

An Interesting Hobby Building Miniature Consoles

by *Bemont F. Venus*

That an organ console is a thing of beauty cannot be denied. In the living room of Venida Jones reposes an exact duplicate, in miniature, of the big 4m Kilgen from which she regularly broadcast in the studio of KMOX St. Louis. Finished in ebony black, like the original, it is a most delightful object to behold. Some one must have spent many painstaking hours carving, gluing and what not. Bill Bunch of Aeolian Skinner and a member of the Eastern Mass. Chapter of A.T.O.E. is likewise gifted with the art of modeling organ consoles. I know, because he produced a model from the mouth-piece. Up in Unionville, Ontario Canada, there is another chap who has perfected the art. So, we asked Mr. Venus to tell us about his interesting hobby.

BACK IN 1938, my brother, Alfred, asked me if I would like to visit a friend of his by the name of Charlie Wright who lived in the west end of Montreal. My brother, who is interested in organs and never misses the opportunity of investigating them, became friendly with Charlie Wright who had played the organ for the Papineau Theatre in Montreal until it was closed down when 'talkies' took over.

I had heard a lot about Charlie who lived with his mother in a four-room flat on the second floor at the other side of town and it seems that he had purchased a pipe-organ and had it in his living room. By taking out the front window and using a block and tackle, Charlie and the movers finally got it inside but not before removing all the rosettes and figurines. Alfred, having been invited over to see the organ thought I too would be interested. Little did he know, (or, in fact, little did I know), that that Sunday afternoon's visit to see Charlie would be the start of a venture with me which has taken me to many places and has been the cause of meeting so many people in the organ field.

I'll always remember arriving at Charlie's and wondering how on earth anyone could put a pipe organ in a flat. I soon found out. On opening the door at the top of the stairs, I was confronted with the strangest contraption I had ever seen, and was informed in great detail that this was a pipe organ. Pipes were lined up everywhere. One row against the wall was connected with an array of wires and, when the keys were pressed down out came quite an assortment of sounds. Even Alfred was impressed.

There was a 'phone hook-up on the organ from which Charlie called his mother and asked her to come in. She was only in the next room but that didn't matter. No use having a 'phone on the organ if it didn't work. Mrs. Wright's only comment to her son's request to come in was "Well, at least I know where he is anyway."

I was fascinated by the maze of wires and pipes; also the 'organ gossip' between Alf and Charlie that I too immediately caught the bug and decided I had to have one of these organs. Of course, I had not reckoned with my Mom and Dad. It seemed that they too liked to hear the organ but only if it was played in some place other than their

home; but, finally after a lot of maneuvering, Alfred and I acquired a reed organ.

Alf was familiar with organs, having worked on some of the local ones. So, with his knowledge, we rebuilt our first one and although it was good for a reed organ, it still wasn't a pipe organ. So we had to connect up a rank of pipes.

My interest was such that I just had to know more about the pipe organ and spent much of my time around every available organ in Montreal. But it wasn't until 1941 when I left for England that my opportunity came to see and hear some of the finest organs in England. I felt, as many of us did at that time, that the War would not last long and so decided to use all my spare time seeing first hand all the more noted organs and hearing some of the greatest theatre organists play. But, as you all know the War lasted somewhere around four years and this length of time gave me the opportunity to familiarize myself with organs in that country.

One outstanding trip I'll always remember was to Llanudno in North Wales to hear and see Reginald Foort's giant Möller organ. One reason for this memory is that on my return trip I met the girl I later married. I think she wondered then if all Canadians were as 'organ nutty' as I was—travelling all this distance just to see an organ. She still thinks there is something disconnected up on top because I still travel out of my way to see an organ.

The organ at the Gaumont State Theatre in Kilburn, London, England was one of my favourite stops. One reason was I felt that I knew the organ so well having listened to so many of Sidney Toreh's records back home. The organ was kept in such good repair, as were nearly



Author puts finishing touches on his miniature Wurlitzer.



(Left) Closeup view of miniature Atlantic City Auditorium console. (Right) Miniature of the 4m/16r Wurlitzer from the Gaumont State Theatre organ in Kilburn, London

all the theatre organs at that time, the console having been newly painted. This was the organ that first inspired me to build a model.

It was after I had returned home and had finally decided the pipe organ which I had dreamed of owning seemed farther away than ever that I came to the conclusion the best I could do for now would be to build a model. The Gaumont State organ seemed the ideal one as I had spent so much time there. After considering that the keys would be the smallest point of the organ in view, I decided that $\frac{1}{8}$ inch to a foot would be the ideal scale; the white keys were to be made of lined paper with the black keys made of dyed wood.

Working from a scaled drawing, everything went fine until I was ready to put the scroll work and trim on the front edges when to my dismay I found that there was not enough room for the fine carvings. After a lot of inquiries I discovered an organ in Europe that was a close duplicate of the Gaumont organ. So, using the case of the one organ with the detailed stop-listing and other characteristics of the Gaumont, I built my first model.

To get the feel of the theatre stage, the case sides are lined in red velvet pleated to look the same as stage drapes; the corner supports for the glass contain two sets of lights in three different colours—red, blue and white. These lights connect through a switch and cable to the basement where the control box is situated. This box contains a moveable rheostat and three cam wheels running from an old transcription phonograph motor. For effect in a room with subdued light, the coloured lights in the organ case brighten up to full then fade out as the next colour comes on and the effect is similar to that of an organ on stage in a large theatre.

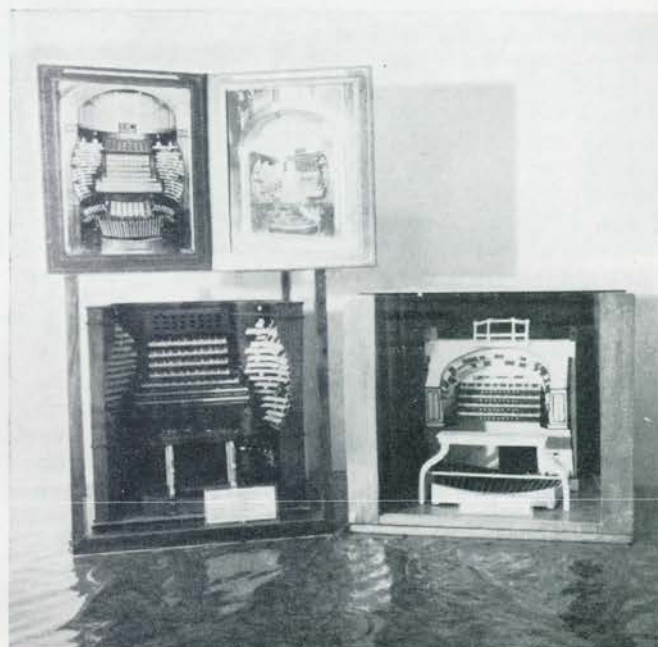
As time went by I felt that the largest organ in the world would be a real challenge but as the Gaumont organ had taken over a month to build in my spare time and weekends, I was sure that to do a good job this would take much longer. It did—six weeks full time.

It came about last Winter when an old knee injury, resulting from the War, which I had to have in a cast kept me from work. I thought this would be a chance to start on the Atlantic City Auditorium organ. So after much correspondence and information, photographs and plans, thanks to the personnel of the Auditorium, I started on the

key boards. These alone took two weeks to get the exact duplicate of the original; still using $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch-to-the-foot scale and paper for the white keys and birchwood for the black keys. The control buttons under the keyboard are made from sheep skin, punched out to size, dyed and touched up with paint. The case work is made of mahogany and walnut, finished to look like the original.

The main idea in the models is to keep as close to the original as is possible and the finished product is most rewarding. I have been collecting information and photographs for future models and have plans drawn up for the next one which I hope to start soon.

The idea of having a real pipe organ has not been forgotten by any means and I am still working towards this end. In the meantime, I find that building models of organs is an extremely satisfying hobby and makes a very realistic atmosphere in my organ world.



The two miniature consoles in their glass enclosed cases with photographs of the original organs.