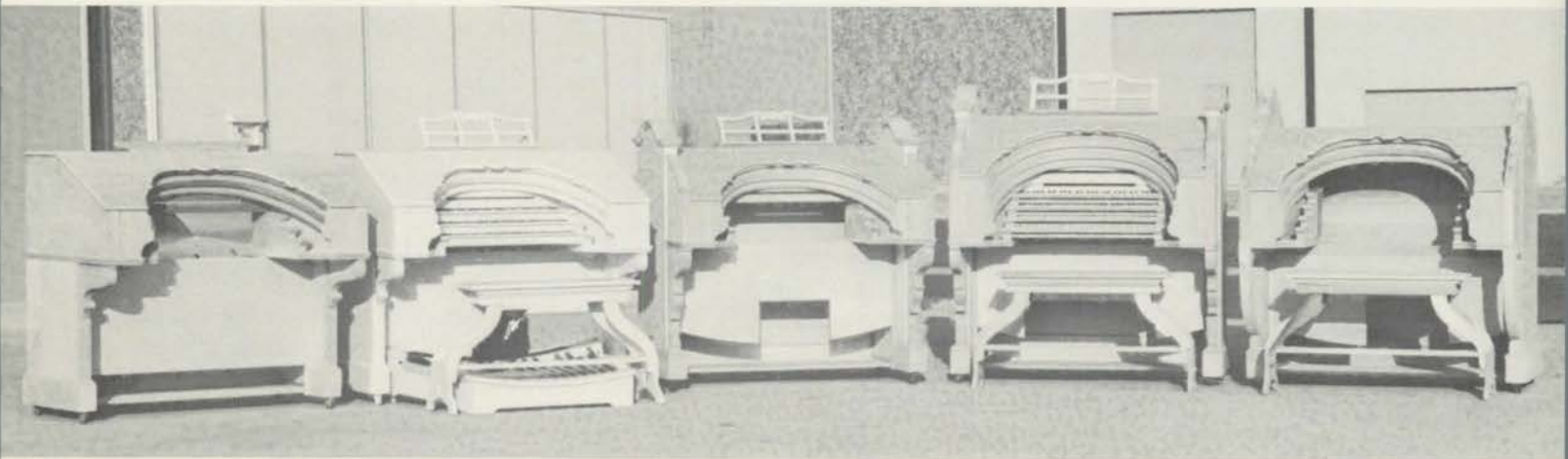


Devtronix Organs- Satisfying A Growing Demand For Custom Consoles

by
Tom Thompson



"Parking Lot Sale." L to R: a three-manual Paramount Scroll shell; the same console with manuals and pedalboard added; a three-manual Paramount French style; a four-manual Publix French style; and the four-manual Modernistic (Waterfall) console custom built for George Wright.

If you wanted to find a Wurlitzer theatre pipe organ console for a project, where would you start looking? What price do you suppose you would have to pay? What kind of condition do you think it might be in, if you were to find just the right style console?

With the growing interest and popularity of theatre pipe organs in public places, there is also a growing need for more consoles. Each year, more pipe organs are relocated in private homes, restaurants, pizza parlors — a few even wind up back in theatres, installed there by the local members of the American Theatre Organ Society. Periodically one is lost in a fire. The point is, the market for the theatre pipe organ and its console is rapidly increasing while the supply diminishes. According to Judd Walton, there were 2,238 Wurlitzer theatre pipe organs built, of which he estimates nearly 1,500 can no longer be accounted for. Since the Wurlitzer theatre pipe organ has not been in production since 1934, you can't turn to them for a new one, fresh off the assembly line. And unfortunately, as the supply diminishes, the price rises.

The good news is that we live in a

time where nostalgia is commonplace. In the case of the theatre pipe organ, nostalgia is only half of it. These magnificent instruments being reinstalled, restored and kept alive are not only for and by the folks who remember them from the old movie house days, but also for the younger set who are intrigued by the

unusual sight and sound. So, where there is a demand, suppliers will arise to fill the need.

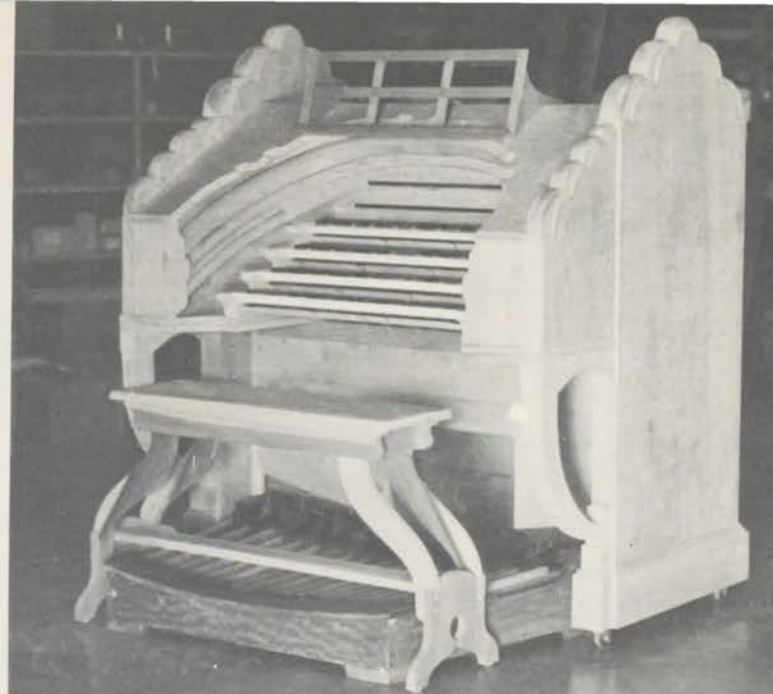
The names Klann, Reisner, Kimber-Allen, Hesco, Arndt and Devtronix are just a few that are important to the theatre pipe organ installer. Each of these companies fabricates or distributes valuable

Shell of the Modernistic style Wurlitzer console custom built by Devtronix for George Wright. It is often called the "Waterfall" style due to the distinctive caps.





The four-manual Publix French style console built for the residence of Carl Weiss, of Weiss and Turney Pipe Organ Builders, Long Island, N.Y. It will accommodate 315 stop tabs and can control a 40-rank pipe organ.



The Wurlitzer Modernistic style four-manual console built for George Wright, with manuals and pedalboard added. Approximately 270 stop tabs are planned.

parts. Some of the parts are exact (reproduction) duplicates of long since worn out originals, while others are replacements that can be made to fit and work. The Hesco Company, for example, makes stop keys, draw knobs, tilt tablets, pistons and name plates for the pipe organ consoles. Back in 1970 they acquired the use of the original Wurlitzer templates from which they made their own set. They now supply exact copies in shape, size, color and engraving style of the Wurlitzer originals.

But what about the consoles? Today, the largest, and by far the best builder of Wurlitzer theatre organ console reproductions is Devtronix Organs, Inc. in Sacramento, California. The company was formed back in 1971 by Ray DeVault, then an electronics design engineer at Lockheed Missile and Space Co. The first effort of the then small company was to supply keyboards and circuits for the organ experimenter. Eventually a need arose to have a console in which the builder could house the accumulation of parts. The first consoles were modest, home organ looking furniture, not at all unlike the Conns and Hammonds of that day. A subsequent run at the console came from DeVault's long interest in the old movie palaces and their accompanying theatre organs. The first prototype was constructed back in 1975. It turned out to be a 3-

manual, 2-stop row French style, white and gold version of the consoles built for the Paramount theatres... so he called it the Paramount French style. The next need came for a less fancy version and so the scroll design was added to the line for the Paramount organ. As any line of products (or reproductions) is created, someone invariably comes along who wants a lesser expensive model that isn't quite so fancy. Beside that customer stands the person who must have the biggest and most complex one that can be built... so out of that need came the Granada model with 3 manuals and 1 stop row bolster; along with it came the Publix models with 4 manuals and 2½ stop rows (later built with 3½ rows of stops). Not far behind the completion of the theatre console line came the classical or straight organ models — a 3-manual Concert style and a 2-manual Chapel console. That brought the line of available consoles to seven. Along with the lineup, there is an occasional custom order that can be a spin-off of existing styles. George Wright decided he would like to have a special console for the new pipe organ now being put together in his home. He has designed it for practice and recording sessions. He wanted a console like the one that came from the Oakland (California) Paramount Theatre but none was available, so he called on Devtronix to custom build it for him. That console is frequently called the Waterfall style, because of its dis-

tinctive scalloped caps. Wurlitzer called it their Modernistic design.

While Devtronix is primarily an electronic organ kit manufacturer, their second function as console supplier has become very active. Their consoles are beginning to turn up all across the nation in homes and public places where they power both electronic and pipe organs. Their circuit designs are as exacting in sounding like the pipe organs, as their consoles are in looking like them, so the package comes together extremely well.

Although Devtronix gets regular requests for woodworking blueprints for their consoles, they currently supply only those for the two Paramount styles. Since it requires a fair amount of skill and an unusual array of shop tools to build such a complex project, very few blueprint buyers have tackled and completed the task. For this reason, the staff at Devtronix has set up a program to provide consoles and electronic circuitry built up to whatever degree the customer requires. If the need is for a completed console in unfinished wood, that's available. Or, it will be painted or stained, and will come complete with keyboards, pistons, tabs, swell pedals and whatever else is desired. The end result is a Wurlitzer theatre pipe organ console that is true in every detail to the originals of the 1920s... a console that is not only functional, but is a thing of beauty that approaches being an art object. □