

Theatre Organ - - Oriental Style

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On a partial travel grant from Cranbrook School, and also commissioned by the Fund for Peaceful Atomic Development to interview Japanese teachers and educators at the Japan Atomic Forum, my wife, Marion, and I left Detroit late in August for the Orient. Although we have travelled as a family of six over most of the remainder of the world, this was the most thrilling, revealing and challenging experience we have ever had. We travelled over 26,000 air miles and several thousand land miles having many contacts with educators, business and industrial people as well as professional groups: in addition we saw some of the most fantastic scenery to be seen anywhere. In Japan, Cambodia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Singapore, or anywhere in South-East Asia, the people were wonderful and most gracious in every way.

We spent two weeks in Japan and while in Tokyo we simply had to see the only Wurlitzer in Japan, located in the Mitsukoshi Department Store. After getting the name and address written in Japanese by the clerk at the New Otani Hotel, we took a taxi and arrived at the store in a few minutes, just in time to meet the

organist, Hiroshi Matsuzawa, who was preparing for his noon-hour concert. He is a most enthusiastic ATOE member and after exchanging formalities, he immediately invited us to sit with him as he played his concert. The store is comparable to Marshall Fields in Chicago with a central open area extending up several floors and ringed with huge columns of polished marble. On the ground floor is a beautiful piece of sculpture, the goddess Tennyo, executed by Gengen Sato. She is depicted descending lightly from heaven escorted by a Phoenix and wrapped in the seven colored clouds of Paradise. On the second floor is a balcony where the organ is located. The console is in the center flanked by the two chambers. As can be seen from the picture it is a piano style console with straight bolsters of stops above the three manuals. The organ sounds wonderful, with the music really rolling around in the central portion of the store that extends up several floors. The only complaint I can make is that the tremulants could be adjusted to a little more depth and speed. When Mr. Matsuyawa finished, he bowed to me and in his inimitable Japanese style gestured toward the console. So, the audience of about several hundred people gathered on the various levels were then listening to an additional 20 minute concert by me as I endeavor-



Bamboo Organ - Upper Section

ed to explore the possibilities of the Wurlitzer. I don't know how many recognized the selections I attempted, which included light opera, hits of the roaring twenties and some college songs, but they must have enjoyed it because there was a generous ovation as I left the console.

While in Japan, travelling from north to south, we rode on the Tokeida Bullet, a trip you must experience to appreciate. It is dead-smooth, travelling up to 136 miles per hour and takes you from Tokyo to Kyoto, a distance of 310 miles in just three hours. The gods must have smiled on us on our way to Kyoto for the weather had been overcast and rainy but as we passed Mt. Fuji, the clouds suddenly opened and there was what is possibly the most beautiful mountain in all the world -- Mt. Fuji -- rising as a symmetrical cone to a height of 12,385 feet with a crown of snow. It is truly magnificent.

If I get carried away with the beauty of the Japanese countryside and become side-tracked into a travelogue, I can only say that if you have the opportunity to go to Japan, don't miss it. Getting back to organs, I played a number of Japanese electronic instruments and they compare very favorably with most of their American counterparts.

Leaving Japan we went on to Taiwan and had a very pleasant surprise. It is not the backward decadent country one would expect. Although poverty exists, the people



HIROSHI MATSUZAWA, Organist 3-12 (R-20) Wurlitzer, Mitsukoshi Department Store, Tokyo, Japan.

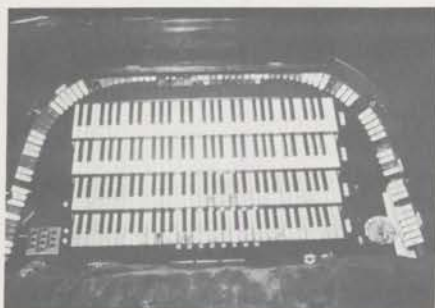


BAMBOO ORGAN—Lower section, one manual, 12 foot pedals, En chamade metal pipes are decorative fakes and are not used -- near Manila, Phillipines.

are progressive, hardworking and above all, seemed to be happy. They have not accepted any foreign aid for over three years and there is a self-determination evident that is very refreshing. Our next stop was the Philippines and here we were fortunate in seeing and hearing the famous Bamboo organ. It has a single manual with foot keyboard and is very melodic and pleasing. Its history dates back to 1818 when Father Diego Cera, member of Augustinian Recolet Friars began its construction. The 950 bamboo pipes used to make the pipes were covered for six months with beach sand to preserve them from attack of bamboo bugs. The work was completed in 1821. However the organ was badly damaged in 1862 by an earthquake and again in 1882 by torrential rains. In 1917 Father Fanile, a Belgian missionary, completed the repair with the help of the Las Pinas people. In 1932 an electric blower was installed and after the second World War the organ was repaired and again most recently in 1962. It is located in the Las Pinas Church, Rizal Province.

Continuing our trip to Hong Kong, Macao, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, we could not locate any other theatre organs although Japanese electronic organs were in evidence all along the way. On our way back to the United States we stopped off in Honolulu for a few days to catch our breath and investigated the theatre organs there.

The Waikiki Theatre organ, a 4-16 Morton had its console damaged by



4-16 Robert Morton Console, Princess Theatre, Honolulu, Hawaii

a storm but luckily the organ chambers were not touched. Through the help of interested people the console has been removed to the basement and the management has provided a workroom and at that time the refurbishing of the console was almost completed. In the meantime Mr. John DeMello, another theatre organ minded individual, most interested in preserving the theatre organ, has temporarily installed the latest and largest Lowrey electronic organ complete with all the goodies of toy counter and percussions, including a piano stop that cannot be distinguished from the real thing. He has hooked the sound output into the theatre speakers and the resulting sound is tremendous and almost indistinguishable from a real pipe organ. Mr. DeMello plays regular opening concerts and intermission bits and on the day I was there he invited me to fill in with a 20-minute pre-show rendition complete with spotlights and ever-changing flood lights. The theatre is in beautiful condition and was redecorated a couple of years ago. It is most gratifying to see a person like Mr. DeMello giving every boost he can to preserving the theatre organ.

Through some contacts I had in Honolulu I was able to get into the Princess Theatre which has a 4-16 Robert Morton. George Lake, the manager of the Princess and Hawaii Theatres is another theatre-organ oriented person who is deeply interested in the reviving and maintaining of the original theatre pipe organ. With only about three hours to departure time for the mainland, Mr. Lake met me at the Princess and after pressing in proper sequence the nine buttons of the electronic lock on the console to activate the blower, he then turned the organ over to me and I had an exhilarating two hours exploring the capabilities of this instrument. The Princess Theatre Organ has been under the diligent and persevering care of Richard Harger and Roger Angel and this fine instrument is being brought up to mint condition. The

chambers and pipes are in excellent shape and the young men have recovered the keys of two manuals, with plans to complete the remaining two as soon as possible. The organ speaks wonderfully and is very majestic in its coverage and tonal range. It is not as well unified as the usual theatre organ but by judicious use of couplers it is amazing what can be accomplished. The theatre is the sole remaining building in the block which has been converted to a parking area and shortly the Princess will succumb to the wrecker's ball. However, the Hawaii Theatre is only a couple of blocks away and Mr. Lake plans to move the organ to this theatre. (The Hawaii organ was removed many years ago).

Again, I wish to propose orchids to Mr. DeMello and Mr. Lake for their interest, dedication and cooperation in the preservation and use of the theatre organ.

Returning to the travelogue bit, if you ever have an opportunity to visit the Orient and Far East, do so. It is an experience you will never forget. We saw things you only read about in story and history books. We saw native girl pearl divers, blood-red hot springs, temples overgrown with centuries of tropical vegetation, king cobras 18 feet long, the famous floating markets of Bangkok, outstanding and beautiful temples, native markets where any kind of food can be purchased from french-fried grasshoppers to live snakes killed before your eyes and popped into cauldrons to make a soup; from geisha girls to communal hot baths where both sexes bathe au-natural; the paradoxes of the cleanest and the dirtiest; the most modern and the ancient; the biggest and the smallest; the ugliest to the most beautiful; from a statue crudely carved from a rock to a solid gold statue of Buddha, several times life size and beautifully executed. It is an area full of surprises and above all, the friendliness and graciousness of the people will make an impression upon you that you will never forget.