

The importance of the West to the early success of the Wurlitzer Company is an insufficiently explored facet of that firm's history, yet a quick perusal of the shipping list reveals that all but one of the four manual, and a major share of the three manual, organs built before 1921 were delivered to points no farther east than Denver. Consider the pivotal importance of the Paris & Isis theatres, Denver; and the Liberty in Seattle; or the origins of Oliver Wallace and Jesse Crawford. For whatever reasons, Western exhibitors were the first to discover and exploit fully the box office power of Wurlitzer music, and in that regard, this year's convention city was right at the front.

San Francisco, despite its great remove from North Tonawanda, was decidedly a Wurlitzer town; of the eight major downtown houses, six had Wurlitzers; and within the area could be found virtually every style built, including two of the rare straight-solo models. Furthermore, the city was the only locale to have superlative examples of Wurlitzer's three tonal periods, in the California's 3 3/5/32 (1917) the Granada's 4/32 (1921) and the Fox's 4/36 (1929).

Wurlitzer dominated the neighborhoods, as well, although Robert Morton was well represented and Smith could claim one important house and several minor ones, despite the proximity and local ownership of the latter two firms. With the exception of three Mollers (one in the Fox lobby, and the two ultimately replaced by Wurlitzers in the Warfield and Golden Gate), the organs of no other builders were sold to San Francisco theatres.

Ironically, the two surviving theatre installations are both Robert Mortons: the Orpheum (nee Pantages) and Cinema-21 (Marina). The 4/20 Orpheum organ, the availability of which is clouded as we go to press, is a most unusual beast. Alexander Pantages always bought Mortons, which he decreed to be placed beneath the stage, but substantial portions of this one are deployed astride the proscenium and above the ceiling. Surprisingly, the sound pulls together very well with a warmth rarely expected from this builder.

The 2/6 Cinema-21 Morton is what you would call "Sweet." Having somehow endured what appears to be countless remodelings of the theatre,

the little organ is something of an anachronism in its setting, and the absence of grillwork has only improved the sound. For years beyond counting, this hardy survivor has been cared for and performed on by Larry Vannucci, "The Bay Area's 'Mister Pipe Organ,'" who will be playing it for you in July.

A whole different sort of place is the Avenue, where the Wurlitzer is king. Originally housing a Style D Wurlitzer, the Avenue has been presenting silent programs with Wurlitzer music for more than eight years with a slightly enlarged Style 240 from Chicago's State Lake, now spread across the Avenue's stage in newly



by Steve Levin

constructed chambers. Totally reconditioned a decade ago, the organ has been so vigorously exercised that the crew there is planning a major work program prior to the convention.

Then there is the Oakland Paramount, totally and faithfully restored two years ago, and still between-Wurlitzers, but of such breathtaking magnificence that the convention would be incomplete without an event there. Our host will be Yamaha Organs, whose "GX-1" polyphonic synthesizer organ will receive its world premiere in the hands of John Seng. A veritable shrine of art deco splendor, the Paramount is done scant justice by words, but we can promise that you will never forget it.

High atop Nob Hill, in Grace (Episcopal) Cathedral, is our largest and most exciting classical organ: the 5/125 Aeolian-Skinner. Designed and installed in 1934 by the legendary G.

Donald Harrison, and slightly revised by him in 1952, this wonderful instrument stands as a monument to the "American Classic" school of tonal design long embraced by its builder. Recent additions have provided Gallery and Bombarde divisions, each painstakingly regulated to complement the special qualities of the main organ.

Sacramento's major instrument is the 4/20 Wurlitzer of Grant Union High School, assembled by George Wright in his student days there. The original Kilgen console, destroyed in an arsonous assault, is being replaced with a new Balcom & Vaughn Wurlitzer replica which will be making its debut at the convention. A very new addition to the Sacramento scene is the 2-manual Golden Bear Theatre organ described a few issues ago.

The lucky few who get in their afterglow reservations will be treated to one of only four outdoor organs in California, Ken and Doris Ensele's 2/9 Wurlitzer. A real Western-style chow-down amid the pipes and pines will be flanked by winery tours and a Bay cruise, making this afterglow the most fabulous ever, but attendance is limited.

Souvenir programs are usually just that — programs, but we will have for every registrant something that money will never be able to buy — a very special record album now being produced especially for this convention. The pick of private collections — music once accessible only to a select few — will be released in this showcase of legendary artists and instruments. We can't tell you who or what just yet, but we do know that you will never again have the opportunity to own this album.

Plenty of home installations will be open to fill some of the free time in the schedule, but we think that you'll want to take in some sightseeing and shopping, too. The back page of the registration insert is a preview of the conventioners' guide we are putting together for you. With the short-time visitor in mind, we're picking the best in shopping, eating and touring, with all the information you will need to know.

So tear off that card right now, particularly if you want to be included in the afterglow, and get it in the mail today. Then get yourself ready for the time of your life . . . at the "Roaring Twentieth," in SAN FRANCISCO, JULY 15 - 20. □