

"But — In a Bike Shop?"

This story was made possible by material submitted by Al Rossiter and Walter Mahns Jr., with a special salute to the Red Bank, N.J., "Daily Register" and its feature writer, Phyllis Spiegel.

by Peg Nielsen

When Walter Mahns Jr., of the Mahns Bros. Bicycle Shop (near Eatontown, N. J.), saw an advertisement in the local paper back in Sept., 1967 offering a Robert Morton theatre organ for sale, he wasted no time. Walter, who recalled these organs in their heyday, used to "go to hear the organist accompany silent movies, not to see the films" in a nearby but long-gone theatre; and his son, Robert, a local organist and New York chapter ATOE member, soon had the organ loaded and rolling. Moving the organ required five men, two trucks and a station wagon. Each of the two pipe cabinets measures seven feet wide by five feet deep by five and a half feet high. Then, there were the 16-foot pipes and the large console itself plus the "additions." Somehow it ended up in the bicycle shop.

The organ was first intended to go into the home of Walter Jr. for his daughter's use, but because the console was too large for the space available, it was decided to install it in the bicycle store.

The result? There may be only one place in the world where you can buy a bicycle or have one repaired and enjoy a live organ recital at the same time.

THREE GENERATIONS of Mahns gather around the organ console. Playing is Robert, while his dad, Walter Jr., is distracted from a "rush job" by the music. Granddad, Walter Sr., parks on a spare pipe chest and looks on in seeming disbelief.



LITTLE DO THEY KNOW that inside this innocent-looking building lurks a roaring beast! The shop facade gives passers-by no inkling.

"In addition to being one of the largest bicycle stores on the East Coast, we also believe we are the only one in the nation with a pipe organ. There's a lot in common between bicycling and playing the organ — pedalling for instance," says Walter Jr.

The bicycle store is owned jointly by Mr. Louis Mahns and his brother Walter Jr., although it was founded by

Walter Sr. in Monmouth county in 1904. He is still active in the store.

Robert, 26, and his father, Walter Mahns Jr., acquired the organ through a "For Sale" ad in the Red Bank "Daily Register" from John Watson, organist at the Presbyterian Church in Rumson, N. J.

Built in 1927 by the Robert Morton Organ Co. of Van Nuys, Calif., "opus 3040, model 49D", was originally a 4-rank "Fotoplayer" with an automatic dual roll player. It was installed in 1927 in the orchestra pit of Loew's 125th Street theatre in Harlem, N. Y., at an estimated cost of \$8,000. Like all Morton Fotoplayer it was designed with a low silhouette, for pit installation.

Watson bought the instrument and removed it from the theatre in 1932. He discarded the roll-playing mechanism and enlarged the voice complement from four to six ranks of pipes. He sold the organ to the Mahns in 1967.

"Fortunately," says Robert, "this building has excellent acoustics. Despite the concrete floor and reflecting walls, plaster ceilings and lots of space, the sound doesn't 'bounce around'."



A graduate of Trenton State College, where he majored in music, Robert teaches music in the Howell Township school system and piano privately. He is organist at a Farmingdale church and a "straight" organ roars in the cellar of his home. Robert burned the midnight oil for three weeks with the help of his father and uncle until the myriad parts were set in place and ready for assembling. Then came the "buzzing out" of scrambled cables, laying of wind conductor and setting up the blower.

"I'd worked with church organs for five years," he said, "and through much reading and experimentation, the tremendous assembly job was finally accomplished — months later."

The men worked from 8:00 pm to 1:00 or 2:00 am every night, and on Sundays after church. They tested and checked thousands of wires and assembled the control mechanisms for seven sets of pipes. And they built a third chamber for the additional 3 ranks.

Many late night work sessions during the installation did not help waist lines, admits Robert, too many pastrami sandwiches and lots of coke were consumed to confound "girth control."

The first of several mishaps occurred when a 6' x 7' plate glass window broke while the crew was moving the console into the store. That was the most serious accident and, luckily, no one was injured.

Walter Mahns Sr., founder of the shop, is strictly a "bicycle man" and he was usually very patient when his "boys" were working on the organ. "But sometimes," says Robert, "we would catch him shaking his head in utter disbelief."

After almost one and one-half years of tracing wires, running wind lines and

releathering, the organ boasts seven playing ranks plus a 16', 30-note Violone pedal extension, and is soon to have another rank added. Each of the two original wooden "swellbox" cases contain two ranks of pipes, while the 16' pedal pipes, percussions, and newer additions are contained in the third chamber built along-side the two stained walnut swellboxes. The "wall of music" from the rear of the store, with sound enhanced by fine "live" acoustics, is unmistakably that rich, deep "Morton sound."



The console adds up to a puzzle. It's definitely unlike the usual Morton style 49 keydesk. We showed this photo to a former Morton factory employee and he identified it as the console shell used with models 75 and 85, 6 and 8 rankers. This one had been altered to house the roll-playing mechanism.

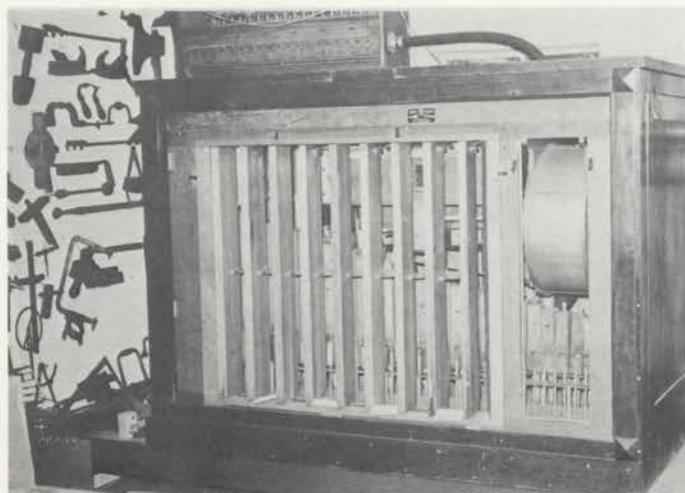
The console is unusual for a model 49 Morton; the stop keys, instead of extending around the horseshoe, are grouped in double rows at the extremes of the curve, and the positioning of the stops on the horseshoe as relayed to the manuals which control them, is sometimes more "straight" than theatrical. This gives rise to the suspicion that perhaps there was a switch in consoles somewhere along the line. Walter Mahns Jr. doesn't think so.

He says, "As far as we know the console is original. The Accompaniment stops are on the left, bottom end of the rail, and the Accompaniment traps are directly above (yellow stop keys). On the upper right end of the horseshoe is the Pedal department, and the lower right stop rail has the Solo stops. All switches are contained in the console except for those controlling additions. Small buttons across the backboard are traps. Combination buttons, added by Mr. Watson, are not now adjustable but they will be in the near future."

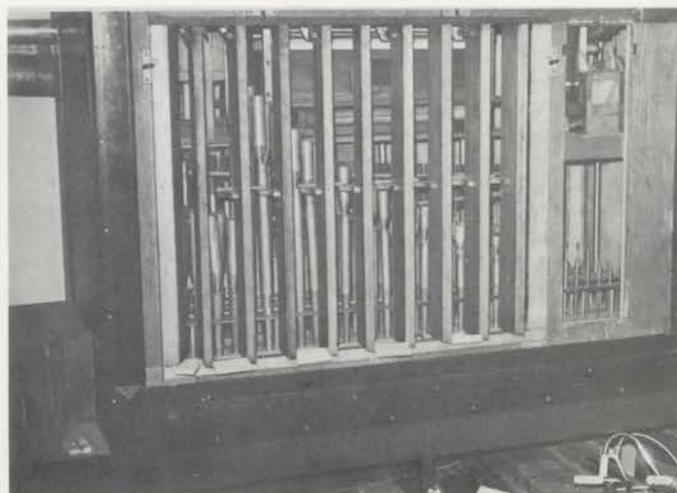
All pipes in the two pit swellboxes are original: Tibia Clausa, Vox Humana, Horn Diapason and Violin Celeste. Mr. Watson added the Wurlitzer Concert Flute (61 pipes) outside.

The String is identified as a "Violin Celeste," although it is the only string on the organ. Normally a "celeste" works with another stop of the same tonal family. Detuned slightly, it enhances the "in-tune" relative with its "shimmer." But here the "celeste" is working entirely alone. The String pipe-work is of a smaller scale than the usual violin and this may be the reason for calling it a "celeste." It is tuned "in". It's original, too, because the switch stacks are also lettered "Violin Celeste."

Organs which have "additions" sometimes end up with voices where they aren't needed. The Mahns' organ has a Kinura among its Accompaniment voices but no Kinura where it's more at home—clowning on the Solo manual. When asked how the raspy little stop weaseled in among the accompaniment stops, Robert replied, "We placed the Kinura on the Accompaniment manual because the only contacts we had left were there. As soon as a new relay is installed it will be available on both manuals."



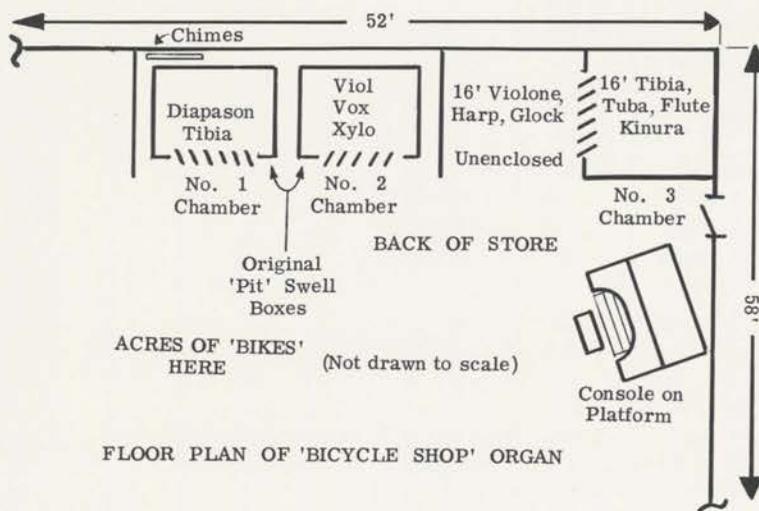
Original Morton style 49D Tibia swell box. Note the bass drum mounted above the smaller pipes. At left is a collection of antique tools.



Open swell shutters on one of the two original pit swell boxes reveal same long stemmed Vox Humana pipes.

1970 ATOS CONVENTION IN NEW YORK CITY!

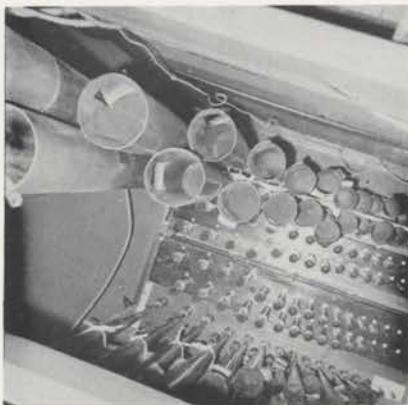
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FLOOR PLAN OF 'BICYCLE SHOP' ORGAN

The blower is original. It had a new motor in 1932 when Mr. Watson bought it because New York City power was dc and he lived in Jersey City, N.J. which had ac. This meant a new Century 2 hp ac blower motor. The blower has been able to handle all of the additions with no "wind fade" or regulation deterioration, even though demands on it have nearly doubled.

When asked about activities planned, we learned the Mahns' had already been host to numerous visitors. Way back in April 1969, the Delaware Valley ATOE chapter held a business meeting and jam session among the bicycles. More than 60 members and friends attended. The Mahns have hosted several "open house by invitation" affairs in the past year, and plans are underway for several Eastern ATOE chapters to visit the unique installation.



A squatty Kinura rank separates two chests of Tuba pipes.

As for future plans, the organ will be used for recording as well as for Sunday afternoon "Mighty Morton Sessions," with Robert Mahns presumably doing the honors at a goodly number of them, plus many guest artists. Beyond that, it's just for fun.

STOPLIST FOR THE "MIGHTY MAHNS MORTON"

PEDAL — 30 Notes

16' Bourdon
16' Contra Violone
8' Bass Flute
8' Trumpet
8' Violin
4' Horn Diapason
Bass Drum
Cymbal
Tympani

ACCOMPANIMENT

8' Horn Diapason
8' Tibia Clausa
8' Concert Flute
8' Violin Celeste
8' Vox Humana
8' Kinura
4' Horn Diapason
4' Tibia Clausa
4' Concert Flute
4' Violin Celeste
4' Vox Humana
Chrysoglott Harp (49 notes)

Chimes (20 notes)

Snare Drum Tap
Snare Drum Roll
Tambourine
Castanet
Tom-Tom
Bird Whistle
Sleigh Bells

ACCOMPANIMENT

Second Touch
8' Horn Diapason
8' Tibia Clausa

SOLO

16' Bourdon
16' Vox Humana (Tenor C)
8' Horn Diapason
8' Tibia Clausa
8' Violin Celeste
8' Tuba
8' Vox Humana
4' Horn Diapason
4' Tibia Clausa
4' Violin Celeste
4' Tuba
4' Vox Humana
2 2/3' Nazard
2' Piccolo
Xylophone (37 notes)
Glockenspiel (30 notes)

SOUND EFFECTS

Auto Horn, Train Whistle
Chime (single), Crash
Cymbal, Door Bell
or Telephone

ACCESSORIES

3 Tremulants
2 Expression Pedals
1 Register Crescendo
6 General Pistons and Toe Studs
1 Cancel Piston and Toe Stud

NOTE: A 73-note Open Diapason (8' & 4') is to be added on each manual.

STOP ANALYSIS

VOICE	Range	Pipes	
*Horn Diapason	4'	61	(bottom 12 notes derived)
*Tibia Clausa	16'-2'	97	
Concert Flute	4'	61	
*Violin Celeste	8'-4'	73	(bottom 12 metal pipes stopped)
Tuba	8'-4'	73	
*Vox Humana	8'-4'	73	
Kinura	8'	61	
Contra Violone	16'	30	(Pedal only)
		529	

*Original rank

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