

CENTURY II



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by Billy Nalle

Century II: A permanent gala expressing the spirit of a city deservedly called great. Century II Center is the huge civic/cultural complex in Wichita, the city known unofficially as Center City, USA. In a metropolitan area of virtually 400,000 people, this dramatic building of architectural and functional excitement projects a new standard and challenge. Taken in the context of the area's vast rebuilding and new construction, it symbolizes Wichita's emergence as a national city. Senior architect John Hickman and the people of Wichita have provided what appears on first sight to be an immense flying saucer having landed from Mars. Its setting is splendid, a downtown square of greenery, walks and fountains, all further enhanced by placement along side the *Big* Arkansas River. (Yes, there is a *Little* Arkansas River!)

The Center's name is derived from the city's wish to commemorate the beginning in 1970 of Wichita's second century. The length of the outside promenade is one quarter mile. The pale blue, domed roof seems to float midair like some latter day Hagia Sophia. Outside basics are tinted glass, bronze tinted steel and tan blown cement imbedded with a stone aggregate of colors, great warmth reaching out to you like that from vermeil. Inside, curtains, draperies, seating and surrounding surfaces bring to your eye beige, cream, burgundy red, Chinese red, depending on the area. Being circular, the building affords each of its four auditoria a slice of the pie with attendant advantages in sightlines, acoustics, production and traffic. The central core provides freight elevator service to every auditorium's stage, loading accomplished from the sub-

terranean level reached by vehicular ramp.

Detailing the interiors, we begin at the theatre, an intimate auditorium of 661 seats continental fashion (walking space between rows and no center aisles), appropriate for a variety of dramatic and musical productions, including small scale opera. This locale is the permanent base of the Wichita Community Theatre now in its 28th year. Scenery shop and storage areas are adjacent and, as in the other auditoria, the lighting, mechanical and sound equipment are highly sophisticated and intelligently installed.

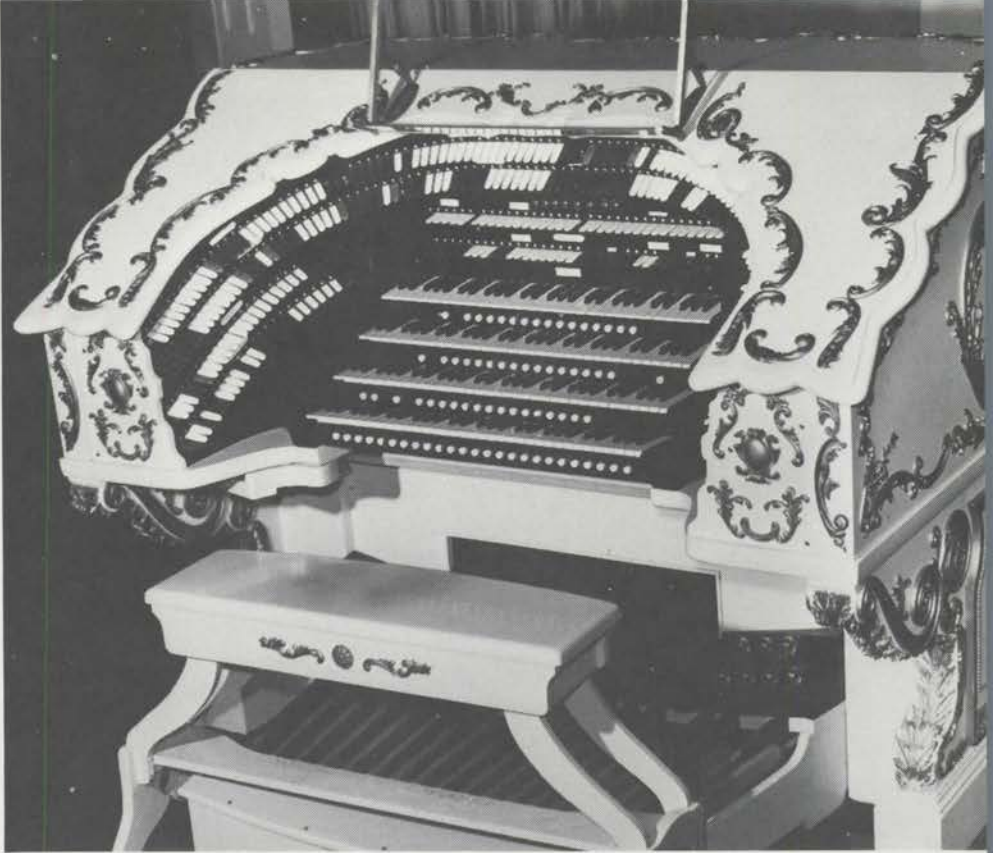
Coming to the concert hall, we have a handsome room for all manner of musical presentations and shows, even large meetings requiring stage production. There is continental seating for 2192. A 16 ton acoustical shell can be lowered to stage level for orchestral

use. Both here and in the theatre are forestage elevators which can be lowered to serve as orchestra pits or raised to augment the stage areas. Beneath the concert hall are storage rooms, a music library and an orchestral rehearsal room. These assets accrue to the Wichita Symphony Society now having its permanent home in this hall. Founded just 30 years ago, this orchestra stands today as one of the most solidly supported symphonic organizations in the country. An award of a half million dollars from the Ford Foundation was met and considerably exceeded by local pledges. When tickets go on sale, *they sail!*

Entering the convention hall, you suddenly confront surroundings on the grand scale. On the main floor are 3184 seats mounted on telescoping risers allowing for the 35,000 square foot area to be cleared when desired. The sweeping balcony seats 2060, the total accommodation being 5244. The 92 foot wide stage affords full facilities for the largest productions, including 40 scenery lines.

Finally, we come to the great exhibition hall with its 62,000 square feet of area comprising the main floor and mezzanine. (Convention and exhibition halls can be combined by telescoping the intervening wall, this providing an immense area of 97,000 square feet.) There is no permanent seating in the exhibition hall for obvious reasons but temporary conventional seating can accommodate approximately 4000. When table seating is used for organ or other concerts, main floor capacity then is 2460. In this great auditorium there is no conventional stage but a large, wide platform with cantilevered organ chambers filling the area above, stereo fashion.

For all internationally who love the organ, this hall is golden for it is the new home of the most celebrated theatre pipe organ in the world. More than any other theatre organ, even more than others of the same builder (Wurlitzer), was this instrument a specification and tonal standard. It has remained so to this day. As the greatest of the European organs set standards in meeting the demands of the classical repertoire, fully as much in the realm of popular music did this particular instrument bring into focus and crystallize all that was best in the first era of the theatre organ. Typical of its genre, this organ was radical and



The new console, built by Balcom and Vaughan of Seattle, for the 4/42 Wurlitzer in Century II. The original New York Paramount console, was lost in a fire.

(Carl Packer Photo)

so far ahead of A.D. 1926 when opened in the New York Paramount Theatre (by no less than Jesse and Helen Crawford), that only refurbishing and a new console were required for its new home. The four manual console was built by Balcom and Vaughan of Seattle and five new ranks will bring the specification to 42. The original specification was 36 but a second and more dramatic Wurlitzer Post Horn was added at the Paramount in the late 1940s. This caused displacement of the fourth Vox Humana during the final years on Times Square. In Wichita, a new chest now accommodates the second Post Horn with the fourth Vox Humana restored to its original position. Both console and chambers are set to receive the new ranks: Unda Maris, Salicional Celeste, Spitzflute, Spitzflute Celeste and Band Fife 2". (That last will be a sizzler and made operable by a protective switch on the backboard.)

Setting a brilliant example are the people who organized to make a dream come true, Wichita Theatre Organ, Incorporated. While retaining ownership of the instrument, they worked steadily, finally winning approval of city officials for installation of the organ in the exhibition hall. This remarkable covey of music lovers was determined to have public organ concerts on exactly the

same value scale as obtains nationally for the other major musical instruments in premium presentation. In their wisdom, scheduling of concerts is a model of sanity. Therefore, enthusiasm holds because the public is not surfeited stemming from a monthly syndrome. As my dad would have said, "they stop while it tastes good!"

As holds for *any* musical instrument, no matter when it enters history, once established, it becomes *timeless*, something Europeans and Asians comprehend far better than most North Americans. Understanding this, WTO first had a private unveiling for civic, business and educational leaders, news media people and others representative of the whole area. The saga of a great organ was told them in word and in music, all present being able to see, hear and then ask all the questions they wished. Thus, everyone came to realize the meaning, value and place on today's scene of a superb musical instrument, that its *timelessness* gives it a solid future in the Age of Space. Hearing and understanding begat appreciation and appreciation led to love. *Right there is the key word*, love! Love was lavished on this phenomenal organ for its first days; now, those who live in the "Air Capital of the World" are repeating the story. Few are the cities worldwide

where a particular organ is regarded as musical co-leader with the resident symphony. (To date, there have been three Wichita Symphony concerts utilizing the organ.) Shades of the 17th and 18th centuries, when such as Sebastian Bach would have thought such a situation merely normal! No doubt he would rejoice seeing an organ concert series draw audiences at capacity!

In Century II, your radar senses that new spirit and growing adventure pervading all the arts today and you realize, suddenly, how close we are to century 21! This place should give serious pause in particular to the AGO, the ATOS and other groups allegedly in the vanguard of organ support and promotion. In Wichita, a small group of people, WTO, completely *outside* these organizations, gave themselves and their talents in a display of faith, labor and love as to shame a multitude *inside* the organ world. In Century II, the essential question about the organ as *musical instrument* in a new day has been answered with a resounding *Yea-and-Amen* by an entire city. In far too many situations the future of the organ still is questionable. Plainly, the instrument will be understood, respected, valued and supported (in that order) only to the extent which those who *talk* a great case go into their communities and invest faith and labor with determination. In Century II Center's Exhibition Hall is one answer of what *will* become reality when you have leaders who *love* music enough to *lead* . . . and when you have supporters who *love* music enough to *believe!*

Orgel Uber Alles! □

BRUBACHER ACQUIRES ROMBERG'S ORGAN

The 3/13 Aeolian residence organ which was originally in the New York residence of the well known composer Sigmund Romberg, has been acquired by Potomac Valley Chapter member Ray Brubacher. The organ, an orchestral instrument, has an Aeolian Duo-Art roll player mechanism. A large collection of rolls belonging to the composer was also acquired. Sigmund Romberg gave the organ to the Scottish Rite Temple, in Baltimore, Md. in 1946 and upon completion of the installation, came from New York to play a dedication program on the instrument. Ray is presently removing the organ from its Baltimore location. □

Hope-Jones Organ Rebuilt

by Harvey K. Elsaesser

The Schlicker Organ Co. of Tona-wanda (only a few miles away from the Wurlitzer plant) is redoing the old Hope-Jones organ in the gallery of St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral in downtown Buffalo. It's the second overhaul since it was installed in 1908.

It was redone by Wurlitzer in the 1920s when the new relays and console were installed. In 1952 Schlicker installed the new chancel organ.

The casework (with all dummy pipes except for a trumpet en chemade put in a few years ago by Schlicker) came down first. It's one of the finest cases in the area and will be rein-

stalled. Next came the 32' Tibias. They will be cleaned, painted and reinstalled along the walls, six on each side instead of across the front. Also being kept are the wooden Trombones, Oboe, Horn Diapason, Vox, Quint, and Quint Celeste. The Hope-Jones plaster chambers and lead lined shutters will be replaced.

The Higgins Co., hired to remove the Tibias, thinks the low CCCC weighed about 1800 pounds. Incidentally many of the original Hope-Jones magnets are still operative after 66 years, a tribute to his engineering skill. □

The second overhaul for the 1908 Hope-Jones organ in St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral.

(Photo courtesy Buffalo Evening News)

