



A 'WURLI' GOES TO COLLEGE

Story by Bill Luttrell

Photos by Rollin Robb

Vincennes University in Vincennes, Indiana is probably the first Junior College in the United States to have a Wurlitzer Theatre pipe organ installed on its campus. Here, in a historical, old city of 20,000 people, a three manual, ten rank Wurlitzer has found a permanent home and a real love affair with the University administration, faculty, students and the community. The credit for the "Wurlis" purchase must go to Richard (Dick) Ertel, a Professor of Music at Vincennes University. Dick is a professional organist and is well known in the mid-West (having played organ and piano for WGN-TV and radio in Chicago while he was in the U. S. Army). He is now director of the Music Department at Vincennes University.

The idea of installing a theatre pipe organ in the Robert E. Green Auditorium on the University campus occurred to Dick on almost the first day he began teaching at the University. Dick knew he must first find an organ and then convince the University officials that this would be a sensible and proper kind of instrument for the auditorium which is used for convocations, concerts, dramas, dances, dinners, religious programs, as well as rehearsal hall for band camps, testing and many other diverse functions. Only a theatre organ could possibly satisfy these varied needs and he hoped to find a Wurlitzer.

In the May 1965 issue of "The Diapason" Dick saw a Wurlitzer advertised for sale. He knew that if the price was right this could be the instrument for the school. It was a three manual, ten rank organ in a private home in Birmingham, Michigan. The owner, James Widdis, was selling the organ to make room for a larger instrument which he had purchased for installation in his new home. Dick knew he would have to act quickly so he called the owner. The price seemed right so he went immediately to see Dr. Beckes, president of the University, and told him of his hope: a pipe organ for the auditorium.



Dr. Beckes was hesitant at first but after experiencing Dick's enthusiasm for the organ he agreed to ask the Board of Trustees for approval to buy the instrument. Dick had acquired some theatre organ tapes which he handed to Dr. Beckes to help convince the board.

The members were convinced; Dick got his Wurlitzer.

It was in late June when Bernie Sampson, a maintenance department employee, and Dick started to Michigan for the organ. After two days of packing pipes, loading relays, console and blower, they realized that they could not possibly get the complete instrument on the truck they had brought. So, after two more trips and three truckloads, plus the wonderful help and hospitality of the owner and his wife, the organ was headed for its new home.

It was at this point that Dick enlisted the help of four others to help with installation: George Smith (a classical organist and druggist), Paul Struck (radio announcer), Bill Luttrell and Terry Parr (students). All were theatre organ lovers and gave many nights of their time for over a year helping Dick in the installation of the instrument. Without their help, and especially that of Mr. Smith, the organ would have had a much longer period of silence before its beautiful sounds could be heard.

As soon as the pipe chambers were completed the crew began installing the monster, having more than their share of cut fingers, sore back and skinned knuckles that go with the installation of massive parts such as blowers, pipe racks and chests — not to mention the console. Paul Struck was the only one of the crew that had any experience with pipe organ installations.

Meanwhile, as work progressed, the citizenry became curious and rumors started. Some were negative. A few people in Vincennes called the project "Ertel's Folly" and doubted that the organ would ever play.

Finally in December, 1965, the time arrived when the chests and ducting were in. No pipes in place yet because the dirt had to be blown from the pipe holes first. The switch was thrown for the first time and the damndest sound imaginable burst forth. It was as if a hurricane had struck; there were so many air leaks that back to soldering went the crew. Then, a bit of luck; Mr. Glenn Underhill, a professional pipe organ installer, offered to help for a few days in order to speed progress. It seems Glenn loved the theatre organ himself and was anxious to see the Wurlis get a proper and speedy installation. That was when Terry Parr joined the crew and things moved more quickly.

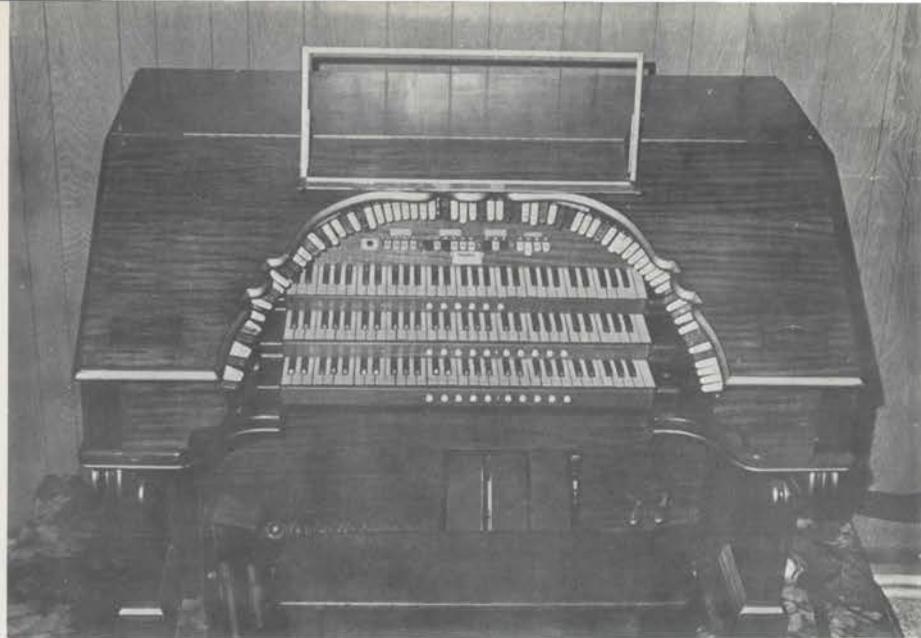
In the spring of 1966 the organ was partly operative, and with so much skepticism about the instrument rampant, Dick decided to give the Wurlis a chance to prove itself. The occasion was a "capping" ceremony for the nursing program with a reception held immediately afterward. After playing for the ceremony on a well known make of electronic, Dick moved to the back of the auditorium where the Wurlis was installed and the big moment was at hand. Dick says it was as though



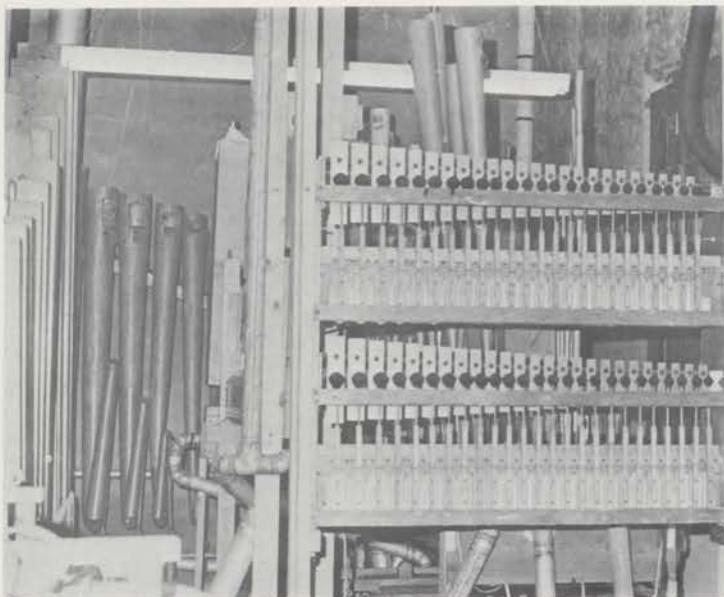
A PUMPHOUSE NO MORE—The home of the Wurlitzer was once a city water department pump station. It's now among the 'halls of ivy', an acoustically good university auditorium where a theatre organ sounds.



UP THE RAMP! This is how the regulators, switch stacks and relays, tremulants, and chests were hoisted up to the chambers.



THE CONSOLE — The 3-manuals make this 10 ranker something special. Wurlitzer normally started with 3-manual consoles on 11 rank organs. Note the exquisite finish.



(Left) The Chrysoglott Harp. Some Pedal Tibia pipes are at the left and behind the Harp can be seen folded Ophicleide which becomes the Tuba (above Harp) at 8' C. Above is one of three fluorescent lights which provide plenty of illumination for chamber work.



(Right) Dick Ertel (left) and George Smith examine Vox Humana pipes. Note the folded-over (mitered) String pipes above. That one was to beat low ceilings in a home installation.

the Wurli knew that now was the time to prove itself, for with only five ranks going, and none of the percussions playing, it sounded beautiful. No sticking keys, no ciphers — just beautiful sounds. After just one tune the Wurli had sold itself to the administration, students and the guests. An interest which has grown continuously started then and there. The theatre pipe organ has helped to bring recognition to a small but live-wire music department, and it started with the organ's first performance. Since then, the organ has created fantastic interest on the part of high school and college students. Almost every student or community function held in the auditorium brings a request for Dick to play the organ.

The organ is now completely installed although Dick says he will never stop working to improve and enlarge the

instrument. A set of English Post Horn pipes, built to Wurlitzer specifications, has been ordered from the Durst Organ Supply Co. and will be playing when this story hits print. And it is hoped that a set of Oboe Horn Pipes can be purchased, thus making it a 12-rank organ.

After a standing ovation following the dedication concert, students and members of the newly formed Vincennes Theatre Organ Club asked Dick to record an album on the Mighty Wurlitzer. This he has agreed to do but wants to wait until the new pipes are in and adjusted. We feel that Dick Ertel will become one of the best-loved and best-known theatre organists anywhere but don't take our word for it. Listen to his album. When completed, it will be advertised in this magazine.

We do not want to overlook the educational value of the organ. Dick feels a good musician is one who has the ability to play all types of music well. This is why he first requires students to gain thorough training in Bach and the other classics plus a reasonable understanding of theory and arranging. Then they are given the opportunity to study the interpretative or theatre type of music.

So goes the story of a Wurlitzer originally installed in New York (exact location unknown), a group of devoted theatre organ enthusiasts, and a Music Department in Vincennes, Indiana, which has shown the way for other colleges throughout the country to have theatre organs installed on their campuses.

Specifications appear on page 40.

it works and sounds perfect. We were happy to welcome at this meeting a visiting ATOE'er from Cleveland, Ohio, Mr. Chuck Galloway, who just happened to make the proper contacts and discovered that a chapter actually did exist in Florida.

We were deeply saddened at the passing of our charter member Clark Fiers, a veteran theatre organist of the highest calibre. Many pages have been written relating his career which started during the golden days of theatre organ and quite naturally he offered much encouragement when chapter interests was manifest in Miami, his home for the



past thirty years. His innumerable friends everywhere shall miss him greatly. He died April 8th, 1969.

—G. W. Gerhart



Letters to the Editor concerning all aspects of the theatre organ hobby are encouraged. Send them to the editor concerned. Unless it's stated clearly on the letter "not for publication," the editors feel free to reproduce it, in whole or part.

Address: P. O. Box 2329

Livonia, Michigan 48150

To: Theatre Organ Bombarde Editor

Subject: The big Move at the Oriental (for the February 20 "Farewell to the Oriental" Show)

Dear Sir:

Much has been said about our Oriental Show, but let me tell you the story behind the show. I'm still not sure how we pulled so many things together in so short a time — it was our CATOE teamwork that put it over.

A few dedicated organ buffs like myself had been working on the organ for some months (we didn't know it had been reported unrepairable) when I received a phone call from the theatre owner that the theatre was to be piggy-backed starting in about two months hence. He was sympathetic in saying that our work was appreciated, but we might as well stop. Not knowing what additional problems would confront us, we asked CATOE if they would be interested in putting on a "Farewell Performance" instantly. They had no sooner said "yes," when the theatre management called saying that the screen and curtain were to be moved forward — directly over the console, forever hiding it and the lift.

This meant that we had to move the console off the lift at once or give up the use of the organ. With the complete roster of CATOE members in my possession, I began my desperate search for strong men who could lift the huge monster. Fourteen brave men volunteered one cold January midnight, and we made the move without disconnecting the cable. We did this by cutting a slit in a tile wall which allowed us sufficient cable slack.

Everything was fine until someone noticed that the console couldn't be seen from about one half of the balcony. What to do? We built a platform for the console which was not high enough. So we added on to it to finally make it about 34 inches from the

VINCENNES UNIVERSITY 3-10 WURLITZER STOPLIST

PEDAL, 10 Stopkeys

16' Ophicleide
16' Tibia
16' Bourdon
8' Tuba
8' Horn Diapason
8' Tibia
8' Clarinet
*8' Cello (and Post Horn)
8' Flute
4' Octave (Horn Diapason)

ACCOMPANIMENT, 25 Stopkeys

16' Viol (TC)
16' Vox (TC)
8' Tuba
8' Horn Diapason
8' Tibia
8' Clarinet
8' Kinura
**8' String (now English Post Horn)
8' Viol (and String)
8' Celeste
8' Flute
8' Vox
4' Piccolo (Tibia)
4' Viol
4' String Celeste
4' Flute
4' Vox
2 2/3 Twelfth (Flute)
2' Piccolo (Flute)
Chrysoglott & Wood Harp (wired together)
†Snare Drum
†Tambourine
†Castanets
†Tom-Tom
†Chinese Block

GREAT, 29 Stopkeys

16' Ophicleide
16' Bass (Horn Diapason)
16' Tibia
16' Viol (TC)
8' Tuba
†8' Horn Diapason
8' Tibia
†8' Clarinet
8' Kinura
8' String (Post Horn)
†8' Viol and String
†8' String Celeste
†8' Flute
†8' Vox
4' Clarion (Tuba)
4' Octave (Horn Diapason)
4' Piccolo (Tibia)
4' Viol
4' String Celeste
4' Flute
2 2/3 Twelfth (Flute)
2' Fifteenth (String)
2' Piccolo (Flute)
1 3/5 Tierce (Flute)
Chimes
Marimba
Xylophone
Glockenspiel
†Chrysoglott and Wood Harp

SOLO, 13 Stopkeys

16' Ophicleide
16' Tibia
8' Tuba
8' Horn Diapason
8' Tibia
8' Clarinet
8' Kinura

8' Post Horn
4' Clarinet
4' Piccolo (Tibia)
Chimes
Xylophone
Glockenspiel

Pedal, 1st and 2nd Touch

†Bass Drum
†Kettle Drum
†Crash Cymbal
†Cymbals

Accompaniment, 2nd Touch

8' Tuba
8' Horn Diapason
8' Clarinet
†Chimes
Xylophone
†Triangle

Great, 2nd Touch

16' Ophicleide
8' Tibia
8' Clarinet

Tremulants

Main
Solo
Vox
Tibia

Pistons

Pedal — 3
Accompaniment — 10
Great — 10
Solo — 6
7 Toe Studs
2 Swell Pedals
Crescendo Pedal

*Cello and Post Horn wired together.

**The String stopkey now controls the Post Horn addition. The String has been wired to the Viol Stopkey which now controls both string voices.

"TC" indicates that the lowest note for the stop plays at tenor C, one octave above the lowest C on the manual.

†Located in great chamber.

ENGLAND

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