



west penn's workshop

by Bob Mitchell

Recent years have brought about an unbelievable resurgence of interest in the theatre pipe organ, resulting in the acquisition and disposition of hundreds of such instruments throughout the world. Love of the theatre pipe organ, and an undaunted dedication to its survival and continuance as a musical entity in its own right has placed it in the loving hands of hobbyists everywhere. Consequently, the access to or acquisition of these many theatre pipe organs resulted in the formation of "little organ factories" in all those places where renovations were contemplated — places represented by major "in theatre" rebuilding, and those projects destined for auditoriums, schools, and private residences. These endeavors opened new fields of interest and education in all the major building trades — carpentry, sheet metal, electrical, mechanical, and leathercraft. Lucky the restoration group who can boast of at least one expert for each of the above trades mentioned. All too often, these crafts must be shouldered by a dedicated inexperienced few, who out of dire necessity, and love of the instrument take on the task of rebuilding. Qualified organ engineers are indeed at a premium, and those who possess or can acquire the services of such an expert will find their work effort easier and the final results engineeringly correct and permanent.

However, many restoration groups must be content with limited ex-

perience of a few dedicated and hard working members. Many precious "theatre organs" have found new homes, where, after endless hours of hard painstaking work, they were "lovingly" set in place and hopefully made to utter once again the vibrant sounds originally imparted to them by the builder. Many of the failures encountered in the rebuilding efforts throughout the theatre organ world could have been avoided if ready access to the experience and talent of the professional organ engineer was made available to those hobbyists needing such assistance. The engi-

neering technology of all phases of organ building and rebuilding techniques is based on exact science. There can be no substitute for this technology. It must be acquired nonetheless, if rebuilding failures are to be minimized and hopefully eliminated from theatre organ restoration efforts.

The founders of the American Theatre Organ Society and their successors, when setting up the purposes and rules of conduct for the Society, realized that such a concept must incorporate certain interrelated contrivances to guarantee its foremost purpose — the preservation of the

Admiring the newly voiced experimental pipe.



American Theatre Organ!

Hopefully, one of these contrivances — organ engineering workshops will be used to better advantage. The American Theatre Organ Society has many individuals within its ranks who are qualified to help in this field. If the “personal touch” is not always available or feasible, then “question and answer” seminars conducted thru the “Journal of the American Theatre Organ Society” may suffice.

For the past three years the West Penn Chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society has conducted a series of pipe organ workshops for its members and friends. These seminars are conducted by Restoration Chairman, Bob Mitchell and are representative of pipe organ history, music, building techniques, and a latter series on the regulation and voicing of flue and reed

pipes.

The photos in this article are of a recent workshop on flue and reed voicing. A supply of new, unvoiced pipes were made available for group participation in the techniques required to make a pipe sound. Pipes voiced by participating members and the Restoration Chairman are then raffled off to the guests. Workshops of this caliber are eagerly accepted by those in attendance, and the interest generated indicates a demand for more of the same.

Many theatre organ buffs have to a great degree managed successfully the problems of electro-pneumatic actions, relay switching, and other associated mechanical devices. Up to this point, their results are reasonably acceptable. The solution of three additional problems would have raised the technical

level of such installations considerably.

Consider then, three such bonuses — the judicious placement of pipes in their new environment (usually this is some distorted and inaccessible location), the proper winding of reservoirs and conductors, and finally the revoicing and re-regulation of reed and flue pipes which may have suffered from the ravages of past tunings, rack board accidents, and distortions produced by the moving of these delicate parts from one location to another.

Let us then seek to help our fellow “pipe” enthusiasts. If it has been our good fortune to have acquired and developed such valuable talents, then let us share them with those who have a need — the fulfillment of which will surely help to perpetuate the mighty theatre pipe organ and make better hobbyists of us all. □

Applying curve to tongue of French Trumpet.



Demonstrating curving procedures for reed tongue.



Setting a reed pipe to pitch.



Adjusting the wind sheet of a new Diapason.

