

# THE THEATRE ORGAN IN BRITAIN: II

... By Frank Hare

**W** E IN THE BRITISH ISLES have never been fortunate enough to encounter the number of really big unit organs which one finds in the key theatres of the United States, but it is regrettable to hear that so many of them are in poor shape these days.

Our average cinema organ may be taken as of 8 to 10 units—not very large, perhaps, but sufficient for some excellent results to be obtained. At the top of the scale stands the Christie at the Regal (now Odeon), Marble Arch, London, a 4 manual with 30 units (36 ranks), built in 1928 and still a fine instrument. Comparable dual-purpose organs were built by Compton and Hill, Norman & Beard (the Christie firm) for the Civic Auditoriums at Southampton and Brighton, and a slightly smaller one by Compton for Bournemouth, but although equipped as fully-fledged cinema organs, they can hardly be classed as such, and are not taken into account here. Still smaller dual-purpose Comptons were made for the Town Halls of Lewisham and Wimbledon.

Five units less than the Marble Arch organ, is the B.B.C. Moller Theatre Organ, with 25 units (27 ranks), which took the place of the destroyed Compton of 22 units (23 ranks). There are two instruments with 21 units, a Compton at the Davis Theatre, Croydon, and a Wurlitzer at the Trocadero, Elephant and Castle, London. With 20 units are the Wurlitzers of the Empire, Leicester Square, and the Paramount (now Odeon), Manchester, and three Conachers having 22 actual ranks, at Wimbledon, Nottingham and Hull. Unfortunately, the latter was damaged during the war, and has since been removed. At 19 units are the Wurlitzers of the Newcastle and Leeds Paramount (now Odeon) Theatres, and the previously mentioned Compton at Shepherd's Bush Pavilion, London, which was dismantled following damage by enemy action, has since been disposed of. What appears to be another 19 unit Compton can be found at Dreamland Cinema, Margate, but in fact this has but 6 units, the other 13 being "straight" ranks from an earlier organ.

Coming down to 17 units, we could find until a few years ago a Jardine at the Stoll Theatre, Kingsway, London, which replaced a "straight" organ by the same builders, while at 16 units are the Wurlitzer at the Gaumont State, Kilburn, London;

Comptons at the Odeon, Leicester Square, London (17 ranks, and the Theatre Royal, Dublin, and a Fitton & Haley unified rebuild of a "straight" organ at the Cecil, Hull. The theatre and organ were completely destroyed in the war, but a new cinema was built during 1955, and a fine 3-manual, 15-rank organ has been installed.

Limitation of space prevents mention of other organs: suffice to say that at the outbreak of war there were three with 15 units, seven with 14 units, nine with 13 units and twenty with 12 units. Continuing down the scale, unit by unit, the numbers increase until we come to the glut of 8 unit jobs, after which they again decrease until we reach the bottom of the scale, where there are half a dozen tiny instruments of but 4 units, representing all three leading makes—Wurlitzers, Compton and Christie.

Only one cinema organ—that of the Odeon, Leicester Square—remains with 5 manuals, since the B.B.C. Moller lost its fifth in favour of an electronic Clavichord. In both cases the top manual was a "coupler," having no relays of its own, but coupling other manuals to it at various pitches. Tonal percussions are usually available on such manuals, and in some cases extra contacts are fitted under the keys to enable some individual stops to be played. Of the 30 organs with four manuals, three of which were destroyed and two damaged in the war, about half had four orthodox manuals, the other half having coupler top manuals. Perhaps the two most unusual four-manual cinema organs in England are the Wurlitzer at the Granada, Tooting, where the fourth manual operates tonal percussions and traps only, and the Conacher at the Plaza, Coventry, which has but 8 units.

Approximately 200 organs of two manuals were installed, but there are not now quite so many, as a number were destroyed or removed, and in several cases a third (usually coupler) manual was added later. The large number of organs remaining have three manuals, frequently including a coupler, which, though less desirable than a normal manual, has its uses and is worthy of inclusion where funds are limited. And apart from that, it *does* convey to the audience an impression of "mightiness," even though behind the grille there may be only five ranks of pipes blowing their heads off!

## ERRATA

No one is perfect; the "manufacturing" department, functioning a thousand miles from the editorial department, sometimes has to use its own limited judgment in last minute corrections, or translations of instructions, and perhaps it's just plain stupid sometimes. In any case the following corrections and additions should serve to correct any false impressions readers may have gleaned from the first two issues of THE TIBIA.

Vol. I, No. 1

ISIS THEATRE WURLITZER, DENVER, COLORADO

Page 10: Specification should read:

PEDAL

Diaphone 32'

Bombarde 16'

Diaphone 16'

PEDAL SECOND TOUCH

Ophicleide, Pizzicato Touch 16'

BOMBARDE

Piccolo (Tibia I) 4'

Page 9: Photo is of Mary Dobbs Tuttle at the console of the Isis Wurlitzer.

Page 13: After Don Baker, 4m/24r, not 3m/24r.

Page 14: Paul Carson, not Garson.

Vol. I, No. 2

Page 1: Author of article on page 10 is Judd Walton, not Roy Gorish.

Page 7: Sherris, Marley is a manufacturer of recordings for funeral parlors, and should appear in small type following Remington.

At least, there were less corrections in Vol. I, No. 2 than there were for Vol. I, No. 1, which may prove that we're getting better. So far we haven't heard of any errors in Vol. I, No. 3, but we have our fingers crossed (which may account for any errors in our Errata). We'll try not to get erratic mixed up with erotic (in spelling, that is.).

The Manufacturing Department