



# Indiana's Paramount Music Palace

by John Ferguson

It isn't often that successful business ventures come about as a result of a spur of the moment idea or hunch, but occasionally it does happen. In the case of the widely known and quite successful Paramount Music Palace in Indianapolis, Indiana, this was exactly how it came to be. Just about two years ago one of the now owners of Paramount visited a similar establishment along with his family. So struck was he with the idea and concept of this type of restaurant that he rushed back to Indianapolis and managed to interest two other local businessmen in pursuing the venture. After much delib-

eration and investigating the track records of other organ-equipped restaurants, they decided to go ahead!

The first order of business was to locate an organ. The final choice was the 4/20 Publix #1 Wurlitzer originally installed in the Paramount Theatre, Oakland, California. The organ was installed in the Oakland movie house in 1931 and because it escaped the rigorous silent movie use most theatre organs had endured, it was in relatively good condition. It had, however, been removed from the theatre in the early sixties. Ultimately it was purchased by Edward and Steven Restivo of Los Altos,

California and it became part of the fare of the Melody Inn in that city.

After inspection, removal was begun in September of '77 by Ken Crome and his crew and the organ was moved to the Crome shops in Los Angeles. The actual rebuilding began on October 18th of that year. Because it was decided early in the project to enlarge the organ, the first order of business was to come up with a new stoplist, which was conceived with the thought in mind that this organ would be used extensively for recordings and for concerts.

A prime consideration in the new tonal design was the shape and

height of the room the organ now was to speak into. Some new and more useful ranks were added while others were deleted from the new scheme because of the almost predictable resultant sound in the new room, i.e., the Diaphonic Diapason with its overly fundamental character was omitted in favor of a small Wurlitzer Open Diapason in the solo chamber. The main chamber was given a very lyrical sounding Kimball Horn Diapason. The Solo Tibia was retained while the lower pressure solo scale Tibia in the main was discarded in favor of a small scale Wurlitzer Tibia on ten inches pressure.

The organ is abundant in color reeds. The solo chamber contains a Krumet, Orchestral Oboe, Saxophone, Kinura and Musette, the latter built to Wurlitzer scaling by the Trivo Company of Hagerstown, Maryland. This company and their representative Joe Clipp were extremely helpful with other needs in the reed department. A special scale English Post Horn on 20" pressure was built for the solo chamber while a 15" w.p. Wurlitzer Copy Post Horn was built for the main. Also scaled off the main Post Horn is a 16' octave built by Trivo. In the rear of the restaurant on the upper balcony wall is a Brass Trumpet en Chamade on 15" wind. Trivo worked with Al Bizik of Penndale, Pennsylvania, who produced the brass resonators.

Allen Miller of Bloomfield, Connecticut was contacted for further pipework which included a Quintadena Celeste rank, Gemshorn and



The customers awaiting admittance line up here in the lobby, inspired by renditions of (left to right): Franklin D. Roosevelt (top), Ted Weems (on sax), Charlie Chaplin, boxer Joe Louis, W.C. Fields, Will Rogers, gangster John Dillinger, Jean Harlow, Laurel & Hardy, Babe Ruth and others.

Gemshorn Celeste, and Krumet ranks, all of which were built to original Wurlitzer scales and wind pressures. This man is no stranger to the organ world and his ability in the field of reproducing high pressure reed and flue pipes is known far and wide. Many examples of his work are in organs throughout the country and the results point out his understanding of the mechanics of tone production.

The Wurlitzer Kinura was taken out and in its place was installed a

Moller Kinura of 1928 vintage. For the musical demands placed on this rank in a restaurant application, it was felt the Moller variety had more breadth and "push." The Dulciana was discarded as being almost useless in a situation such as this. Also the Wurlitzer Solo Strings were taken out and a large scale Gamba and Gamba Celeste put in their place.

Added to the main chamber for additional "lush" effect and color were a Concert Flute Celeste and a Gottfried Lieblich Flute on its own tremulant. Additionally, to include 16' pedal extensions of more definition and lesser power, electronic extensions, built by Peterson Electro-Musical of Chicago, Illinois, were added. Many of Peterson's electronic extensions are installed in organs over the country and are uncanny in their realism.

Hesco of Hagerstown, Maryland was called in for engraving work. All main stoprail stopkeys are original and some re-engraved. All backrail stopkeys are new from Hesco.

In view of the fact that the additions to the organ were so many and in some cases, complicated, it was agreed by all early in the game to purchase a new solid-state relay in lieu of using the original Wurlitzer. Again we called on Dick Peterson of Peterson Electro-Musical. The solid state organ relay has proven itself over

The Ice Cream Parlour, a little to the left of the main scene. It's popular with the juniors while momma and papa partake of the main dishes.



years of service in church and theatre organ installations. Because of limited stoprail space serving so many ranks, there was a good deal of "amplex" switching in the relay causing one set of stopkeys to control more than just one rank. Gary Rickert of Peterson's was the mainstay of this part of the project. The problems encountered in laying out a relay of this complexity are many and gargantuan. There have been no major problems of any kind with this system and no breakdowns. To date, this is the largest solid-state organ relay built by this firm.

Roy Davis of McMinnville, Tennessee was also on hand to offer his help. Roy helped us find innumerable odd trap actions and a much needed six-rank Wurlitzer chest. We also purchased an unusually beautiful chandelier originally installed in the lobby of the United Artists Theatre in Detroit. The fixture contains examples of the earliest forms of colored Steuben glass. This was further highlighted by crystal and framing of wrought iron. Roy also kindly loaned a Wurlitzer Krumet from his own instrument until we could re-

The big scene. Here's what visitors entering the Palace encounter while anticipating the tonal goodies.

place it with a new rank.

Much has been said in past articles on similar restaurant-organ equipped installations about the people behind the scenes. On looking back, it was fortunate that some of the most innovative minds in the field of the organ were involved. The Paramount project was blessed with some of the finest, for example, Ken Crome, a man of many abilities. In the course of the rebuild, Crome employees, Bill Rippl and Steve Hansen shifted their attention and talents to all phases of the project from the time the organ arrived in the shop.

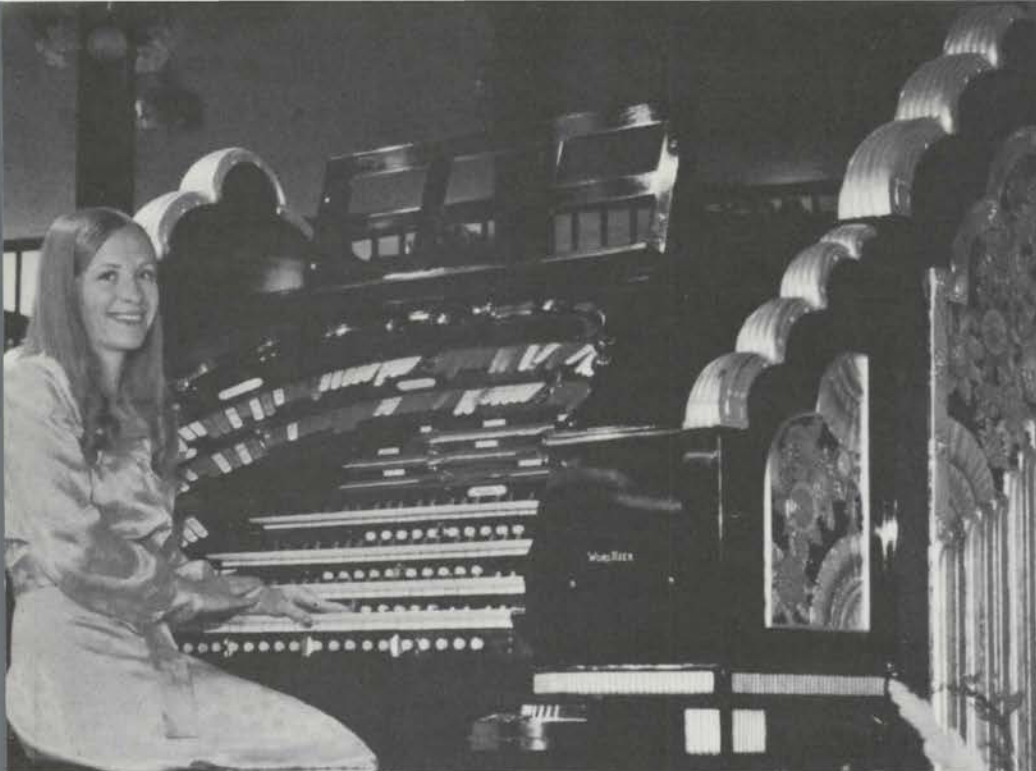
Unique to this particular pipe organ are the plexiglass swell shades used. Much thought was given to making the organ more visual in the restaurant and all agreed that the organ should speak directly out of the shade openings in the usual fashion. The obvious drawback to the usual restaurant organ installation is the "view-window" aspect. Because the tone openings in these instances are often several feet higher than the rack boards, the direct sound path and tonal egress from the chambers is blocked by the view window, causing higher notes and treble ends to be choked out. Add to that the usual amount of audience absorption and

an imbalance occurs tending to make the organ deficient of top end sound.

Crome's idea for using a double thickness of plexiglass with each shade completely enclosed on the ends worked just fine. The dynamic from soft to loud is smooth and the shades are incredibly quiet. Ken also built new exact-copy Wurlitzer regulators for the organ when we found ourselves needing more. The workmanship is immaculate.

The console is something of an artistic achievement in itself. In deciding on a new color scheme for the console, thought was given to keeping the new appearance of the console in line with the design period it was patterned after, the "Art Deco" period. In the beginning we came up with the gloss black color with the art relief work highlighted in gold and silver leaf. Meantime, artist Joe Musil of Long Beach, California was hired to do the application of the leaf. Musil is widely known as an expert in the field of art deco design. He suggested adding the tones of bronze and copper leaf to create more color and depth. The result is a richer overall appearance. Other color tones were added sparingly for subtle definition and the result is that of viewing a fine painting.





Donna Parker. She appeared on the CBS Morning News recently, at the console.

Refinishing of the console itself was given over to Carl Leon of El Monte, California. The shell was given several coats of black laquer, each hand rubbed to a high gloss. The piano case also was finished in this way. All manual keys were re-brushed and new front guide pins installed. Original ivory coverings were removed and new ivory tops purchased from H. Harris of Cornwall, England, were installed. Further into the console project, the special talents of Richard Schroder were enlisted. Dick Schroder's reputation for excellence in craftsmanship has been well earned. As most

musicians will agree, the "feel" of a console often governs the attitude of the player. Thanks to Dick, the feel of the Paramount console is that of almost perfection and comfort. All keys are exactly the same depth of travel, firing time, and motion. All stopkeys are uniform in feel and tension as well as pedal keys toe studs and all other moving parts.

An all-electronic backrail especially designed and constructed by Dick Schroder contains three rows of stopkeys. They appear cosmetically correct and feel normal which is unusual since the actions for these stops are all removed to a rear framework.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Author John Ferguson during one of his concert appearances in southern California. (Stufoto)

*John Ferguson is a many-talented individual. He is a skilled pop organist and he knows what makes pipe organs work, and how to minister to ailing instruments. He planned the enlargement of the 20-rank Publix #1 Wurlitzer to a total of 42 ranks in the Paramount Music Palace, where he is the music director. He keeps the instrument in good playing shape for the featured organists but he is fully capable of sitting in at the console when the occasion arises. He's an excellent writer and has contributed articles of interest to this publication on previous occasions. — Editor.*

Coupling to the stopkeys is by means of precision-adjusted rods connecting to the tabs themselves. All of this unplugs for ease of servicing. Action boxes in the console were rebuilt by Ken Crome using all new valves and magnets. Ken's decision to use all new Reisner magnets was a wise one and has surely paid off in many ways. They are easy to service and are reliable.

The organ arrived in Indianapolis in December, 1978. Preparations were made in advance of this with chambers and sub chambers and relay rooms finished. General contractor on the job was Vernon Shakel of Shakel Construction Company of Indianapolis. He worked closely with Ken Crome on problems encountered with chamber design. The entire crew was won over by the genuineness of this man who soon became a friend to all.

During installation much assistance was given by Ed Holloway of E. H. Holloway Organ Company as well as Cave Organ Company. These people were willing extra hands when help was needed. Assisting in parts of the rebuilding processes as well as installation of the organ was General Manager Bob MacNeur, no stranger to organ circles.

In its present form, the Paramount organ is 95% complete and 95% playing. Awaiting installation are the electronic extensions from Peterson's, a new seven rank classical Positive Division from Allen Miller, and one set of 32-note pedal quints. All these things are part of the original specification and should be playing soon.

After installation was completed organist Lyn Larsen was on hand to help with the tonal finishing and regulating. Lyn is rapidly making a reputation for his abilities as a tonal finisher. Working with Ken Crome for about one week on this part of the work, the results were astounding.

The restaurant building itself is basically contemporary in outside design. The walls are eighteen feet in height with a total rise to thirty-five feet. All of this was planned with the thought of giving the organ plenty of height and air space in which to develop — and it does! Inside seating is 600. Besides the main dining room, to the left is a non-smoking parlor and to the right, an old fashioned ice cream parlor. Topping all this area is a dramatically sweeping horseshoe

shaped balcony seating over 250 persons. All of the building design concept as well as kitchen design and equipment placement, lighting, etc., were the ideas of Manager, Bob MacNeur. Provided with his initial layout drawings, the architectural firm of Beaman and Guyer of Indianapolis was engaged to draw up final plans. All areas are easily accessible and uncluttered and easy to work in. The Paramount is indeed fortunate in having the talents of organists Donna Parker and Bill Vlasak. Donna's work in the concert field is well known and she most recently was one of the featured organists at the Roaring Twenties Pizza in Grand Rapids, Michigan, before coming to Indianapolis. Bill Vlasak was formerly with Bill Brown's Organ Stop Pizza restaurants in Phoenix, Arizona. More recently he substituted regularly for organist Dennis James at the Ohio Theatre, in Columbus, his hometown. Both or-



Bill Vlasak.

ganists are seasoned performers and have endeared themselves to the Indianapolis audiences. Paramount welcomes all who would come and hear this magnificent installation of the Paramount Theatre Wurlitzer and enjoy the artistry of its musicians.

*Due to limited space in this issue, we regret that we cannot include the chamber analysis.* □

Longshot of the solo chamber pipework



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