

THE MITSUKOSHI WURLITZER

by Dr. Edward J. Mullins

Japanese department stores do not simply sell merchandise. They also function to contribute culturally. Mitsukoshi Limited considers its stores as cultural media through which it aspires to promote international cultural exchanges and raise the cultural standards of Japanese people. One of the unique things about the Mitsukoshi Main Store in Tokyo's Nihombashi district is that it is the only department store in the world having its own theatre pipe organ.

In 1673 Takatoshi Mitsui, a clothier, began selling kimono fabric rolls on Nihombashi Street in a dry goods store called Echigo-ya in the town of Edo, then the headquarters of the Tokugawa warrior family who ruled Japan. The store's sales system of cash-and-carry on list prices in the old Edo three centuries ago was as much a novelty as the mail-order system in the United States in the 19th century.

The new idea caught the fancy of the Edo population, which was weary of the hush-hush wangling in shopping for apparel materials. In 1904, the 37th year of the Meiji Era, the store was renamed Mitsukoshi Gofukuten (clothes shop) and declared it was embracing the department store system. It became the present Mitsukoshi Department Store in 1928. Edo has now become Tokyo, and the shop once called Echigo-ya is the most famous department store in all Japan.

On February 26, 1930, Opus 2099, the only Wurlitzer sent to Japan, was shipped from the factory at North Tonawanda, New York, to the port of Yokohama by steamship. The Model R20, three-manual, 11-rank straight stop rail, with walnut rolltop console, was installed in the Central Hall, an atrium rising to the top seventh floor, of the Mitsukoshi Main Store. The console was put on display in the seventh floor exhibition hall and theatre, while the second floor balcony structure was under construction. One unusual aspect of the console is the "tropicalized" keyboards; the ivories being held in place by six flat-head screws. This is believed to be the only such tropicalization done by Wurlitzer.

The store has a roof garden with bonsai trees, a waterfall and a playground, an art gallery on the sixth floor, plus 18 restaurants, coffee shops and tea rooms. It is the only Tokyo department store with its own subway station (Mitsukoshimae on the Ginza Line) in the basement. Located in the downtown shopping district, it can also be reached by taking the Tozai subway line to the Nihombashi station. Fortunately, the store was missed by the bombings during World War II.

Two bronze lions guard the Main, or Lion, Entrance. They are replicas of the lions at London's Trafalgar Square that guard Nelson's Column. They were placed outside the main entrance in 1914 and symbolize Mitsukoshi's elegance and courage. When the store

opens its doors at 10:00 a.m., the staff is on hand to greet shoppers and visitors with polite bows, as is the Japanese custom. As you enter you can hear the sounds of the Mighty Wurlitzer being played by Mr. Hiroshi Matsuzawa, who has been house organist for over 32 years.

Approaching the Central Hall of the store you are overwhelmed by the beautiful statue of the goddess Tennyo "Magokoro" rising to the fifth floor. The statue is a masterpiece of Mr. Gengen Sato, a famous Japanese sculptor, who spent more than ten years at the task after it was commissioned by Mitsukoshi Limited.

Consisting principally of a 500-year old Japanese cypress "Hinoki" that was selected from the woods surrounding the Kibune Shrine in Kyoto, the statue is painted with clay pigment and chemical coloring, and decorated with gold and platinum. The figure

represents the cloud-swathed Goddess of Sincerity descending lightly to the fruitful earth, accompanied by a phoenix bearing an offering for her tray of heavenly flowers. Erected in 1960, it has become a favorite meeting place for visitors. The size of the statue can be judged from the photograph showing the second floor balcony (where the organ is located) behind the statue. A very imposing and impressive sight, to say the least.

A marble staircase runs to a landing behind the statue and then divides. Above the landing on a small balcony is the ivory and gold console of the only Wurlitzer in Japan. The organ is installed in two chambers, main and solo, located on either side of the console. Thin curtains cover the chambers. The organ is tuned monthly and has a pleasant sound, considering that the music travels seven floors.

The 791 pipes that make up the 11 ranks are as follows: Main chamber — 16' Flute-Bourdon (97 pipes), 16' Tuba (73), 16' Open Diapason (85), 8' Clarinet (61), 8' Salicional (73), 8' Voix Celeste (73), 8' Dulciana (73) and Chrysoglott; Solo chamber — 16' Brass Trumpet (61), 8' Tibia Clausa (73), 8' Oboe Horn (61), 8' Vox Humana (61) and Cathe-

Organist Hiroshi Matsuzawa at the console of the 3/11 Wurlitzer in the Mitsukoshi Main Store in Tokyo. Well-worn ivories of manuals are held in place by six flat-head brass screws. (Ed Mullins photo)





Central Hall of Mitsukoshi department store showing height of Tennyso "Magokoro" statue. Wurlitzer organ and console are on second floor balcony behind statue. (Ed Mullins photo)

dral Chimes.

I first heard Hiroshi Matsuzawa play in 1972 and have returned six times, most recently in August 1984 en route to Beijing, China. Mr. Matsuzawa is a very kind and considerate gentleman whose English is better than my Japanese. When he learned that I was doing a story for THEATRE ORGAN he located an interpreter to assist with the interview. The sales staff also speaks German, French and Chinese.

Matsuzawa-san is married and father of three children ages 27, 24 and 20. The older two are living at home and the youngest is in school. He began his musical studies with piano lessons at an early age. He received instruction in piano and voice in grade school and middle school. His advanced musical education was at the Tokyo Art School, where he studied harmony with Mr. Motoyuki Sasaki. He learned to play the organ on his own and has developed a distinctive style with a flair for showmanship.

The organ did not have a regular organist after it was installed in 1930. It had many visiting players such as guest organists, clergymen and music teachers. Matsuzawa became the first full-time organist in 1951, a job he has held to this day. In autumn and spring he has many private engagements playing for weddings in hotels.

Visitors to the store are entertained by the superb sounds and music of the Wurlitzer five days per week. The store is closed Mondays and Wednesday is the organist's day off. He plays 15-minute recitals thrice daily at 10:00 a.m., 12:00 noon and 3:00 p.m. Over the 12 years that I've heard his concerts I've noticed Matsuzawa's penchant for playing popular

and semi-classical Occidental music. He also likes Hawaiian tunes and plays traditional Japanese music during cherry blossom time, as well as popular Japanese music.

His hobby is magic and he frequently performs magic tricks and illusions at company parties. He is a friend of Dr. Vernon Di, a well-known magician and habitué of the Magic Castle in Hollywood, which he hopes to visit one day. Future plans also call for a trip to the United States and a chance to sample some of the American theatre organs.

He will be 60 years of age in May, 1985. The store policy is that employees must retire at

sixty. Let's all hope that Mitsukoshi Ltd. will make an exception to the rule in the case of Matsuzawa-san so that he will remain on the bench of the Mitsukoshi Wurlitzer for many years to come.

Dr. Edward J. Mullins, an ATOS member since 1966, practices acupuncture in San Francisco and in Billings, Montana. His profession enables him to travel throughout the world and observe the theatre organ scene. Ed was a Special Feature writer for The Console for over 15 years. □

ATTENTION: FRIENDS OF BEN HALL

The Board of Directors of ATOS has determined that they do not have the means to properly supervise the operation and maintenance of the ATOS-owned (2/6) Wurlitzer organ (known as the Ben Hall Organ), installed in the Carnegie Cinema in New York. In order to assure that this organ receives a proper place in ATOS history as a memorial to the late Ben Hall, we make the following offer:

ATOS will donate the Ben Hall Organ to a nonprofit group formed for the purpose of operating and maintaining the organ in a manner to assure its present and future preservation as a memorial to Ben Hall and to demonstrate the purpose of ATOS in the education and historic value of the theatre pipe organ to all Americans.

The organ must remain intact but may be expanded (the two-manual console must remain a part of the organ). The organ must be returned to ATOS if the group decides that they can no longer operate or maintain it in the proper manner. This group will have the

authority to move the organ to any public location they desire, but must make the first offer of a contract to the owner of the present location at the Carnegie Cinema. This condition is set because of ATOS Board's appreciation to the Carnegie Cinema for housing the organ in the past. This nonprofit group must adopt a set of bylaws to assure that all decisions about the operation, maintenance, or location of the organ are made by a group of directors and not by any one or two individuals. The decisions must reflect the desires of the majority of the members. The ATOS Board of Directors must approve the bylaws of the group.

As a first step in making this offer, the Board of Directors invites any member interested in this type of program to write to ATOS, P.O. Box 420490, Sacramento, California 95842. Any group that wants to reply may do so by listing the names of all members of the group. ATOS will furnish more information and take further steps if the response to this offer shows appropriate interest. □

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