

# Famous Organs—

## The Wurlitzer Organ in the Acca Temple Mosque, Richmond, Virginia

... Mac Murrill

**T**HE magnificent Wurlitzer organ in the Mosque Auditorium, Richmond, Va., has delighted thousands in this country and abroad, through the recordings of Reginald Foort. Behind this happy event lies the unique story of Harold Warner, Jr., the man responsible for saving the three-manual, seventeen rank Mosque organ and restoring it to its former mechanical and musical perfection.

Warner, for the past 20 years an employee of the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company of Virginia, has been fascinated with the picturesque Mosque and its organ ever since the huge Shriners Acca Temple opened on January 9, 1928. The organ, a Model 260 Special, was Wurlitzer Opus 1757 and cost \$26,000. Shipped from the factory in North Tonawanda Sept. 15, 1927, it was installed in two months and, according to a *Diapason* advertisement at the time, was "the talk of the community." Warner, still in high school then, was one of a select few who managed to talk their way into being allowed to practice on the new organ after the late evening show. This wonderful opportunity ended, however, when someone left the blower running all night.

The Mosque auditorium, larger than that of the New York Paramount Theatre, opened as an entertainment mecca with lavish stage presentations and first-run movies. Early organists for these shows were Charles J. Possa, Waldo Newbury, and Ferdinand Himmelreich. But the auditorium, seating 5000, was only part of the great Acca Temple, there being a grand ballroom below the auditorium where 3500 could dance, and 80-foot swimming pool, and 42 hotel rooms, plus dining rooms, restaurants, bowling alleys, a gymnasium, and two roof gardens. The main function of the auditorium organ was to supply the appropriate setting of sublime and majestic music for the awe-inspiring rites of the Shriners in their imposing new temple.

Unanticipated trouble had turned up, however, in the construction of the Mosque. The excavation had uncovered artesian springs which flooded the huge foundation. Large pumps had to be installed in the sub-basement, and these have been kept in perpetual operation for the past 30 years. By the time the difficult foundation had reached ground level, all of the originally appropriated money had been spent. Heavily mortgaged, the building was finally completed. Three years after it opened, with the country in the midst of a depression, the expensive Mosque was closed and offered for sale by the membership to cover the debt incurred. Eventually, in May, 1940, it was bought by the City of Richmond for a little over a tenth of its original \$1,650,000 cost. Today the city operates it as a combination civic center, renting the auditorium for symphony concerts, opera, stage shows, and so on, and a permanent office building. Along with several other city departments, a division of the city police is housed there, with their own rifle range in the building.

Harold Warner, Jr., at the console of the Mosque organ. The present glory of this instrument is largely attributable to Mr. Warner, who spent his spare time for two years in reconditioning the organ throughout—as a hobby.

### \$30,000 of Work for \$32.50

Although the organ was played on occasion before the war, by 1950 ten years without repair had made it unusable, and renovation bids ran as high as \$30,000. The city officials, not conscious of the musical treasure they had, decided to sell the organ for junk, but fortunately, before it could be dismantled, Harold Warner offered to donate his time to restoring the instrument. For the next two years, with the help of some other volunteer enthusiasts, Warner spent his spare time removing the layers of dirt (at some time the filter had been removed from the blower and coal dust had penetrated the whole organ), repairing electrical connections and pneumatics, refinishing the mahogany console, and polishing and tuning the 1169 pipes and 287 bars, bells, traps and effects. The total bill to the city was \$32.50 for replacement of magnets and a new head for the snare drum.

In April, 1953, in recognition of his service to the city, Warner received from the mayor of Richmond the Sertoma Club's Service-to-Mankind Award. And in March, 1954, the Bell System honored his achievement with a full-page advertisement in several national magazines showing Warner at the Mosque console and telling the story of the restoration under the title "The Once Proud Pipe Organ That Played Again." Further well-deserved recognition came in the form of a tribute on the Telephone Hour that same month through a coast-to-coast radio broadcast which included a selection played by Warner from the Mosque. Later he was guest star by wire from the Mosque on Denver radio station KOA. The organ has since co-starred with visiting symphony orchestras in serious music such as Richard Strauss' "Thus Spake Zarathustra."

The rebirth of the beautiful Mosque Wurlitzer had been appropriately celebrated, however, two years before. Cook Laboratories, of Stamford, Conn., wanted to include a theatre organ in their high fidelity "Sounds of Our Times" recordings, and had approached Reginald Foort along this line shortly after he came to America. Foort, however, at the





time was interested only in classical concert organ work and even went so far as to say he never wanted to touch another Wurlitzer! It took Warner most of a trip between Suffolk and Richmond one day to persuade Foort to try out the Mosque organ. But once at the Mosque console, it was love at first sight (or rather, sound) for Foort, and Warner and his volunteer help worked late into the night for the next two weeks to complete their repairs in time for the first recording session. Thus the reborn Mosque organ was put on records, first under Foort's pseudonym, Michael Chesire, and at later sessions under his own name. One of his discs entitled "Percussion and Pedal" includes an improvisation called "Nightmare in the Mosque" which delightfully brings in many of the possible effects of the instrument.

Foort, former staff organist for the British Broadcasting Company on their 5-27 Moller, has been playing organ for over 50 years. At one time he toured England with a five-manual "portable" Wurlitzer. It weighed 25 tons and required a staff of fourteen to set it up and dismantle it. Foort says he had no idea of the number of recordings he had made until Mel Doner looked him up in Chicago (where Foort now works as a Baldwin salesman) and gave him a list—numbering more than 200.

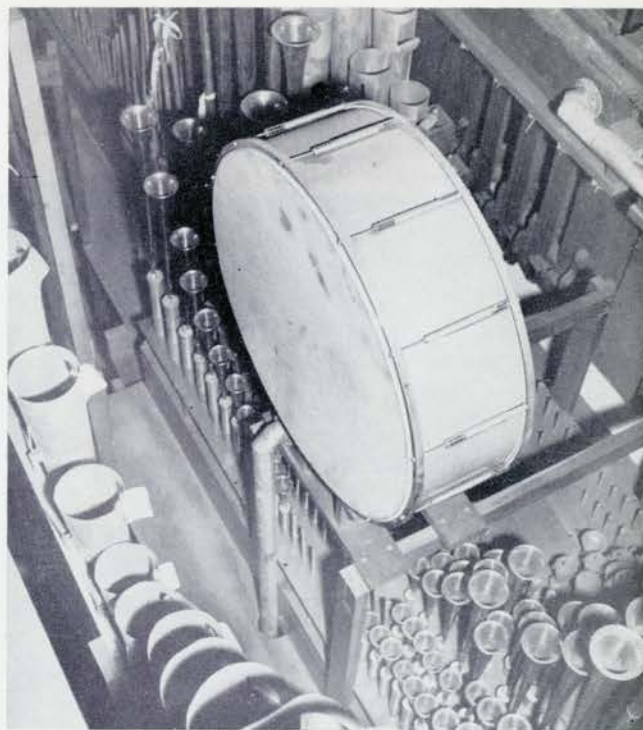
### A Typical Recording Session

And now let us look in on one of these recording sessions at the Mosque. In April, "Reggie" Foort arrived in Richmond for his third session at the Acca Temple Wurlitzer, this time to record two LP records, "Waltz and Ballet" and "Intermission at the Mosque." For several days, before Foort arrived, Warner, Tom Landrum, and the author checked over the organ, repairing an occasional dead magnet, stuck armature, split pneumatic, or air leak. Landrum spent the final day tuning the organ. The Main Virole d'Orchestre and the Solo String stops had previously been tuned to 440, using a Conn Strobotuner with the chambers at 70 deg. The rest of the pipes were now tuned to these. With the work completed, Warner, an excellent organist himself, gave us an impromptu recital, bringing out the brilliant reed chorus, the rhythmic Pizzicato action, and the lovely Tibia, which on the Mosque installation, is as beautiful as Wurlitzer ever produced. We were satisfied that Foort would find the organ in the best condition possible.

Foort arrived the following morning and spent the next three days and late into the nights at the console working out registrations and arrangements of his twenty numbers, which ranged from *12th Street Rag* to *Der Rosenkavalier*. Warner stood by during this time to remedy any minor mechanical troubles as they arose. The day before the session began, Landrum went over all the reeds again, touching up those that had slipped out of tune during the long hours Reggie had "worked out" at the console.

The next morning, a Friday, Gus Jose and Gary Wozniak arrived from Cook Laboratories with tape recorders and microphones. An Ampex 600 Stereophonic Tape Recorder, changed over from 7½ to 15 in/sec., with special Cook mikes which responded down to 10 cps. One of these microphones was hung a few feet in front of each organ chamber so that music from the Main and the Solo organs could be recorded on separate sound tracks, the final tapes and records to be issued in both a realistic stereo and a balanced monaural edition.

There was one final difficulty to overcome. With the console located on the left side of the auditorium, Foort was bothered on fast numbers by the small time difference between the sound arriving from the Main chamber above him and from the Solo chamber across the broad Mosque stage. To overcome this he wore earphones while playing which were connected to a single mike located in the center of the auditorium.



The Solo chamber of the Mosque organ. Visible are the Brass Sax, Brass Trumpet, Tuba Mirabilis, String, etc., and the Bass Drum.

With all preparations made, and the auditorium doors locked against any interruption or noise from stray on-lookers, the recording session began. It lasted two full days with Foort continuously at the console, and Gus Jose or Emory Cook, who had flown down during the first day, monitoring the tape recorder. Foort insisted on recording each piece over and over, not satisfied until he had just the right effect. Sandwiches and coffee were brought in while Cook and Foort revised arrangements and Warner reset pistons between numbers at the back of the console.

Foort had brought with him several arrangements he had written featuring "double-takes" for two organs and for organ and piano. As the Mosque organ lacked a Piano stop, a concert grand was rented and brought in for the latter. For the "double-takes"—Foort accompanying Foort—another recorder was needed for the play-back. A long distance call brought Jim Huff, CBS audio engineer, by plane from New York with the necessary extra equipment.

Cook put himself on the records in two spots. The Triangle became erratic, so it was temporarily removed from the organ for Cook to strike at the right moments with a screwdriver. And the "wolf-whistle" at the end of the *Doll Dance* number is also Emory Cook, not a special Wurlitzer effect. Cook forgot to buy a doll to say "Ma-ma" at the end of the number as he had planned. Various stops were tried in an attempt to imitate the sound, but without success. Finally Warner suggested the turnabout "wolf-whistle," which Cook performed with gusto.

A recording session is high-lighted by many such incidents. On the second day a cipher in the low B-flat of the Tibia halted operations for a time. We didn't tell Reggie until after it was all over that, to save valuable recording time, we had had to stuff it with a paper towel to stop it. Fortunately he hadn't discovered the dead note.

### One of the Finest Wurlitzers

Foort considers the Mosque organ one of the finest he has ever played. This is due partly to the quality of the instrument, which, though not as large as some, has perfect tonal balance and great flexibility of its many rich voices.



The rest of the credit must go to the wonderful acoustics of the installation which produce the effect of an instrument several times the size. The two pipe chambers are located three floors above the console and flank the 70-foot stage. Each is a triangular room with smooth hard-plaster walls which project the sound into the great auditorium through ideal grillwork openings. Except for the stage curtains, there are now drapes in the entire auditorium and its smooth plaster walls give the organ a thrilling brilliance, power, and sonority which makes it preëminently satisfying for all types of music, serious or popular.

The *Main Chamber* on the left is a large, high-ceilinged room containing the following ranks:

16' Tuba Horn	85 Pipes	8' Viole d'Orchestre	85 Pipes
16' Diaphonic Diapason	73 "	8' Viole Celeste	73 "
8' Trumpet	61 "	8' Vox Humana	61 "
16' Flute	97 "	Chrysoglott	49 Bars
8' Clarinet	61 "	Bird I	

The *Solo Chamber* on the right is also tall but somewhat smaller in floor area and considerably more crowded. Here is found:

16' Tibia Clausa	85 Pipes	Bass Drum-Kettle Drum	
8' Tuba Mirabilis	61 "	(large)	
8' Trumpet (Brass)	61 "	Snare Drum-Tom Tom	
8' Open Diapason	61 "	Cymbals	
8' Orchestral Oboe	61 "	Crash Cymbal	
8' Kinura	61 "	Tambourine	
8' Saxophone (Brass)	61 "	Castanets	
	61 "	Chinese Block	
8' String	61 "	Sand Block	
8' Oboe Horn	61 "	Triangle	
8' Quintadena	61 "	Fire Gong	
Marimba-Harp		Steamboat Whistle	
(large scale )	49 Bars	Horse Hoofs	
Xylophone	37 "	Bird II	
Glockenspiel-Bells	37 "	Surf	
Sleigh Bells	25 Notes	Auto Horn	
Cathedral Chimes	24 Tubes	Door Bell	

The three-manual plain mahogany console is double-bolstered, with 135 stop keys. Originally it was mounted on an elevator in the orchestra pit, but years ago it was moved to its present fixed position in the left orchestra loge. Wind for the organ is supplied by a 15 h.p. blower in the sixth floor relay room above the Main chamber.

### One-Man Organ Magician

It is Harold Warner's ambition to keep alive the few remaining theatre organs in Richmond. After Foort's recording session, he renovated, with manuals and other parts from a discarded Norfolk organ, the Loew's Theatre's battered 3-13 Wurlitzer, which had the unusual distinction this spring of *wearing out*—having been featured five times daily ever since the theatre first opened 28 years ago. More recently he has been extensively rehabilitating the long-silent 4-17 Byrd Theatre Wurlitzer (which was put on records in May by Dick Leibert) for a revival at Saturday shows with Warner at the console. And though he does not consider himself a professional organ repairman, undertaking the work, instead, as a hobby and "learning," he says, "as he goes," through his efforts Warner is almost single-handedly reviving and perpetuating the wonderful era of the "theatre unit orchestra" in Richmond.

As for the Mosque, Warner's first love, it has been his avowed intention from the beginning not to alter the organ, but to restore it to its original condition and grandeur, which he considers difficult to surpass. After years of devoted labor he has succeeded beyond expectations, so that today, with all its original pipes and percussions speaking and with its console gleaming under a new finish, the Mosque organ conforms exactly to its original specifications. Following is a copy of these, sent to the author in 1934 by Mr. Robert H. Spahn, then General Manager of the Wurlitzer Organ Department (Words in *italics* were added by the author):

### GREAT

Compass 61 Notes—CC to c4

Ophicleide ( <i>Tuba Horn</i> )	16'
Diaphone ( <i>Diaph. Diapason</i> )	16'
Tibia Clausa	16'
Clarinet (Tenor C)	16'
Saxophone (Tenor C)	16'
Contre Viole ( <i>VDO</i> ) (Tenor C)	16'
Bourdon ( <i>Flute</i> )	16'
Tuba Mirabilis	8'
Trumpet	8'
Tuba Horn	8'
Diaphonic Diapason	8'
Open Diapason	8'
Orchestral Oboe	8'
Kinura	8'
Clarinet	8'
Saxophone	8'
String	8'
Viole d'Orchestre	8'
Viole Celeste	8'
Flute	8'
Vox Humana	8'
Clarion ( <i>Tuba Horn</i> )	4'
Piccolo ( <i>Tibia</i> )	4'
Viole ( <i>VDO</i> )	4'
Octave Celeste ( <i>V. Cel.</i> )	4'
Flute	4'
Twelfth ( <i>Flute</i> )	2 2/3'
Fifteenth ( <i>VDO</i> )	2'
Piccolo ( <i>Flute</i> )	2'
Tierce ( <i>Flute</i> )	1 3/5'
Marimba (re-iterating action)	
Harp	
Bells	
Sleigh Bells	
Xylophone	
Glockenspiel	
Chrysoglott	
Cathedral Chimes	
Sub Octave	
Octave	
Solo to Great	
Ophicleide, 16 feet	Second Touch
Tibia Clausa, 8 feet	Second Touch
Solo to Great	Second Touch
Solo to Great	Pizzicato Touch
Ten D. T. Adjustable Combination	Pistons
One Tablet to cause the Pedal stops and couplers to move so as at all times to furnish automatically a Suitable Bass	

### ACCOMPANIMENT

Compass 61 Notes—CC to c4

Contre Viole ( <i>VDO</i> )	16'
(Tenor C)	16'
Bourdon ( <i>Flute</i> )	16'
Vox Humana (Tenor C)	16'
Tuba Horn	8'
Diaphonic Diapason	8'
Open Diapason	8'
Tibia Clausa	8'
Clarinet	8'
Saxophone	8'
String	8'
Viole d'Orchestre	8'
Viole Celeste	8'
Oboe Horn	8'
Quintadena	8'
Flute	8'
Vox Humana	8'
Viole ( <i>VDO</i> )	4'
Octave Celeste ( <i>V. Cel.</i> )	4'
Flute	4'
Vox Humana	4'
Twelfth ( <i>Flute</i> )	2 2/3'
Piccolo ( <i>Flute</i> )	2'
Marimba (reiterating action)	
Harp	
Chrysoglott	
Snare Drum	
Tambourine	
Castanets	
Chinese Block	
Tom Tom	
Sand Block	
Octave	
Solo to Accompaniment	
Tuba Horn, 8 feet	Second Touch
Tibia Clausa, 8 feet	Second Touch
Cathedral Chimes	Second Touch
Xylophone	Second Touch
Triangle	Second Touch
Solo to Accompaniment	
Solo to Accompaniment	Second Touch
Solo to Accompaniment	Pizz'o Touch
Ten D. T. Adjustable Combination	Pistons
One Tablet to cause the Pedal stops and couplers to move so as at all times to furnish automatically a Suitable Bass	

### SOLO

Compass 61 Notes—CC to c4

Ophicleide ( <i>Tuba Horn</i> )	16'
Tuba Mirabilis	8'
Trumpet	8'
Tuba Horn	8'
Diaphonic Diapason	8'
Open Diapason	8'
Tibia Clausa	8'
Orchestral Oboe	8'
Kinura	8'
Clarinet	8'
Saxophone	8'
String	8'
Oboe Horn	8'
Quintadena	8'
Clarion ( <i>Tuba Horn</i> )	4'
Piccolo ( <i>Tibia</i> )	4'
Xylophone	
Clockenspiel	
Bells	
Cathedral Chimes	
Ten D. T. Adjustable Combination	Pistons
One Tablet to cause the Pedal stops and couplers to move so as at all times to furnish automatically a Suitable Bass	

### PEDAL

Compass 32 Notes—CCC to G

Ophicleide ( <i>Tuba Horn</i> )	16'
Diaphone ( <i>Diaph. Diapason</i> )	16'
Tibia Clausa	16'
Bourdon ( <i>Flute</i> )	16'
Tuba Mirabilis	8'
Tuba Horn	8'
Octave ( <i>Diaph. Diapason</i> )	8'
Tibia Clausa	8'
Clarinet	8'
Saxophone	8'
String	8'

### PEDAL (Cont'd)

Cello ( <i>VDO-V. Cel.</i> )	8'
Flute	8'
Flute	4'
Great to Pedal	
Solo to Pedal	
Diaphone, 16 feet	Second Touch
Ophicleide, 16 feet	Second Touch
Bass Drum	} Available at First and Second Touch
Kettle Drum	
Snare Drum	
Crash Cymbal	
Cymbal	
Three Adjustable Combination	
Pistons	

### GENERAL

Two Balanced Expression Pedals	
—with Indicating Keys	
One Balanced Crescendo Pedal	
Thunder Pedal (Diaphone)	
Thunder Pedal (Reed)	
Two General Tremulants	
One Tibia Clausa Tremulant	
One Vox Humana Tremulant	
One Tuba Tremulant	
One Tuba Mirabilis Tremulant	
One Double Touch Sforzando Pedal:	
First Touch—Full Stops (Wind)	
Second Touch—Full (Everything)	
One Double Touch Sforzando Pedal:	
First Touch—Snare Drum	
Second Touch—Bass Drum & Cymbal	
Fire Gong	} Played by Toe Pistons
Steamboat Whistle	
Horse Hoofs	
Bird	
Surf	} Played by Push Buttons
Auto Horn	
Bird	
Door Bell	