Famous Grgans-

The Wurlitzer Hope-Jones Unit Orchestra in the Isis Theatre, Denver, Colorado

... Roy Gorish

HE YEAR 1915 is notable as the date when the silent movie entered its Golden Age, for in this year D. W. Griffith released his film "The Birth of a Nation" which became widely acclaimed as the world's greatest silent motion picture. This famous twelve-reel epic doomed the Nickelodeon, as the early movie houses with their two-reelers were called, and established the "feature picture." Motion pictures were nationally accepted as a preferred medium of entertainment by this time, vaudeville houses were feeling the effects of the shift, and legitimate theatres were being rented for these feature productions. The time was right for the advent of the "Movie Palace."

In Denver, the enterprising Samuel L. Baxter had already established a house with a seating capacity of 2,000 solely for the showing of motion pictures. He had come to Denver in 1906, purchased a small theatre for the showing of "flickers," progressed rapidly through the Nickelodeon-player piano stage, and finally established the Isis Theatre with music provided by an orchestra and (reportedly) a small straight organ. Located on Curtis Street, it vied with some fifteen other theatres in what was then referred to as "The Broadway of the West." This theatre soon gained much fame and recognition when late in 1914 Mr. Baxter consulted Mr. Farny Wurlitzer on the building of a Unit Orchestra.

A precedent for a Wurlitzer Hope-Jones Unit Orchestra had already been set by the installation in May of 1913 of the thirteen-rank organ in the Paris Theatre located diagonally across the street from the Isis. In addition, the Wurlitzer Company had been consulted about an organ for the Denver Civic Auditorium in the same year; however, the former was to be no rival for the newly proposed Isis organ, and the latter venture was not to see completion until the winter of 1917–18 due to considerable political discord.

Robert Hope-Jones had been dead for three months when Mr. Baxter contacted Mr. Wurlitzer and although Mr. Hope-Jones had not been actively employed as manager of the factory for a year prior to his death, one can readily see how closely his thoughts were adhered to by the Wurlitzer Company. Mr. Wurlitzer wrote to Mr. Baxter on January 4, 1915: "As regards distinctive varieties of tone color for each of the various stops, here we feel none will question our supremacy. Beyond dispute, the Unit Orchestra leads and always has led in providing extreme colors. In this connection, we venture to call attention to the fact that the variety of tone an organ yields depends much less upon the number of its stops than upon the degree of variance of each from all others." Surely, this statement is a concise explanation of the thought behind the Unit Or-

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chestra where the stress is on tone color in an endeavor to emulate the orchestra.

The contract was negotiated on January 11, 1915. The price for the instrument was fixed at \$40,000. Mr. Baxter provided the necessary alterations to the building for housing the organ which brought the total expenditure to \$50,000 for the completed instrument. This amounted to the largest sum ever spent for an organ in a motion picture theatre up to that date.

Mr. Henry B. Murtaugh, who was delighting audiences on the newly-installed Wurlitzer in the Liberty Theatre, Seattle, Washington, was consulted on the specifications, and work on the theatre started immediately. The first shipment left the factory on May 22, 1915. This was followed by two more consignments on June 3rd and 4th—all by railroad from North Tonawanda, New York.

The end product was a specification consisting of twenty-eight ranks of pipes housed in six chambers and controlled by a plain mahogany four-manual console situated mid-way in the orchestra pit, with 156 stop tablets. One of the prime reasons this organ proved a delight to both audience and organist is that they were both actually engulfed in the organ, as you will notice by the following layout.

The *Main Organ* was located on the left side, and as was the case with all the chambers, it was provided with a "tone reflector" to focus the sound most advantageously into the auditorium. This chamber contained the following ranks and percussions.

16' Tuba Horn	85	Pipes	8'	Salicional	61	Pipes
16' Clarinet	73	ú	8'	Viol d'Orchestra	85	**
16' Horn Diapason	73	"	8'	Viol Celeste	73	"
8' Open Diapason	73	"	8'	Saxophone	61	"
8' Concert Flute	85	"	8'	Krumet	61	**
				Chrysoglott	49	Bars

Noteworthy is the fact that the Horn Diapason was extended down to 16', called 'Bass' in the Pedal. The Concert Flute did not extend down to the usual 16' Bourdon. Here, also, we notice the Saxophone and Krumet—stops usually found in the Solo Organ.

The *Foundation Organ* was situated above the procenium arch and contained these ranks:

16'	Diaphonic-Diapa-			Brass Drum-Tympani (large)
	son	73	Pipes	Snare Drum I
16'	Tibia Clausa I	85	"	Snare Drum II
8'	Gamba	61	"	Tambourine
8'	Gamba Celeste	61	"	Castanets
8'	Vox Humana	61	**	Cymbal, Crash
				Cymbal, Band
				Triangle

The twelve lowest pipes of the Diaphonic-Diapason

extended down to 32', and were located in their own chamber above a false ceiling running lengthwise of the auditorium. Thus, this rank contained 85 pipes in all. No part of this stop was effected by tremulant. The Tibia Clausa I was unleathered.

The Unenclosed Percussion and Effects Chamber was also located above the procenium arch immediately in front of the Foundation Organ with both sharing a common ornamental grill. Here was found:

Wood Harp	49	Bars	Wind Machine
Xylophone I (large			Lightning Effect
scale)	37	Bars	Fire Gong
Chimes (Tower scale)	25	Tubes	Auto Horn
Thunder Sheet			Steamboat Whistle
Rain Machine			Telephone Bell
Surf Machine			

The Wood Harp was a conventional Marimba without reiterating action. It was constructed in the manner of a regular instrument with divided naturals and sharps unlike the chromatic scheme later employed in organs. The Tower Chimes were the largest scale tubular chimes manufactured by Deagan. The lightning effect consisted of an intricate array of electric bulbs (the old hand-blown variety) concealed behind the ornamental grill and put into action through a series of pneumatic motors which operated electric switches. In the top of this chamber was the tone opening for the 32' Diaphone pipes.

The Solo Organ was on the right side, directly opposite the Main Organ. This organ was entirely straight with the ranks available on the Solo Manual only at 8' pitch—to other manuals only through coupling. Here were found:

8'	Trumpet	61	Pipes	Glockenspiel	37	Bars
8'	Orchestral Oboe	61	**	Xylophone II	37	"
8'	Kinura	61	"	Sleigh Bells	25	Notes
8'	Oboe Horn	61	**	Bells	25	Notes
8'	Tibia Clausa II	61	"			
8'	Quintadena	61				

The straight Solo Organ seems to have been standard procedure in all Wurlitzer organs of large size at this period. This scheme was abandoned in the case of the larger organ in the Civic Auditorium where the Solo Organ is unified to a degree. The Isis Solo division is identical to that of the early Style 35 of which there were several installations prior to 1915. The Bells were of the tuned door bell variety.

The Tuba Chamber was also located on the right side of the theatre in a position slightly above and partially behind the Solo Organ. Herein was contained the 16' Bombarde-Tuba Mirabilis consisting of 85 pipes. This stop was voiced on 25" pressure and was not effected by tremulant. The lowest eighteen pipes had wooden resonators, but all of the pipes were reeds—not the customary Diaphonic-Bombarde. For some unfathomable reason, one lone percussion was found in this chamber —the Tom Tom. It is known that the Tom Tom, probably the first one ever used in a theatre organ, was an after-thought of Mr. Baxter's; but why locate it with the Tuba Mirabilis?

In the back of the theatre on the right side was the *Echo Organ*. Like the Solo Organ, this organ was also straight except for the Bourdon which was drawn at 16' and 8' pitches. (The entire organ, excepting the

Bourdon, was on one chest and affected by only one tremulant. Everything was voiced on 6" pressure.) Here were found:

16'	Bourdon	44	Pipes	8'	Vox Humana	61	Pipes
8'	Horn Diapason	61		8'	Vox Humana	61	
8'	Gamba	61	**	4'	Flute	61	"
					Chimes (Class A) 25	Tubes

The 16' Bourdon and 4' Flute were independent ranks. There is no indication that the second Vox Humana was tuned as a celeste rank.

The organ was officially opened on August 4, 1915; and it was a gala affair. Mr. Wurlitzer had persuaded Henry Murtaugh to come to Denver for the opening of this organ. Carmenza Vander Lezz, employed by the Wurlitzer Company as an official demonstrator, also performed. In the audience were the principals from the Wurlitzer Company, the Mayor of Denver, and many other prominent local dignitaries. There is even the story of the pedal tones causing the fragile electric filaments in the light bulbs to break, plunging the theatre into total darkness for a period.

Mr. Murtaugh apparently remained at the Isis for some time because early newspaper accounts make reference to his daily recitals. The organ was an important and vitally needed addition to the musical life of Denver at this time-a period when organs were called upon to provide the music now available to everyone through radio, recordings, and orchestras. It was acclaimed as a great concert instrument and utilized by the Chamber of Commerce as an example of one aspect of Denver's cultural life. One Denver newspaper stated: "A feature of the city. Something that every visitor must see at least once; and every citizen will want to hear time after time." It is interesting to note that the word "recital" was always used in referring to a performance. The term "interlude" is nowhere to be found.

To quote from the various sources of publicity about the organ seems unnecessary, but two outstanding facts prove beyond any doubt the success of this instrument. Mr. Baxter felt confident that the organ was sufficient alone in its drawing power for him to give up everything else in the way of music; and because of increased



attendance, he was able to pay for this organ many years in advance of the stipulated agreement. \$50,000 is a tremendous sum today, but in 1915 it was a fortune. It seems doubly so when one is aware that admission to the Isis at this period was a mere ten cents!

Through the 1920's, the Isis remained a first-class house; but as the city grew and the years of The Depression descended, Curtis Street found itself too close to the railroad tracks, literally. The city was forced to expand to the east, and the newer section with its modern theatres commanded the attention of the crowds. Thus, Curtis Street was relinquished to a less discerning group.

The organ was last played in 1939. Its "Swan Song" was played by a pert little lady by the name of Mary Dobbs Tuttle. Mrs. Tuttle had been with this organ from the very beginning. By 1939, not only the theatre, but the organ itself was merely a shadow of its former self. In an effort to draw patronage, an over-zealous manager decided to present stage shows. However, the Isis had been designed strictly for motion pictures and it had no dressing rooms. Therefore, a junkman was called in and the Main, Solo, relay and console were literally axed and hammered into scrap to make dressing rooms from the evacuated space. Although the destruction of the organ was a pathetic blunder, yet needless to say, no bribery could cajole patrons into this unpleasant neighborhood.

With the passing of time it was an accepted fact that the Isis Wurlitzer no longer existed. Mrs. Tuttle mentioned to me in a conversation one day in 1952 that she was certain some of the organ was still in the theatre. It was not long before several organ enthusiasts were able to investigate the situation. We discovered that the Foundation Organ, the Tuba, and the Echo Organ were still intact, preserved in an excellent state behind locked doors. What remained was acquired posthaste. With the exception of the 32' octave of the Diaphone and the 8' Horn Diapason from the Echo which was destroyed in an unfortunate accident, all of this material is now again in use or is being stored for future use in various home installations throughout the country.

Thinking of the Isis Wurlitzer as a commercial venture, it must be acknowledged a complete success. As a theatre organ, it must have been superb. Its limited unification, as we may now reflect on more recent instruments, possibly leads us to look askance; but although bigger and more versatile theatre organs have since been built, certainly few ever knew the glory of the Isis. It was the largest of its day and remained close to the top in size even when the last one was installed. Its unfortunate ending is an incident which has been repeated time and again throughout America. Nothing remains of the theatre itself today, for it was condemned and torn down this year.

A complete and authentic stop tablet layout follows.

PEDAL (Compass 32 Note:	s)		Piano 8'	
Diaphone	16'	Octave Celeste (Viol) 4	Harp	Kinura 8'
Diaphone	32'	Flute 4	Xylophone	Oboe Horn 8'
Bombarde	16'	Twelfth (Flute) 2 2/3	Sleigh Bells	Quintadena 8'
	16'	Piccolo (Flute) 2	Chrysoglott	Cathedral Chimes
Ophicleide		Piano 8	Bells Reiterating	Xylophone I
Tibia Clausa I	16'	Harp	Octave Coupler	Glockenspiel
Bass (Horn Diapason)	16'	Chrysoglott	Solo to Great	Xylophone II
Clarinet	16'	Snare Drum		Sleigh Bells
Tuba Mirabilis	8'	Tambourine	Sforzando Touch	Bells Reiterating
Tuba Horn	8'	Castanets	C I C I T I	Harp
Octave, (Phonon Diapason)	8' 8'		Great Second Touch	Chrysoglott
Open Diapason	8'	Solo to Accompaniment	Ophicleide 16'	
Tibia Clausa I	8'		Tuba Mirabilis 8'	Six double-touch pistons.
Cello (SalVDOV, Cel.)	8'	Accompaniment Second Touch		
Flute	8'	Storage and the second s	Sforzando Touch	ECHO ORGAN (Playable from
	4'	Tuba Horn 8	Solo to oreat, second roden	
Clarion		Diapason-Phonon	Solo to Great, Pizzicato Touch	Pedal and Great Key boards)
Piano	16'	Tibia Clausa I	Ten double-touch adjustable combi-	PEDAL (Compass 32 Notes)
Bass Drum		Glockenspiel		
Cymbal		Cathedral Chimes	nation pistons.	Bourdon 16'
Snare Drum		Sleigh Bells	One tablet to cause the pedal stops	Flute 4'
			and couplers to move so as to fur-	
Pedal Second Touch		Triangle	nish automatically a suitable bass at	GREAT
		Solo to Acc. Second Touch	all times.	
(with Pedal)		Solo to Acc. Pizzicato Touch	an miles,	Horn Diapason 8'
Bass Drum		One tablet to cause the pedal stops	BOMBARDE	Gamba
				Oboe Horn
Kettle Drum		and couplers to move so as to fur-		Vox Humana
Crash Cymbal		nish automatically a suitable bass at	Bombarde 16'	Vox Humana
Cymbal		all times.		Flute 4'
Snare Drum		Ten double-touch adjustable combi-		Cathedral Chimes
Triangle		nation pistons.		Carrieorar Crimes
		marion protonor	Tuba Mirabilis 8'	CENTER AL
Pedal Second Touch		CREAT (Commence 61 Mater)	Diapason-Phonon 8'	GENERAL
		GREAT (Compass 61 Notes)	Tibia Clausa I 8'	Five tremulants: Main, Solo, Founda-
(middle board)		Krumet (Ten, C) 16	Gamba 8'	tion, Vox Humana, Echo.
Diaphone	32'	Ophicleide 16	Gamba Celeste 8'	Four expression pedals and indicating
Ophicleide, Pizzicato Touch	32'	Clarinet 16	Vox Humana 8'	keys: Tuba, Solo, Main, Foundation.
Bombarde to Pedal		Contra Viol (Ten, C) 16	Clarion (Tuba Horn) 4'	Reys. Tuba, 5010, Main, Foundation.
Great to Pedal				One General expression pedal and
Echo to Pedal				indicating keys with couplers.
				One balanced crescendo pedal.
Three adjustable Toe Pistoris		Diapason-Phonon 8		One thunder pedal for 32' Diaphone.
		Open Diapason 8	Great to Bombarde	One thunder pedal for Reed 16'
ACCOMPANIMENT		Horn Diapason 8		One thunder pedal for Tibia 16'
		Gamba 8		One double touch sforzando lever:
(Compass 61 Notes)		Gamba Celeste 8		First touch-full stops wind,
Contra Viol (Ten C)	16'	Saxophone 8	Sforzando Touch——1st and 2nd	Second touch-Full everything.
Tuba Horn	8'	Clarinet 8	Touch	One double touch sforzando pedal.
	8'	Viol d'Orchestra 8		First touch—Snare Drum.
Open Diapason	8'		Bombarde Second Touch	
Horn Diapason			Bombarde 16'	Second touch-Base Drum, Cym-
Gamba	8'			bal.
Gamba Celeste	8'	Salicional 8	Mandolin	Two blowers: 20 HP, 10 Hp.
Saxophone	8'	Concert Flute 8		
Clarinet	8'	Clarion (Tuba Horn) 4	and couplers to move so as at all	EFFECTS:
Viol d'Orchestra	8'	Octave (Open) 4	times to furnish a suitable bass.	
Viol Celeste	8'	Viol 4	, times to furnish a suitable bass.	Rain, Surf, Wind, Lightning, Thun-
Krumet	8'	Octave Celeste (Viol) 4	Ten double-touch adjustable combi-	der, Fire Gong, Auto Horn, Steam-
	8'	Flute 4		boat Whistle, Electric Bell, 3
Salicional	8'			birds (Solo, Main, Foundation).
Concert Flute			SOLO (Compass 61 Notes)	
Vox Humana	. 8'			Wind, Rain, Thunder and Light-
Bells		Piccolo (Flute) 2		
Octave (Open)	4'	Tierce (Flute) 13/5	' Trumpet 8'	key cheeks,

SPECIFICATION-Four-Manual Wurlitzer Hope-Jones Unit Orchestra, Isis Theatre-Denver, Colorado

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