

# THE HOWARD VOLLUM STUDIO WURLITZER

by Dennis Hedberg

At the 1973 National ATOS convention, in Portland, one of the instruments to be featured will be the Howard Vollum studio organ. The foundation for this instrument is the 4/32 Wurlitzer originally installed in San Francisco's Paramount Theatre in 1921. At the time of that theatre's demolition, Mr. Vollum was successful bidder to purchase the organ. Ten days from the date of purchase, the theatre building and all fixtures were to become the property of the demolition company. Therefore, there was no time to lose in getting a crew together to remove the organ.

The crew consisted of six laborers who climbed about the plaster facade in front of the chambers with cutting torches, hammers and wrecking bars making openings where needed so the various components could easily be removed. Then, four riggers were employed to hoist the many heavy pieces to the auditorium floor. At times, as many as six movers were on the scene just to carry the myriad of parts to waiting trucks. A San Francisco crate builder shipped his entire output to the Paramount for five days. That amounted to about 70 crates. The actual organ crew of seven men was made up of both professional and amateur organ technicians. Among them was the well known San Francisco organ technician, Ed Stout.

When the organ was finally entirely out of the theatre it was noted that somewhat over a ton of wood excelsior was used. Five large vans made up the caravan to bring the organ to Portland. Everyone was surprised to learn that the crated weight of the Para-

mount Wurlitzer was a whopping 60,200 pounds!

The first problem after the organ was shipped to Portland was to find some place to keep it for the rebuilding process and for storage while its new permanent home was being built. After all, it is not every day that 30 tons of Wurlitzer is dumped at your door step! With this obstacle overcome, the tedious releathering process began. All power pneumatics in the chests and console were recovered with Neatsfoot Oil treated leather.

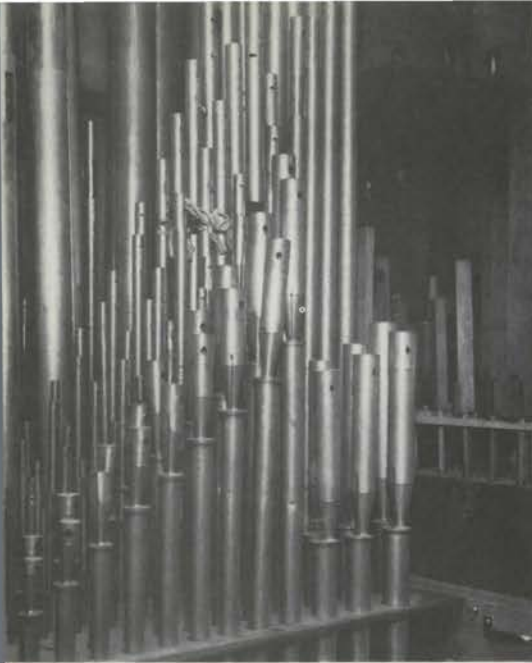
The organ had two Orgoblo blowers connected in tandem and powered by

25 H.P. and 10 H.P. direct current motors. These motors were replaced with 3 phase units of the same horsepower rating. A problem did develop though. It seems that the blowers originally turned at a somewhat slower speed than that indicated by the name plate. Not knowing this, the new motors turned the blowers at the rated speed with the result that the highest static pressure was nearly 50"! One rotor was removed from the large blower thus bringing the wind pressure to a more realistic figure.

While the console pneumatics were being recovered and the keyboards



Photos by Claude V. Neuffer



Solo chamber showing E.M. Skinner strings and Gottfried Vox Humana. Flute Celeste and 15" Tibia are at extreme right.



Main chamber showing from left Viol d' Orchestra, Concert Flute, Clarinet, and Oboe Horn.



Solo chamber showing from the left: Orchestral Oboe, Brass Trumpet, Quintadena, and Brass Saxophone. Not visible on this chest are the Kinura and Musette.

were being rebushed and recovered, the console shell was taken to the Rodgers Organ Company where countless layers of paint were removed. Since there were several bad scratches in the woodwork, it was decided to refinish the console in antique white and gold rather than try to strive for a natural wood finish. Even at this, some of the console woodwork could not be

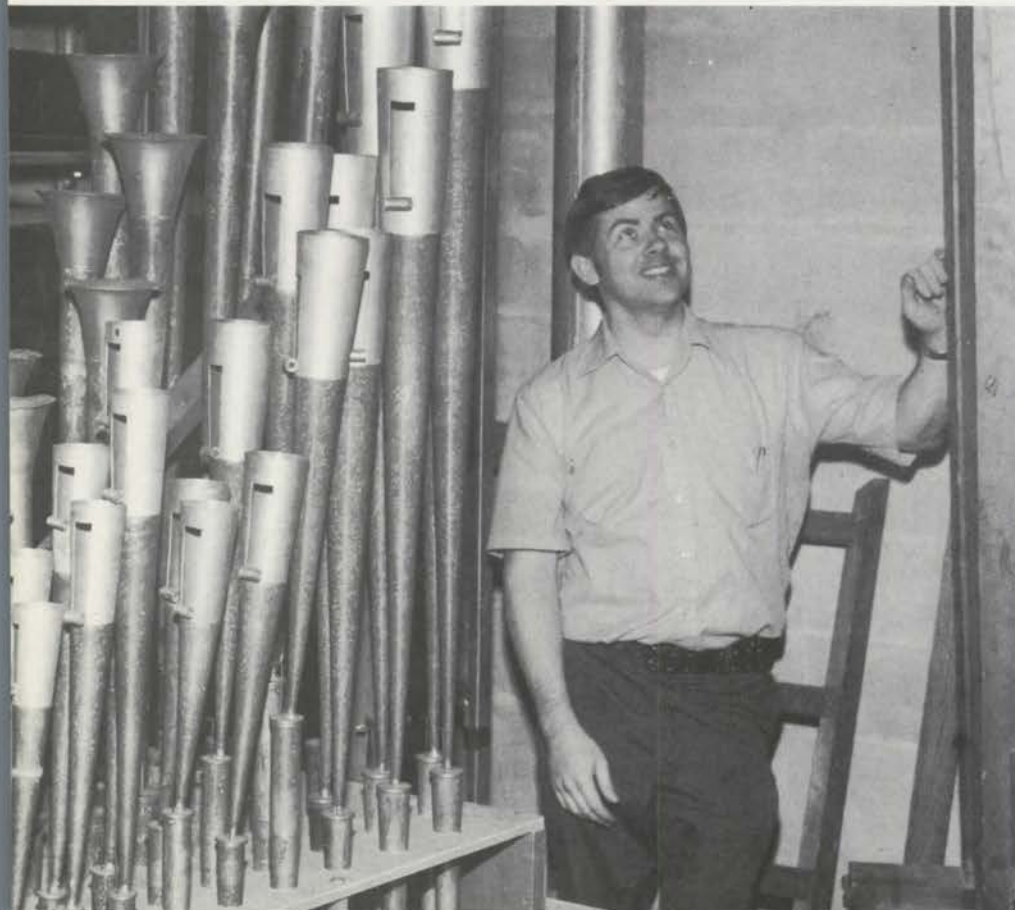
repaired and new pieces were milled in the Rodgers wood shop.

As the rebuilding work continued, plans for the organ's new home were being drawn and construction work begun. Seldom has so much been done for a theatre organ. The studio is located adjacent to Howard Vollum's home and overlooks lush forest land. It provides a listening room whose

minimum length and width are about 44' by 37' and whose height is over 24'. The five organ chambers proper are made entirely of poured concrete with surfaces ground smooth . . . not plastered.

As the organ was being installed, modifications and additions to pipe work, chest work, percussions, and unification were made in accordance with Mr. Vollum's desire to expand the resources of the instrument so that some types of classical music might be played with a fair degree of authenticity. This brought the total number of ranks to the present count of 49. Most of the added ranks are installed in the typical theatre organ fashion but there

Brass chamber with author showing Gottfried French Trumpet and 4' Clarion. 32' Diaphones are at extreme left and right.



Foundation chamber showing from left: Vox Humana, Harmonic Flute, Gamba, Gamba Celeste, 10" Tibia Clausa, Solo String, and Diaphonic Diapason.



## THE VOLLUM WURLITZER CHAMBER ANALYSIS

### FOUNDATION

Diaphonic Diapason  
Solo String  
Tibia Clausa  
Gamba  
Gamba Celeste  
Harmonic Flute  
Vox Humana

### SOLO

Kinura  
Orchestral Oboe  
Musette  
Brass Trumpet  
Quintadena  
Brass Saxophone  
Tibia Clausa  
Flute  
Flute Celeste (Ten C)  
Vox Humana  
Aeoline  
Aeoline Celeste  
Viol  
Viol Celeste  
Horn Diapason  
Vox Humana (Ten C)

### PRINCIPAL/PERCUSSION

Fifteenth  
Twelfth  
Octave  
Principal  
Mixture IV Ranks  
Nazard  
Baroque Flute (un-nicked)  
Dulciana  
Dulciana Celeste  
Celesta  
Xylophone  
Marimba/Harp  
Glockenspiel  
Chimes

### MAIN

Tuba Horn  
Salicional  
Horn Diapason  
Viol d' Orchestra  
Open Diapason  
Viol Celeste  
Concert Flute  
Oboe Horn  
Clarinet  
Accompaniment Traps

### BRASS

Double English Horn  
Tuba Mirabilis  
French Trumpet  
Clarion

### UNENCLOSED PERCUSSION

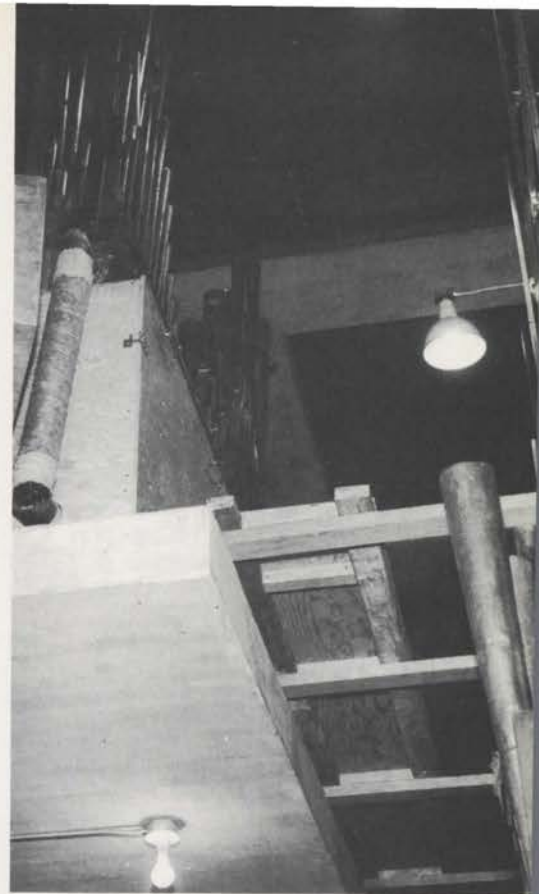
Harp  
Xylophone  
Piano  
Steinway-DuoArt  
Sleigh Bells  
Chrysoglott  
Chimes  
Miscellaneous Solo Traps

is a complete diapason chorus playable from the Great manual and is made up of eight ranks including an untremp'd four rank mixture. The diapason chorus blends in well with many of the typically theatre organ registrations and the mixture adds the same kind of clarity to the full organ ensemble as it does in the classic organ. For additional variety, there is the Baroque Flute which is actually an un-nicked Rohrflute voiced for maximum chuff. The diapason chorus is installed in the percussion chamber whose shutters are wired so they may be locked in the open position. In playing classical

music this simulates the un-expressed Great division.

A second set of movable shutters are mounted over the chamber openings with the exception of the Principal/PerCUSSION chamber. This technique reduces the overall volume of the high pressure ranks to a more comfortable level without noticeably altering the timbre. Furthermore, this reduction in volume allows the lower pressure diapason chorus to satisfactorily blend with the remainder of the instrument.

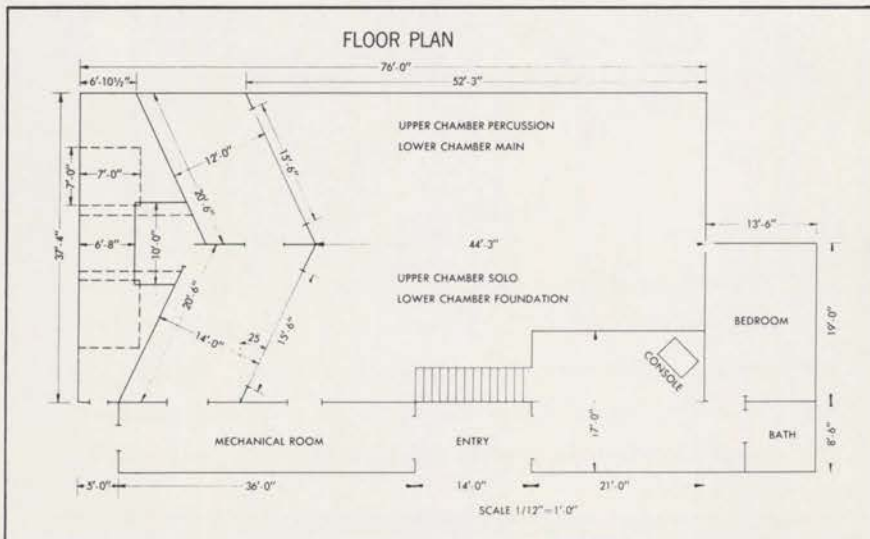
Originally the Paramount Wurlitzer had an eight rank Echo division play-



Brass chamber showing 8' Tuba Mirabilis and 8' English Post Horn on upper level. Note sound proof enclosure around chest and shutters mounted in ceiling. 16' Post Horn offset is at extreme right.

able from the Great and Pedal divisions. In the new setting, the Echo division could not be justified and was therefore eliminated. Its components, however, were added to the Solo division and its stops unified throughout the organ.

After rearranging all stops on the console so they follow the basic pat-



MECHANICAL ROOM

LOWER LEVEL  
RELAYS, HEATING AND AIR CONDITIONING  
EQUIPMENT

UPPER LEVEL  
BLOWERS, ELECTRICAL PANELS,  
RECTIFIERS, SHOP AREA, RELAYS

KITCHEN BENEATH CONSOLE  
BLOWERS, ELECTRICAL PANELS,  
RECTIFIERS, SHOP AREA, RELAYS

Foundation chamber showing 16' Tibia offset and 16' wood Diaphones mounted horizontally.





Principal/Percussion chamber showing Diapason chorus with mixture in foreground and independent 2-2/3' Flute at extreme right. Note cone tuning.

tern used in the Publix #1 Wurlitzers it was found that the combination action was no longer suitable. The pneumatic stop actions were retained but the combination relays and setterboards were replaced by specially designed units manufactured by the Rodgers Organ Company.

The only significant additions made to the organ since its installation in Portland are the Musette formerly in George Wright's studio organ and a Steinway Duo-Art Reproducing Grand Piano.

The entire project, from the dismantling in San Francisco to the present installation in Howard Vol-lum's studio, took 4½ years to complete, was totally under the supervision of the author. □

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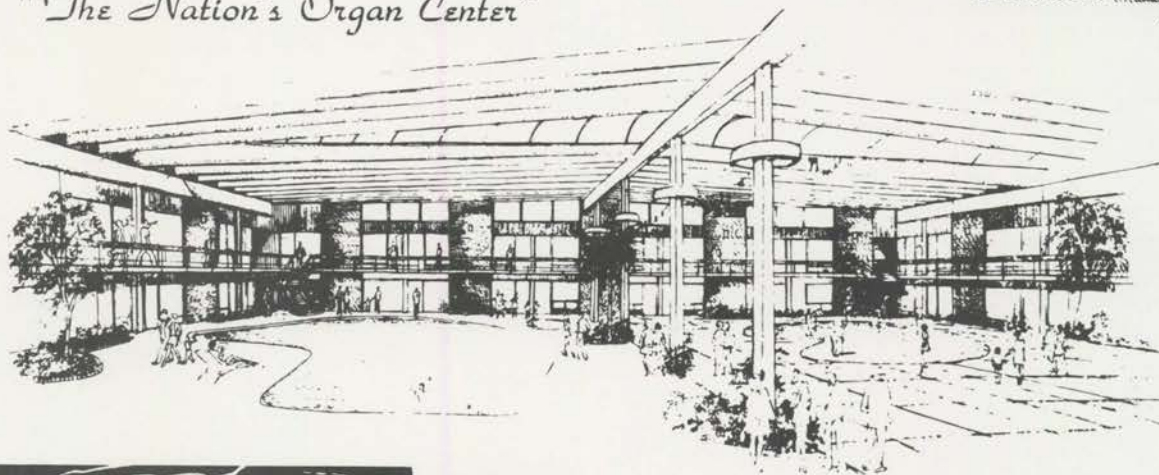
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