

The Rebirth of a Princess

by Linda and Cecil Whitmire

We returned to Knoxville, Tennessee, in December of 1980. It was difficult to leave Birmingham's beautiful 4/20 Wurlitzer installed in the Alabama Theatre. Making it easier was the fact that we knew Knoxville had a gorgeous Balaban 2, 3/14 Wurlitzer in the Tennessee Theatre. We had kept tabs on the activities of the Tennessee and its organ ever since we originally moved from Knoxville in 1975. The stories we heard about the fate of the organ often sent chills through us. On our occasional weekends back in Knoxville, we always tried to go to the theatre and check for ourselves how things really stood. Each visit proved that conditions were becoming increasingly worse. The organ was being played on an occasional basis but little, if any, maintenance was being done on it. The organ was becoming straighter and straighter with each passing day.

On November 3, 1977, ABC South-eastern Theatres decided to drop their lease on the theatre. The horrible day came when the marquee read "CLOSED" and her fate was a big question mark. The building was owned by the C. B. Atkins family, and though they had a dear spot in their hearts for the magnificent structure, it was put on the market, quietly, when the doors closed. Her halls remained dark and silent until March 15, 1978, when the Tennessee Classics, a new company, leased the building to show classic films. The organ was again raised for occasional appearances between shows, usually on weekends. But this was a short-lived venture and the doors closed again. Then, Robert Frost took over the theatre and successfully revived the classic films, using the organ on a regular basis. Dr. Bill Snyder, a local organist, agreed to man the console and did a marvelous job under the most ad-

verse conditions. Bill enlisted the aid of Tim Johnson, a local piano technician and school teacher, to help him smooth out some of the rough spots in the organ. Once again, she was receiving very limited maintenance, but some was better than none. Later, the Atkins family resumed management of the theatre and continued showing classic films and using the organ. This was where things stood when we returned to Knoxville.

The one fact that had not changed all this time was that the theatre was still on the market. Our greatest concern was how we could muster enough support to save the organ should the theatre be sold. We contacted Bill Synder and worked out a plan to start showing the theatre management that the organ could be a viable part of the attraction. It worked, and the theatre management was delighted, as we were. Interest was once again generated in the organ and people were coming to hear it, not just to watch the movies. We began some serious maintenance to help improve the theatrical sounds, and take away some of the classic sound. This, unfortunately, was just a drop in the bucket of what was needed.

Bill, who is a professor of engineering at the University of Tennessee, was nearing his wit's end having to play every weekend, plus teaching, plus playing for his church. His wife was asking for photographs to place around the house so she would remember what he looked like! Bill and Cecil worked out an arrangement so that Bill would have some nights off and Cecil would play in his place. This worked out great, except that on Bill's nights off he would still come to the theatre to hear Cecil, and vice versa. Oh, well!

Just when things seemed to be looking good, rumors began flying

that someone was interested in buying the theatre and turning it into an office building. That really made our blood run cold! Then on July 1, 1981, the announcement came — the theatre *had* been sold, but not to the office "butcher." It was sold to Jim Dick of Dick Broadcasting Company, the owners of WIVK radio. He quickly put out the word that he intended to keep the theatre intact and operate it. He also announced that he would begin pouring restoration funds into the theatre — no mention of the organ at that time. However, we knew that he loved the instrument and our hopes began to soar.

Cecil and Bill arranged a meeting with Jim Dick to get a firsthand report on his intentions concerning the organ. Mr. Dick was very frank in explaining that he knew nothing about the mechanics of the instrument, did not know who to contact for repair work, but he did want to reassure us that the instrument would be preserved and restored whenever possible. This meeting was what actually put the wheels of restoration into motion. Cecil and Bill suggested that we put together a nonprofit organization to restore the organ and to continually maintain it for him. Mr. Dick approved wholeheartedly and suggested that our new corporation bring him a contract spelling out our intentions and what we would need in return. Thus was born the **Theatre Organ Society of Tennessee, Inc.**

At first, the only members of our society were the members of the Board of Directors, seven to be exact, and all individual ATOS members. But as Bill and Cecil, playing the organ for each movie, began telling the audiences about our organization and the planned restoration, the interest grew and eager volunteers joined our ranks. As is usual with most organiza-



Wurlitzer in state of undress prior to performance. Sign says "Please pardon the organ's appearance. It is being restored by the Theatre Organ Society of Tennessee."



Tim Johnson (left) and Bill Snyder looking over the new contact blocks before installing the top rail. (Photo by Dave Carter)

tions, a few too-eager volunteers had to be restrained. The Board of Directors drew up a workable contract with Jim Dick that allows T.O.S.T. almost total control of the organ. We agreed to supply a qualified organist for special functions that the theatre chose to book. We also agreed to restore and maintain the organ for as long as T.O.S.T. is in existence. This restoration and maintenance would be paid for by funds received from concerts and special presentations that T.O.S.T. would promote. In return for this, T.O.S.T. asked for a set theatre rental, total control of access to the organ, permission to hold monthly meetings within the theatre (free of charge and when it didn't conflict with a theatre performance), and most importantly, first refusal rights to the organ should the theatre ever be sold. Jim Dick promptly signed the contract, and added new features to it. He agreed to fund the parts for the initial restoration, since our bank account was nearly empty. When initial restoration was complete, the society would assume the bills for any future work. How could we refuse such an offer?

Having been duly chartered in the State of Tennessee, we then applied for and received tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Now we were legitimate! Officers were elected as follows: Linda Whitmire, President; Cecil Whitmire, First Vice President and Director of Concerts and Publicity; Bill Snyder, Second Vice President and Director of Restoration and Maintenance; and Tim Johnson, Secretary and Treasurer. Wallace Baumann was installed as resident historian and trustee of the library. The work crew consisted mainly of the same people, with an occasional hand

offered for a specific job or two.

Our first work session was an evaluation of the organ. We met at the theatre after the movie ended one evening, with pencils and paper in hand, to make a list of the good and the bad. It only took us about 15 minutes to realize that the bad far exceeded the good. That's when the decision was made to completely rebuild the entire console.

Having completed our evaluation, we spent the rest of the evening "cussing" and discussing how the console had come to such a state. Some of the problems were caused by well-intentioned organists and church organ technicians in the past. As happens to all instruments that remain in a closed building, the weather, humidity and simple neglect caused the worst damage. Of course, the mice did their share of altering the console by chewing holes in the pneumatics and making nests out of the twill tapes. The exterior had undergone the worst abuse. Many cuts and gouges in the wood, as well as holes drilled for various reasons (Lord knows what!), would have to be filled. Small pieces of the intricate wood carvings were missing and would have to be cut to match.

Then came the tragedy of the paint itself. The color showing on the organ had faded to a "pitiful pink," as we referred to it. It had been applied at some time during the 1968-78 era, but unfortunately the entire console had not been done. So parts of the console still showed the red paint that was applied during 1961 and parts were showing the faded pink. Quite a sight! We knew that beneath the second red layer was a layer of black, which was applied in 1956 by some misguided soul. We hoped that beneath the black would be the original Wurlitzer and no surprises. The first differences

of opinion came about concerning the original color.

When Wurlitzer installed this organ they were very proud of it, and used it in all of their advertising for their three-manual promotions. They also printed lots of official pictures of it, but unfortunately all of these pictures were in black and white. Many local pictures were taken of various artists who played the organ, but there again, they were all in black and white. The only thing we were certain of was that Wurlitzer had used contrast shading around all of the gold filigree carvings to accent the gold and make it stand out against the red. This was evident in nearly all of the pictures we studied. This even surprised our resident historian, who owns one of the original Wurlitzer promo pictures of this organ, but he had never noticed the shading that is apparent in the picture. The consensus was that the console should be "Chinese Red" because that was what everyone thought Wurlitzer liked to use. I volunteered to begin an intense search for a match of the original paint (which was found under the black paint on the backboards over the manuals). But what Wurlitzer called "Chinese Red" and what the present paint manufacturers call "Chinese Red" are worlds apart.

Having laid out a plan for the work, it was time to meet with the theatre management and schedule our work times. This is where we suffered our first heart attack. The manager wanted the organ to remain playable *at all times* for the movies. This meant that any work we would do had to be scheduled very late, after the movie ended, or during the day, before the movie started. They told us that during the coming months the theatre would close down for a period of four

weeks to install new wiring in the building. This meant that there would be *no power* inside the building during that time. At this point we would accept anything we could get.

Out of necessity, we decided that the stop tab contact blocks needed to be repaired first. Many of the wires had been so badly mangled that straightening them was impossible. Being an engineer, Bill Snyder volunteered to completely rebuild the contact blocks. They were removed, a section at a time, and Bill took them home to work on. The original silver wire was 0.020-inch in diameter. We were able to get 0.040-inch wire donated, which would be too stiff and too large to go through the wire holes in the blocks. The 0.040-inch wire was reduced to 0.020-inch diameter by hand drawing it through a wire die. Each draw reduced the diameter by 0.005-inch, so each wire had to be pulled through the die four times. The new wires were inserted in the blocks, the blocks replaced on the rail, and the wire connections resoldered. As each section was completed, another section would be removed and the process repeated. As there are 132 stop tabs on this organ, 264 soldered wire connections had to be removed and replaced. During this entire time the organ had to remain playable. Needless to say, there were occasional surprises while Bill and Cecil were using the organ.

The pneumatics were our next challenge. We received much advice as to what material to use to re-cover the pneumatics. There are those who believe that real leather and hide glue should be used, and then there are those who believe that polyton and contact cement will do just as well and is not as expensive. Because of our time factor, we opted for polyton, thinking it would be easier to work with, and quicker, too. Wrong on both counts! There *is* no quick and easy way to re-cover pneumatics, if you want to do a good job. It takes a *lot* of patience and a lot of wind (to blow and inhale on the pneumatics to check them for leaks). You haven't lived until you've spent an evening blowing and inhaling on hundreds of pneumatics and having a mouth that tastes like a musty cellar! Using a belt sander, each pneumatic was carefully cleaned of all old glue and gasket before applying the polyton. New gaskets were cut from heavy blotter paper and applied. Blotter paper

works great, but we later learned (advice from Walt Winn) that a circle of glue placed around the pneumatic hole and no blotter works just as well and is easier to take off, if need be. We used this technique later when re-installing the tremulant and second-touch pneumatics, just hours before a concert. We will freely admit that if we had to re-do any of the pneumatics and had both the time and money, we would use leather. Polyton works very well, and it smells so offensive that we're sure the mice won't go anywhere near it, but we did encounter quite a few leaks that had to be stopped. As always happens, the leaks appeared more frequently on the bottom rail, necessitating breaking down the console each time. To this day, there is still a "mouse" somewhere in the pneumatics that squeaks occasionally, and we can't find it! As both of us have also had experience using leather to re-cover pneumatics on the Alabama's Wurlitzer, we agreed that the leather is the better way to go.

Having completed the pneumatics, we plunged ahead to the task of replacing the stop tab twill tape pulls. The mice had certainly enjoyed themselves on the old ones. We had some very ingenious people working with us, so we didn't have to order new twill tapes. Bill Snyder and his crew made them for us. Anyone who has replaced twill tapes on a three-manual organ will understand that this is no small task. We were fortunate to have

a young lady volunteer who was small enough to practically climb inside the console to install the most difficult tapes to reach. Having accomplished this and replaced all the missing stop tab clips, we could then adjust each stop tab. Everything was working beautifully. Then came the word — the theatre was shutting off the power for four weeks to rewire the building.

We should have been happy to have the time, but the prospect of working completely in the dark using flashlights, in January with no heat in the building, didn't exactly appeal to us. We hurriedly replaced the wind line to the console so it could be checked while there was still power to the organ. A game plan was laid out to see what could be removed from the organ and worked on at our various homes. We agreed to order the new pedals and prepare them for installation. This meant covering the naturals with a sanding sealer, then applying three coats of acrylic so they would not wear. The job of replacing pedal contacts would have to wait until power was restored to the organ, as would installing the 1929 Ford dashboard lights on the pedal backboard to replace the hideous fluorescent fixture presently there. The front horse-shoe cover and the top board could be removed and taken home with us, as could the capitals and front jambs. The pedal backboard and the two back panels could also be removed. Bill, his engineering mind at work again, volunteered to take the How-

Linda and Cecil Whitmire stripping paint from the console.

(Photos by Dave Carter)





Larry Donaldson and Cecil Whitmire rebuilding the combination action at 2:00 a.m., to be used at a performance that day.



Linda hand-painting the horseshoe cover in the makeshift workshop/laundry room.

ard seat home and have it repaired. I volunteered to re-cover the seat itself, as the original leather was badly worn and beyond repair. Loading these pieces, plus the bench, into our hatchback car and the Howard seat base into Bill's car, we carefully covered the organ and bid her farewell for a short time.

The original Howard seat was found in a storage room at the theatre and several repairs had to be made before it could be used. No height adjustment could be made because the spring-loaded pawl which engages the rack on the shaft was broken and had to be rebuilt. The seat itself is held to the shaft by a collar, and a pin which moves in a groove in the shaft. This pin is what allows the organist to swivel around on the seat without "screwing himself right off the top." The collar also was broken and a new one had to be made. Bill enlisted the aid of two local machinists, Earl Rosenbalm and Steve Hunley, who donated their time. On an earlier occasion these same machinists repaired a beater which had broken in one of the pedal Diaphone pipes. The seat acquired a new covering of black cotton velvet with a 2" black fringe attached with brass decorative upholstery tacks. This hid the top collar and pin from the audiences and gave some character to the seat itself.

While all this night work and planning was going on, I spent my days combing the paint stores within a 30-mile radius trying to match the original paint. It was a group decision (I think!) that while the power was off would be an excellent time to refinish the console's exterior. (As this was going to be my job, I don't remember agreeing to this — never liked to paint in the dark!) After many days of

searching and testing colors, Porter Paints came up with the perfect match. It wasn't called "Chinese Red," but instead was "Cardinal Red." They were so intrigued with what we were going to do with the paint that they asked to take pictures when it was completed. (Believe it or not, a gallon of paint is *more* than enough to do the entire console!)

Having settled the problem of the basic color, next came the gold, and another difference of opinion. The console had lost its original gold through the many paintings and what everyone was used to seeing was a bright, almost brassy, gold. It was the opinion of most of our group that this was the original color. Being a very stubborn person, I refused to accept this and set about to prove them wrong. Using one of the front jambs bearing the Wurlitzer crest and gold filigree wood carving, I carefully removed the gold, a layer at a time. The newer paints applied in later years came off like syrup. The original, hardened gold finish was still intact beneath the other three layers. It was the most beautiful, deep Florentine gold that I had ever seen. In spite of the years and the layers of paint covering it, the gold glistened and I knew I was right! Proudly showing the others what I had found, they had to admit that they, too, had been fooled by the years of "brassy" gold. The only way to achieve the same gold color and effect was to mix lacquer and gold dust, a process which was carefully handled by a local craft store. This achieved the depth effect and gave the gold real dimension.

We converted our laundry room into an organ workshop and began removing the three top layers of paint from each piece of the console. The

original bottom layer was the most difficult to remove because of the hardened finish that Wurlitzer gave it. By removing all paint down to the wood, we were able to see intricate detailing that had not been visible since the 1956 painting filled it. Each piece became a new adventure. Although Wurlitzer sprayed each piece of the organ individually before assembling it in 1928, I chose to repaint it by hand. This way I could keep the red off the gold areas and thereby preserve the detail. The wood used by Wurlitzer to make this console was so beautiful that it was almost a shame to cover it with paint. But red and gold it was in 1928, and red and gold it would be again. Each piece was carefully painted and the intricate shading put around all of the gold to highlight it. Then three coats of non-yellowing acrylic was applied as insurance against damage (and future attempts to change the color). All the holes and cuts had been filled and sanded and the finished product was more than we ever anticipated.

The finished pieces were so beautiful that I couldn't wait to get to the theatre and start the remaining parts of the console. Little did I know that the parts just finished were only the icing on the cake! Because there was no power in the building (and no heat) we cheated and borrowed power from the building next door via a 250' extension cord. That gave us a work light, at least, and we could begin stripping off the paint remaining on the stationary console pieces. Bill and Tim used this time to trim and adjust wire on the contact blocks and adjust tension on the twill tapes. Cecil and I were the official "strippers." It creates quite a mess (and a lot of fumes), but the finished product is

worth all the effort. We knew that we were going to replace the carpet surrounding the console, so we were not concerned about the huge globs of paint “jelly” that fell to the base. After stripping the wood, we carefully cleaned out each section of the carvings and finished with extra-fine steel wool. Missing pieces were replaced and nicks and cuts were filled. I was ready to start putting on the red, but the temperature was far too cold to chance it. Rather than waste time waiting on the power, I began putting the first coat of gold on all the detail work. It would require a second coat after the shading was put on, so I didn’t have to worry about missing an occasional spot or two in the dim light. Cecil, being a hardware man and dealing with all sorts of equipment, fixed me up with a battery-powered miner’s lamp to wear on my head so I could direct the light where I needed it most.

The theatre finally finished their re-wiring and power was restored to the building. It took six weeks, not four. Down to the theatre I tramped, with paint in one hand and brushes in the other, ready to start the red. That’s when the theatre manager informed me that they were getting ready to start refinishing the stage floor. There sat the console — open, with all the “innards” exposed — and they were going to create massive clouds of dust! Hurriedly, Bill and Cecil covered the console and sealed it as best they could. Actually, there is no way to protect from the clouds of dust created by power sanders, especially when they come within ten inches of the console. No matter how well you seal the instrument, dust manages to creep into nooks and crannies you didn’t know existed. Dust also managed to settle down to the next floor

where the blower is located, so that when we finally wanded the organ we acquired dust in some of the newly-covered pneumatics. Needless to say, they had to be re-done.

Finally, the worst of the theatre carpentry work was completed and the console could be finished. Using a compressor and an air brush made the shading on the larger pieces go much faster. The final coat of gold was put on and the finishing three coats of acrylic. To ensure a smooth coat of acrylic, the pieces were rubbed down with a wet sander block between coats. This works much better than using steel wool, which will cut the finish; a wet sander won’t.

We began re-assembling the console and replacing the chrome stop tab dividers. New plastic keys had been ordered to replace the badly worn and chipped ivory ones, but disagreement with the historians prevented these from being changed. If historians were also organists, they would be far more receptive to having smooth keys on which to play, not keys that cannot be properly aligned or will cut your fingers if you attempt a glissando. Maybe someday this will be resolved and the new keys can be added to this otherwise beautiful instrument.

Finally, we stood back to admire our months of hard, but rewarding, work. She looked absolutely breathtaking! Never, in any of our lifetimes had we seen this instrument look as beautiful. But she still had a peculiar look about her. She seemed to have a definite list to the left. We knew that when this organ was installed the theatre owners wanted additional room in the orchestra pit. They therefore moved the organ over on the lift approximately 12” and cut off the floor of the lift to within 6” of the right side



Linda Whitmire and the “Princess” spending one of many hours together in the dark.

of the organ. The orchestra rail was then built against that. If you attempt to mount the organ from the right side, you have to “tip-toe” down the orchestra rail to reach the front. Through the years, this shifting of the organ had caused a very obvious tilt to the left. This would never do! Our beautiful lady could not sit “all-a-kilter.”

Again calling on our resident engineer, Bill came up with all the necessary tools to jack up the lift and level it. The lift was raised just high enough in the pit so that Bill and Tim could get under it with a hydraulic jack and shims. Cecil stayed topside with the level and I gave words of encouragement. This was not as easy a task as we thought it would be. When the lift registered level at the working position, it changed when it reached the top. Back down would go the console and Bill would add more shims; up would come the console and it still wasn’t level. This went on for quite some time before we finally hit the perfect shim and the console rose perfectly level. We were so proud — and hot, and dirty and ready to call it a night.

The console at her worst, half-way through the restoration.



Console before restoration, showing the obvious tilt to the left.



We all gathered around the orchestra rail and watched as Bill pushed the down button to put our beautiful lady to bed for the night. As she lowered herself gracefully into the pit and reached mid-level, we watched in horror as the lift jerked and rocked and the sickening sound of metal scrunching floated up from the pit. We were helpless to do anything but watch as the lift finally screeched to a halt just below mid-level. Our hearts in our throats, we raced down to the next floor, to the entrance to the pit. It seems that over the years, as the lift tilted more and more, the limiter switch had been moved from its original position on the wall to keep the lift operating. As the lift, once again level instead of askew, came down the pit wall it caught the limiter switch box and ripped it completely off the wall, snapping all the cables. Naturally, the

organ died where she sat. Relieved that it wasn't nearly as disastrous as the sound indicated, we made arrangements for the theatre electricians to replace the box (in the proper place) and the lift once again rose perfectly level.

The new pedals were installed to replace the badly worn ones and new contact blocks were ordered to be installed at a later date. Cecil mounted the new pedal lights on the backboard and our lady was cosmetically complete.

With the restoration of the console itself complete, except for the combination action, it was time to turn our attention to the chambers. We called on the expertise of Larry Donaldson, from the Alabama Chapter of ATOS and a super pipe organ technician, to help us tune our lady. He immediately discovered that the Diapasons were

over-blowing and the Tibias would not tune properly. By chance, we had found a card laying in the bottom of the console, very dirty and faded, but it showed the factory recommended wind pressure for the Tibias. Checking the Tibia pressure, we found that it had been dropped to 12 inches instead of the recommended 15 inches. Correcting these two problems made a tremendous difference in the sound.

Tim Johnson set to work rebuilding the engine for the vibraphone effect on the Chrysoglott, which had not worked since the late '60s. He had to spend so much time up in the chambers during this project that we began jokingly referring to Tim as "up in the chambers with Chrystall." This tag somehow stuck, and we still refer to the Chrysoglott as our lady, Chrystall Glott, living in the main chamber. Tim also attempted to re-install the

TENNESSEE WURLITZER STOP LIST

PEDAL

Tuba Profunda 16'
Diaphone 16'
Tibia Clausa 16'
Bourdon 16'
Tuba 8'
Octave 8'
Tibia Clausa 8'
Clarinet 8'
Salicional 8'
Cello 8'
Flute 8'
Flute 4'
Bass Drum
Kettle Drum
Snare Drum
Crash Cymbal
Cymbal
Great to Pedal
Solo to Pedal

SECOND TOUCH

Diaphone 16'
1st & 2nd Touch Traps Switch
3 Adj. Combination Toe Pistons

ACCOMPANIMENT

Clarinet (TC) 16'
Contra Viol (TC) 16'
Bourdon 16'
Vox Humana (TC) 16'
Tuba 8'
Diaphonic Diapason 8'
Tibia Clausa 8'
Clarinet 8'
Salicional 8'
Viol d'Orchestre 8'
Viol Celeste 8'
Oboe Horn 8'
Quintadena 8'
Flute 8'
Vox Humana 8'
Piccolo 4'
Viol 4'

Octave Celeste 4'

Flute 4'
Vox Humana 4'
Twelfth 2-2/3'
Piccolo 2'
Marimba (re-it)
Harp
Chrysoglott
Snare Drum
Tambourine
Sleigh Bells
Chinese Block
Tom Tom
Accompaniment Octave
Solo to Accompaniment

SECOND TOUCH

Trumpet 8'
Tuba 8'
Tibia Clausa 8'
Xylophone
Triangle
Solo to Accompaniment
10 Adj. Combination Pistons

GREAT

Tuba Profunda 16'
Diaphone 16'
Tibia Clausa 16'
Clarinet (TC) 16'
Contra Viol (TC) 16'
Bourdon 16'
Vox Humana (TC) 16'
TRUMPET 8'
TUBA 8'
TRUMPET 8'
DIAPHONIC DIAPASON 8'
TIBIA CLAUSA 8'
ORCHESTRAL OBOE 8'
KINURA 8'
CLARINET 8'
SALICIONAL 8'
VIOL D'ORCHESTRE 8'

VIOL CELESTE 8'

QUINTADENA 8'
FLUTE 8'
VOX HUMANA 8'
Clarion 4'
Octave 4'
Piccolo 4'
Viol 4'
Viol Celeste 4'
Salicet 4'
Flute 4'
Twelfth (Tibia) 2-2/3'
Twelfth 2-2/3'
Piccolo (Tibia) 2'
Fifteenth 2'
Piccolo 2'
Tierce 1-3/5'
Marimba (re-it)

Harp
Bells
Xylophone
Glockenspiel
Chrysoglott
Cathedral Chimes
Great Sub-Octave
Great Octave
Solo to Great
SECOND TOUCH
Tuba Profunda 16'
Tibia Clausa 8'
Solo to Great
10 Adj. Combination Pistons

SOLO

Tuba Profunda 16'
Tibia Clausa 16'
Trumpet 8'
Tuba 8'
Diaphonic Diapason 8'
Tibia Clausa 8'
Orchestral Oboe 8'
Kinura 8'
Clarinet 8'

Salicional 8'
Oboe Horn 8'
Quintadena 8'
Clarion 4'
Piccolo 4'
Twelfth (Tibia) 2-2/3'
Piccolo (Tibia) 2'
Xylophone
Glockenspiel
Bells (replaced w/octave coupler)
Cathedral Chimes
(replaced w/sub-octave coupler)
6 Adj. Combination Pistons
GENERAL
Crescendo Pedal
Two Expression Pedals
Main Tremulant
Solo Tremulant
Vox Humana Tremulant
Tibia Clausa Tremulant
Diaphone-Tuba Tremulant
Chrysoglott Dampers off-on
Chrysoglott Vibraphone off-on
One Double Touch
Sforzando Pedal - Piano Pedal
First Touch - Full Stop (wind)
Second Touch - Everything
One Double Touch
Sforzando Pedal - Piano Pedal
First Touch - Snare Drum
Second Touch - Bass Drum & Cymbal

Surf
Horse Hoofs
Bird I
Fire Gong
Auto Horn
Boat Whistle
Door Bell
Bird II
Police Whistle
Acme Siren



T.O.S.T. Historian Wallace Baumann checking a re-finished jamb against old pink finish still on the organ. (Photo by Dave Carter)

Bird II, which was found on the floor of the solo chamber, and which no one remembers ever hearing. But there was a relay and console problem which Larry Donaldson helped us track down and correct. Bird II sings again!

While all this activity was going on, the rest of us were "chasing" dead notes and doing general maintenance. No matter how hard we tried, very little could be done to make our makeshift Trumpets sound good. Our original Brass Trumpets had been removed some time in the 1950's and a set of makeshift pipes put in their place. We made a commitment to ourselves that these Trumpets would have to go and Brass Trumpets put back in, just as soon as possible. But, that would take money and we didn't have any, yet.

We thought the organ was now in good enough shape to put on a grand re-debut of the instrument, and show all the restoration work that had been done to the theatre at the same time. We contacted Walt Winn and asked him to play a "Meet the Mighty Wurlitzer" concert for us. Walt preferred to see the instrument before committing himself to this performance. We certainly couldn't blame him for that — he had never seen the organ and had heard the same stories about it that we had heard in the past. Walt, Don Weiss and Rick McGee came up from Atlanta to inspect the instrument. We found that even though we had completed most of the major work, and the organ was certainly playable, there were some little details that needed attention to make it even better. Walt was instantly intrigued with the organ and had great fun fiddling with it, both mechanically and musically. He sent Don and Rick into the chambers to make some minor changes, and he made notes as to

what he suggested be done. He did suggest that we not delay in rebuilding the combination action, because it worked sporadically. We invited Larry Donaldson back to spend the weekend with us, and promptly put him to work ramrodding the rebuilding of the combination action. Cecil and Bill had a *marvelous* time trying to play the organ while this work was being done! Walt also suggested that we add an octave and sub-octave coupler action, plus a unison off for the Solo manual. Don Weiss built this and installed it on his next trip to town. We knew that this instrument was a Style Balaban 2, which were all 13-rank organs, but we were not quite sure where the fourteenth rank was added. Walt told us that the difference was the addition of the 8' Oboe Horn. Having heard the instrument and getting "itchy" fingers to do more work on it, Walt agreed wholeheartedly to do the concert, scheduled for April 4, 1982.

The weekend of the concert, Walt and Don, as well as Larry, descended on us with their tool boxes and their "new additions" to the console. The Bells and Cathedral Chimes on the Solo manual were replaced with the new octave and sub-octave couplers. They set about checking and correcting wind pressures, adjusting the tremas, and fine tuning. As a surprise for Knoxville, Walt had brought the Brass Trumpets owned by Dick Weber at the Showboat in Marietta and installed them in place of our pitiful Trumpets for this concert. He wanted Knoxville to hear what they had lost and should get back again. The Brass Trumpets sounded as though they had been made for our organ, and we tried our best to get Walt to forget to take them back with him. An eleventh-hour problem found Don replacing crushed lead lines to the tremas and second-touch pneumatics with poly tubing (something that we intend to do with all the lines eventually). The concert was set for 2:00 p.m., and at 5:00 a.m. we closed our tool boxes and headed for home to rest before show time.

For all the many years that we have been associated with theatre organists, we had always heard that there is a certain "mysticism" about this instrument. We had never understood what they meant, until this concert on April 4. It has to be the rare combination of the organ itself, the placement

of the chambers, the shape of the auditorium and the perfect organist at the keyboards that creates a massive sound never heard on any other 14-rank Wurlitzer. We heard that magnificent sound at this concert. What better way to re-introduce the citizens of Knoxville to our "Tennessee Princess" than to have them experience this rare combination. The pride we felt, when Walt hit his first note and our beautiful lady rose into the spotlight, was matched only by the memories we share of the fun we had restoring her to her original grandeur.

The only planned additions to this instrument will be the replacement of the Brass Trumpets, one additional rank of Strings and a possible Post Horn rank. We feel that any further additions would only hurt the organ, rather than help it.

Since that initial concert, the "Princess" has been a very busy lady. During the 1982 World's Fair, she was used regularly for the stage play *Drumwright*, which was performed at the Tennessee Theatre. The Knoxville Chamber Orchestra has used her for many of their featured organists. The "Miss Knoxville" pageant was held at the Tennessee and the organ used instead of an orchestra, as well as for the 1983 Dance Festival. T.O.S.T. proudly presented Tom Helms playing the *Phantom of the Opera* in November 1982, and she is currently being used for each movie. She even has the distinction of being used for a wedding at the Tennessee this Spring. Thank heavens, Bill suppressed the urge to play the "Wedding March" with the bells on!

Though we are now back in Birmingham, we maintain our membership in and support of T.O.S.T. The "Tennessee Princess" holds a very dear spot in our hearts, and we will do everything in our power to see that she and T.O.S.T. continue to thrive. We are proud to have been a part of their birth and the organ's re-birth.

The one peculiarity that this organ claims would be that no matter how hard you try to push the down button, she will not allow herself to retire without the "Tennessee Waltz" being played. A fitting lullaby for a grand and proud lady.

See THEATRE ORGAN October/November 1978 for an article on the Tennessee Theatre. □