

WURLITZER STYLE 165X* A RARE BREED?

by H. Clealan Blakely

The American ingenuity of a suburban Buffalo, New York, enthusiast has resulted in the very unusual yet successful installation of a small Wurlitzer in the home of Earl G. Gilbert of Getzville, New York.

The Style 165X is a 2/6 organ, with divided chambers. The X in the style number denotes it was divided. The main chamber contains a Bourdon-Concert Flute, Diaphone-Diapason, Salicional, Chrysoglott, re-lays and switch stack. The solo contains a Vox Humana, Tibia Clausa, Trumpet, Xylophone, Glockenspiel, Bass Drum, Snare Drum, Cymbal, Chinese Gong, Auto Horn, Chinese Block, Bird Whistle, Fire Gong, Tambourine, Surf Machine, Castanets, Door Bell, Tom-tom, Sleigh Bells, Triangle, and Cathedral Chimes.

Wurlitzer built only 19 of the Style 165, most of which were not divided. The 165 was an improved model of the Style D. In this late model the Tibias were extended up to 2'. Then it was unified at 16, 8, 4, 22/3 and 2' making available the Crawford Tibia sound. The Flute also is there with the same unification. The divided organ is also standard with 3 tremulants. The first of these organs was shipped in May, 1928, and the last one in December, 1929.

Mr. Gilbert's Wurlitzer is Opus

Earl Gilbert in his studio. The solid shutters at each end of the room form large tone openings that surround the listener with sound.



1966, which was shipped 10/11/28 to the Gaiety Theatre, Utica, N.Y. While in the theatre it was played by Elizabeth Bergner and Paul Loomis, who still resides in the Utica area. The organ was actually used only five months in the theatre. Mr. Gilbert bought it, and with his patient wife Stella, and friends, removed it in January, 1966. The theatre, slated to be demolished, was then known as the Utica Theatre.

Mr. Gilbert examined nine different available pipe organs over a six year period, and concluded that this one would be an ideal size for a home installation. It was one complete organ of all small scaling. He designed and built a special house for this particular organ, choosing hard surfaced shallow chambers. His forced hot air heating system keeps both chambers, as well as the rest of the house, at an even temperature, and no difficulty has arisen in keeping the instrument in tune. He started the house in the Spring of 1967, and moved in the following October. The organ was installed and the blower started on Decoration Day weekend in 1969. He had no leaks in the wind ducting and still has none. The same ducting from the theatre installation was used.

The console is located midway between the two chambers, which have all the original frames and shades from the theatre (28 shutters). The music room is 12' x 20' with an 8' ceiling. With the solidness of the shutters for large tone openings forming each end of the studio, a natural reverberation is achieved. Mr. Gilbert is a Wurlitzer purist and a perfectionist, and carried out the installation exactly as it was in the theatre to the last detail, using the

*Editors Note: the Wurlitzer style D and its successor the style 165 were probably Wurlitzer's most commonly installed theatre organ. However, very few were divided which makes the 165X quite rare.

original framing, bracing, wind trunking, and cable.

The blower operated on two phase current in the theatre. By splitting single phase with the help of capacitors, it is still operating on the exact current for that motor. Washing machine solenoids remotely operate the original manually operated starting switch.

What makes this installation unique is the addition of a Wurlitzer Theatre Organette, Style W. He secured the organette from the Little Hippodrome in Buffalo in January, 1963. The organette is a roll player which was a mechanical orchestra of three or four pieces, a combination of piano and 98 pipes.

With the continuous help of his wife, these two instruments have been electrically combined to improve the original performance of each, but each will still perform as it originally did in its theatre.

While rebuilding the organette, he installed a player piano roll box in place of one of the duplex players to greatly enlarge the compass of the instrument. It plays automatically on the duplex side, and plays programmed player piano rolls automatically on the other side. Mini tabs and other controls are incor-

The needed tabs are on the theatre organ in order to have the piano from the Organette (center background). This will be under pedal expression when completed. Eventually, the photoplayer will be wired as a player for the whole organ and it will then make its own registration changes.



porated so that it will play the organ on two manuals plus the pedal on either roll if desired. It has bass and treble hammer lifters, and both are often actuated to produce organ solo. While simulating an orchestra soft pedal, sustain pedal, mandolin, solo volume, hammer lifters, turning pipes on and off and tremulant on and off, are used to their full advantage. The theatre rolls play 30 to 40 minutes each. Bass drum has been borrowed from the organ for use automatically on marches if desired. Vacuum magnets were installed in the organette so that piano 16' pedal, 16-8-4 accompaniment with pedals expression plus mandolin is available when played on the organ. When mandolin is desired from the console, solo volume is actuated, which makes it very effective.

These Organettes were sold to small theatres, and designed for automatic operation; they would play one roll while the other was re-winding, or the accompaniment music could be changed from love scenes to westerns by push button. These stop tabs indicated Piano, Manual,

Coupler, Tremolo, Bourdon, Flute, Quintadena, and Mandolin. Mr. Gilbert has a large collection of both types of rolls. He, unlike many organ technicians, can play very well himself. I asked about his musical background, and he told me that while living with his parents in Dansville, N.Y., he had three years of piano training, starting at age 12. His teacher was Miss Mertie C. Stoner. At high school he studied the rudiments of musical theory. The next school year he studied piano under Leo F. DeSola — all instrumental music teacher, a graduate of the Eastman School of Music. After graduation, Mr. DeSola, a native Cuban, gave him free after hour instruction at the school, at which time he was taught to play piano without the notes by applying his background of musical theory. In 1940 he came to Buffalo, and later got a job as organist at the Main Roller Rink in downtown Buffalo, on a Hammond organ. He also played Hammond in the Genesee Roller Rink in Buffalo.

For any organ buff considering a pipe organ in his home, I would sug-

gest that you try to see this very effective Wurlitzer installation. It is the only complete Style 165 outside of California; it is the only Style 165X that exists any place with no ranks added. Mr. Gilbert's address is 2289 Hopkins Road, Getzville, New York 14068. His phone number is (716) 689-8683. You will find the organ in excellent condition, with a remarkable "in-theatre" sound. It is heard in true stereo, and being a divided organ, the organist may choose his combination, then balance what he's got with the shutters. It is a fine example of saving two theatre instruments, that future generations may see and hear what they were. You will be surprised at the inventive genius of Earl Gilbert in the many things he has been able to accomplish with this installation.

Many prominent organists have had pleasure in playing this organ; the Gilberts have private concerts. Often persons attending are so surprised to find out how little they really knew about these theatre organs, and many are thrilled when taken back to those days, to see and hear one again. □

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Reginald Foort

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