

A few years ago we started a series entitled "Pipes for the Price of a Plug-in." After the first installment, the series disappeared because no builder of pipe organs came forth with a theatre organ model he was willing to talk about; current builders' major source of income is revenue from church organs, and too often their customers harbor resentment toward entertainment organs. Yet, several of the remaining pipe organ builders lock their doors at 5:00 p.m. and gleefully construct entertainment organs after hours — only on order, of course. Visitors to the factories report the fleeting sight of horseshoe consoles, color coded stoprails and stoplists to delight the most voracious "Tibia Tooter."

While our premise of electronic-priced pipes holds, this story deals with a different aspect of the love of pipes, the quest of those with limited resources, even less space, and a classical background.

Take, for example, Lawrence and Teresa Walters of Garden City, Kansas. Both were organ majors in college and the pattern was set. This doesn't mean they lack interest in pops and the theatre organ. In their part of Kansas, pipe organs number about three, all in churches, and no opportunity to get near a theatre instrument.

The couple currently live near Garden City, in a mobile home park. They found the home-on-wheels practical because Lawrence is with a supermarket chain and is subject to occasional transfer. His wife is a secretary.

Their enthusiasm for the sound of pipes seemed to increase after they acquired their mobile home. But the opportunity to play pipes was severely limited. Gradually, the idea evolved; why not some pipes right there in their small metal home? They shopped around, visiting nearby organ builders, but the price for even four ranks was beyond their range.

Finally they made inquiries at the Wicks Organ Co. in Highland, Illinois. This veteran organ company, associated with the Robert Morton Co. of Van Nuys, Calif. in the manufacture of theatre organs in the silent film era, is noted for some calculated gambles. The firm still builds theatre organs on order, but its mainstay is orthodox organs. Lawrence explained

his space limitations, and the man from Wicks replied, "I think our 'classic six' model will fit your needs very nicely." After much checking with a tape measure, the Walters agreed — except for one thing. Would the mobile home be able to stand the weight of the 2000-pound organ over an area of 64 square feet?

Sure said the mobile home builder. Actually, the organ weighs no more per square foot than a refrigerator.

pipes in a mobile home

by Stu Green

The Walters had to wait 10 months for delivery of their organ because Wicks is a busy builder. Then one day, a truck ground to a halt outside their door. The organ had arrived. It was installed by an experienced hand from Kansas City. They had spent \$12,000 for a six-rank straight organ tailored to fit their mobile home. Let's see what they got.

Teresa and Lawrence Walters enjoy their compact organ-in-a-trailer. The entire instrument occupies only 64 square feet. It is all self-contained, even to the blower which is mounted beneath the chest. Note the mitered 16' Subbass pipes at both ends of the main chest.

Stop Analysis

8' Gemshorn	49 pipes
8' Gedeckt	61 pipes
8' Dulzian (reed)	61 pipes
4' Nachthorn	73 pipes
4' Principal (Diapason)	85 pipes
1-1/3' Quint	61 pipes
16' Subbass (Pedal)	12 pipes
Total	402 pipes

This pipework is on a single chest, except for the 16' Subbass which is built on two offset chests resting on the floor, with six of the largest pipes mitered to fit under the 7½-foot ceiling. There are no chambers or swell shutters and the console is directly in front of the pipes.

"Probably the hardest thing to get used to is being right on the sound," says Teresa. The room which contains the organ is 18'5" x 13'3".

The only unification involved is the extension of two 4' ranks to their normal upper octaves. However, it will be noted that the Pedal Division, with the exception of the 16' Subbass, is borrowed from the manual stops, which is getting close to Hope-Jones practices.

Here are the voices as they appear at the drawknob console:

SWELL (UPPER MANUAL)

Gemshorn	8'
Nachthorn	4'
Spitzoctav	2'
(from Nachthorn)	
Quint	1-1/3'
Dulzian	8'
Tremolo	



PEDAL

Subbass	16'
Gedeckt (from Great)	8'
Octave (from Great)	4'
Dulzian (from Swell)	8'
Swell to Pedal	8'
Great to Pedal	8'

GREAT (LOWER MANUAL)

Gemshorn (from Swell)	8'
Gedeckt (Flute	8'
Principal (Diapason)	4'
Blockfloete	2'
(from Principal)	
Dulzian	8'
(from Swell)	
Swell to Great	8'
Swell to Great	4'

While there is some borrowing, extensive unification has been avoided. Church organ builders often resort to the practice of "extending" a rank beyond the orthodox organ's standard 61 note range, adding an octave or two at the top to form a Piccolo or a Mixture. Or the lower end of a voice may be extended downward to add a 16' Subbass to an 8' Flute or Diapason.

The Dulzian, in this case, is a reed voice and should not be confused with that mix of Diapason and String known as the Dulciana, which is a flue pipe. One might wonder whether 6 ranks of pipes played in a somewhat confined area might not be deafening. It's all in the voicing, and the playing area size was considered when the factory voicing was done. Incidentally, wind pressure is 2½ inches throughout. The blower is powered by a Swedish Meidinger Basel motor.

"One of the quietest motors in the business," says Lawrence.

With the console right up against the pipe chest, the installation would seem to be ideal for tracker action, which would further the classic makeup of the little organ. It was considered, but the Walters were favorably impressed by the response and simplicity of the Wicks direct electric action, whereby pneumatics within the chests are entirely eliminated.

There was also another reason voiced by Larry: "Trackers seem to be very touchy, and they might be damaged during a move. Besides, I like the idea of no chest pneumatics. That'll save me a lot of 'releathering' bread later." During a move, the



Even the console is mounted on the chest. It took some getting used to being so close to the pipework. The pipes in the foreground are part of the reed Dulzian rank.

pipes are removed from their racks and laid flat, the only precaution required for transit.

One of the unforeseen problems was getting the organ insured, and Larry can't figure out why.

"I tried to deal with insurance companies in all 50 states, but none showed any interest. They have a 'thing' about fire risk, even though more pipe-equipped churches than mobile homes burn down." The Walters finally secured a policy from Lloyds of London "which insures against everything but nuclear attack — at \$400 a year."

What do the Walters' friends and neighbors think about the pipe organ on wheels? There have been no complaints from neighbors living in the same park and the music-minded associates aren't doing much talking. But Larry has some theories.

"Out here on the plains, the classic organ buffs probably think it's a sacrilege to put a classical pipe organ in a mobile home, while the pop buffs most likely think of us as starched shirts, so we just keep a low profile. Guess I'm considered weird because I like all types of music," says Walters.

Asked why he didn't consider a unified organ with theatrical voices, Larry explains.

"First, it was a matter of cost. Our six-rank classic organ cost \$12,000, which we are financing much as a car buyer would. For the same amount, Wicks would have built us a four-rank unified organ. So the simpler classic system gained us two ranks of pipes. Secondly,

most of our work is in churches. Both Teresa and I hold down Sunday church jobs, and our home installation makes it possible to practice at home."

How do the Walters like their instrument?

Says Larry, "We've had it for over a year, now, and we are still so excited about having our very own instrument, it's easy to overdo the bragging!"

Adds Teresa, "The organ is excellent for Bach's music because of its clarity. The independent 4-foot pitches (Nachthorn and Principal) and the 1-1/3-foot Quint, are bright but not overpowering. Later periods of classical, and even pop music, also sound good on this instrument."

"This has got to be the most compact six-ranker ever built," adds Larry, "Volume is just right for the room, it was adjusted at the factory so it doesn't shake the roof or rattle the windows."

Thus ends our saga of a pioneer installation. With the rising popularity of both mobile homes and pipe organs, it is safe to predict there will be more.

Since our initial "Pipes For the Price of a Plug-in" story several years ago, the price of comparable electronic organs has shot upward into the 30 to 60 thousand dollar bracket. All of which makes the compact 12-grand pipe organ the more tempting.

And what has been done with a "Classic 6" may also be done with unified theatrical voices, we might add. □