



THE SECOND GOLDEN AGE OF THEATRE ORGAN

THE GRANDE BARTON PIPE ORGAN IN THE VIRGINIA THEATRE

Story by Ray Brubacher

Photos by Ray Brubacher and Richard C. Sullivan

In 1931 the Bartola Musical Instrument Company of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, built and shipped what was to be its final theatre pipe organ, to the Paramount Theatre in Newport News, Virginia. This instrument a three manual ten rank installation was installed in two chambers, one on each side of the stage. The console, one of the rare Bartons with a waterfall design was installed on a Barton lift which did not require the usual deep orchestra pit to house the console when it was not in use. Through the years the organ was used on a fairly regular basis but after the second world war it was rarely heard. Sometime within the last ten years there was an attempt made to do some restoration work on the instrument, but until the spring of 1968 the organ sat dormant as if awaiting a miracle to happen and last year one did happen, one which its instigators are still not quite sure just how it did occur.

The Virginia Theatre located on First Street, just off of the George Washington Memorial Parkway in Alexandria, Virginia, was built in the late forties as a motion picture house, but with a fairly deep stage and two dressing rooms. Its designers left a sizeable space behind the walls on each side of the proscenium as if intended for an organ installation however small it might have to be.

The Potomac Valley Chapter of A.T.O.E. was formed in 1960 and one of its first members was Woodrow W. Wise Jr., then the manager of the Virginia. Woody as he is better known, first discussed the remote possibility of an organ installation in the theatre with the author some years ago and at that time it was decided that within reason,

an organ installation in this theatre was a distinct possibility. It remained to find an organ suitable to the needs of the eleven hundred seat house.

In the Spring of 1968 while pursuing several leads on available organs it was learned that the 3-10 Barton in the Paramount Theatre in Newport News, about 180 miles south of Alexandria, was for sale. However, before any negotiations could be made with the Paramount, someone had to be found who would take charge of the removal and the installation of the instrument should it be purchased. That person was soon found in a young man by the name of Paul G. White who then at the age of seventeen had already had two installations to his credit. With a director secured, the Potomac Valley Chapter stepped in to lend its support with enough manpower to handle whatever situation would arise.

The organ was purchased and removal began at once. The most difficult removal maneuver was the taking out of the blower and relay located on the third story of the theatre building. These had to be removed with the aid of a crane crew, possibly one of the reasons why no one had ever attempted removal before.

In the meantime, the theatre's architect and engineering staff were called in to make the necessary changes in the new home of the organ. This involved the construction of a large chamber out of an unused storage room just off of stage right, the preparation of two pipe chambers on the right of the stage, and one on the left above the console. It was decided that the console would roll out from an alcove at stage left onto a large platform and that a moving door

would go up into the ceiling of the console room to allow the entire console to roll out in full view of the theatre audience. The blower was placed in a room in back of the stage separated by a thick brick wall so that it could not be heard in the theatre.

At this time it was also decided that the organ's pedal bass range should be extended to give a more powerful low end when the occasion called for it so two sixteen foot pedal ranks, a tuba mirabilis and a gross flute were secured from what was remaining of the Moller installation in the Palace Theatre in Washington, D. C. These ranks consisting of twenty four pipes each were erected immediately behind the movie screen at stage left.

The relay stacks were placed in position at the far left of the stage and will be enclosed in a room when installation is completed. Upon graduation from high school Paul went to work full time on the rebuilding and reno-





Bob St. John and Gil White operate on a static regulator while Hank Poole wires the relay.



Soldering windline can be fun! George Johnson has his doubts.



Marvin Lautzenheiser (left) and Paul White at work on part of the console cable.



Woody Wise, ass't. general manager of Alexandria Amusement Corp., asked ATOE President Al Mason to speak at the invitational performance.

vation of all component parts. Each chest was taken apart and checked and completely rewired. All leather everywhere was examined and any that was found faulty was replaced.

The call for volunteer help went out and thus began a program of literally thousands of hours of manpower given to restore and reinstall the organ. Work crews assembled at the theatre on a regular Friday night basis from the time the theatre closed until well after sunup the following morning. In the final months of installation, it was decided to work both Saturdays and Sundays from 7 a.m. to matinee time in the afternoon.

By this time, Post Horn fever had taken its full effect on the powers that be and it was decided that the eleventh full rank on the organ would be this brass stop. A Dennison Post Horn which had originally been on a Barton organ was purchased and room was found in the already very crowded solo chamber to install it. Since the main and solo pipe rooms were not big enough to accommodate the wood diapnone, the bourdon, and the diapason extension, these were housed in the reconverted store room on the lower level of stage right. The complete percussion division with traps was also installed in this chamber but very close to the swell shades so that the sound would be transmitted directly into the auditorium. A beautiful ornamental grillwork extending from floor to ceiling was installed on both sides of the stage and the console alcove door was covered with the same pattern of grillwork to match the chambers.

While all of this work was in progress, the console was taken completely apart and was re-leathered. Since this instrument did not possess any couplers, it was decided to add a sub and super octave coupler to the great and solo manual, an accompaniment super coupler to that manual, and a great to pedal 8 foot coupler and a pedal octave coupler to that division. New stop tablets were made to look like the originals, and the console was redone in the ornate gold gilt typical of many Bartons. A new Howard seat was ordered to supplement the standard bench which was rebuilt just in case of a special preference.

April 16th of this year saw the organ presented to the public for the first time in a special program featuring Jimmy Boyce at the organ for a pops concert and silent film feature. On April 30th, the organ was presented on a grander scale with Boyce at the console and the noted traveler and cinematographer Andre de la Varre was on

stage to present his most recent film "A Grand Tour of Eastern Europe." Future attractions will include Jim Boyce in a silent film feature and concert on May 18th, and on May 25th, Ray Brubacher will present THE MARK OF ZORRO with Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.

The installation of this instrument in one of the most beautiful motion picture showcases in this part of the country is truly a dream come true for theatre organ enthusiasts. As it now stands, Virginia is the only state in the union to now have five theatre pipe organs in theatres being played on a regular basis. They are the Virginia in Alexandria, the Byrd in Richmond, the Mosque in Richmond, the Loews in Richmond, and the American in Roanoke. It is indeed fitting that a vote of sincere appreciation be extended to the following people for their devotion above and beyond the call of duty in making the Virginia Theatre Barton installation the pride of the area. The Virginia Theatre Organ Crew consists of the following members: Paul G. White, Henry "Bank" Poole, George Johnson, Paul Johnson, Bill Alexander, Barry Washington, Bob St. John, Marvin Lautzenheiser, Erwin Young, Gil White, Charles Affelder, Ray Brubacher, Tommy Landrum, Sherman Hjort, Robert Wise, Dave Snyder, Woody Wise, Sr., and Ralph Rodda, staff member of the Alexandria Amusement Corporation.

A special note of appreciation is extended to Mr. Harmon Martin, general manager of Alexandria Amusement Corporation for his interest and enthusiasm for the entire project.



Exposed pipework at stage rear. Tuba mirabilis and gross flute.



The Woody Wise organ, a rare Barton waterfall console. The flick of a switch and it disappears into the wall recess on a specially designed track.

SPECIFICATION FOR THE VIRGINIA THEATRE BARTON PIPE ORGAN

*indicates addition

PEDAL ORGAN

32' Acoustic Bass*
16' Tuba Mirabilis*
16' Diaphone
16' Grossflute*
16' Bourdon
16' Ophicleide
8' Diaphonic Diapason
8' Flute
8' Tibia Clausa
8' Tuba
8' Clarinet
8' Cello
4' Octave
Bass Drum
Cymbal
Kettle Drum
Crash Cymbal
Pedal to Pedal 4'*
Great to Pedal 8'*

ACCOMPANIMENT

16' Bourdon
16' Contre Viole T.C.
16' Vox Humana T.C.
8' Diaphonic Diapason
8' Flute
8' Tibia Clausa
8' Vox Humana
8' Clarinet
8' Orchestral Oboe
8' Tuba
8' Kinura
8' Violin
8' Violin Celeste
4' Octave
4' Flute
4' Tibia Piccolo
4' Vox Humana
4' Viole
4' Octave Celeste
2 2/3' Flute Twelfth
2' Piccolo
8' Harp Chrysoglott
Snare Drum
Tambourine
Castinets
Chinese Block
Tom tom
Accomp Octave 4'*
Solo to Accomp 8'*

GREAT

16' Diaphone
16' Bourdon
16' Post Horn T.C.*
16' Ophicleide
16' Contre Viole T.C.
16' Tibia Clausa T.C.
16' Vox Humana T.C.
8' Diaphonic Diapason
8' Flute
8' Tibia Clausa
8' Post Horn*
8' Tuba
8' Vox Humana
8' Orchestral Oboe
8' Kinura
8' Clarinet
8' Violin
8' Violin Celeste
4' Octave
4' Tibia Piccolo
4' Flute
4' Octave Celeste
4' Clarion
4' Viole
2' Fifteenth
2 2/3' Tibia Twelfth
2 2/3' Flute Twelfth
2' Tibia Piccolo
1 3/5' Tierce
Great to Great 16'*
Great to Great 4'*
8' Harp Chrysoglott
8' Xylophone
4' Glockenspiel
4' Orchestra Bells
8' Chimes

SOLO

16' Diaphone
16' Ophicleide
8' Diaphonic Diapason
8' Tuba
8' Orchestral Oboe
8' Post Horn*
8' Tuba
8' Tibia Clausa
8' Kinura
4' Octave
4' Piccolo
4' Clarion
8' Xylophone
4' Glockenspiel
4' Orchestra Bells
8' Cathedral Chimes
Solo to Solo 16'*
Solo to Solo 4'*

SECOND TOUCH STOPS ON BACKRAIL

PEDAL
Bass Drum 5 on solo with cancel
Cymbal 3 on pedal with cancel
Kettle Drum 9 toe pistons for special effects such as horse hoofs, bird call, bells, etc.
Crash Cymbal

ACCOMPANIMENT
8' Tuba
8' Clarinet
8' Diaphonic Diapason
8' Xylophone
8' Chimes
Triangle

GREAT
16' Ophicleide
8' Clarinet
8' Tibia Clausa

TREMULANTS
Main
Solo
Tuba
Tibia
Vox Humana

PISTONS (manual)
9 on accomp with cancel

ANALYSIS OF RANKS

Tibia Clausa	85 pipes	Orchestral Oboe	61 pipes
Tuba	85 pipes	Kinura	61 pipes
Tuba Mirabilis	24 pipes	Grossflute	24 pipes
Diaphone	85 pipes	Post Horn	61 pipes
Flute	97 pipes	Vox Humana	61 pipes
Violin	85 pipes	Clarinet	61 pipes
Violin Celeste	73 pipes		

DISPOSITION OF RANKS OF PIPES AND PERCUSSIONS IN CHAMBER

SOLO CHAMBER — left side of stage above console
Tuba Horn (including 16' extension)

Tibia Clausa
English Post Horn
Kinura
Vox Humana
side of stage upper level
Diaphonic Diapason
Concert Flute
Violin
Violin Celeste
Clarinet
Orchestral Oboe

MAIN CHAMBER — right side of stage upper level
Diaphonic Diapason
Concert Flute
Violin
Violin Celeste
Clarinet
Orchestral Oboe

PEDAL EXTENSION AND PERCUSSION CHAMBER — right side of stage lower level

16' Diaphone (wood) low twelve pipes of diapason
16' Bourdon (wood) low twelve pipes of flute unit
8' Diapason (metal) low twelve pipes of 8 foot stop
Chimes, Glockenspiel, Chrysoglott, and Xylophone plus toy counter.

EXPOSED PIPEWORK AT STAGE REAR LEFT OF PICTURE SCREEN

16' Tuba Mirabilis (unmiteder) 24 pipes
16' Grossflute (open wood) 12 pipes

GEORGE WRIGHT RETURNS TO ROCHESTER

by Lloyd E. Klos

It is a common axiom in the Flower City that a musician does not appear in concert in consecutive years, with notable exceptions of Roger Williams or Fred Waring. To do so only invites succeeding smaller audiences. However, in the case of George Wright, who appeared at the Auditorium Theatre 4-22 Wurlitzer on April 19, the audience almost filled the house, in spite of his appearance here only eleven months ago. What's more, he was competing with the Fred Waring audience which almost filled the Eastman Theatre up the street.

George rode the console up into the spotlight with the sprightly Vincent Youmans' "Hallelujah!" with plenty of brass. Doing his own introduction of numbers, spiced with the inimitable Wright humor, he stated that he had been swimming in California the previous day in 80-degree temperature, but on arising in his Rochester hotel room, looked outside at a thin mantle of snow. This disparity of weather was reflected in "April Showers" and "Let It Snow", the latter dedicated to his old crony from his radio days on the NBC "Prudential Show," Rochesterian Eddie Dunn.

Although we couldn't see any evidence of perspiration on cool George, he said he wanted to get out of his "wet tuxedo". Second half began with his rendition of a 6/8 rollicker from an early Marx Brothers movie, "Cosi-Cosa." The artist, now dressed in white suit, black turtle-neck sweater and boots, did a thoroughly moving "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes". With help from the audience, he did several variations on organist Lloyd del Castillo's "How Dry I Am" with tunes which include it, such as "Skaters Waltz", "How High the Moon", "Man On a Flying Trapeze", "La Paloma", "Home on the Range", and "High Noon." More than variations, it seemed the theme was used to bridge the songs.

After recognition of Eddie Dunn, who was in the audience, he wound up with the regular program with "American Bolero", a number quite closely paralleling Ravel's "Bolero" with its thematic repetition, increasing intensity and volume. A standing ovation by the appreciative audience, some of whom came from Michigan, Ohio, Massachusetts and Canada, was rewarded by "I'll See You Again" and "Good Night, Sweetheart".

It was an evening well invested, and this reviewer hopes it will be an annual event.