

Eastern Massachusetts

by J. Paul Chavanne, Stuart Hinchliffe and Richard Linder

Photos by Richard Linder

Next year, along with the Bi-Centennial observances, the Eastern Massachusetts Chapter will be celebrating its 20th birthday. A lot of wind has passed through the Tibias since 1956! We'll try to give you the Eastern Mass. story and hope that in reading our tale you will feel that you have come to know us as friends, and as fellow sufferers and celebrants of the travails and the joys

which we share as victims and lovers of the magnificent theatre organ!

Surely everyone has heard of Bill Bunch, of Balcom & Vaughn, builders of (among many other things) the replacement console for the New York Paramount/Witchita Wurlitzer. Back in the spring of 1956 Bill, along with Don Phipps, Dave Garbarino and Brent Tyler, were sharing their common enthusiasm

for the Mighty Wurlitzer here in eastern Massachusetts. They held their first formal meeting around the 2/7 Wurlitzer in Don's family home in Milton, Mass. Bill Bunch entertained at the console. By August of that year, the group having increased to ten, the natural course of action was to inquire of the newly developing AATOE "out on the Coast" as to the requirements for association

and a charter. Judd Walton supplied the answers and the local group, now grown to 23, agreed at their September meeting at Don's to apply for a charter. The late Ralph Woodworth, former theatre organist for the B & K and Warner chains, was featured artist on this occasion. Bill Bunch was probably the most active member of the group, but was too deeply involved with organs in his professional capacity to enable him to take chapter office. There was no shortage of ability and interest, however, and four willing enthusiasts assumed their posts: Don Phipps, president; Howard Silva, vice president; Dave Garbarino, treasurer; and Brent Tyler secretary.

In October, 1956, then president of AATOE Richard Simonton authorized the issuance of Charter Certificate #1 to the Eastern Massachusetts Chapter. A November meeting was held at the Phipps home, at which former Metropolitan Theatre soloist Stan Cahoon provided the beautiful sounds. And plans were begun for what was to be a continuing series of annual concerts, to be played on the 2/14 Special Wurlitzer which is still in the Stoneham, Mass. Town Hall. This unusual instrument, made up of two theatre organs plus added ranks, had been presented to the people of the town in 1942 by Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Patch, after having been played for many years over Boston radio station WNAC by the late Francis J. Cronin. Chapter concerts were presented on this organ at least once, and often twice a year until the spring of 1974.

The Eastern Mass. Chapter went "big time" in May of 1968, being incorporated as an educational and charitable chapter in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. There were now seventy members on our roster. The growing chapter's concerts at Stoneham were guaranteed success by the performances of such theatre organ celebrities as Reginal Foort, Eddie Weaver, Don Baker, Leonard MacClain, Ann Leaf, Ashley Miller, Lowell Ayars, Allen Mills and John Seng. Many of these artists returned a second and third time by popular demand.

In addition to public concerts at Stoneham, many fine home installations were enjoyed as a regular part of our monthly meetings. At the same time the Wurlitzers in the Lynn

and Salem (Mass.) Paramount theatres received a lot of attention from chapter members in an effort to restore and maintain them. But the all too common fate of such endeavors marked the end of these efforts. Both organs were unexpectedly sold and the theatres demolished. These losses served to illustrate the futility of such arrangements and sparked the search for a chapter instrument and a location for its installation.

Under the leadership of our then president, Jim Rockett, the chapter organ committee was diligently searching for an instrument.

In the Spring of 1968 we became the delighted owners of Opus 1349, a Style 235 Special 3/13 Wurlitzer. This instrument was sitting in nearly complete retirement in the former Loew's State Theatre on Massachusetts Ave. in Boston right behind Boston's famed Symphony Hall. The organ had, through some miracle, been spared the ravages of vandals, and everything was there just where you'd expect to find it. The State, once a fine 3400 seat house, was sold to the Archdiocese of Boston and was subsequently renamed the Donnelly Memorial. Again the theatre was sold, to the Christian Science Church which named it the Back Bay. All this shuffling around did not avoid the ultimate fate of the theatre — demolition.

In 1968 the Back Bay closed its

doors for the last time, and the Eastern Mass. Chapter took possession of the 235 Special.

After a brief, emotional farewell concert (attended by about 35 stalwarts), what was to become 28 unbroken hours of organ removal began. The removal crew started its work on a Friday evening, and the building wreckers were on the spot the next Monday. The deed was done, and the already beloved EMC-ATOS Wurlitzer was stacked away neatly (?) in a member's warehouse, while the search for a suitable home would be undertaken. Like all such removal projects, this one had its high spots; and the shared experiences of such a venture make for lifelong friendships between those fortunate enough to have been part of them. Of perhaps no other endeavor can it be more truly said, that one's benefits are in direct proportion to one's contributions.

The next chapter of our saga concerns itself with the search for, and the locating of, a home for our lonesome Wurlitzer. President Rockett appointed Carl Getz chairman of the "search committee." Several unfruitful leads were pursued, one of them (in a shopping mall) even progressing as far as the blueprint stage. But like Goldilocks, we were unable to find a home that was "just right" until Babson College in Wellesley, Mass. came into our lives. Several thoughtful men with insight and an

Richard Knight Auditorium, at Babson College, is now the home of the Eastern Mass. Wurlitzer.



appreciation for the past as well as the future sought and reached agreement to bring our Wurlitzer (and our growing chapter) into its ultimate home, Babson College. For the chapter, Carl Getz joined with our organ committee to achieve agreement with the Babson counterparts headed by Mr. Jesse Putney, treasurer and vice president in charge of business and financial affairs.

Babson's Richard Knight Auditorium is a Colonial-style brick building of about the same vintage as our Wurlitzer — circa 1925. The building is fronted by six graceful columns, its concert-hall interior has side and rear balconies, and a shallow stage. The hall accommodates 1100 persons, mainly in comfortably cushioned seats. A large motor-operated screen, projection booth and considerable theatrical lighting equipment are available for movies, concerts, etc. Best of all, tentative provision had been made, when the hall was designed, to accommodate a pipe organ! Since the two chambers were too small for the 3/13, these areas had to be enlarged and re-enclosed. They now have become our main and solo chambers, left and right stage wings respectively.

The agreement between the parties may be of interest (and perhaps help) to other chapters who may be searching for a home. In its simplest terms, the college provides the auditorium, including utilities and security (plus excellent parking areas); Eastern Mass. Chapter provides (but retains title to) the organ, and maintains it. We are allowed regular monthly meetings, work sessions and private practice sessions for individual members. (We are scrupulous to avoid conflict with College activities.) We essentially come and go as we please via a side entrance set up for Eastern Mass. Chapter key holders. It's not unusual for two or three members to meet there around 9 p.m., and the music usually goes on and on and on! A specified number of public concerts are also provided for each year. We enjoy the most cordial relations with our hosts; they are as pleased with the splendid theatre pipe organ which now calls Babson its home as are we, and the secure and prestigious surroundings to which we have entrusted our prize have been a great source of gratification to the



Console of Wurlitzer, Opus 1349, in concert position in Knight Auditorium.

chapter.

The console is moveable from center to left side, its usual resting place. Each chamber enjoys the advantage of having two openings, two facing each other obliquely across the stage, and two facing their respective balconies. More than adequate swell shade openings provide what has been praised as an unusually broad dynamic range. When fully opened the organ really "gets out."

Opus 1349 is designated a 235 Special by reason of its added Horn Diapason and Brass Trumpet. It also boasts a total of six tuned percussions. During the planning stages, the membership empowered the organ committee to provide for expansion of the 3/13 to 18 ranks. Some of this pipework is already on hand, but the expansion program appears to be some distance in the future as yet. Full size doors allow easy entrance to the chambers, although space becomes scarcer once one is inside. There just wasn't a great deal of space available. The understage electrical area is accessible from either the auditorium or the adjoining rear annex to the building.

The console is made mobile by means of a splendid wheeled, elevating dolly. Former theatre organist and club officer Al Winslow designed the platform; member Arnold

Smith, a machine shop owner (and a fine organist) did the construction — and then donated the platform to his chapter. Large rubber wheels make it easily moveable; and four 3' jackscrews, when cranks are attached, easily raise the platform to "concert height." When in place, and with steel legs and steps attached, the dolly is as solid as a church.

The three-decked console, itself, is probably our chapter's most admired showpiece. As could be expected, the poor old thing was a disaster when salvaged from its orchestra pit home. Countless layers of hideously-colored paint had been thrown at it during its long life, and general neglect had done the rest. What a dismal picture it made, sitting in the warehouse, with its still intact cable dumpily coiled atop it!

The console was moved directly from the theatre to Pat Fucci's home in Waltham, and it was there that a phenomenon called "console fission" took place. The bottom part remained with Pat who took charge of stripping and patching the lower shell and disassembling and re-assembling the manuals and pedalboard. The manuals were sent out to be recovered with new ivory and ebony. (The naturals of all three manuals were taken from a single tusk, to ensure uniformity.) Pedals



Solo Chamber and Toy Counter in Knight Auditorium. The chambers had always been there, but had never housed an organ.

were rebuilt with new maple naturals.

Console chief Dick Linder adopted the top part of the console as his own, and it soon sat solidly atop four cement blocks in the Linder basement, where it would live for two whole years.

While the console crew labored to restore the most visible part of the instrument, every stick and screw in the venerable keydesk was removed, restored or replaced. Stop tabs and pneumatics were re-spaced to include enough extras to handle the planned additional ranks. It was completely releathered. Every stop contact was replaced, and all lead

tubing removed, and in its place, new "Tygon" was installed. A third swell shoe was added (for future chamber space); and the original twenty step crescendo pedal was rebuilt to provide eighty steps of increment, fully programmable, making for a fine, smooth crescendo. All electrical connections in the console, as well as most of those in the chambers and relay room, are of the present-day plug type, making service much simpler.

But the console's exterior finish is what really catches the eye. After all the accumulated layers of gunk were removed, it became apparent that the old veneer was beyond resto-

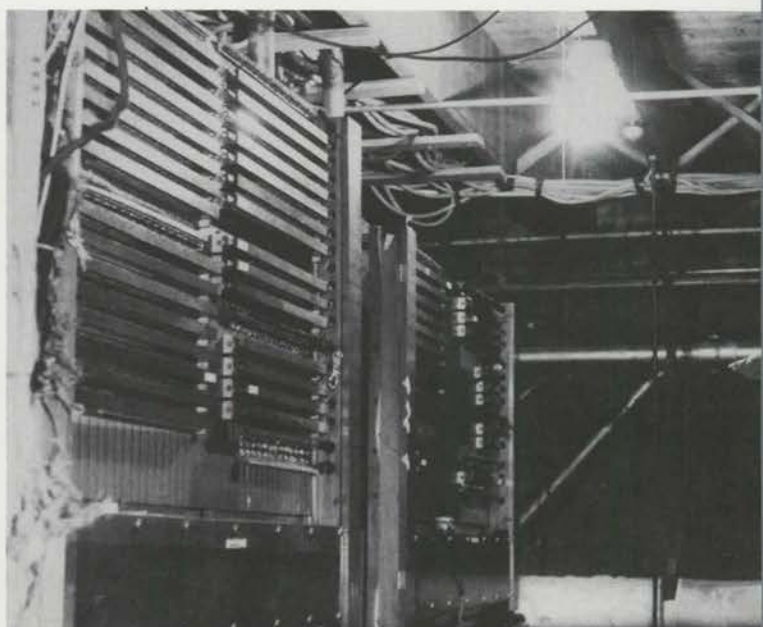
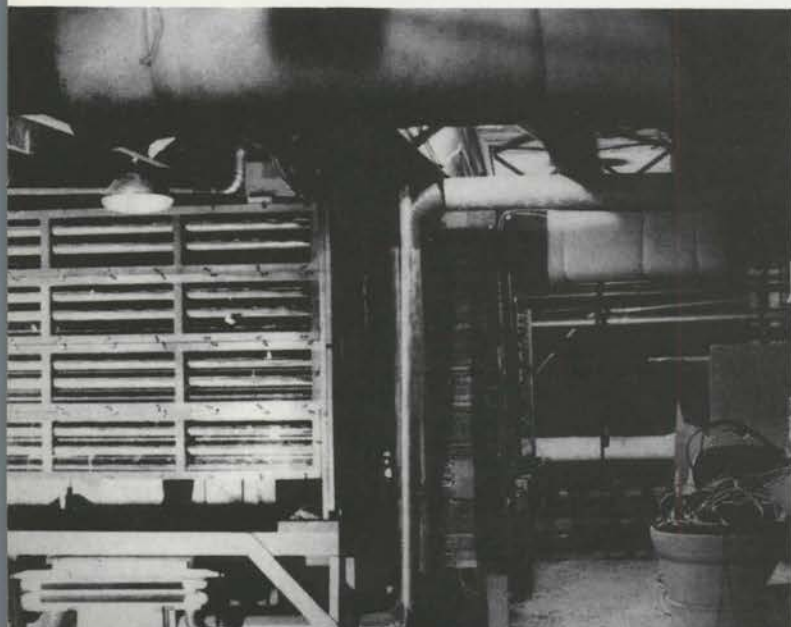
ration. So, fillers were applied, and reams of fine sandpaper were worn out (along with Dick Linder's right arm); before the pristine veneer was smooth as glass and ready for lacquer. After much debate, black had won out over white as most practical, if less showy. This proved to be a wise choice. Then came the seemingly endless task of spraying on lacquer, then rubbing most of it off; on again, off again, and on and on and on. After about fifteen such coats, the once neglected surface had acquired a sheen and depth that appeared almost three-dimensional. Occasional rubdowns with pure lemon oil are all that is needed to maintain a real showroom glow.

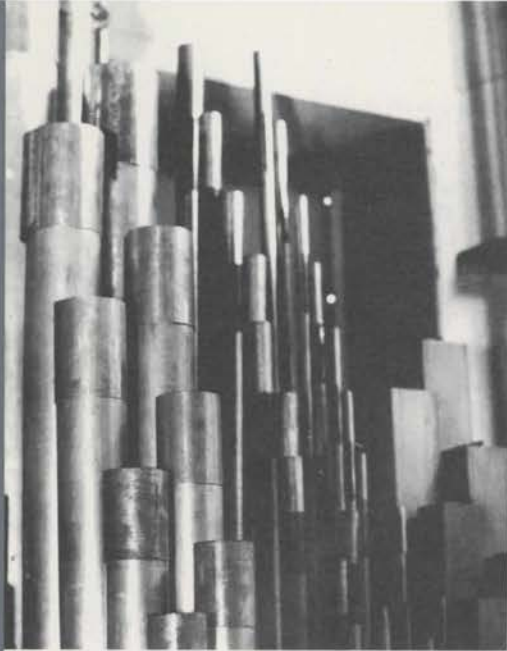
Once restored, the console completed its own journey to Wellesley to be reassembled, and to rejoin its pipework and wiring, and for the first time to assume its now permanent position on its elevator dolly.

During this time, of course, the organ crews, under current President Arthur Goggin's leadership, were completing the rest of the installation. Such major feats as walling-in the two chambers, and cutting open the two direct-facing swell-openings had to be dealt with.

As we have said, all of EMC's public concerts in times past had been played on the Stoneham Town Hall/Patch Memorial Wurlitzer. With our 1973 fall concert, we could no longer ignore what had been disturbing us for some time — the Stoneham organ was beginning to show the effects of age and insufficient maintenance. Much as we

Under the stage are the relays, switches, capture combination system and two 5 hp 3-phase blowers.





Diapasons, Flutes and Strings in the main chamber.



Strings on offset chest in the main chamber "just make it."



Tuba and Trumpet ranks in the Solo chamber.

had come to love the old girl, we realized that the time had come to sink or swim with our own State/Babson Wurlitzer. Art Goggin's crew went into high gear, the debugging team of Clay Stone and Ed Stanley shouldered their Flit guns, Erle and Mark Renwick applied tweezers and probes to the eye-crossing job of key contact adjustment. And then came the big one — our tireless wire men tied in a solid-state capture combination action — in time for our spring concert! Our organ's original Wurlitzer combination action, considering that the planned expansion would require major additions to it, was deemed to be hopeless. We just didn't have years enough to do the job. We had heard of a solid state action being marketed by Damon Corp. of Westwood, Mass. Consultation and research determined our course, We bought the "black box," and a "super crew" made up of Dick Linder, Elbert Drazy, Walt Wilson, Ed Stanley, Clay Stone and others wired it in. Bugs we had, but our whiz kids spotted them all and banished them. Did it work? Ask any one of the three artists who have played it in concert! If the much larger Damon system now in use in the famed Paramount-Witchita Wurlitzer is as successful as ours, the artists who will play the "Dowager Empress" will surely love it.

Practically all our regular monthly meetings are held at Babson. Aside from the obvious benefits of having plenty of comfortable space, there is

the endless delight of playing and listening to our very own Wurlitzer. Meetings usually provide some sort of planned entertainment (Eastern Mass. Chapter includes several professionals, and a good number of very talented non-pros); following business meetings and during refreshments, open console always brings forth unexpected pleasures for both players and listeners. Heaven must be something like this!

Our organ has seen us successfully through three public concerts so far. In the spring of 1974, as we have explained, we had decided to launch our prize into the concert field (though it had actually been heard already by a few limited audiences at college functions). Fearless Larry Ferrari (Bless him!) agreed to fly our as yet untried organ in its concert debut. The cheerful grin on Larry's face as the evening progressed assured us all was well. And the waves of enthusiastic applause that followed his program confirmed the feeling! Only those who have sweated and suffered and worried over a theatre organ could know the pride and the joy that filled our hearts that night!

The fall of '74 saw the organ considerably more honed down and tightened up than it had been six months before. Though still not tonally "finished," it was greatly improved. A fortunate bit of scheduling put Hector Olivera on the bench for this concert. What happened? Another Olivera Experience! The cheering audience left no doubt

as to their approval of both the organ and the artist. And Hector? Bowing in acknowledgment after his encores, he turned and planted a fervent kiss square on the console's Hope-Jones nameplate! (Endorsement enough!)

And last spring, Ashley Miller came up from New York and made it all happen again. Ashley's formidable technique can put severe demands on an organ, but the Babson Wurlitzer met the test. Ashley especially enjoyed the facility of our Damon capture system. It showed in his playing; and his performance was, as always, outstanding.

What lies ahead? Formal dedication, scheduled for November 8, 1975. The end of a long, hard road. By this date, organ builder Ray Whalen and Art Goggin should have completed the tonal finishing and regulating of our present thirteen ranks. And our bug-chasers will have exterminated every last cotton-pickin' bug. A committee headed by ex-chapter presidents Carl Getz and Dick Linder plans a program worthy of the occasion. The artist has already been engaged. By general agreement, Hector will return to our bench for this momentous event.

Most ATOS chapters publish newsletters. Eastern Mass. Chapter had for several years come up with sporadic bulletins, mostly authored by Al Winslow, some by Jim Rockett, and others. Vice President Erle



Knight at night.

Renwick started the first regularly published paper in 1969; it acquired a name (by balloting) and in 1970 the paper, now the "Eastern PIPES," enmeshed itself in the hitherto casual life of its present editor, Stu Hinchliffe. Published monthly ten times a year, the paper has been reaching a widening readership outside eastern Mass., as well as being read(?) by the chapter's present 120-odd members. Several publishing aides have introduced various printing methods. The PIPES is presently mimeographed on a brand-new club-owned duplicator. The PIPES' purpose is, simply — inform and unify; its content tries to achieve this by printing of bulletins, coverage of chapter events, exchange of views, the publishing of historical articles,

technical pieces, etc. Though its staff has seen numerous changes and has included many able contributors, Paul Chavanne and Dick Linder (both ex-presidents) have been Stu's most constant partners and counsels. This tale has been jointly authored by this same trio, with much of the earlier background material contributed by long-time member and officer Jim Rankin.

For all of us, the members of Eastern Mass. Chapter, in our organ-restoring activities we have not only fulfilled the purposes of the ATOS, while providing ourselves much pleasure (along with some discomforts); but most importantly, our shared experiences have brought the priceless gift of friendships with some truly fine people. □

FOURTH SEASON FOR WURLITZER POPS

Season ticket sales for Wurlitzer Pops have very nearly doubled from the number sold at this time last year. The three-concert series which began Sept. 20 is going into its fourth year following its premiere concert in December of 1972.

Michael Coup, president of Wichita Theatre Organ, Inc., sponsors of the series said, "We are gratified by the response and want to continue to bring the additional culture and unique entertainment to the Wichita area. We have also kept the cost the same as last season, even though our expenses have risen. Our thought is to make these concerts available for the enjoyment of as many people as possible."

This year's series will be launched by Bill Thomson, a previous guest artist in 1973. The initial concert was set for Sept. 20 at Century II Exhibition Hall. Recently Thomson was named best overall organist and winner of the best new organ album in a readership poll by *The Organist Magazine*.

Thomson is a composer who has acquired the title "jet set" organist. He concertizes with classics and popular music.

The other two events on the Wurlitzer Pops series schedule includes the popular-with-the-fans Silent Movie Night with Gaylord Carter. The crowd pleasing composer/arranger has appeared here before to sold-out houses. His performance is scheduled for March 20, 1976.

Here's Hector Olivera, booked for May 8, 1976, will be a new musician to Wichita area audiences. The 29-year-old native of Buenos Aires has played Carnegie Hall and had the pleasure of performing before the Pope during a visit to the Vatican Pavillion at the World's Fair in New York.

Not a part of the regular series but an option for series ticket holders at a reduced rate is a new concept, Billy Nalle's Concert/Dance on June 5, 1976. *The New York Times* called Nalle "notable, imaginative, lively."

The three-concert series is priced at \$12.50 at Central Ticket Agency. Billy Nalle's Concert/Dance is \$5.00 to series ticket holders. Ticket holders are entitled to reserved table seating and complimentary refreshments. □

REMEMBER



COPY DEADLINE

FOR THEATRE ORGAN MAGAZINE

All material to be published must be received at
P.O. Box 1314, Salinas, Calif. 93901
by the FIRST of the month PRECEDING publication.

Copy for December-January Issue must be in by November 1.