

safe storage. I stopped by the Saenger, after a long trip, to check on the restoration and found that everything stored in the Main chamber had been destroyed. All of the pipes had to be hoisted back down, re-rolled, resoldered and repaired another time.

However, seeing the theatre restoration progress gave us renewed energy to continue our work. This work was being done during a period when inflation was at its peak, and none of the money allotted for the organ project by the theatre restoration board was ever received by our chapter. Without this support, the dream of having a solid state relay and combination action seemed to be more impossible than ever. As a result of the impressive console construction and other work, however, several large financial gifts were pledged, and these were matched by the Monsanto Corporation of St. Louis which brought us over our financial hurdle. Peterson Electro-Musical Products built both the relay and combination action, and the long-awaited purchase of these parts made it possible to complete the project.

Our last impasse was the elevator. Since the original was deleted from the plans in 1924, a new hydraulic system had to be found. During the theatre's restoration, which was complete by this time, the orchestra pit floor had been raised by filling it with concrete which had to be removed along with the 60-year-old concrete wall which formed the back wall of the pit. Crews were scheduled, and the sounds of jackhammers filled the theatre for weeks. All this had to be done during the theatre's idle summer months. The pit was covered with plastic to prevent concrete dust from filling the newly restored house. After six exhausting weeks of very hard labor, this job was completed, and the pit was ready to receive its new lift. Wonder Morton consoles are very impressive and very large and are too big to live in a pit. A new "garage" was constructed behind the pit to house the console. The platform rides on steel rails both in the "garage" and on the elevator and can be easily rolled into place by one person.

In the spring of 1985, the organ was given its long-awaited tonal finishing and then, after fifteen years, was ready for its dedication. Seven years had passed since it was last heard in public, and this concert was planned to demonstrate the many tonal capabilities of the new Morton. The program included organ solos, a slide tour of the interior of the organ, a sing-along, a short Harold Lloyd silent, and many surprises, including an orchestra. A professional advertising agency had so successfully promoted the concert that a capacity crowd was there and was treated to the new (old) sounds of the sixth Wonder Morton in a Saenger theatre. Friends and ATOS chapters were represented from all over the country and toasted our success at an elegant champagne reception on the stage after the show. Now, perhaps, you can understand how seeing such a dream become reality would evoke a feeling of paternal pride. The Pensacola Theatre is *not* a parking lot today — it is a beautiful, functioning tribute to the "best in music, photoplay, and the theatrical arts!" □

We Did It!

by Dorothy Standley

An old radio show came on the air with the words: "The house lights dim; a hush comes over the audience, and the curtain rises on the first act of . . ." So it was at the dedication of our new 4/23 Robert-Morton theatre organ in the recently restored Saenger Theatre in Pensacola, Florida. Our story begins.

From the time he brought the first sheet of plywood home on the top of his car to the finishing of the gold leafing on the console, Barclay Donaldson Rhea, M.D., master organ builder, started and completed a labor of love. In between were miles and miles of wire, thousands of pipes, windlines, chests, regulators, etc., that most of you who have ever tackled a pipe organ know all too well.

Dr. Rhea, a practicing radiologist, a Major in the Army Medical Corps during WWII, a kinsman to the wife of President Andrew Jackson and quintessential southern gentleman, had never built an organ console, but master-builder he is. His workmanship is of a generation gone, characterized by meticulous detail, careful planning, exquisite execution, an unfailing eye for beauty and infinite patience. We are so very fortunate that he did this work for us, on his own time and at his own expense. When he undertook this project, he wrote the fateful words, "What A Fool Am I," as a parody of the song, in the margin of his shop notes.

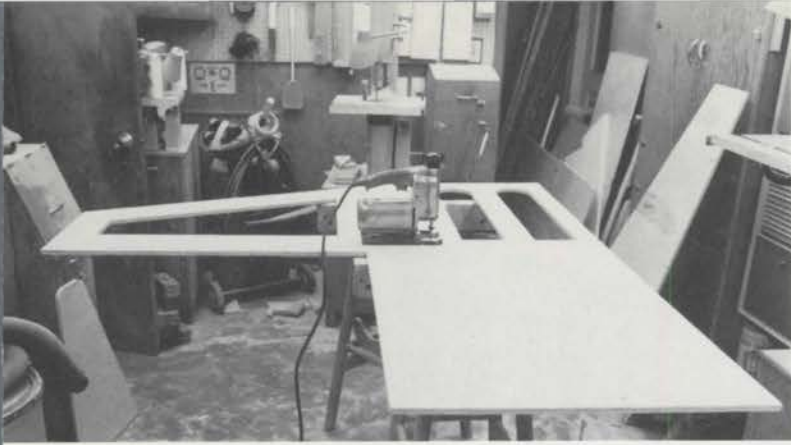
It was more than ten years ago that we found our long-neglected, puny, original-to-theatre 2/6 Robert-Morton. We named it "Lola," worked on it, maintained it, repaired it, restored it and played it with love. Gulf Coast Chapter gave several concerts during this time to raise money to "Save The Saenger." Our capable resident organist, Mr. Thomas F. Helms, had a dream of a large, magnificent instrument, of impeccable tonal balance, that would fill the restored theatre with organ music second to none. He encouraged our group to aim for this. With his skill, and after consultations with Lyn Larsen, Tom produced a tonal design to fill this dream. His motivation and enthusiasm kept us pushing on, and his expertise and personal skill as a craftsman contributed greatly to the completion of this project.

Before Dr. Rhea started work on the console, he undertook the gargantuan task of completely restoring the Brambach baby grand piano stored backstage at the theatre under a pile of old, dusty stage props and scenery. We were told that this was the original rehearsal piano used at the Saenger in its early days. Dr. Rhea modified an Aeolian player-piano action to enable it to be used in the Brambach to make it playable from the organ console — no easy task! The finished piano sits grandly now, for all to see and hear, in the box seats immediately below the new chamber opening stage right.

Then came the time when we all felt that we could give "Lola" the attention she wanted. First, we scouted for the necessary Robert-Morton parts, then we mounted a campaign for funds. Our men, some "shanghied" volunteers and Tom Helms rented a truck and drove hundreds of miles to bring these parts home. What days! We faced, too, the problem of storing the thousands of pieces until we could refinish, repair, re-leather and install them. Some pipes were in such terrible shape they looked like refugees from a war disaster area. Eventually, all were put into first class condition by Dr. Rhea and Tom. At first, all these parts were stored under the balcony in the theatre, but we had to empty that space when restoration was in full swing. Parts were "farmed out" to every conceivable bit of space, including private homes and the top of the case of an antique Wurlitzer in a local historical church.

We made several trips to Fort Worth, Texas, during this time to measure, photograph and copy parts of the Wonder Morton owned by North Texas Chapter. Their cooperation was invaluable since one can't find a Wonder Morton at just any local supermarket. Only five of these instruments were produced, so having an original to copy was a bonanza.

Tom heard of a blower for sale at McMurray College in Abilene, Texas, and we made a trip there to buy this behemoth from the college. Naturally, the thing was still completely assembled in the basement of the college auditorium, and our task was to disassemble and move the tons of equipment upstairs and into



First stage of console construction in Dr. Rhea's workshop — still a long way to go.



Sad and pitiful state of ranks of pipes before Dr. Rhea worked on them.

a rented U-Haul — all this in a Texas temperature of 117° and no airconditioning. We pulled this loaded — and I *do* mean loaded — U-Haul back to Pensacola to the Saenger Theatre. At that time the trap door was still in the original stage floor, so the blower and motor were lowered v-e-r-y c-a-r-e-f-u-l-l-y through this opening to the blower room where it would be completely reconditioned and installed. As a safety precaution, a sump pump was installed in the blower room since it is five feet below mean flood level during a severe hurricane. After the blower was permanently installed, Dr. Rhea built a very large muffler to tame the noise of the mighty beast.

Then it was time to investigate the space for the second chamber. This is the room the planners planned, the builders built, but the financiers didn't finance, and the original 1926 lightbulb was still hanging on its bare wire along with antique dust from 1926. Here Tom Helms measured everything so that chests, pipes, regulators, supports, wiring, swell shades, etc., would fit with the jewel-like precision of Dr. Rhea's workmanship. The chamber also received its first coat of paint. Some of the ranks from the original chamber were relocated to achieve better tonal balance. Additional openings were cut and fitted with swell shades to help the organ speak with more authority into the auditorium.

Meanwhile, work on the keydesk progressed! The stop bolsters had been bent and were ready to be put into the console. The bol-

sters were built so they can be raised by balance and held upright with built-in supports. The swell pedal assembly is enclosed but opens and can be moved forward for any needed adjustments or repairs. Dr. Rhea built the mechanisms himself, and, to ensure a source of supply for replacement parts, duplicates of each part were made and are stored in the pedal-assembly box. The combination action power supplies were built and fitted, with precision and serviceability, in the back of the console — spares here, too.

The bottom two manuals came from "Lola," and the top two from a Robert-Morton in Selma, Alabama. Dr. Rhea altered the key frames to accommodate these manuals, adapting them to make them align at the AGO playing angle. Gallons of 409 went into cleaning 50 years of grime before the "ivories" were replaced. The black keys he painstakingly refinished by hand using black automobile lacquer. Their beautiful finish is 50/50 love and elbow grease. The lights on the stop bolsters are Ford Model A dashboard lights that were standard on the original Robert-Morton. (When we go for authenticity, we go all the way!)

Dr. Rhea then re-felted all the manuals and realigned them with a weighted measure for accurate balance — again, perfection in each detail! The original Wonder Mortons had a most unusual arrangement of the area under the lower bolster to accommodate the combination action switches. This was modified to

utilize the space for the various control switches. About this same time, Dr. Rhea was involved in an automobile accident; he replaced the car, but kept the clock and fitted it into the console for the benefit of the performing artists. Neat, huh?

The console was constructed of maple, birch, walnut and fir. All fittings were handcrafted of solid brass. The key cheeks and stop bolsters are book-matched walnut veneer. The exterior is finished in white with gold leaf trim and just a touch of dull, deep red to outline the carvings. The carvings were molded from the original Wonder Morton in Fort Worth and cast in a permanent medium (water putty impregnated with epoxy), carefully re-carved, sanded and finished, then affixed to the console and gold-leafed. The front carvings on the cheeks were done by Dr. Rhea as the original was of such quality that it would not replicate as well as desired. The gallery across the top and the pilasters around the side were turned on Dr. Rhea's lathe. The carvings between were copied from a mold we made from the original. All the molded copies can be sawed, nailed and painted, and the entire console can be disassembled as simply as 1-2-3 by removing some significant screws, pins and fasteners, all handcrafted in solid brass by Dr. Rhea.

The theatre's old electrical system had been installed in a brick, chimney-like area. All this was replaced with modern computer controls when the theatre was restored, and we used

Second phase of console construction. (Note pedal assembly.)



Stop bolsters being steamed inside pipe so they can be bent to fit console.





Same rank of pipes after Dr. Rhea finished them.

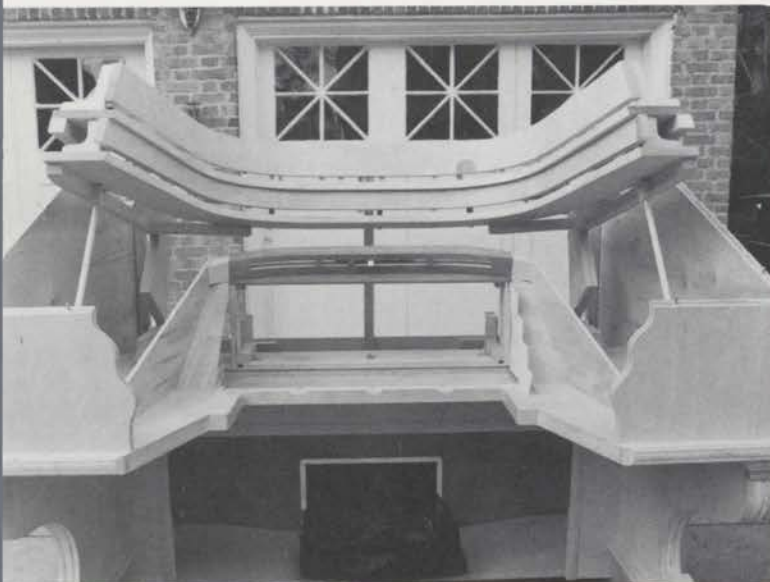
this brick "chimney" to run our new windline up from the blower room, through the new Main chamber, across the proscenium and down into the old Solo chamber.

Because of a most generous contribution by Mr. Scott Brodie of Pensacola, a Peterson Quad Memory, duo-set, solid state combination action was installed by Tom Helms, Bob Sidebottom and Dr. Rhea. Mrs. Rhea suffered through the loss of her dining room for most of this work!

The console, built to AGO specifications, has second touch on the Great and Accompaniment manuals. One second touch trap line is on the Solo, and one is on the Pedal traps. There are 24 toe studs. The console has 283 stop tabs, each with its tiny magnet motor behind the bolster to snap it into action. There are 54 thumb pistons. The organ plays on 6", 10" and 15" wind. The refurbished clavier is from "Lola." The console is on a nine-foot hydraulic lift which brings it from below the orchestra pit floor to almost stage level and affords the capability of changing levels when the organ is featured or is used for accompaniment. The console is on rails that enable it to be rolled easily into a permanent "garage"



Form which held steam-heated boards for stop bolsters.



Third phase of construction with stop bolsters raised.

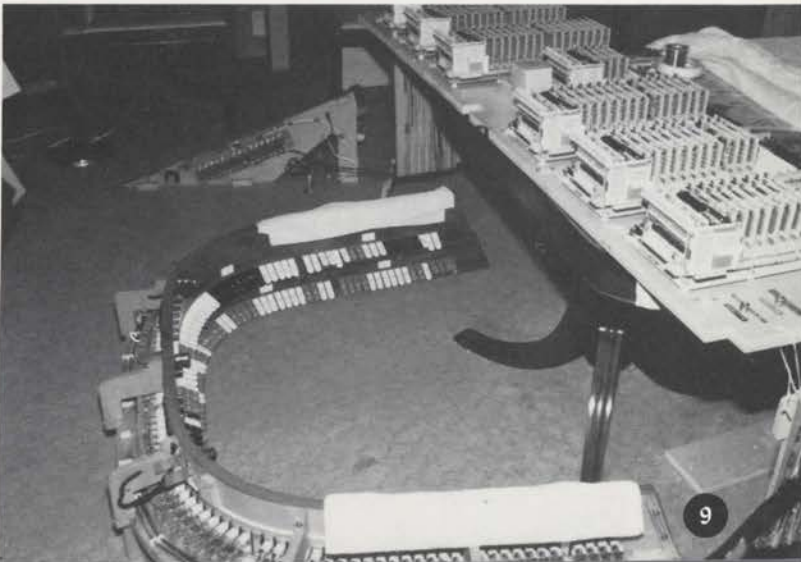


Mixed up keys before treatment. See front cover for final result.

Molded carving before final finishing.



Peterson solid state combination wiring on Dr. Rhea's dining room table before installation at theatre.



behind the orchestra pit which can be locked for security.

The music rack that Dr. Rhea designed and built for the console is another example of his magnificent artistry. This rack is lighted and can be used with bright or dim lighting or can be folded flat when necessary.

We owe our everlasting gratitude to all of the contributors, workers and helpers such as Bob Sidebottom, David Dietrich, Miles Frisinger, Dorothy Standley, Scott Brodie, Robbie Giroir, Jim Scoggins, Byron Melvin, Gary Rickert, Jim Peterson and Hans Felix, Special thanks also go to manager Truman Reed and the staff of the Saenger Theatre for their splendid cooperation during this installation.

Now you understand why, to quote the late Ben Hall, the "marrow danced in our bones" at the installation dedication. With Tom Helms at the ready on the Howard seat, we sat in awe as the house lights dimmed, a hush came over the audience, and the spotlighted new console, in all its splendor, rose from the pit to the thundering sound of "Swanee!" □

CHAMBER ANALYSIS OF THE SAENGER 3/24 ROBERT-MORTON

MAIN CHAMBER

Harmonic Tuba	16'
Diaphonic Diapason	16'
Tibia Clausa	16'
Concert Flute	16'
Clarinet	16'
Salicional	8'
Salicional Celeste	8'
Gamba	8'
Gamba Celeste	8'
Vibrato Violins (II)	8'

Vox Humana 8'
Chrysglott

SOLO CHAMBER

Tibia Clausa	16'
Violin	16'
Violin Celeste	8'
English Posthorn	8'
Trumpet	8'
Orchestral Oboe	8'
Kinura	8'
Saxophone	8'
Horn Diapason	8'
Quintadena	8'
Vox Humana	8'
Chimes	21 tubes

Orchestra Bells	Tap Cymbal
Marimba Harp	Sizzle Cymbal
Xylophone	Crash Cymbal
Tambourine	Song Birds
Castanets	Bass Drum
Tom Tom	Chinese Block
Snare Drums (II)	Truck Horns
Sleighbells	Siren
Acme Siren	Trolley Bell
Train Whistle	Doorbell
Triangle	Fire Bell
Ahooga Horn	Thunder
Beep-Beep Horn	

EXPOSED

Grand Piano

ACCESSORIES

Pizzicato
Trick Couplers 6-2/5, 5-1/3, 4-4/7
Sostenuto
10 Tremulants
Four memory combination action □

various projection and music-making machines are discussed fully and some of the early actors are touched upon simply because they never got billing with the studios and directors in those times. A list of 100 actors is supplied in order of their popularity in 1913.

The story line of the 1912 film *At Cripple Creek* is included, as is a list of 82 film companies of the 1911-1915 era. Of special interest to theatre organ buffs are pictures and text on Robert Hope-Jones, the eccentric father of the instrument, an abbreviated lecture by him, given to the National Association of Organists in 1910, and a listing of Wurlitzer theatre instruments shipped from 1911 through 1915 with text on each. Finally, there is the address given by Farny R. Wurlitzer before the ATOE at its 1964 Convention, taken from his personal transcript.

Mr. Bowers has done his homework exceedingly well, and the subsequent work should find a prominent place on many a theatre and theatre organ buff's reference bookshelf. □

LLOYD E. KLOS

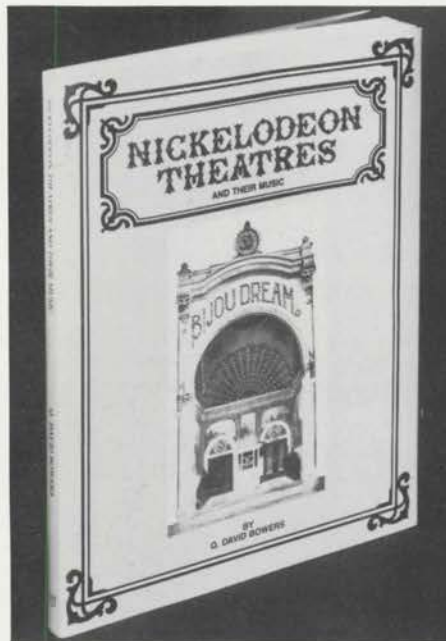


BOOK REVIEW

NICKELODEON THEATRES AND THEIR MUSIC by Q. David Bowers. Soft-cover, \$16.95 ppd. Hardcover, \$26.95 ppd. from Vestal Press, Box 97, 320 N. Jensen Road; Vestal, New York 13850. 212 pages.

To everyone who has been party to the renaissance of the theatre pipe organ, the name of David Bowers has been familiar for 25 years. He has authored or co-authored over 25 books on nostalgic items with emphasis on mechanical musical instruments.

Now he has come out with a book on Nickelodeon Theatres, predecessors of the Motion Picture Palaces of the twenties. Excellently written, extensively researched, the book is illustrated with over 200 pictures, and over 80



reproductions of ads, sketches and cartoons.

Bowers traces the development of movie theatres in the nickelodeon era from just before the turn of the century (storefront theatres) until its demise about 1915 when movies became more sophisticated and costly. The

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