

The "Anglicised Wurlitzer" Myth

By Quentin Maclean, Toronto, Canada

IN THE previous issue of THE TIBIA, two congenial and generally well informed theatre-organ enthusiasts—J. J. Critser and G. Edgar Gress—claim to have discovered a strange new object which they call the "Anglicised Wurlitzer." Such an intriguing concept, however, was a purely imaginary one without any factual basis, as I shall attempt to prove, although in no spirit of acrid controversy, as I am sincerely grateful to these two young American organ-lovers for their kind remarks concerning the Odeon, Marble Arch organ, for the stop-list of which I was responsible. They will, I am sure, be gratified to learn that I felt no regrets at exchanging my custom-built 30r Christie for a stock American 21r Wurlitzer at the Trocadero, Elephant & Castle, over which it was my privilege and delight to preside for nine consecutive years.

With the exception of three examples which will be discussed later, all the Wurlitzers imported into England were strictly stock models; the most frequently met with being what was known there as a Model F. This was an 8-rank two-chamber job consisting of:—

Main	Solo
16' Bourdon-Concert Flute	16' Tuba Horn
8' Open Diapason	8' Tibia Clausa
8' Violin	8' Vox Humana
8' Violin Celeste	
8' Clarinet	

All on 10-in. wind, except Tuba Horn and Vox Humana.

This model was well exploited by Jack Courtney, who had learned his trade in the States, and was the first to introduce the American conception of theatre-organ style into England. Following him came Albert Hay Malotte, who was imported to demonstrate the 15-ranker at the Plaza, Piccadilly Circus. This job suffered from atrocious location, the Main chamber being at the left side on main-floor level, while the Solo division was over the stage, with the 32' Diaphone somewhere in the roof! It served, however, to introduce to the British theatre-organ public the Wurlitzer Brass Trumpet, Saxophone, and Kinura ranks; as well as to some novel ideas in the presentation of organ solo interludes on the part of A.H.M., such as whistling duets with himself and "Piccolo 4'" in *Valencia*, which was No. One on the Hit Parade at that time. Malotte's premature demise was a great loss to the theatre-organ world—I cannot listen to the *Lord's Prayer* without feeling a deep nostalgic regret.

The Fall of 1928 saw the installation in London of both the largest English-built and American theatre-organs—the 30r Christie at the Odeon, Marble Arch, and the 20r Wurlitzer at the Empire, Leicester Square. As I have been credited with having *designed* the Odeon organ, I feel it only fair to point out that my share in the design consisted of writing down a list of stop-names distributed over four manuals and pedal, plus some verbal suggestions as to the kind of tone-quality I had in mind. Scales, wind-pressures, and the herculean task of finding room for everything in the cramped quarters available, in fact all the manifold tasks implied by the word "design" were carried out by that ace British organ designer and builder—Herbert Norman. My selection of pipe-units for the Odeon organ was made on the basis of providing a highly flexible instrument for the accompaniment of silent movies, which seemed to call for a wide variety of relatively subdued, yet contrasting tone-colors. Solo interludes were a secondary consideration, as

the Odeon at that time featured a 20-piece pit orchestra, which combined with the organ for the spotlight interlude. Owing to cramped chamber space, and the acoustics of the Odeon which tended to favor the higher frequencies, the ensemble of the organ was almost entirely dominated by the brilliant chorus reeds, which overshadowed the rather too delicately voiced flutes and strings. At that time also, Compton and Christie were making their Tibia ranks of metal, which suggests an adaptation of an old riddle—"When is a Tibia not a Tibia?" Answer—"when it's made of metal." Hope-Jones showed remarkable acumen when he gave the name "Kalliope" to one of his early experiments in large-scaled stopped metal ranks! A similar preference for metal flute stops is discernible among most American church-organ builders to-day. The smaller "Tibia Minor" in the Odeon organ was not a true Tibia, but a "Zauberflöte" of harmonic stopped metal pipes.

Within a couple of months of the Odeon opening, the 20r Wurlitzer at the Empire was introduced to London theatre patrons by the Canadian-born Sandy Macpherson, who was brought over from the States by MGM, for whom he had previously worked as official Wurlitzer demonstrator. Sandy's genial personality and attractive interlude presentations quickly endeared him to the British public and eventually secured him the post of successor to Reg Foort as the official BBC Theatre Organist, a position which he still occupies with distinction. The fact that the two larger Wurlitzer installations up to this time were being played by players imported from the States proves conclusively that these organs were stock American models, and not, as our two young friends suggest, instruments modified to suit British preferences. The same applies to the 21r Trocadero organ, installed two years after the Empire. This organ is unusual for its size in having only one Tibia, the larger scaled kind, on 15-in. wind. I was informed by my friend Harold Ramsay that this particular model was known in the States as a "Publix No. 1," and was in every respect a stock factory job. Ramsay is another Canadian who came to England from the States, and was for many years resident organist at the Granada, Tooting. He is at present occupying the Chair of Music at the University of Alberta in his home town Calgary.

I can well remember Jesse Crawford's visit to the Empire, where he endeared himself to us as much by his modestly unassuming personality as by his superb artistry. Apart from having the seven Tremulants carefully adjusted to his liking, Jesse did not ask for any tonal modifications to the organ, nor would they have been necessary, as this particular instrument was, as it stood, admirably suited to his highly individual style, being "lush" almost to the point of tonal indigestibility—a complete contrast to the reed-dominated Odeon ensemble. The Trocadero was, in my opinion, a better balanced and more tonally versatile instrument, but it probably would not have suited Jesse as well as did the Empire.

The London Wurlitzer agency at that time was in the capable hands of Walter Pearce, a practical organ-builder who had formerly worked for the Aeolian Company in the States, and was, in association with Major S. J. Wright, responsible for introducing the Wurlitzer into England. Wally and a small but highly efficient staff did a first-rate job of installation, tuning, and routine maintenance, but the

factory was not equipped to carry out any major alterations to the pipework, and any requests of this kind would most surely have met with stern disapproval, as the whole organization was inspired by a spirit of ardent enthusiasm and pride at being associated with the magic name of Wurlitzer, most of the personnel having served their apprenticeship with British firms. There was, however, one way in which some tonal modifications could be made in the stock before they left North Tonawanda, by substituting other ranks for those normally included therein. The London office had a copy of a kind of pipe-rank catalogue issued by the Wurlitzer Company, from which the buyer was at liberty to choose within reason any combination of pipe-ranks to suit his individual taste, a golden opportunity of which I was able to avail myself on three occasions. The first of these "customized Wurlitzers" was installed at the Gaumont, Watford; and was a modification of the standard 8-rank Model F, as follows:—

Main	Solo
16' Diaphonic Diapason (15 in. w.p.)	8' Tibia Clausa
16' Bourdon-Concert Flute	8' Vox Humana
8' Solo String	8' French Trumpet
8' Dulciana	
8' Saxophone	

The "French Trumpet" was included in the American factory list of available pipe-ranks, and could not, therefore, have been a special stop designed for the English market, as the Watford job was the first for which any changes had been requested. This rank is made of ordinary pipe-metal instead of brass, and resembles in tone-quality what the church-organ makers call a "Cornopean" with a little more "bite" to it. Although not lacking in brilliance, it seems to blend better with the other ranks than the brass variety, especially in a small scheme like this. I found the large-scale Diapason quite a good substitute for the discarded Tuba Horn, to which it bears some tonal resemblance. The Celeste, being only a slightly smaller version of the Viol d'Orchestre, seemed rather a waste in a scheme of only eight ranks, and was therefore replaced by the different-colored Dulciana. Where only one String stop is provided, the broader-toned Solo String seems a better choice than the narrow-sealed Viol or Violin. In respect of tonal versatility, the Saxophone proved of more value than the Clarinet usually included in this model.

My second venture at customizing the Wurlitzer was at the State, Kilburn, where the budget permitted a choice of 16 ranks, double the size of my initial Watford experiment. This organ was not, as has been stated, designed for Sidney Torch or for anyone else, but embodied my conception of a 16r Wurlitzer giving, bluntly, the best value for money, from a tonal point of view. My friends Critser and Gress consider this a "strange scheme, with all ideas of 'lushness' being strictly banished." This I find difficult to understand, for if one concedes that tonal "lushness" is dependent on the proportion of Flute and Tibia ranks, the Kilburn instrument is well provided with these—four instead of three as in the super "lush" Empire organ which Crawford found so much to his liking. The 21r Trocadero has only two! My object at Kilburn was to strike a true balance between the extremes of "lushness" (Tibias and Flutes) and "brashness" (English Horn etc.); but then, I guess my American friends speak a somewhat different language, for if the tone of the Paramount English Post-Horn can be accurately described, in their own words, as "rich and lyrical" then so can Stan Kenton's brass section, which to my mind it resembles very closely! The State, Kilburn, contained the following units:—

Main	Solo
16' Diaphonic Diapason (15 in.)	16' Tibia Clausa (15 in.)
16' Bourdon-Concert Flute	16' Gamba (15 in.)
	16' English Post Horn

16' Tuba Horn	8' Tuba Mirabilis
8' Tibia Clausa (10 in.)	8' Open Diapason (medium scale)
8' Viol d'Orchestre	8' French Trumpet
8' Viol Celeste	8' Krumet
8' Dulciana	4' Harmonic Flute
8' Vox Humana (large scale)	

If this appears to be a "strange" scheme, the 12-ranker which I specified for the Gaumont, Holloway, will surely seem to be completely crazy! Even that dyed-in-the-wool Wurlitzer enthusiast Reginald Foort shied away from it in abject horror, although when pinned down to essentials, his main objection seemed to be that it lacked a Tuba Horn rank! Anyway, here is the scheme, which sounded better than it maybe appears in print:—

Main	Solo
16' Diaphonic Diapason (15 in.)	16' English Post Horn
16' Bourdon-Concert Flute	8' Tibia Clausa (15 in.)
8' Tibia Plena (10 in.)	8' Saxophone
8' Lieblich Flute	8' Krumet
8' Solo String	8' Vox Humana
8' Dulciana	4' Harmonic Flute

Let me explain, before our readers recover from the shock, that the effectiveness of this instrument depends on what I may call the concord of opposites. Extreme "lushness" combined with the ultimate in "brashness" join to form an ensemble of unparalleled richness and brilliance. The keystone of the whole effect is the Tibia Plena rank, which in the bloom of its upper register can make rings around the Tibia Clausa, on account of its pipes being open instead of covered at the top. The neglect of this exquisite component of the theatre-organ tonal spectrum is a truly inexplicable mystery. Horace Finch specified it in his organ at the Opera House, Blackpool, for which I am devoutly thankful, as the Holloway organ was completely destroyed by enemy action. The Lieblich Flute is a delightful stop, sounding rather like a miniature essence of Tibia Clausa, with a dash of Quintadena added.

To return to our earlier discussion regarding stock models, I have often speculated as to the tonal effect of the combination, in one instrument of the best features of the Empire and Odeon organs. The superimposition of Herbert Norman's glorious reed tones upon the solid Wurlitzer Tibia and Diaphonic Diapason foundation would surely provide an unique musical thrill. On paper, the Kimball/Wurlitzer hybrid at Radio City would seem to give an approximate realisation of such a utopian organist's dream; but I am given to understand that this instrument, like the Odeon and Kilburn organs, suffers greatly from inadequate chamber space.

One of the most effective British all-purpose organs is the Hill, Norman & Beard (makers of the "Christie") at the Dome, Brighton. This organ is divided on both sides of the stage; one side consisting of a "straight" non-unified Great and Swell on orthodox church lines, and the other side a heavy-pressure "Solo" section on Wurlitzer lines, with brilliant Tuba and Trumpet tones being well supported by an authentic wooden Tibia Clausa, plus an open wood Harmonic Claribel, a stop showing some tonal resemblance to the Kimball Melophone. This section also contains what is probably the most realistically imitative Saxophone stop that has ever been made. The fact that this organ was conceived and designed entirely by the builders, who thereby showed themselves able to recognize and correct some basic defects in their earlier Odeon instrument, would seem to indicate that a spirit of conservative progress is still very much alive in British organ-building circles to-day.

In conclusion, our readers may find some interesting points of comparison between two Wurlitzers, both of the same size, but varying greatly in tonal content—I refer to Richard Vaughn's customized studio organ, and the "Publix" model at the London Trocadero. Both instruments contain

21 ranks and both have proved very suitable for recording purposes.

1. Richard Vaughn Studio Organ

Main	Solo
16' Diaphonic Diapason	16' Tibia Clausa
16' Bourdon-Concert Flute	16' Tuba Mirabilis
16' Tuba Horn	16' Oboe Horn
8' Tibia Clausa	16' Solo String
8' Viol d'Orchestre	8' Solo String Celeste
8' Viol Celeste	8' English Post Horn
8' Dulciana	8' Trumpet
8' Quintadena	8' Saxophone
8' Clarinet	8' Kinura
8' Vox Humana	8' Orchestral Oboe
	8' Vox Humana

2. London Trocadero Organ

Main	Solo
16' Diaphonic Diapason	16' Tibia Clausa
16' Bourdon-Concert Flute	16' Horn Diapason (Diaphone Bass)
16' Tuba Horn	8' Solo String
8' Gamba	8' Quintadena
8' Gamba Celeste	8' Tuba Mirabilis
8' Viol d'Orchestre	8' English Post Horn
8' Viol Celeste	8' Trumpet
8' Dulciana	8' Saxophone
8' Unda Maris (Ten. C)	8' Orchestral Oboe
8' Clarinet	8' Kinura
8' Vox Humana	

Counting the Quintadena and Dulciana among the String ranks, a comparative analysis of the above two schemes works out thus:—

	Vaughn Organ	Trocadero Organ
Diapason	1	2
String	6	8
Flute	3	2
Reed	11	9
	21	21

Chapter Meetings

(from page 6)

a Hammond organist and teacher. His excellent capabilities as a musician as well as his humor and showmanship really made the entire program a huge success.

After the introduction by the president, Dr. Stocker, which revealed some of Randy's past as an organist from college days through the silent movie period, the program got off to a fiery start with the Spanish "Novellero" to warm things up. For contrast, he played a most modern rendition of *Stars Fell on Alabama* which left us with the impression that he had thrown that one in just to show us that the evening would not be entirely "square." Next, the authentic old "doosie," *Saxaphobia* which Randy boasted as having originally introduced in the Ford Theatre in Washington the night Lincoln was assassinated! After this, a nostalgic rendition of *Roses of Picardy*, complete with verse. This was played in the mellow colorful style of the old Theatre Organ solos so reminiscent of the Jesse Crawford style which had such a marked influence on the theatre organists.

Then came another complete contrast in a surprising arrangement of *I'll Remember April*. This, too, was apparently put in as a subtle reminder that Randy was also a student of Dr. Wesley LaViolette, the famous contraportalist who has done so much for furthering the "West Coast Modern Jazz" musicians.

Then came a medley of what Randy called, *Elevator Music*, so named because of the music played when the house lights dimmed and the colored spot hit the orchestra pit to find the organ on an elevator rising out of the darkness to play the song favorites of the day. This medley included such numbers as *Meadow Lark*, *Tonight You Belong to Me* (played Honky-

tonk-piano style), *Mary Lou*, *Pretty Baby*, *San Antonio*, *Pony Boy* and of course, *Are You From Dixie?*

This last number was an opening to pay a joking tribute to one Elvis Presley, another Southern Boy, with the lament, *I tried it for years, but this boy made it!* So Randy played *Love Me Tender* as he would have played it in past years, with "tibias swooping and slurping all over the place." This was a good breather before the big moment to follow.

In introducing his opera selection to the audience, they were reminded that in these days of Hi-Fi, radio, and TV, we have become accustomed to much better music than any operatic selection; at least in the strict sense of the word. But in his hey-day people were not so acquainted with good music, anyway, and the "cultured" music was forced on them only to tell the story of the opera. This choice bit could not be repeated without losing the humor as it was told. He replaced *Madam Butterfly* with the *Drinking Song* from "Traviata" because it was too sad. Silent Newsreel music was offered which left little to the imagination.

Randy kept up the flow of old favorites to the satisfaction of the packed house—over two hundred and fifty seated and others standing.

The meeting was completed with his playing of the old *Fire Music* and his overture music from *Orpheus*.

The next meeting of the Greater Los Angeles Chapter will be held in the same studios on March 11th.—DK

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ADM 26. Sel.—"Over the Footlights"; Sel.—"Memories of the Ballet"; Swing medley; Flirtation waltz; Song of the Trees; Cornflakes; Put your arms around me, honey; Ready, willing and able.

ADM 30. Coronation Rag; Can I forget you; Buzzin' Bees; Sel.—"Bing Crosby Rhythm Hits"; Strauss waltz medley; La Golondrina; Sel.—"The King steps out".

BRYAN RODWELL (Granada Cinema, Tooting)

ADM 36. Black eyes; Speakeasy; Puppet Suite; Embrujo Gitano; Louise; Samum; Harlem Nocturne; Malaguena; Toy Trumpet; Valse Grieg.

ADM 38. Sweet Georgia Brown; Don't blame me; Lover; Sophisticated Lady; Ain't Misbehavin'; When Somebody thinks you're wonderful; Honeysuckle Rose; Stars fell on Alabama; Red Resin; After the Rain; Irish Legend; Bach goes to Town.

ADM 40. March: Up with the curtain; If I should fall in love again; Jazz Pizzicato; Deep Purple; Tyrolean chase; Children's Overture (Quilter); Selection: King's Rhapsody (Novello).

GERALD SHAW (On the Huge Christie Organ—Regal/Odeon, Marble Arch)

ADM 44. Sel. Gershwin at Marble Arch (Inc. Rhapsody in Blue); Sel. Berlin in London; Czardas; Come back to Sorrento; Jamaican Rhumba; By the Sleepy Lagoon; Liebesfreud; Grain of Rice; Bela Marques; Sassetti.

ADM 46. Brindisi (La Traviata); Musetta's Song (La Boheme); Waltz (Faust); Gypsy Music (Carmen); Dance of the Hours (La Gioconda). Granada; Donkey Serenade; Estrellita; Tango Bolero; Stardust.

ADM 48. Ritual Fire Dance; Ay, Ay, Ay; Seville; Maria, my own; Ecstasy; Limehouse Blues; Kiss me again; Carnival; Soliloquy; Frenesi; Nola.

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