

St. Mary of the Lake auditorium.

Theatre Organ in a Seminary

by Bob Boin

One of the highlights of the 1985 ATOS Convention in Chicago will be the theatre organ installation located in Mundelein, Illinois. There are 1500 acres of woodlands as well as a 300-acre man-made lake on the grounds of the University of St. Mary of the Lake, built by the late George Cardinal Mundelein, after whom the town is named. Winding roads and spacious lawns lead to a 900-seat auditorium which houses the 4/24 theatre pipe organ. The overall layout of the campus is symmetrical about the chapel, and the architectural style is Colonial, chosen by the Cardinal because it was the "only purely American style."

Upon entering the somewhat plain auditorium, one cannot miss the Wurlitzer console with its ebony finish. It sits on a permanent platform at the left side of the sunken orchestra pit. This console has a unique history complete with pitfalls, literally.

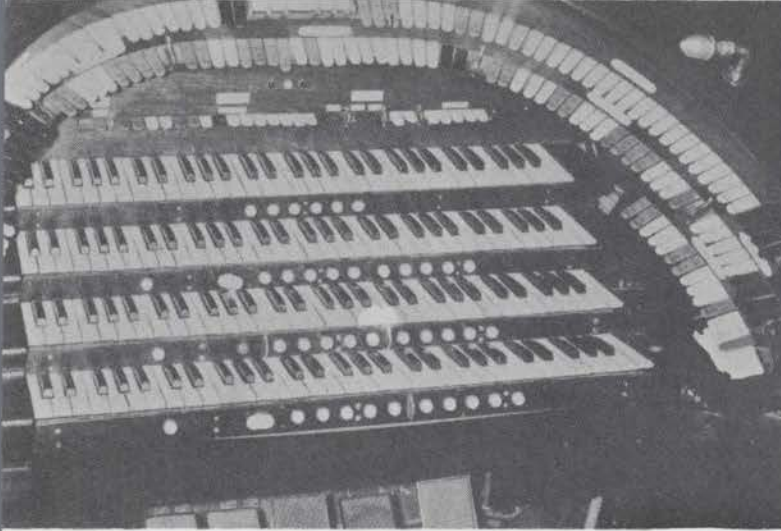
It began its life as the original console of the Chicago Theatre's mighty

Wurlitzer, Opus 434, a 4/29 Style 285 Special. At some time early in its life, a maintenance man adjusted the organ lift and failed to replace the top limit switch. The relief house organist, unaware of the problem, took the console up during a show. At the point where the lift was supposed to stop, it didn't. Instead, the console fell forward onto the organist, seriously injuring him. The console and lift were quickly repaired; little is recorded about the organist. Jesse Crawford, the chief house organist, had just married the organist from the Roosevelt Theatre down the street and decided to add a second complete console to the Chicago Wurlitzer to play duets with his new bride, Helen Anderson. The second console was added to the left side of the pit, along with an orchestra lift. The original organ lift was repositioned under Helen's new console and Jesse's console was placed on the new orchestra lift with sufficient cable so that it could be moved about. In 1932 a stage console was added to the instrument.

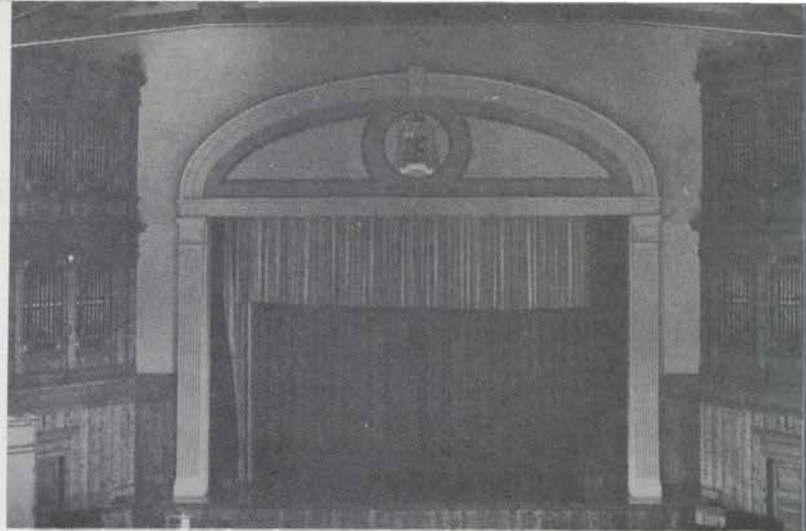
With Jesse and Helen's departure for the New York Paramount in 1927, only the stage console and Helen's, with its separate lift, continued to be used.

The original console was eventually purchased by Al Carney for his radio studio pipe organ of 14 mostly Gottfried ranks. With the death of Mr. Carney, the organ and Chicago Theatre console were sold in 1934 to long time family friend, Cardinal Mundelein, for use in his seminary auditorium then under construction.

Cardinal Mundelein was an avid theatre organ and movie fan. He had two complete projection booths built on campus, one in the auditorium and a second one on the third floor of the residence across the lake from the auditorium. Being a friend of William Fox, Mundelein had access to all the first run Fox films. When films were shipped from Hollywood to New York for their grand openings, the planes would normally refuel in Chicago. At this point, the films were rushed out to St. Mary's for a special



Closeup of the console before refinishing. Note the curious external console lights, reminiscent of old time auto dashboard lights. These were removed when a new top was made.



Front of the Seminary auditorium, showing the stacked chambers. Percussion and Main at left; Solo and Foundation at right.

screening. As a film might arrive at any time of the day or night, the Cardinal's staff was always ready for a small premiere.

The person most called upon for these impromptu screenings was the first "house organist," Reverend Charles N. Meter, a faculty member at the seminary. Father Meter studied theatre organ with Dr. Eddy Eigenschenk of the Roosevelt Theatre. It was not unusual for the Cardinal to unwind after a long day in Chicago by taking the car from his Chicago residence and driving down Milwaukee Avenue with full police escort to the city limits. From this point it was all open farmland to St. Mary's and reports are that 90 mph was not an uncommon speed for the Cardinal's car. Once arriving on the grounds, Father Meter would be called to provide organ accompaniment or intermission music for that night's film.

During the 1960s, with the new emergence of theatre organ interest, John Seng received permission to enlarge and rebuild the instrument. He retained six of the original ranks and added 16 new ranks, bringing the total to 22. All new stop tabs were installed, along with a new AGO pedal board and a new combination action.

The organ was used extensively for accompaniment of live theatre presentations, including musicals presented by the students. Many CATOE members received their first glimpse of theatre organ attending these open-to-the-public shows.

After John Seng left for California, John Peters and Fred Kruse took over the dual role of maintaining and improving the organ. In 1983, a new Trumpet was added, and in 1984 an English Post Horn, Orchestral Oboe, Krumet Horn and 16' Gamba were purchased to replace pipe work that was on loan or provided for but never installed. A two-rank metal Flute Celeste has also been purchased and should be installed by convention time. Just recently a gift from CATOE member Dennis Fugh has made possible the extension of the Diaphone to 16', adding much-needed weight to the pedal division.

The organ also has a full complement of traps and tuned percussions, including Vibraharp, Metal Harp, Wood Harp, Glockenspiel and Xylophone. The organ is installed in four shallow chambers on either side of the stage. The shallow angle and size of the chambers make the sound projection into this room striking.

Specifications of the organ are as follows:

SOLO CHAMBER (top right)

English Post Horn
Saxophone
Orchestral Oboe
Violin Diapason
Violin Celeste (II ranks)
Trumpet
Salicional
Tibia Major
Tibia Minor
Vox Humana
Oboe Horn

FOUNDATION CHAMBER (lower right)

String Celeste
Tuba
Solo Gamba
Metal Flute Celeste (II ranks)
Vox Humana
Diapason

MAIN CHAMBER (lower left)

Quintadena
String
Krumet Horn
Concert Flute
Clarinet

PERCUSSIONS (top left)

Glockenspiel
Vibraharp
Metal Harp (Chrysoglott)
Wood Harp
Xylophone
Traps: Crash Cymbal, Crash Cymbal roll, Sizzle Cymbal, Tap Cymbal, Brush Cymbal, two Snare Drums, Tambourine, Castanets, Chinese Block and Triangle. □

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