

# THE MIGHTIEST CONTINUES A WURLITZER TRADITION

by Jerry Kenney of the Wurlitzer Company

The Mightiest Wurlitzer is more than just a museum piece. It is a living example of the best of the organ-builder's art. And its installation follows the Wurlitzer/Hope-Jones tradition of unique instruments designed to enhance the lo-

cations that house them. This quality of uniqueness may seem ironic in that Wurlitzer's standard specifications and mass-production techniques made many of Hope-Jones' innovations technically and economically feasible. But irony is one of

the qualities that distinguishes true art.

Purists may argue that the Mightiest Wurlitzer should be built to a strict set of specifications. And it is, inasmuch as all of the instrument's components meet original

Stop tablets for the Mightiest Wurlitzer were all etched with the original plates from the old Rudolph Wurlitzer factory in North Tonawanda.





Wurlitzer specifications. And when completed, the organ will be capable of reproducing a complete range of Wurlitzer pipe organ sounds. But to say that the Mightiest should reflect a specific style of instrument or unification formula would be to ignore a basic point of authenticity. Because few, if any, of the more than 2,200 Wurlitzer pipe organs exactly match the specifications drawn up for the 100 or so different styles developed over the decades.

“ **More than  
five dozen ranks  
of pipes** ”

Evolution occurred because the instrument designers and installers were continually innovating according to the state of the art at the time of installation and to the requirements of each location. For example, rather than there being 200 or so simon-pure Style D's, most of these instruments were modified with the addition of optional features, and specifications were revised to fit the installation. The evolution of the Mighty Wurlitzer, then, followed two courses. The first was on the engineering drawing boards and in the sound laboratories at North Tonawanda. But the second course was in the theatres, halls, residences and houses of worship in which these instruments were installed.

The Mightiest Wurlitzer, then, follows this evolutionary tradition. True, the instrument will include a fantastic array of typical Wurlitzer theatre and liturgical organ features selected from four decades of experience. But because of its size and scope, it may also show pipe organ enthusiasts a few innovations made possible by its ideal location. Although more than five dozen ranks of pipes may encompass more possibilities than even the most eager enthusiast can dream of, the Mightiest will also feature some innovations, especially in the area of unification. These innovations are being

Top — An inspiration to today's craftsman in the Wurlitzer model shop is this photograph from the North Tonawanda pipe organ factory. Of this equipment, only the pantograph and plates used to etch stop tablets remain.

Bottom — The etching machine is a pantograph that transfers the form of the lettering from the plates to the molded tablet.

developed right now as the installation is completed. The exact scope of these innovations won't be realized until they are actually combined. But we can assure theatre organ enthusiasts several delightful surprises — surprises that are authentically within the Wurlitzer tradition.

Meanwhile, here are some indications of the size and scope of this instrument. For example, in the 100 or so specification lists of original Wurlitzer/Hope-Jones Unit Orchestras, ranks at the 32' level were somewhat rare, and at best, there was only one in those instruments that had them. The Mightiest will have three 32' ranks.

There are over five dozen capture pistons on the Mightiest including single and double touch combinations. The pistons will include a *Sforzando*, something few theatre organs boasted of, most of which were Mighty Wurlitzers. Of course, the pistons will include a General Cancel for all stops.

The more than 340 stop tablets that curve around the newly refinished console have all been etched individually, using the original plates and equipment from the North Tonawanda workshops. Over 30 couplers



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will provide exciting inter- and intramanual combinations. The organ features over two dozen Tremulants. And the six expressions pedals, plus an Additive Crescendo pedal, will enhance the full organ sound.

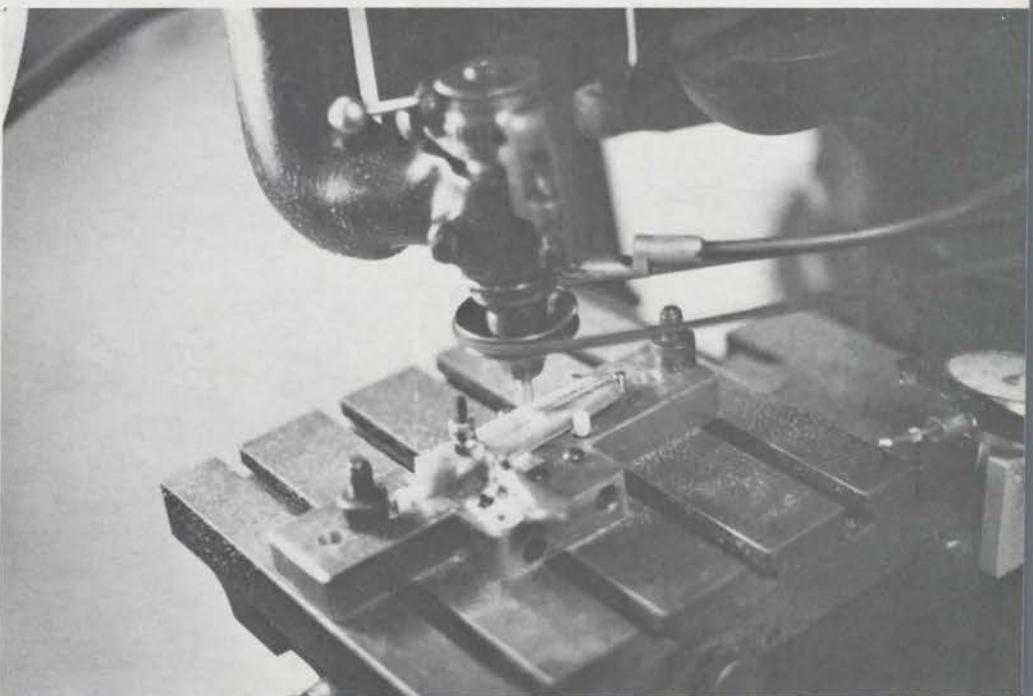
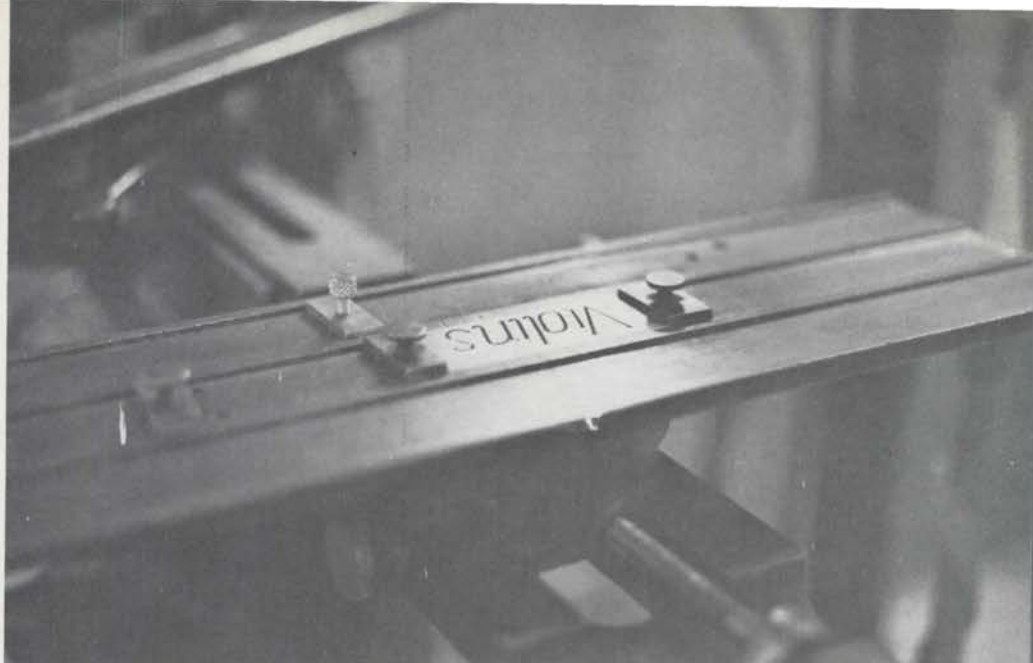
In addition to the five Tibia and five Vox ranks previously mentioned, the Mightiest will have a Floating Orchestral division of 19 ranks.

But this is merely a hint of the full scope of the instrument. The tradition of innovation is not opened by any means. In fact, the organ's completion is clearly in sight. Much of what has been done is based

Top — The etching plate is jugged in position to cut a new stop tablet designation.

Center — The stylus that etches the lettering into the tablet is guided by the arms of a pantograph.

Bottom — When the etching is completed, the operator clears away any burrs that remain.



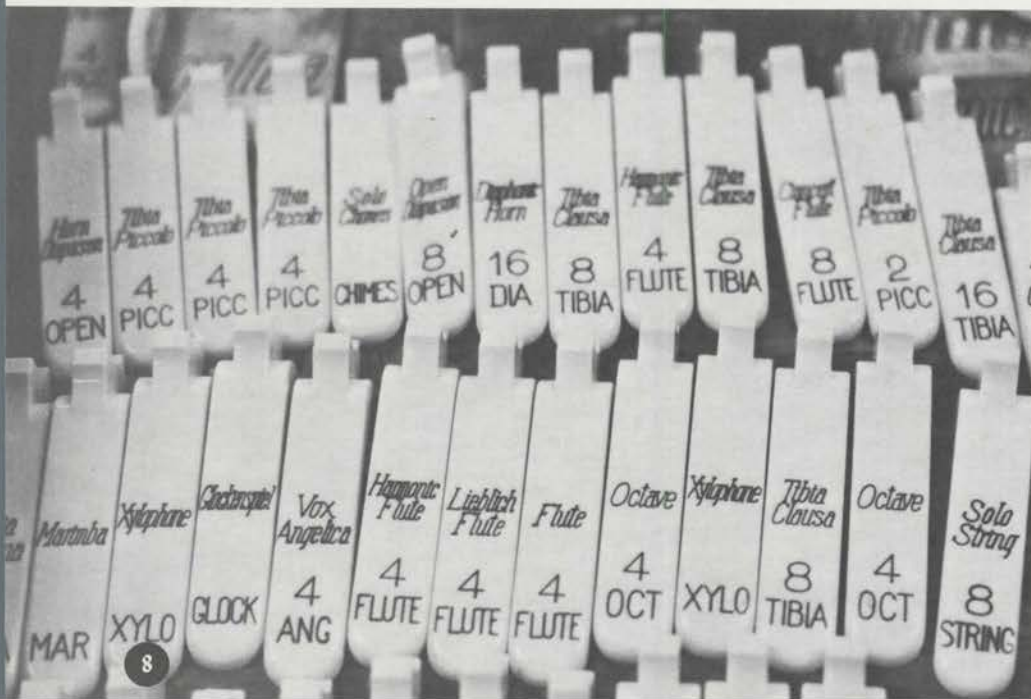


Top — Paint is applied to the surface of the newly etched tablet and then wiped off, leaving a residue in the grooves of the lettering.

Center — After the paint dries, the surface of the tablet is polished clean of any extraneous paint using a smooth cloth and a paint solvent.

Bottom — The completed stop tablets are then left to dry, soon to be installed in the rails on the console of the Mightiest Wurlitzer.

on consultation with the recognized authorities — the giants among American Theatre Organ Society membership. After a final check out of the installation with these authorities, more details will become known. □



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