

Paris Gets a "Soufflé"!

by Willem T. Brouwer as told to Walter Beaupre

Willem Brouwer is undoubtedly Holland's most ardent theatre organ fan. An ATOS member of the London and South of England Chapter, Willem asked Dr. Beaupre at the London 25th Convention to edit this report for THEATRE ORGAN. Although the account has been extensively rewritten for publication, all of the credit for this interesting story belongs to Mr. Brouwer.

In the April/May 1979 issue of THEATRE ORGAN I read a report which claimed that the 4/13 Christie which was associated with the Gaumont Palace in Paris was once again for sale and that "elaborate plans to re-install it in the Paris area seem to have fallen through."

The Christie had originally been built by the British firm of Hill, Norman & Beard Ltd. for installation in

the largest movie house on the Continent with a seating capacity of 6,000. The 1,500 pipes were all placed in chambers above the proscenium arch 62 feet above stage level. Organist Philip Dore was the first to play the Christie when the Gaumont Palace opened in 1930. Tommy Deserre followed Dore in 1931 and played for six years; then he returned in 1948 to hold forth at the console until 1962. Deserre came back to make a souvenir recording on the Christie in 1972, just before the Palace was torn down. George Gesthem also did a stint at the Palace, and Gilbert Le Roy was the last appointed organist in the movie theatre location.

Fortunately, the Christie did not suffer the same fate of organs in the Olympia and Paramount Opera along with the "UT" movie palaces

in Strassbourg which had been sold for scrap. Thanks to the devotion and tenacity of organ buff A. Villain, the Christie was rescued from a "melt down" and purchased for one French franc. J. Probst, who had been responsible over the years for organ maintenance, dismantled the Christie and put it in storage.

On April 17, 1976, the Christie was sold at auction to Roland Nungesser for 200,000 French francs. Formerly a minister, Nungesser is now the Mayor of Nogent, Marne. Meanwhile the French Minister of Culture, Michael Quay, had the Christie classified as an historic monument.

It was finally decided that the theatre organ should be installed in the Baltard Pavillion in Nogent, Marne. The pavillion itself is registered as an historic monument and is the only restored building in what was once the famous "Les Halles" marketing center. It has been named in tribute to its architect and builder, Victor Baltard.

So much for the chain of past events surrounding the Gaumont Palace Christie. What has actually happened to the organ in the interim? A few phone calls and letters resulted in an invitation from Jean Legoux, Director of the Baltard Pavillion, to see the rebuilt Christie and to hear it played by the resident organist Madame Simone Bernard. Naturally I accepted the invitation!

The reconstructed Baltard Pavillion suggests the ambiance of old Paris around 1900. It has cast iron supporting columns, glassed in galleries all around the perimeter, and typical ornamentations of the period. Mobile interior partitions and

The organ pipes are installed in two chambers along one wall of the reconstructed Baltard Pavillion. Behind the dummy pipes, which separate the two swell shade openings, is the Trumpet En Chamade.



staging facilities make it possible to use the pavillion for shows, concerts, exhibitions, and even sporting events.

The organ pipes, as one can surmise from the picture, have been installed along one wall with two chambers. Decorative dummy pipes separate the swell shade openings on either side. Near the left chamber is a relay room and near the right chamber are the percussions and blower. The painted murals beneath the swell shade openings depict scenes from Nogent's history. Behind the dummy pipes is an added 14th rank, a trumpet en chamade (not under expression).

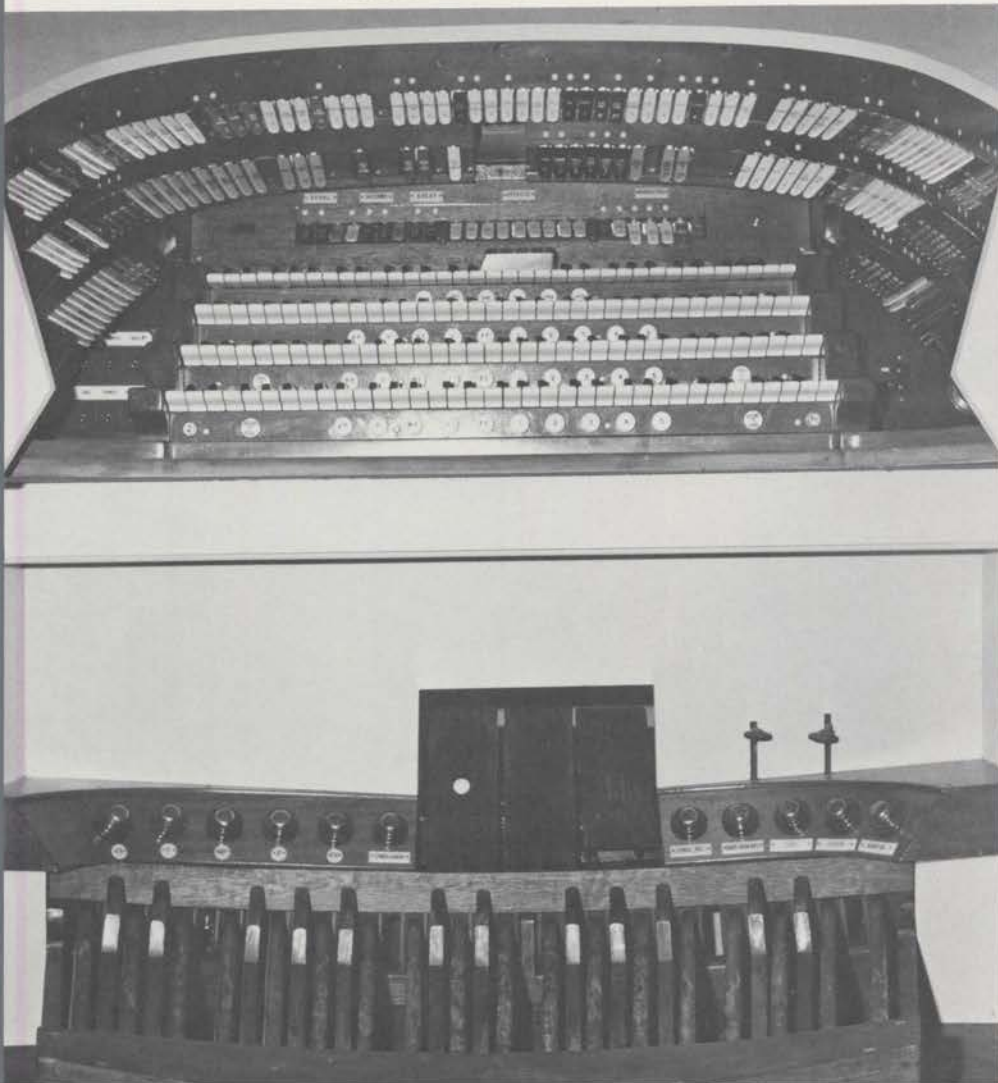
The Christie was rebuilt and installed over an 18 month period at a cost of 800,000 francs (about \$200,000) by Bernard Dargassies, formerly of the organ building firm, Maison Gonzales. Solid state devices have been substituted for the old Christie relays. Whereas the Christie console in the Gaumont Palace had 15 adjustable presets, there is now an electronically operated preset system

which allows for 240 preset combinations. The crescendo pedal is also operated electronically. Miniaturization allows all of the electronic devices to be included within the console. A 100 foot cable (with 800 wires) makes it possible to move the console from a center stage position to its glass protective case when not in use. Bernard Dargassies figured a way to put the trumpet en chamade on 2nd touch. One might hope that the present owners of the Christie would consult Hill, Norman & Beard about further adjustment of reeds and the vox tremulant, but the sound is already as magnificent as it is welcome.

Madame Bernard demonstrated the organ for me with a private mini-concert. It was beautiful. As an added thrill I was allowed to explore the possibilities of the Christie in an hour at the console.

For the record, the official re-opening of this Christie theatre organ in Paris was on Feb. 6, 1980, a benefit concert for "la Fondation Anne-Aymone Giscard d'Estaing

The console of the now-4/14 Christie.



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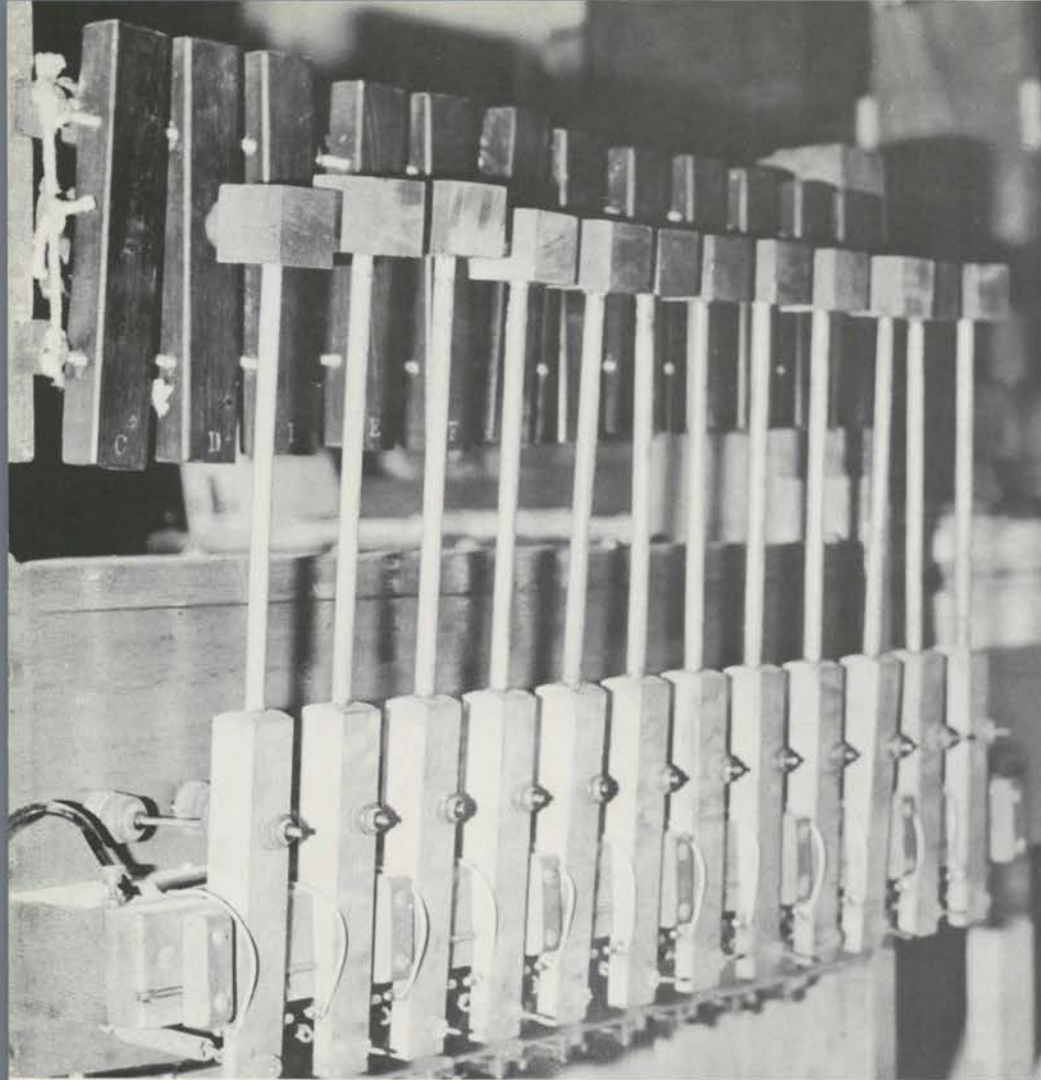
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The Xylophone in the right chamber.

pour l'enfance" — a slightly delayed tribute to the U.N.O. 1979 Year of the Child. Notables attending the gala affair were the president of the foundation, Madame Valéry Giscard d'Estaing; Mr. Nungesser, the Mayor of Nogent; Alain Poher, president of the Senate and senator for the Marne valley, and Jean Philip Lecat, Minister of Culture, along with many other dignitaries. Performing artists for the concert included Pierre Cochereau (Notre Dame organist), Tommy Deserre, Gilbert Le Roy and, of course, Madame Simone Bernard. The organ was used to accompany such famous French stars as Tino Rossi, Jean Sablon, Colette Renard, Pierre Douglas and Peter Ustinov.

So the wonderful old Christie of the Gaumont Palace now is assured a bright new future or, as the untranslatable French idiom puts it, a new "souffle" (whistle!).

I was able to attend a second formal concert in Nogent on May 19, 1980, when the venerable Madame Bernard performed with two of her pupils. I was in Seventh Heaven!

What a terrific concert on a truly magnificent organ!

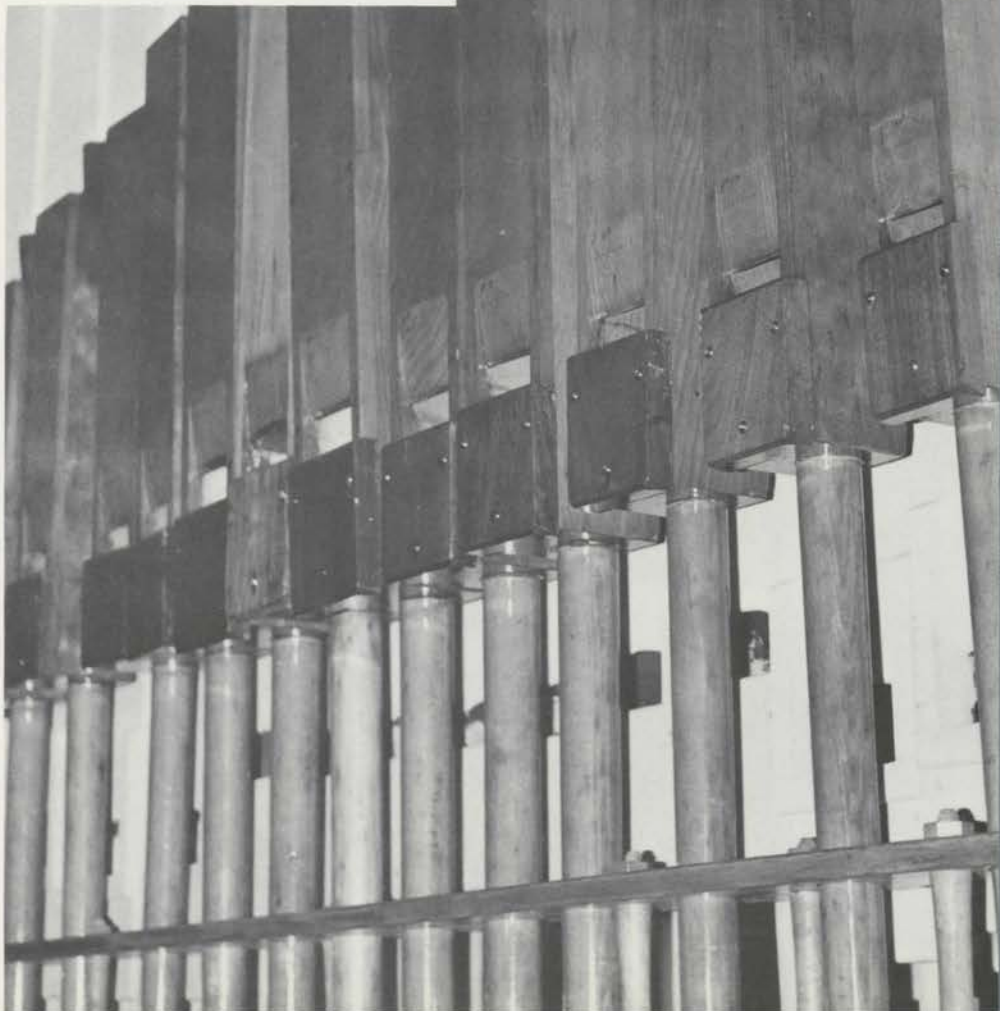
Yes, theatre organ fans, "Paris est merveilleux encore!" which roughly translated means that a Christie theatre organ is alive and well and playing once again in Paris.

SPECIFICATIONS

PEDAL ORGAN, 30 notes

Acoustic bass	32
Diaphone	16
Tibia	16
Contra viola	16
Bourdon	16
Contra salicional	16
Ophicleide	16
Bass clarinet	16

The "basso de flutte."



Open diap. (diaphone).....	8
Tibia	8
Bass flute	8
Violoncello	8
Tuba	8
Clarinet	8
Tibia	4
Bass drum tap: f*	
Bass drum tap: p*	
Bass drum roll*	
Cymbal crash*	
Loose cymbal*	
Triangle*	
Tom-Tom*	
Cathedral chimes (17 notes)*	
Snare drum roll*	
Tolling bell*	
Ophicleide*.....	16

Couplers

Accompaniment to pedal	
Great to pedal	
Solo to pedal	

ACCOMPANIMENT

CC to C, 61 notes	
Bourdon	16
Con. viole d'amore (ten. C).....	16
Bass clarinet	16
Vox Humana (ten. C)	16
Strings Viole (2 rks. ten. C)	16
Open Diap.	8
Viole d'orchestre	8
Strings d'orchestre (2 rks.)	8
Viole d'amore.....	8
Concert flute	8
Tibia	8
Tuba	8
Clarinet	8
Orchestral oboe	8
Vox Humana	8
Viola d'amore	4
Strings d'amore (2 rks.)	4
Flute	4
Vox Humana	4
Twelfth	22/3
Piccolo	2
Tierce	1-3/5
Chrysoglot	8
Chrysoglot	4
Marimba, reiterating	8
Marimba, reiterating	4
Marimba harp	8
(from Marimba 8 ft.)	
Snare drum tap	
Snare drum roll	
Tom-Tom	
Wood block tap	
Tambourine	
Tambourine slap	
Castanets	
Jingles	
Sand block	
Traps to 2nd. touch switch	
(snare drum to sand block)	

Diaphonic diapason*	
Tuba*	
Cathedral chimes (17 notes)*	
Triangle*	
Birds*	
Siren*	

Coupler

Solo to accompaniment

GREAT ORGAN

CC to C, 61 notes	
Diaphone	16
Contra Tibia	16
Bourdon	16
Violine	16
Tuba	16
Diaphonic diapason	8
Open diapason	8
Tibia	8
Concert flute	8
Viola	8
Violin (VDO)	8
Tuba	8
Trumpet	8
Clarinet	8
Saxophone (ten. C)	8
Octave diapason	4
Tibia	4
Flute	4
Viole	4
Tuba	4
Twelfth Tibia	5-1/3
Salicetina	2
Piccolo	2
Trumpet en Chamade	16 ten. C
Trumpet en Chamade	8
Cathedral Chimes (17 notes)	
Marimba, reiterating (ten. C)	8
(49 notes)	
Xylophone	37 notes
Glockenspiel	30 notes
Bells (from Glockenspiel) ..	30 notes
Wood Block	
Chrysoglott	49 notes
Cathedral Chimes (17 notes)*	
Ophicleide tuba*.....	16
Trumpet en Chamade*.....	8
Snare drum roll*	
Cymbal tap*	

Couplers

Accompaniment to great	
Solo to great	

SOLO ORGAN

CC to C, 61 notes	
Diaphone	16
Contra Tibia	16
Violone	16
Con. viol. d'amore (ten. C)	16
Strings viole (2 rks. ten. C)	16
Ophicleide (Tuba)	16
Trombone (ten. C)	16
Clarinet	16
Bassoon (ten. C)	16

Diaphonic diapason	8
Open diapason	8
Tibia	8
Viola	8
Viole d'orchestre	8
Viole d'amore	8
Strings d'amore (2 rks.)	8
Concert flute	8
Tuba	8
Trumpet	8
Clarinet	8
Orchestral Oboe	8
Saxophone (ten. C)	8
Vox Humana	8
Trumpet en Chamade	8
Twelfth Tibia	5-1/3
Trumpet en Chamade	4
Tibia	4
Viola	4
Viola d'amore	4
Strings d'amore (2 rks.)	4
Flute	4
Clarion (Tuba)	4
Vox Humana	4
Clarinet	4
Salecetina (viole d'amore).....	2
Piccolo	2
Ocarina	2
Octave viole	2
Twelfth	2-2/3
Tierce	1-3/5
Cathedral chimes	17 notes
Cathedral chimes (muted) ..	17 notes
Chrysoglot (8 ft.)	49 notes
Celeste (4 ft.)	49 notes
(from chrysoglot)	
Glockenspiel	30 notes
Bells (from glockenspiel) ..	30 notes
Vibraphone	49 notes
(from chrysoglot)	
Xylophone	37 notes
Marimba (TC, 8 ft.)	49 notes
(reiterating)	

FOURTH MANUAL

Percussion: 61 notes	
Marimba (TC, 8 ft.)	49 notes
(reiterating)	
Marimba harp (8 ft.)	49 notes
Xylophone	37 notes
Glockenspiel	30 notes
Cathedral chimes	17 notes
Cathedral chimes (muted) ..	17 notes
Vibraphone	49 notes
(from chrysoglot)	
Snare drum	
Chinese block	

NOTE

Saxophone (ten. C)

on great- and solo organ is

30 notes, voiced imitative of the

orchestral instrument. (May 1980

in working order.)

*Second Touch. □