

# der wurlitzer orgels

by Bob Longfield

For many years the Schmitt Music Company in Minneapolis was the largest music store in the mid-west. They had everything in music from pianos and organs, to records and sheet-music. My favorite department was "Records", and of course my favorite records were theatre organ. In those days — the '20s and '30s — theatre organ records were not filed under "Organ" as they are today. In those days organists were stars and their recordings were filed under their own names. There were counter-top bins labeled "Crawford", "Charles", "Dunstedter", "Velazco", "White", etc. Unfortunately, by the late 1930s most of these bins had ceased to exist and only an occasional Crawford release could be found.

One very hot day in July of 1940, I stopped in at Schmitts hoping to find an organ record I didn't have in my collection. There was nothing and I was about to leave when the record clerk, who knew of my interest in organ records, asked if I'd ever heard any Telefunken records. I admitted that not only had I never heard any of his records, I didn't even know who he was. I was informed that Telefunken was not a him, but the label of the largest German recording company. Ted told me that there were occasionally some organ records included in the shipments they received and showed me a large bin labeled "Telefunken". I began to thumb through the records but the labels were all in German (which was Greek to me) and I was losing interest when I saw "Die flauernde Orgel, Wurlitzer Orgel, Ernst Fischer"; and on the umseitig (reverse side) "Der Alte Cowboy". Wurlitzer was Wurlitzer in any language and orgel came mighty close to organ, so I hastened to one of the listening booths — you could hear a record before you bought it in those days — and placing "Die flauernde Orgel" on the turntable I carefully set the needle in the groove. Imagine my surprise to find that "Die flauernde Orgel" was the popular American num-

ber "Whispering" and "Der Alte Cowboy" was "The Last Roundup". Both were beautifully played on records that were technically perfect. I was very excited at finding a new source of theatre organ records and hurrying back to the Telefunken bin I found four more Wurlitzer orgel records: "Oase" (Oasis) backed by "Auf Einem Persischen Markt" (Persian Market) and "Sternennacht" (Serenata) backed by "Zaubernacht am Meer" (Shadow Waltz) both played by Ernst Fischer. "Holladrio" and "En Puppenladen" (In Puppetland) played by Adolph Wolff; and "Lab uns Traumen" (Let Us Dream) and "Simonettis Madrigal" played by Gerd Thomas. At home with my treasures, I found everyone of them to be beautiful theatre organ. My one regret, no locations were given for any of the Wurlitzer orgels.

I had purchased all the stock of orgel records that Schmitt's had and I waited month after month for more to come in, but Germany was at war and shipments were uncertain. Finally in February of 1941 I wrote the Telefunken Company in Berlin and inquired if they had a catalog of their organ recordings. A very prompt reply enclosed a small catalog listing — in German — some fifty or more organ records. The price however was in indisputable English: "10 inch — \$.75, 12 inch — \$1.25 American dollars." By return mail I sent an American Express Money Order and without even knowing what I was ordering I carefully typed out the German names of all those listed which I did not already have. Several weeks later a very well packed box arrived and upon playing my "foreign imports" I found that I had "Glow Worm", "Old Spinning Wheel", "Tell Me That You Love Me Tonight" and other American numbers plus several beautiful German melodies — some with vocals — and one, "Wurlitzer Orgel Mit Klavier Duo". Klavier, I found was piano. "Letzte Neuheiten" (Latest Novelities) played by Han-Henning Osterloh, designated the Wurlitzer orgel

as being in Der Kristall Palastes, Berlin. The only other location given was Auenkirche, Berlin where Rudolf Meimberg had recorded "Stille Nacht" and "O Du Frohliche". This was the only record that did not state Wurlitzer orgel, and it was obviously played on a very large classical church organ. Several of the records carried the warning: Recht zur Radioverbreitung vorbehalten! — Rights for radio broadcasting forbidden! A 12 inch disc of "Intermezzo Cavalleria Rusticana" backed by "Bajazzi", was played by the Berlin Philharmonic mit Orgel, but no credit was given the organist. This record carries a large red seal stating, "1937 Grand Prix, Paris, France." To each of the records has been affixed a small green gummed stamp stating "B.I.E.M., Telefunken-USA". There are other stamps on various records one stating: "B. Feldman & Company, 125-129 Shaftesbury Ave. w.c." One recording by Horst Hanns Sieber contains two beautiful numbers from German Tonfilms.

These were the last Telefunken recordings I was able to get. A letter several months later brought the courteous reply that: "Due to present conditions, international shipments were no longer being made."; and of course it was not long before we ourselves were at war with Germany. Several years after the war I again wrote to Telefunken but never received an answer. A friend who was stationed in Germany in 1950 contacted the Telefunken Company for me and was told that the recorded organs were destroyed by bombs during the war and that all contact with the organists had been lost.

I am still curious as to how several pipe organs and several prominent organists could have "just disappeared". There must be someone who knows where these organs were located, and if they really were destroyed during the war. Also, some of these German organists must still be living. Can anyone provide information? □