

# Wurlitzer Readed for Oakland Paramount

The restoration and installation of the Oakland Paramount's Wurlitzer organ is scheduled for completion by winter, in time to kick off the 50th Anniversary of the theatre's Grand Opening on December 16, 1931.

The Wurlitzer now being restored in the Paramount came to Oakland under exceptional circumstances. An authentic, million-dollar restoration completed in 1973 rendered the theatre back to its original design. The successful restoration and re-use of a movie palace (as the home of the Oakland Symphony) created such national interest that two donors came forward with replacement organs for the theatre's missing instrument.

J.B. Nethercutt, of Merle Norman Cosmetics, was the donor of the Paramount's new instrument — a twin to the Paramount's original Wurlitzer — and it, too, had changed hands several times. First installed in the Capitol Theatre in Detroit, the instrument was sold to a skating rink, to a private owner, and to Mr. Nethercutt before finding its current home in the Paramount. Interestingly, the Paramount's original organ was the last of 20 Paramount Publix models made by Wurlitzer, and the Paramount's present instrument was the first.

Preston Fleet, of San Diego, donated the second Paramount Publix organ to the theatre which was used

to augment the Nethercutt organ and further improve it. Other donors — corporations, foundations, individuals and California's Office of Historic Preservation — helped with cash pledges and organ parts to complete the project.

Like the theatre itself, the organ is undergoing careful, loving restoration. The organ technician on the project, Bill Klinger, possesses the skills of a metal worker, carpenter and electrician. The work is extremely intricate in putting together myriad parts from the giant 25 hp blower to the smallest ½" pipe located high in the organ chambers in the walls of the Paramount's auditorium.

The Paramount's original organ was, like nearly all of its genre, sold and removed from the theatre. Once installed in a restaurant in Los Altos, Ca., it now resides in a restaurant in Indianapolis where staff organists entertain nightly. The organ's new owners have lavished loving care on the instrument and have taken an interest in the origin and history of what was the Oakland Paramount's first Wurlitzer.

The Paramount's new organ will have one of the most complete and versatile specifications in the nation. Several prominent organists and design experts participated in drawing up a stoplist which will provide every possible combination that would be

desired by artists who will play the organ. The 4-manual console will control 27 ranks of pipes, 10 tuned percussions including 2 Harps, Piano and Vibraharp, 20 traps and effects, as well as 13 tremulants and 96 individual swell motors. Although the organ is built around the nucleus of a Paramount Publix, it will bear little tonal resemblance. However, the designers have adhered absolutely to the preservation of Wurlitzer tonal ideals.

The chambers have been reduced in cubic volume to optimize tonal projection. Nearly every square foot of the chamber fronts are devoted to swell opening, providing excellent egress through open grillwork.

A special feature of the instrument is the winding system which provides nine separate static regulators and noise reducing baffle boxes prior to the 23 individual wind regulators. This system is powered by a 25 hp Spencer Orgoblo which originally powered the historic California Theatre organ in San Francisco. The objective of the wind system is ample supply, steadiness, silence and proper matching of tremulant to pipe register. The entire system is in sheet metal construction.

The electrical system is another unusual and special feature of the organ. It will use one of the largest digital solid-state relay and switch systems yet employed on a pipe organ. This allows one single cable to transmit the impulses from the console to each chamber of the organ. In addition, a digital tape player will allow absolutely faithful reproduction of recorded performances of the instrument. The electronic system is being designed and built by S'Andelco Company of San Diego.

The console was restored by Edward Stout, III, to his own design. A walnut veneer and metal leaf has been applied which match the wood of the organ lift and the gilded auditorium.

A premiere concert with a nationally-renowned theatre organist is being planned to bring the sound of the mighty Wurlitzer back to the Paramount. The Paramount is accepting names of persons who wish to be provided information about the premiere concert in advance of public advertising. Call or write the Paramount Theatre, 2025 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94612, (415) 893-2300. □