 13x25-foot living room.

In closing, I had much help from several other chapter members, and I am afraid that the debt I owe all of them can never be fully repaid. I have been chided by many of my fellow organ-owning friends that I have joined the "Idiot Club." If having a pipe organ gives one the pleasure it has given me in the short time I have had it, I am indeed ready to enroll in that club as a life member.