

# A KIWI WURLITZER IN FLIGHT

by Norman Dawe

Eddie Horton made history at the Regent Theatre, Auckland, New Zealand, when, in late December of 1926, he presented his first programme at the console of Opus 1475, a 2/8 Model F Wurlitzer. (See *THEATRE ORGAN*, Volume 14, Number 3 of June 1972 — page 14.) The instrument was used constantly until 1944 when it was purchased by parents and pupils of the Lower Hutt High School (Wellington). Unfortunately, due to water damage after a severe storm, the organ became unplayable and was later acquired by Mr. Lindsay Anderson of Wellington who stored it in his home and warehouses in the city. Recently he decided to sell, and Mr. Leslie Stenersen of Auckland, a keen collector of vintage mechanical musical instruments and other memorabilia, and a member of the Kiwi Chapter, became the new owner.

Then came the problem of transportation back to Auckland, some 450 miles to the north, and the following paragraphs tell the story of the UPHEAVE ALL that followed.

We are very fortunate in Auckland, to have a Museum of Transport and Technology, known as MOTAT. Situated close to the city, this covers a large area with many buildings, steam engines, trams (street cars) aeroplanes, and anything from the past. You name it, all is there and in perfect working order. It is also very fortunate that Les Stenersen is a member of the management committee, and when he mentioned purchase of the Wurlitzer and the problems connected

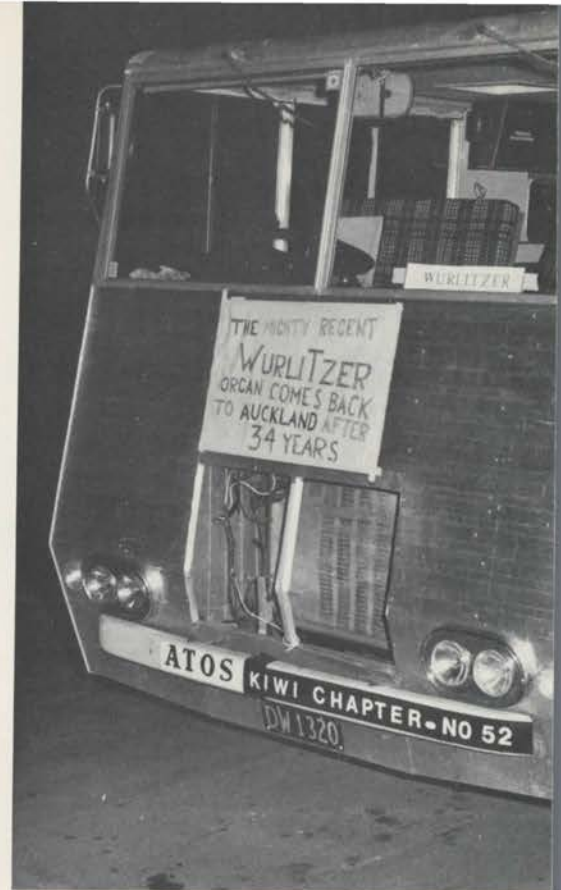
with the uplifting, and the transport, many more cogs of a different nature started to turn. Another keen member of MOTAT, Mr. Hugh Lithgow of Freightways, a haulage firm, offered the use of an articulated truck and trailer, along with three of his drivers.

Members of ATOS and MOTAT offered to journey to Wellington to help with the loading. Accommodation and transport problems were quickly solved when Keith Wagner, of the Kiwi chapter, offered the use of his mobile home unit, which, with all the modern conveniences provided sleeping accommodation for eight. This unit is affectionately known as Jumbo.

George Croft and Son, organ-builders, offered much encouragement, and, at their expense, flew their representative, John Parker, to Wellington, to supervise the sorting and loading of the beastie.

A date in August was set for the big lift. Les and the writer would travel a day ahead by car, Jumbo and party would leave early Friday morning, the transporter later in the day and travel through the night — all to rendezvous early next day. Chapter wives rallied round and provided casseroles and tasty dishes. Meals were cooked and tea and coffee served to the accompaniment of organ music on 4-track stereo sound.

All proceeded to plan, but we had not reckoned with the elements. There is, in the centre of the island, a very large desert area. Active volcanoes tower over this, and Mount



Jumbo

Ruapehu is the mecca of thousands of ski enthusiasts during the snow season. These sports minded people pray all week for snow, and more snow, and it did just that. Jumbo plowed bravely through, spurred on by a recording of Christmas music. More history being made — who had ever heard of Christmas in August?

Alas, the transporter did not fare so well, for the road had been closed for the night. The drivers stayed overnight in Taupo and made an early start on Saturday but it meant the loss of several valuable hours of daylight, but, by 3 p.m. that day all was under control. Masses of pipes were delivered to the Wellington Cathedral, where Croft's is installing a new organ, the trailer was left at a warehouse with a loading party, and the truck to Mr. Anderson's home. Here, a party of four had emptied the house and covered the lawn and footpath with pipes, relay equipment and toy counter, much to the amazement of passers-by, who had probably never seen an organ in such a state of confusion. The keyboards and stop rail were placed with loving care in Jumbo's wardrobe and by 6:30 p.m. loading was completed at this point. Yet a call to another address to collect the swell fronts and shutters, then to



Keyboard and stoprail being unloaded from Jumbo. Bill Mitchelhill, Norman Dawe, Keith Wagner, Les Stenersen, John Hardicker and Alan Gwyn.



A disorganized organ unloaded in a hurry.



The transporter and trailer.

Console of the Regent Wurlitzer, Opus 1475.



The blower.

Heave Ho! Heavy pipes that really were heavy.



connect with the trailer, and by 8 p.m. the procession headed for the North.

At Paraparaumu, ATOS member, Len Southward had been storing the blower and other parts, and these were awaiting our arrival. The final lift was completed, dinner was served and we called it a day.

Len is the owner of the 3/16 Wurlitzer special, Opus 2075, which was previously in the Civic Theatre in Auckland. This will eventually be installed in a concert hall that he is building, in conjunction with a vintage car museum — but that will be another story.

Sunday, at 7 a.m. saw us on the road again, all in high spirits, one of the most beautiful days you could ever have in mid-winter, with the mountains glistening in their mantles of snow. With a stop at Taupo for lunch, the mountainous area all behind, Jumbo rolled on, bearing a canvas that announced the return of the Wurlitzer to Auckland. We were welcomed at 6 p.m. by Vice Chairman Jack Granwal, who had organized a band of willing helpers, and by 7:30 p.m. Opus 1475 was housed in its new temporary home, the Hollywood Cinema. Here it will be reassembled and played until some future date, when, hopefully, it will be installed in a concert hall to be built at MOTAT.

A "live" weekend of music at MOTAT was presented the following week and over 12,000 people visited the museum and to see the new arrival. The console of Opus 1475 was on view, and the grand old lady smiled at everyone. For many people, young and old, it was the first time they had seen the control centre of a Wurlitzer pipe organ.

Music filled the air for two days, organ societies and dealers provided instruments and players — they were everywhere, in the fire station, the car museum and the oddest of places. The mammoth fairground organ, the barrel organ and player pianos worked overtime, as did a pipe band, a choir, strolling players, a xylophone and harmonica player. Now comes the task of rebuilding the organ, and, under the direction of John Parker, enthusiasts gather each Sunday to help in the project. All are helping to make history and to demonstrate the aims and ideals of the American Theatre Organ Society. □

## AN APOLOGY

### To Wallace Baumann of Knoxville

Mr. Baumann researched and wrote the cover story, "The Beautiful Tennessee," for the October/November issue of THEATRE ORGAN. In the publication of the story, he was given no credit for his work.

This is particularly embarrassing because the story shows that a great effort was put forth and much time was consumed documenting the article. He went so far as to search files, old newspapers, and other documents in order to list all the organists who had played the Tennessee Wurlitzer.

We offer no excuses for this gross oversight and can only humbly apologize to Wallace Baumann, admitting that he deserves more than an apology after the fact. The lack of credits for his efforts is inexcusable.

It is sincerely hoped that Mr. Baumann will accept the apologies of the staff of THEATRE ORGAN and the editor, George Thompson.

# Knoxville's Tennessee Theatre Closed

by Wallace W. Baumann

The Tennessee Theatre, the cover story in the October-November 1978 THEATRE ORGAN, closed October 3, 1978, just two days after its 50th birthday, which passed unnoticed. Two months unpaid rent caused the C. B. Atkin Estate, owners of the building, to ask the lessee, Tennessee Theatre Classics, to vacate the premises.

Poor management, and a completely unprofessional approach in operating the theatre caused its demise. Attendance at first was very good, but poor advertising and poor marquee and exterior sign displays were early evidence that the operation was doomed to failure.

The theatre was closed November 3, 1977, by ABC Southeastern Theatres and was reopened March 15, 1978 by the new company with much fanfare. The theatre was opened again for one evening, October 19, for a special benefit showing of *The Hasty Heart* starring Patricia Neal, former Knoxvillean, who appeared in person in connection with the dedication of the Patricia Neal Re-

habilitation Center of Fort Sanders Presbyterian Hospital, Knoxville, sponsor of the program. Billy Barnes, Tennessee house organist from 1937 to 1942, returned to play the 3/14 Mighty Wurlitzer for the event. □

## New Catalogue "L"

The Organ Literature Foundation is the largest supplier of organ books and recordings in the world and offers the most diversified stock anywhere. They are also active in reprints and the publishing of original works on organ history.

The foundation has announced a new catalogue "L" offering over 800 items. Over 160 of these are new and were not previously listed in the former catalogue. There are new books and over 100 new recordings. Catalogue "L" is available free to any of our readers who care to have one.

Sincerely yours,  
Henry Karl Baker  
45 Norfolk Road  
Braintree, Massachusetts 02184  
Telephone: (617) 848-1388 □