

Testimonials to the Greatness of Dan Papp

PART I

Compiled and Edited by
Lloyd E. Klos

This feature will be a departure from the norm. It will not be a biography of an organist. Rather, it will be a "group testimonial" to a man whose standards of organ maintenance live on in the instrument which was labeled "The Queen Mother of All Wurlitzers," the ex-New York Paramount organ, now in Wichita's Century II Center. The man on the pedestal: Daniel Papp. Very little has been written about him — up to now.

A modest man with a twinkling smile and a Hungarian accent, he immigrated to America in 1912. He worked for the Beach Organ Co., then joined Wurlitzer in 1919. In a letter to journalist W. Stu Green in 1961, he had this to say:

"Before going to the Paramount Theatre in 1925, I worked for the Wurlitzer Company for seven years, primarily as a finisher. During this era of silent movies, I installed or finished Wurlitzer theatre organs from New York to Chicago, and in cities and towns in the deep South. It was a rewarding experience and good training for my duties at the Paramount.

"The Paramount Wurlitzer is a very fine four-manual theatre organ. Its extensive technical capabilities and tonal qualities are in a large measure due to the fine workmanship and materials which the Rudolph Wurlitzer Co. used in building the instrument. Mr. Jesse Crawford contributed much to the lasting quality which the organ possesses.

"I will always remember Mr. Crawford. I worked many long hours for him, often with him, trying to please both him and myself. He always knew what the organ could do, and what he wanted to do with it.

This made it a pleasure working for him.

"There were other fine organists such as Sigmund Krumbold, Fred Feibel, Don Baker, George Wright and Ann Leaf — all in their own way making the Paramount organ famous. In working with all these very accomplished organists, I learned more about the organ's capabilities and thus was able to contribute much more to bring out all of the beautiful tonal effects and combinations which had been built into the organ originally."

The above will give the reader some proof of the man's overwhelming modesty and the ability to credit others for the success of the Paramount organ. This modesty probably accounts for the dearth of material about Dan Papp. For this feature, we have enlisted a number of persons who have graciously written their impressions of the man from on-the-spot association. Since the contributions are of varying lengths, they will appear in alphabetical order of their spokesmen.

First, we hear from Don Baker, who played the Paramount organ longer than anyone. He had a 14-year stint at the theatre which was located at "The Crossroads of the World."

"Dan was a charming, modest man who lived in Linden, N.J., when I was at the Paramount. His trip to New York entailed a train or bus ride, plus subway; he never told me whether he ever drove or not.

"He got to the theatre between six and seven in the morning, and his first task was to check the 4/36. His work was so good and done so conscientiously that the instrument was

always in tip-top shape. Occasionally, I would find a note on the console, saying something like: 'Re-leathering clarinet. It will be back in service tomorrow.'

"He never let the organ get out of tune, and if a rank had drifted, he'd tune it immediately. When he had no helper to hold keys, he used a little junction board which he devised. This was connected to a portable keyboard so he could hold the notes with one hand and tune with the other.

"With the theatre's organ in A-1 shape, he would go either to the studio organ and check it, or tune a piano or two: one in the pit and one on the mezzanine. I had an old upright in my dressing room and that was always in tune, too.

"He must have been a most efficient worker because he was often through with his chores and gone by the time I got to work around 10:30 or 11:00 a.m. When he wasn't, I'd find him in his relay room office, re-leathering or doing some odd job.

"I left the Paramount in 1948 and was overjoyed to see him in the audience at the final concert I played in September 1964. I had the pleasure of again meeting his wife, Theresa, at my Wichita concert in April 1975.

"Dan was one of the last of the fine technicians who knew and understood every facet of the theatre organ. He was one of my most favorite people: a charming gentleman whom I shall never forget."

Clealan Blakely, noted Canadian theatre organ enthusiast and Jesse Crawford authority, adds his impressions of this great organ technician:

"Back in 1929 when attending

Note to Our Readers . . .

We had planned to include other material in this issue, however, a few members insisted that the bylaws, minutes of meetings and the financial statement be printed. Since this material requires eight pages to reproduce, we have been forced to leave out some interesting articles. **The Editor**



The dean of theatre organ maintenance men at the "Queen Mother" console, N.Y. Paramount.
(Bill Lamb Collection)

electrical school in New York, I walked to the 44th Street stage door of the Paramount many times, hoping to meet Jesse Crawford or some maintenance people, not knowing Dan at the time. I never got the nerve to go in, which I have regretted ever since. I was 19, from a small town, and had a huge inferiority complex.

"In 1956, following that tremendous AGO theatre party at the Paramount, I went thru that stage door the following morning and found Dan. He realized I was quite shy, but soon put me at ease. He told me that I should have looked him up in '29 and he would have introduced me to Jesse.

"He turned on the blower and allowed me to play THE Wurlitzer for a few minutes, although I was so excited that I was almost unable to play anything! I asked him about that beautiful Tibia sound, so he showed me where the stopkeys were located in that bewildering array. A few chords on those well-tremulated Tibias thrilled me to the core! Dan was most kind and gracious and told me to drop in to the Paramount and see him any time I was in New York.

"It was the summer of 1957 when I got back there. My late wife, Frances; my daughter, Mary Lou; my aunt Ethel, and I were on a motor trip to Virginia and we stopped in New York enroute. We went to the Paramount to see Dan, and he made us all very welcome. Before he answered my technical questions about

the organ, he carried in some chairs to his organ workshop so that the ladies could be seated while we talked.

"We had a very interesting conversation about the Crawford days, and various aspects of organ maintenance. Dan was quite upset that he no longer was on full time at the Paramount, as there were two pipe organs and eight pianos there which he felt still required continuous maintenance. He said Jesse would have been horrified to see so many things not working properly on the big Wurlitzer.

"He then told me some of his experiences while working with Jesse. It seems Crawford would often stay after the last show or return to practice his next program in the middle of the night. Dan would sometimes get a call at home and have to return to the theatre to correct some malfunction. I got the impression that Dan didn't mind this as his love for the organ was very obvious. He said that Jesse knew exactly what he wanted, and what he wanted was right — and good.

"After awhile, we went up into the theatre and he gave me a few minutes to play the Wurlitzer. The first solo I had heard Jesse play in 1929 was 'When Summer Is Gone,' and I tried to play it. Somehow, it didn't come off with any resemblance to Jesse's version, try as I might.

"My last meeting with Dan took place at the final concert at the Para-

mount in September 1964, played by Don Baker. I sat beside Dan, who was very delighted with the attention and respect given to the organ as well as the organist. When Don played 'When Yuba Plays the Rumba on the Tuba,' Dan got a big laugh out of it, and when Don played '76 Trombones' as a finale, there was a smile of contentment on his face.

"He was pleased when I congratulated him on that great Paramount sound which has been achieved on no other organ. (Fortunately, the boys in Wichita were wise enough not to alter any of the voicing, so expertly done by Dan, with Jesse Crawford on the bench, so have retained this great sound for posterity. I have heard it in Wichita and can subscribe to this statement first-hand.)"

We are happy to include the remarks of Mike Coup, organ maintenance chief of Wichita's Century II Center. For, if there is a living memorial to the genius of Dan Papp, it is most certainly the sound of the Center's organ.

"I'm afraid there really isn't a great deal I can tell about Dan Papp's maintenance practices, methods of voicing, type of tones, etc., as I never met him, though we chatted on the telephone and corresponded. I can say how the organ here in Wichita differs from other instruments.

"Primarily, the differences are in the voicing, both as to quality and level, of different ranks within the total, and even from one register to another within a rank.

"Let me illustrate each point with an example. The flues, particularly the Diapasons, Flutes and small strings, are regulated down in level far more than any Wurlitzer I know. The Salicional is the softest example of that stop I've ever heard, and examination of the toe holes of the pipes shows them to be closed as far as proper speech from the pipe will allow. The Horn Diapason is barely louder than the Dulciana; the toes reveal a similar treatment to that given the Salicional.

"From an ensemble point of view, this voicing allows a fundamental 'lushness' which cannot be achieved with louder, harsher voicing. The first level of loudness, rankwise, is much lower in level than usually is found. Further, the position which various ranks are able to assume in

the ensemble increase, is different from the usual. No doubt this 'philosophy' was Jesse Crawford's. It is almost *identically* the same as Crawford honored in the Richard Simon-ton Wurlitzer.

"Now, within a rank, the various registers may be made to vary in tonal character as the envisioned musical use of a register would demand. The Diapasons are all voiced *down* in the tenor register to allow a full sound, in chords in that region, without sounding harsh or boomy.

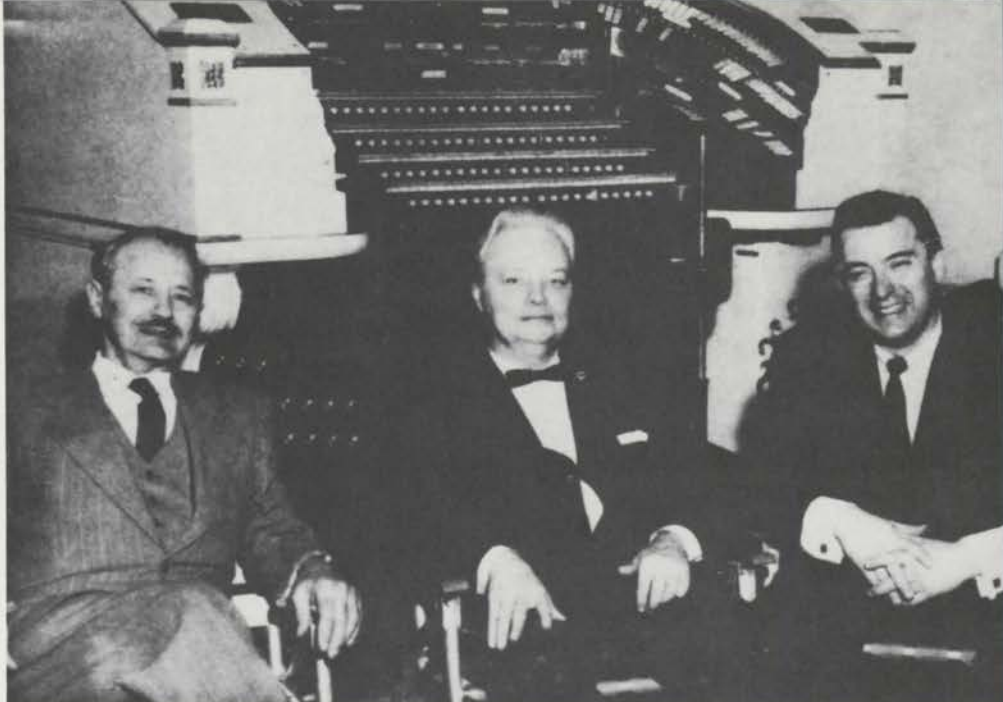
"The Tibia voicing, intra-rank and inter-rank, is a study in varietal voicing. It makes the various pitch stops usable almost as though there were independent ranks of at least three pitches, as well as three variations of each pitch. That is, in combination, for example, the 16', 8' and 4' pitches can be mixed about as equivalent nine ranks (3 x 3). Each pitch is slightly different, and each rank is different.

"It is difficult to make exact determinations about credits for matters of this kind. I assume that Jesse's ears were making the tonal demands and that Dan was carrying them out. The *genius* was to know (or feel, or whatever) where all these matters could fit and be basic to the *musical* results. From our experience in Wichita, no other theatre organ gives such *subtle* possibilities in the ensemble.

"To deal for a moment with the reeds, similar intent seems to have governed here. First consideration, as always, was given to the *musical* purpose and use of each reed. The Trumpets have different quality, not just a differing volume. The Voxes all are different in character as well as level. The Clarinet is the 'woodiest' I've ever encountered. In fact, I've had clarinetists tell me they'd like to 'have a sound like that!'

"Essentially, each voice is regulated to fulfill its function, musically, from both a *color* and a *level* point of view. The instrument obtains its impact from a *careful* balance of all the ingredients. Nowhere, ever, does anything dominate. That is, after all, a fundamental principle of any good ensemble sound. Jesse and Dan seemed to have understood this well.

"Where Jesse 'left off,' Dan 'picked up' is rather simple in fact but not so simple to determine. Who



In 1962, Dan Papp did his last work on the ex-Paramount Studio Wurlitzer for a recording session. Here, he is seen (left) with organist Bob Mack (center) and Dick Loderhose, Renwick Records executive and the organ's new owner. Papp completely tuned the organ at this time. (Renwick Photo)

urged what, tonally, is difficult to know. Believe one thing: No other theatre organ yet has come close to the result, *musically*, as this one has attained. Dan certainly was one of at least two major factors in that. (We must recall that Wurlitzer supplied the raw material as to manufacturing, and to that company's credit, one really cannot 'make a silk purse . . . !')

"I hope this helps to understand Dan's role in the tonal development of the ex-New York Paramount organ. It is a tonal perspective, I think, never before told about Wurlitzer Opus 1458."

Another ex-Paramount organist who was familiar with Dan Papp was Fred Feibel, whose *Organ Reveille* program, using the 4/23 Paramount studio Wurlitzer is well remembered:

"I knew Dan Papp well during the entire time of my playing as one of the Paramount organists. He was an authority on the construction and maintenance of pipe organs.

"Dan and his assistant (or assistants) would take over after midnight when the theatre closed and would work on that magnificent Wurlitzer during the night. I remember so well, arriving at the theatre each weekday morning at 6:30 (6 mornings a week). After entering the stage door, I would drop in and greet Dan and his assistant, Fred Helmes. Then I'd go to the studio organ on the ninth floor to practice for, and to perform my daily program, starting at 7:30.

"Mrs. Feibel and I recall being Mr. & Mrs. Papp's guests for an afternoon at a summer cottage in New Jersey which they owned then. We enjoyed that afternoon very much.

"Our association ended when I left the theatre in 1935, but I think of Dan Papp often."

Bill Floyd, an organist who played the Brooklyn and Manhattan Paramount organs, has fond memories of Dan Papp:

"I say 'thank you' for remembering those most frequently forgotten. I am certain Dan would be pleased, yet being as quiet and unassuming as he was, he doubtless would have been embarrassed.

"Long before our times together at the Times Square Paramount, Dan was 'my' serviceman at the Brooklyn Paramount when we both worked for manager Gene Pleschette (actress Suzanne's father). Strangely, I saw more of Dan at Brooklyn than I did in Manhattan because of our schedules.

"Dan worked daily on the organ from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m., and when I arrived for my 10 to 14-hour day, there was breakfast at the 'greasy spoon' across the street. Then Dan would leave for the day and I'd start the grind of four, five or six shows, which of course, never was a grind.

"If the schedule permitted, I'd often drive Dan home to New Jersey and enjoy another cup of coffee in the Papp kitchen, this time with his lovely wife, Theresa. It was then that I realized what a marvelous crafts-

man he was, truly an artist in wood-working!

"Life, beautiful as it was in those times, was quite routine. However, once comedian Jerry Lewis decided to sit across the four manuals as I played! This resulted in the blowing of an army of cartridge fuses in the action current circuits of the organ. Busy moments followed as I manned the phone to page Dan, first at home, then at the local super markets, so that I could find out where the fuse box was located. Once found, Dan gave me a verbal map as to where one could find the fuses. It was not unlike a pirate map for hidden treasure!

"During those late days when the budget tightened, Dan often proved his ingenuity in 'making do' with various and sundry things to keep the great Paramount Wurlitzer humming.

"In my book *Flashback — American Adventure*, which is nearly finished (May 1977), I mention that while I enjoyed meeting and working with the great names of Hollywood and Broadway in off-hours, I enjoyed more the fraternity of projectionists, stage hands, carpenters and management staff. Dan certainly was a most loved part of the crew at the Paramount. The great Wurlitzer was glorious to the end. The gifted hands of Dan Papp kept it so.

"Thank you for asking me to be a part of this tribute."

TO BE CONTINUED

Oakland Paramount Prepares for Premiere

Final steps in the painstaking restoration and installation of the Oakland Paramount Theatre's four-manual Wurlitzer pipe organ are underway, according to Peter Botto, general manager.

The seven-year project will be complete this fall in time for the theatre's golden anniversary celebration, Botto said.

A concert featuring the renowned George Wright is planned for the premiere performance on November 7, 1981 at 8:30 p.m.

The Paramount, donated to the City of Oakland by the Oakland Symphony Orchestra Association in 1975, had a Wurlitzer when it opened in 1931 but the instrument was sold and moved from the theatre in the 1960s.

Because of the national interest created by the successful restoration and reopening of the theatre eight years ago, a 56-year-old console, pipes and parts have been donated or made available for purchase to replace the originals.

Donations from individuals, cor-

porations and foundations have paid for the restoration and installation project. Those funds were matched by a grant from California's Office of Historic Preservation to the Paramount.

The project requires much attention to detail in assembling thousands of parts from the giant 25-horsepower blower to the small treble pipes located high in the organ chambers in the walls of the theatre auditorium.

When installed, the pipe organ will have one of the most complete and versatile tonal designs in the nation, according to Botto.

Several prominent organists and pipe organ experts have helped design the instrument's tonal scheme, he added.

The four-manual console will control 27 ranks of pipes, numerous percussion instruments including a piano, xylophone, mandolin, cymbals, two harps, and 13 tremulants as well as 96 individual swell motors.

The electrical system will have one of the largest digital solid-state relay and switch systems to be used in a pipe organ, according to Botto.

A digital tape player will allow for exact reproduction of concerts.

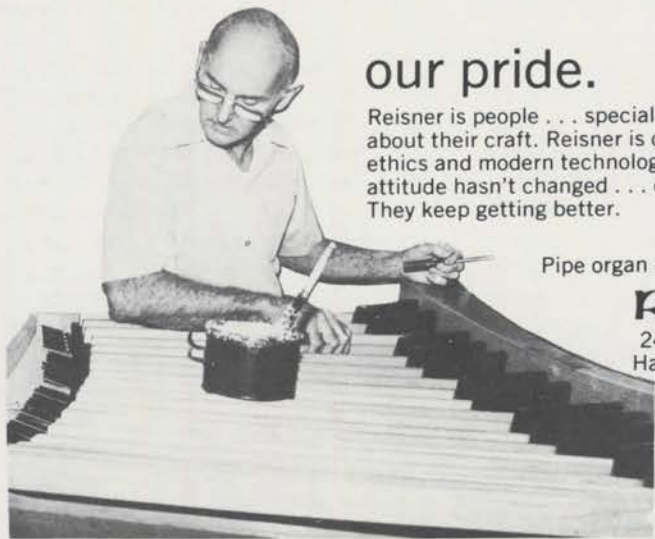
The Paramount was one of the first survivors of the departed era of the movie palace to be restored for use as a performing arts hall.

That project, completed in 1973, has been a model for numerous similar restorations throughout the country, Botto explained.

The theatre is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and has earned historic landmark status from the U.S. Department of the Interior, the State of California and the City of Oakland.

Oakland's symphony and ballet are resident companies at the Paramount. The theatre is used by touring stage companies, popular concert artists and nationally-known annual events including the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame and the National Educational Film Festival. □

There's one thing in our plant that hasn't changed in 83 years . . .



our pride.

Reisner is people . . . specialists who really care about their craft. Reisner is old-fashioned work ethics and modern technological brain power. Our attitude hasn't changed . . . only our products. They keep getting better.

Pipe organ parts and consoles by

REISNER

240 N. Prospect Street
Hagerstown, Md. 21740
301/733-2650