

# Another Opening ... Another Show!

by Dr. Larry Warkintin

The Moore Memorial Wurlitzer organ will play for the first time in the Special Events Center at Fresno Pacific College on March 7, 1986. For this private, Christian liberal arts college in Fresno, California, it will be a major first. The event, called OPENING NIGHT, will be heralded in true show-stopping style with beacon lights, a jazz band, a delicious dinner with singing waiters, celebrities, and a concert by nationally recognized organist Tom Hazleton.

But this will not be the first "opening night" for this venerable Wurlitzer. Like many old theatre pipe organs, the Moore Memorial Organ embodies a fascinating history. Its first opening night came during the 1920s when the console was installed in the CBS studios in Hollywood. There it played background music for such radio programs as the "Amos 'n Andy Show."

Later the organ was sold to a Presbyterian church in Fillmore, California, but the Fillmore church actually wanted a more traditional console. Marguerite Moore of Porterville, California, acquired the console for a theatre organ she was building in her home (THEATRE ORGAN March/April 1982).

Mrs. Moore was an active teacher of organ and piano. When she lost her son, Richard, she needed some activity to consume her time and her grief, so she naturally turned her energy to a musical task. She decided to build a pipe organ in her den. Over a period of 20 years she bought, borrowed and traded parts for her project. Soon her den was overcrowded, so she had her patio enclosed.

Her project was getting national attention. At a convention of the American Theatre Organ Society, of which she was a long time member, she overheard a group inquiring if

anyone knew "that crazy woman from California who was building her own organ." She piped up "That's me." By 1980 the organ had grown to 18 ranks and more than a thousand pipes, including parts of theatre organs from San Diego to Santa Cruz.

Early in 1980 Mrs. Moore learned that she would soon die of cancer. She turned her remaining energy to finding a suitable home for the organ. She wanted it to be used for instruction and entertainment. Through a chain of acquaintances which resembles the underground railroad for theatre organists, she contacted Richard Cencibaugh of Fresno. Richard contacted Fresno Pacific College because he knew of its strong music program. College leaders told him the project was too expensive and unrealistic. It wouldn't work. But the chairman of the music department couldn't let go of the dream so easily. Almost out of the blue a major donor came forward. The families of Ron and Don Underdown pledged to contribute the first \$20,000 necessary to move the organ. The project was off and running. Few people at the Fresno Pacific College could have imagined the amount of community involvement that lay ahead.

During the summer of 1981 the work began with dismantling of the Porterville installation. Frank Caglia of Fresno donated space for storing the console, blower, shutters, pipes, cables and various traps and percussions which had been crowded into the Moore home. Harvey Kroeker, a skilled carpenter, gave hundreds of hours to the project. It was he who worked through the engineering details for construction of the chamber in the college Special Events Center.

The chamber is hung from the five-foot-thick laminated beams which span the Center. It cantilevers nine feet out and runs 40 feet wide along the wall. The chamber is only 13 feet tall, which required the longest pipes to be installed horizontally. It is divided into three sections, Solo, Percussion and Main. The three sets of shutters permit a high degree of dynamic control. The exterior of the chamber, also designed and built by Kroeker, is covered with a grille of vertical dark-stained slats which match the dark wood highlights of the auditorium-sports center.

The Center is large: its 415,000 cubic feet of space can seat 2500 people. This required some adjustment of the organ's capability. A 7½ hp blower was placed in a chamber on the roof of the building. It provides the necessary 15 p.s.i. of air pressure to make the pipes speak with authority. Two new ranks (English Horn and Brass Trumpet) were added to provide needed brilliance.

A major decision was made early in the project to completely update the circuitry of the old Wurlitzer. This added more than \$10,000 to the cost but is well worth it in terms of performance capabilities and maintenance. Robert Trousdale of Santa Ana, California, agreed to create a highly complex multiplex relay system and computer capture combination action for the organ. This intricate system makes use of the best features of modern technology. Lynn Upham of Alameda, California, did the total rewiring of the

Dr. Larry Warkintin at the console of the Moore Memorial Organ at Fresno Pacific College.





View showing the unusual design of the former CBS studio Wurlitzer. The middle row of stops above the top manual was added during the rebuild for the college.

console and connected the Trousdale system with the installed Wurlitzer.

This new approach to wiring in organs is being used today in many pipe organ installations. In laymen's terms, the Trousdale system uses a computer in the console to translate messages such as notes, registrations and dynamics into digital information which can be understood by a computer up in the chamber. The chamber computer translates the digital information back into electrical impulses which then activate pipes, percussions, traps and shades. This efficient system permits registrations and couplings which would be virtually impossible with a traditional system. For example, one may set up a registration which adds a bass voice to the lowest member of any chord. Or one may select a registration which produces a pizzicato attack on a sustaining chord. And all of this requires only a very small cable running from the console to the chamber. For the Moore Memorial Organ this is a decided advantage, as the console will travel as far as 200 feet from the chamber.

Even while the project has been underway, the unique character and history of the organ has been growing. In 1983 the Masonic Temple Building on Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco was scheduled for redevelopment. This meant that its two pipe organs would have to be sold, given away or destroyed. Bay West Development Company, which controlled the San Francisco project, agreed to give the two organs to Fresno Pacific College if the college would pay for their removal. This provided some additional ranks of pipes and also made available some materials for sale to help in the cost of the total project.

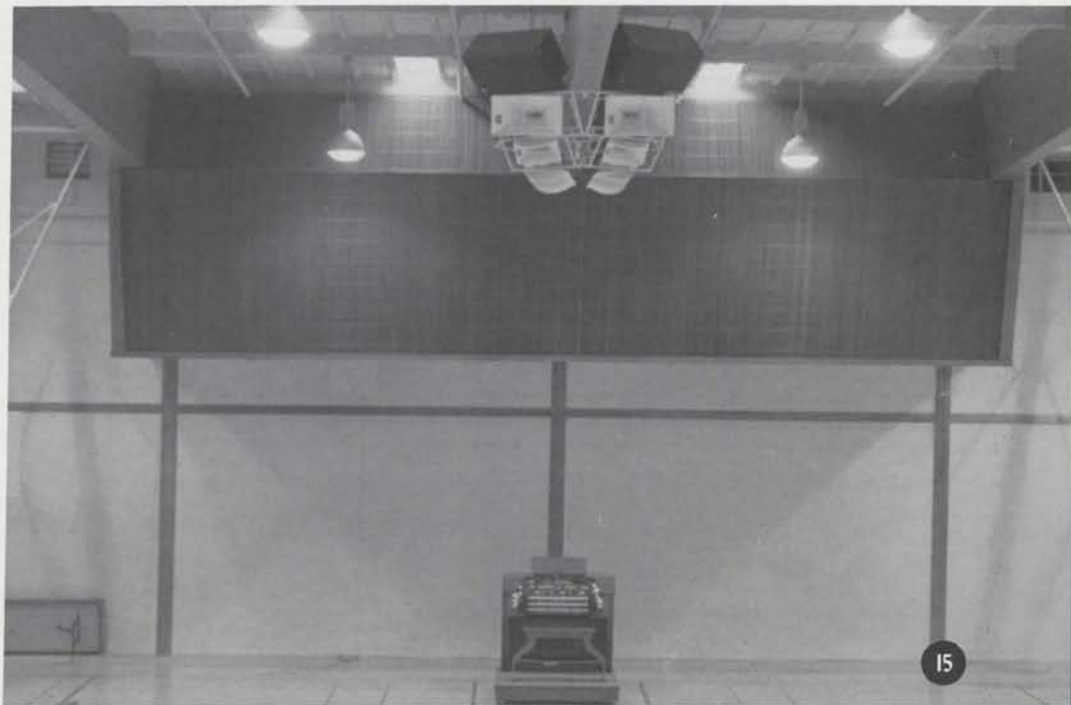
The specifications of the Moore Memorial

Organ in its modern reincarnation on March 7 will include 20 ranks of pipes, six percussions and 20 sound effects. In total, 1800 pipes will be controlled from the console, as follows: Pedal — 30 stops; Accompaniment — 51 stops; Great — 65 stops; Solo — 38 stops; nine tremulants; ten general pistons and 67 combination pistons.

The technical work of the installation has been under the supervision of Riverside, California, organ technician, Don Cover. Much of the work has been done by volunteer students and friends of the college.

When Mrs. Moore played the Wurlitzer for the last time in her home during the summer

Installation in the college's Special Events Center. Chamber structure is hung from the two beams, directly above the console.



of 1981 she shed a few tears, but she rejoiced that she had found a good home for her life's work. She did not live to hear the organ again. But she had planned wisely for the organ's future. Not only had she found a place where it would be used for instruction and entertainment, but she had also created an advisory committee to look after its installation. The stature of the names in this group is a reflection of Mrs. Moore's active involvement in the organ world. Richard Purvis, Tom Hazleton, Richard Cencibaugh and Richard Villemin have contributed to the project. Gaylord Carter, known for his long colorful history as a theatre organist, also became involved in the project by giving a concert on Fresno's Warner Theatre pipe organ in 1982 to help raise money.

The OPENING NIGHT dinner concert with Tom Hazleton is designed to pay off the remaining expenses and add to the maintenance endowment fund. The endowment project is being encouraged by the enthusiastic support of Eleanor Foerster, daughter of Marguerite Moore.

Elona Kriegbaum, OPENING NIGHT coordinator, has announced a \$25 per person contribution and plans to serve 600 guests. The festivities will feature a theme of early twentieth-century Hollywood. A short Laurel & Hardy silent film will be shown with Hazleton providing organ accompaniment. He will conclude the evening with a performance demonstrating the broad capabilities of the Moore Memorial Organ. His national reputation as organist in church, concert hall and theatre gives promise of an exciting evening.

Seats for OPENING NIGHT may be reserved by calling 209/251-7194, or by writing to Elona Kriegbaum, Fresno Pacific College, 1717 South Chestnut Avenue, Fresno, California 93702.

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