

Organ Transplant

An organ transplant? You bet!

A 3,000-pipe Aeolian organ, purchased in the early 1900s and custom-built for the Blandings' "Organ House" in Belvedere in 1917, is being transplanted to Oakland where it may become a part of the massive organ being restored for the Paramount Theatre of the Arts.

The operation is a costly one.

"We're going to need \$70,000 before the actual installation can begin," Jack M. Bethards, executive director of the Oakland Symphony Orchestra Association, owner of the Paramount, declared.

The original Paramount organ in the 1930s vintage movie palace, a 24-ton, 1,500-pipe Wurlitzer Publix No. 1, was sold in the 1950s and is now installed in a Los Altos restaurant, Ken's Melody Inn.

A nearly exact duplicate has been donated to the Symphony Association by J. B. Nethercutt, owner/director of the new San Sylmar Museum in the Southern California community of Sylmar. It will form the basis of the Paramount's new organ.

"We hope to have the instrument installed by next July," Bethards added, "but we can't proceed with the work until we get the money."

The Aeolian organ was donated for addition to the musical behemoth by Mrs. Constance Reynolds of San Francisco.

It is one of the largest residence organs known that is complete and in good condition, according to Bethards, himself a pipe organ technician and restorer.

Organ Engineer Edward M. Stout of San Francisco, curator of musical instruments at Grace Cathedral on Nob Hill in San Francisco, began the painstaking dismantling job last month.

"A lot of care has to be taken in removing the thousands of wooden and lead and tin alloy pipes which were custom-built to fit the house's maple-lined organ chamber," Stout explained.

"The pipes alone are worth \$86,000," he said.

"One of the most important tasks to be done before anything is moved is to label each piece so that it can be identified later. You can't reassemble a pipe organ as you would a jigsaw puzzle, using the 'try and see if it fits' approach," he explained.

One of the unique features of the Aeolian organ is its capacity to play music on rolls, similar to player-piano rolls, according to Bethards.

"This kind of organ was the 'stereo set' of the wealthy in the '20s and '30s," he explained.

"In those days they called the paper rolls 'records' and they were even purchased in 'albums,'" Bethards said.

There are almost a thousand player rolls which will be shipped with the 53 ranks of pipes in huge wooden crates to Oakland this month.

They will remain in storage until enough money is raised to complete the restoration.

"There's no sense in starting the job and then having to stop work for lack of funds," Stout explained. "It's like a heart transplant operation. The whole job has to be coordinated and finished before the patient can wake up." □

Each of the 3,000 pipes of the massive Aeolian organ built for the "Organ House" in Belvedere is being painstakingly removed and shipped to Oakland to be stored until \$70,000 is raised to complete the Paramount Theatre's pipe organ. Working on the dismantling project are (left) Bill Sylvester of Castro Valley, a pipe organ technician, and Edward M. Stout of San Francisco, curator of musical instruments at Grace Cathedral. (Catherine Centorbe Photo)

