

# THE PARAMOUNT WURLITZER

... from the player's view

by James C. Roseveare  
Organist, Paramount Theatre

For the many who have expressed interest in the Paramount organ from a musical standpoint, I think it appropriate to state first the viewpoint from which this article is being written, before going into any real detail. Simply stated, what I am going to do is to give the reader information about the organ from the player's standpoint: there will be nothing about how many light bulbs there are in the theatre, how many miles of wire there are in the organ, and so forth — interesting points, to be sure, but not germane to the task at hand.

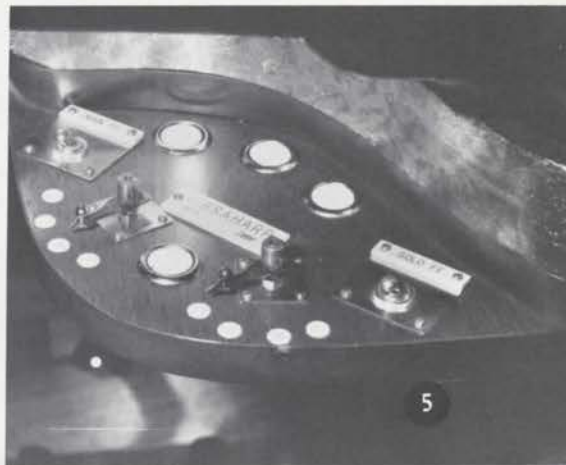
In my opinion, the logical place to begin our study is the console. All the great pipework in the world isn't going to do anybody any good if it can't be controlled well. Indeed, "control" is the key word here, for the playing of any instrument presupposes as much control as is possible — the more control one has over one's medium, the more expressive one may be. Surely one of the basic considerations any designer must make in the specifying of an organ is the number of combination pistons available. Our scheme contemplates ten per manual, and ten for the pedal. To have provided for any more would have necessitated extensive re-engineering of the console, nearly to the point of rebuilding it — hardly a practicable approach. In addition, we were constrained by the number of stopkey positions available of pneumatic control. True, we did add 17 new stopkeys, but these aren't governed by the combination action, as there simply wasn't room in the console to add the required mechanism (our basic console, I should point out, was a Wurlitzer Publix I, which

model contained 20 ranks). What we did, therefore, was to make the non-combination stopkeys control features that *are* on the combination action. I'll go into detail later. Luckily, the Publix I, as mentioned above, has ten pistons for the Pedal, so our first task was to render these more usable than they were originally. The stock arrangement of pistons under the Accompaniment manual was awkward, for there were twenty pistons in this location, the left-hand ten controlling the Pedal and the remaining ten controlling the Accompaniment. This layout made the Accompaniment pistons difficult of access; furthermore, the Accompaniment pistons did not affect the Pedal pistons, so that to draw a matched Accompaniment/Pedal combination required the player to push two pistons. What we did was to rearrange the layout so that the center ten pistons now control the Accompaniment stops, while the far left five and the far right five control the Pedal. In addition, we caused the Accompaniment pistons to operate such that when a given Accompaniment piston is pushed, the corresponding Pedal piston is also activated; the pressing of a Pedal piston, however, does *not* cause the corresponding Accompaniment piston to be activated. This isolation was done through the use of diodes. The Great manual's pistons are second touch-equipped, so that when a Great piston is pressed to first touch, only the Great stopkeys are affected; if, however, a Great piston is pushed through to its second touch, it acts as a "collective general" — that is, it activates the corresponding piston on every division. This is an admirable scheme,

for it allows the organist to concentrate on the playing of music rather than on the management of mechanism.

We now come to stop layout. In many Wurlitzers, particularly the older ones, I feel that a lot of positions are wasted by the appearance of 16' stops on the Accompaniment, manual traps, and the like. We overcame this difficulty by relegating such traps as horses' hooves, triangle, etc., to push buttons, eliminating the 8' Saxophone in the Pedal and the Kicura in the Accompaniment, and so on, thus gaining valuable space on the stoprails for more usable stops. The Publix I originally consisted of 20 ranks; our design called for 27. Clearly, we had to do something to economize stopkey rail positions, even though we had gained some as outlined above. The main area addressed was in the matter of strings. The Publix I had four: a Viol d'Orchestre and Celeste, and two unison Solo Strings. In our scheme, we added two more Solo Strings, and a Violin and Celeste. So now our string complement consists of two Solo Strings and their

Vibraharp controls on swing-out shelf on right side of console.  
(Rudy Frey photo)



Celestes, a Viol d'Orchestre and Celeste, and a Violin and Celeste. We simply couldn't afford eight stopkey positions for these four pairs of strings, so what we did was to put both pairs of Solo Strings on one stopkey, and the four softer strings on another, so that in any one division we now had, for any given pitch, one stopkey for the loud strings, and one for the soft ones. This brings us back to our stopkeys that are not on the combination action. Six of these keys

modify the amplexed string stopkeys so that their consist can be reduced. For example, if the Solo String (solo chamber) and the Solo String Celeste ventils stopkeys be drawn, then when the Strings Celeste stopkey on the stoprail is drawn, only the Solo String (unison) in the main chamber will play. The other ventils cut off the Metal Diaphone in the solo chamber, the 16' String in the solo chamber, the Flute Celeste, and the unenclosed Marimba Harp. Five more stopkeys

not on combination control pedal traps. There is but one pedal stopkey marked "Trap." This is governed by the combination action, and the five non-combination stopkeys simply select what trap(s) will play when this one key is drawn. A simple and effective solution. The two remaining non-combination stopkeys are utility ones, such that they can be connected at the will of the player to operate nearly every function that any other stopkey can. The solid-state relay

## PARAMOUNT WURLITZER STOP LIST

### PEDAL

Tuba Profunda 16  
Diaphone 16  
Bass 16  
Tibia Clausa 16  
Bass String 16  
Oboe Horn 16  
Bourdon 16  
English Horn 8  
Tuba Mirabilis 8  
Tuba Horn 8  
Tibia Clausa Solo 8  
Tibia Clausa 8  
Octave Horn 8  
Clarinet 8  
Strings Celeste 8  
Cello 8  
Oboe Horn 8  
Flute 8  
Piano 16  
Trap  
Accompaniment to Pedal  
Great to Pedal  
Solo to Pedal  
Tibia Ensemble 8 PIZZ

### ACCOMPANIMENT

English Horn 8  
Tuba Mirabilis 8  
Trumpet 8  
Tuba Horn 8  
Diaphonic Diapason 8  
Horn Diapason 8  
Tibia Clausa 8  
Clarinet 8  
Strings Celeste 8  
Viols Celeste 8  
Oboe Horn 8  
Quintadena 8  
Concert Flute 8  
Vox Humana Solo 8  
Vox Humana 8  
Octave Horn 4  
Piccolo Solo 4  
Piccolo 4  
Octaves Celeste 4  
Flute 4  
Vox Humana Solo 4  
Vox Humana 4  
Twelfth 2-2/3  
Piccolo 2  
Mandolin  
Piano 8  
Marimba  
Harp Sub Octave  
Harp  
Chrysoglott

Sleigh Bells  
Snare Drum  
Tambourine  
Castanets  
Chinese Block  
Jazz Cymbal  
Sand Block  
Octave  
Solo to Accompaniment

### SECOND TOUCH

English Horn 8  
Tuba Mirabilis 8  
Trumpet 8  
Tuba Horn 8  
Diaphonic Diapason 8  
Tibia Clausa Solo 8  
Piano 8  
Harp Sub Octave  
Vibraharp Octave  
Glockenspiel Octave  
Cathedral Chimes  
Great Octave Accompaniment  
Solo to Accompaniment  
Solo to Accompaniment PIZZ

### GREAT

Trumpet 16 TC  
Tuba Profunda 16  
Tibia Clausa Solo 16  
Tibia Clausa 16 TC  
Orchestral Oboe 16 TC  
Clarinet 16 TC  
Saxophone 16 TC  
Cellos 16 (all 8 string ranks)  
Vox Humana Solo 16 TC  
Vox Humana 16 TC  
Tuba Mirabilis 8  
Trumpet 8  
Tuba Horn 8  
Horn Diapason 8  
Tibia Clausa Solo 8  
Tibia Clausa 8  
Orchestral Oboe 8  
Kinura 8  
Clarinet 8  
Saxophone 8  
Strings Celeste 8  
Viols Celeste 8  
Oboe Horn 8  
Quintadena 8  
Concert Flute 8  
Vox Humana Solo 8  
Vox Humana 8  
Fifth Solo 5-1/3  
Octave Horn 4  
Piccolo Solo 4

Piccolo 4  
Octaves Celeste 4  
Flute 4  
Vox Humana Solo 4  
Vox Humana 4  
Twelfth Solo 2-2/3 (Tibia)  
Piccolo Solo 2 (Tibia)  
Piccolo 2 (Tibia)  
Fifteenth 2  
Piccolo 2  
Tierce Solo 1-3/5 (Tibia)  
Piano 8  
Xylophone Master  
Xylophone  
Marimba  
Chrysoglott  
Bells  
Sub Octave  
Unison Off  
Octave  
Solo Sub Great  
Solo to Great

### SECOND TOUCH

Vibraharp and Sub Octaves  
Bombarde to Great  
Solo Sub Great  
Solo to Great  
Solo to Great PIZZ

### BOMBARDE

English Horn 16 TC  
Tuba Mirabilis 16 TC  
Trumpet 16 TC  
Diaphone 16  
Tibia Clausa Solo 16  
Tibia Clausa 16 TC  
Saxophone 16 TC  
Vox Humana Ensemble 16 TC  
English Horn 8  
Tuba Mirabilis 8  
Trumpet 8  
Tuba Horn 8  
Diaphonic Diapason 8  
Tibia Clausa Solo 8  
Tibia Clausa 8  
Saxophone 8  
Vox Humana Ensemble 8  
Piccolo Solo 4  
Piccolo 4  
Twelfth Solo 2-2/3 (Tibia)  
Piccolo Solo 2 (Tibia)  
Xylophone Master  
Glockenspiel  
Great Sub Bombarde  
Great to Bombarde  
Great Octave Bombarde

### SOLO

English Horn 8  
Tuba Mirabilis 8  
Trumpet 8  
Tuba Horn 8  
Diaphonic Diapason 8  
Tibia Clausa Solo 8  
Tibia Clausa 8  
Orchestral Oboe 8  
Kinura 8  
Clarinet 8  
Saxophone 8  
Cellos 8 (all 8 strings)  
Oboe Horn 8  
Quintadena 8  
Vox Humana Solo 8  
Piccolo Solo 4  
Piccolo 4  
Twelfth Solo 2-2/3 (Tibia)  
Piccolo Solo 2 (Tibia)  
Piano 8  
Xylophones (both Master and Solo)  
Harp Sub Octave  
Vibraharp  
Chrysoglott  
Glockenspiel  
Cathedral Chimes  
Sub Octave  
Unison Off  
Octave

### PEDAL TRAPS

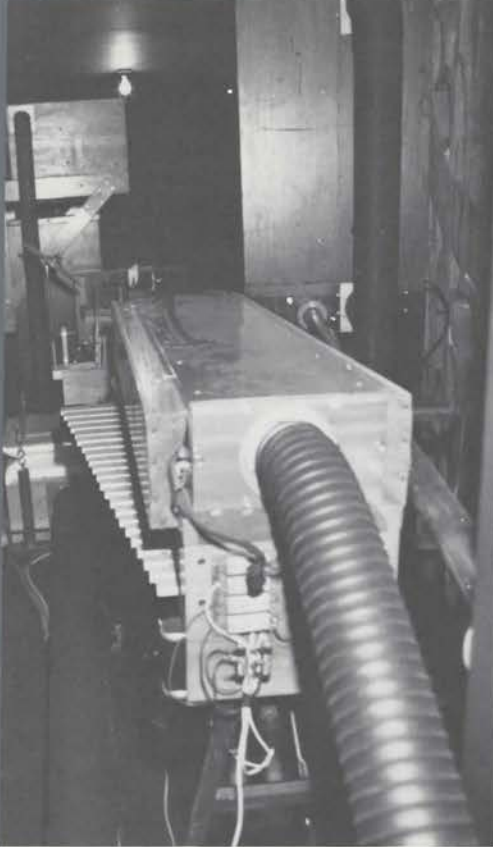
1. Bass Drum
2. Kettle Drum
3. Cymbals
4. Crash Cymbals
5. Jazz Cymbal

### VENTILS

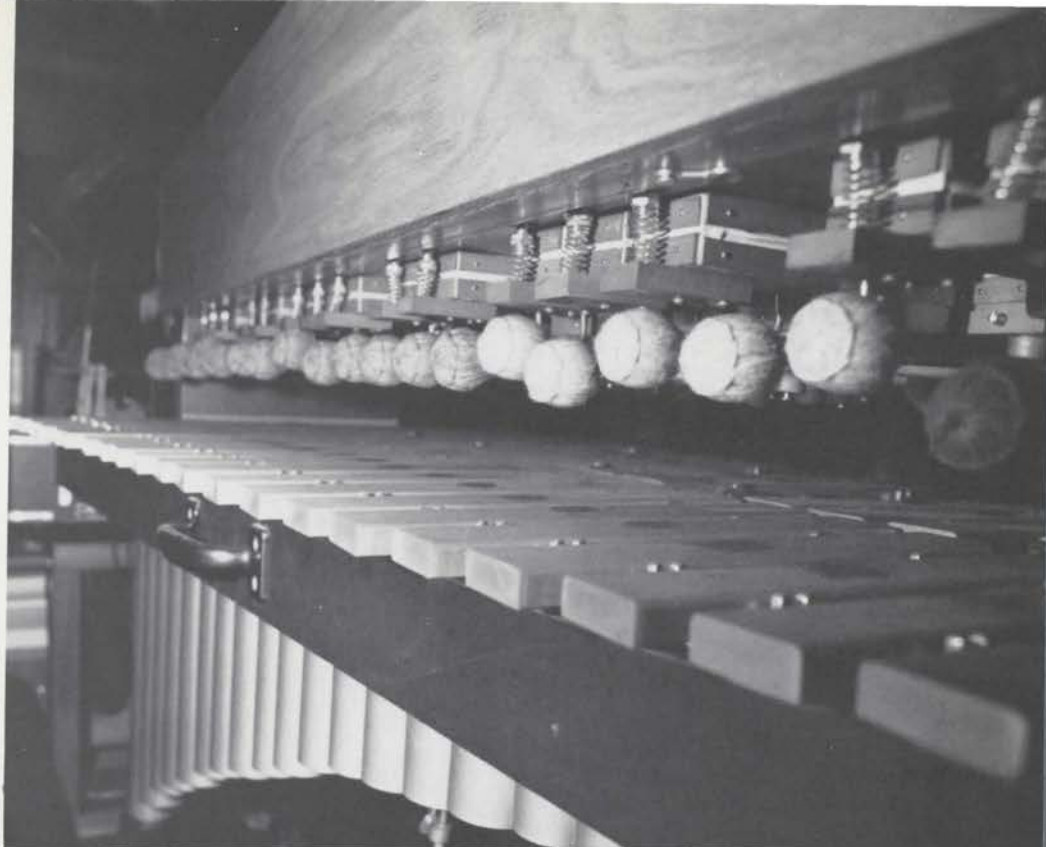
1. Bass Off (Solo)
2. Bass String Off (Solo)
3. Solo String Off (Solo)
4. Solo String Off (Main)
5. Solo String Celestes Off (Solo & Main)
6. Violin Off (Main)
7. Viol d'Orchestre Off (Main)
8. Viol Celestes Off (Main)
9. Flute Celeste Off (Main)
10. Marimba Off (unenclosed)

### TREMULANTS

Main  
Clarinet  
Tibias & Voxes  
Tubas & Diapason  
Solo  
Solo  
English Horn



Vibraharp located in unenclosed percussion chamber above main chamber. (Rudy Frey photo)



Vibraharp, showing action mechanism. (Rudy Frey photo)

makes this utility function easily available. We gained flexibility also by treating the Great as primarily a "color" manual, real full organ being drawn on the Bombarde. Finally, additional convenience was gained by the extensive use of couplers. Regarding Tibia and Flute extensions, we went, as we did throughout the organ's design, with the idea that given a choice between, say, two alternatives, the one that would see the most use was the one that we chose. A look at the stoplist will bear this out: there is no Flute Twelfth on the Great, there are no Tibia 2' Piccolos on the Accompaniment, there are no Tibia main mutations anywhere, etc. It would have been nice to have them all, of course, but we had to draw the line somewhere, based upon the number of combination positions available.

I guess the real question most everyone has at first, and the one we will answer now, having got the preliminaries pretty much under our belts, is "what pipework did you add to the original, what did you change, and why?" The answer really depends on the approach we took, tonally speaking. My primary objection to the Publix I design is that it tends to deny the organist the more subtle dynamic options that are essential to a truly musical performance, especially in the Accompaniment and Pedal. For

instance, the original design called for a Dulciana, a fine stop in its way, but certainly not at the expense of a Horn Diapason, especially in a 3000-seat theatre. As mentioned before, the string complement in the original design was at best inadequate. We doubled it. In the Publix I Pedal is to be found what is to me simply unacceptable tonal thinking: the 16' extensions (Tuba Horn, Tibia Solo, Bourdon, and Wood Diaphone) provide for no real texture below the dynamic level of full organ, and as we wanted the bass to have as much mezzo-forte texture as possible, we took our lead from what I have always considered to be the definitive Wurlitzer Pedal treatment, that of the Style 285. The stoplist reveals a few differences (the 285 had a Double English Horn, a Bombarde, and a Double Clarinet in the Pedal, whereas ours has a Double Oboe Horn, two Metal Diaphones, and two Double Strings), but the idea is the same: definition in the 16' line. To achieve improved variety, we made our main chamber Tibia a small unleathered one (originally from the Million Dollar Theatre Wurlitzer in Los Angeles), and added a Celeste rank to our Concert Flute, thus also improving our accompanimental capabilities. In the percussion department, we added an unenclosed Marimba Harp, an unenclosed light Brush Cymbal (called "Jazz Cym-

bal" in the stoplist), a terrifically successful Siren Whistle, and my own pride and joy, a real orchestral Vibraharp. We had an action built for it, including a rather elaborate damper treatment and pulsator speed control, so that it is a very versatile affair indeed. It is unenclosed, and performs exactly as I wanted it to when I "designed" its treatment.

A final word should address the expression in the organ. We were very lucky to have immense shutter openings, and 16 six-blade-per-frame sets of shutters, so that when the swell pedal is depressed, the fronts of the chambers virtually vanish. I spent no little time planning the sequencing of the shutters, and the result is the smoothest, most musical expression I have yet heard in a theatre organ.

What I hope to have conveyed is that what we have here at the Paramount is a Wurlitzer of immense versatility and superb sound. All the work and planning has really paid off.

*The photograph reproduced on the cover of this issue is from the book The Oakland Paramount, published by Lancaster-Miller Publishers. The book is available from them at P.O. Box 3056, Berkeley, California 94703, for \$12.95 postpaid. A review will appear in the May/June issue of THE-ATRE ORGAN.* □