

MYRTLE—A Queen in a Barn

By Judd Walton

THIS IS A LOVE STORY—between a fellow named Joe and a beautiful lady known as “Myrtle.” The setting is in a barn located amongst verdantly green apricot, peach and palm trees in Suisun Valley, California. On May 5 last Joe and Myrtle celebrated their ninth anniversary — in a barn — with over 350 guests present!

Joe who? Chadbourne, of course, former theatre organist of the San Francisco Bay area. In his early years, he played in local dance bands and taught music in the local high school. When the lure of the organ became too great, he forsook teaching and became a theatre organist. Joe has played everything from a 2-rank Robert Morton to the big 36-ranker in the Fox, San Francisco. A few years ago, he “re-did” a silent picture “The Shiek” at a local theatre, accompanying it on a 4-rank Woods organ since removed to a church. Joe recalls it went over with a dull thud — all the audience got out of it was laughs. Today, Joe stands as a musical giant in his community.

The Start of a Romance

With a long career as a theatre organist in back of him, Joe fell in love with a divorcée, a beautiful girl named “Myrtle.” For nine straight years now they have celebrated

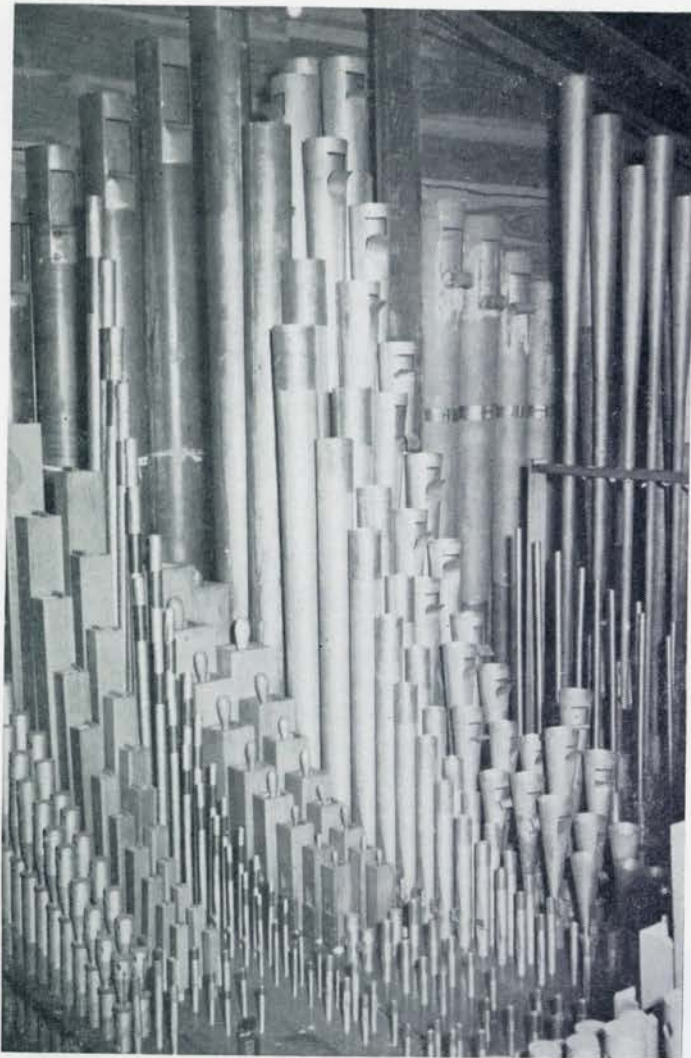
their anniversary in his barn, inviting all who would come to see and hear the beautiful “Myrtle.” At such occasions, Joe beams with pride and whispers, “Myrtle has a soul, just like a person, and she simply performs *with* the organist.” But there have been times when his beloved Myrtle behaved not like a lady!

Patient readers, Myrtle is a Wurlitzer (Opus 909) which actually sounds like a 19-rank organ. It is unchallenged as the finest sounding small Wurlitzer around, according to unanimous opinion of all who have heard her.

Myrtle was not impressive as a youngster. She was, in fact, a very ordinary appearing Style D Wurlitzer living in the Hill Opera House (now the California Theatre) in Petaluma, California. Little did the folks who adopted her realize what a tremendous chain of events were being initiated with that little youngster. After serving through six years of silent pictures she was dismantled and sold to an owner who installed it in his home at Santa Barbara overlooking the Pacific Ocean. For reasons unknown, the organ ended ingloriously, strewn about in a Los Angeles warehouse. Her 50-cycle, three-stage blower — oh the trouble it was to cause!



Joe Chadbourne standing beside “Myrtle.” This was taken a few years back during one of his Spring concerts.



View inside the chambers.

This transpired about 1945 when Frank Bindt, a young friend of George Wright and Everett Nourse, was prevailed upon to buy an organ that "was for sale." Although Frank did not have a place to install it, could not play even a piano, he did have a deep love for the theatre organ and had spent many hours on many an early morning recording the music of the then emerging George Wright. Frank solved the housing problem by renting a vacant store on College Avenue in Oakland where he was working as an electronic engineer. The little organ was installed in a space about 15 by 25 ft. by two well-known Bay Area organ men, Hudson and Blanchard, the latter with a reputation as the best Tibia reamer on the west coast — a la screw driver! It was here that a fine Wurlitzer English Post Horn was added and when the organ was first played without benefit of shutter frames, the result was said to have been deafening. With complete lack of ceremony the organ was affectionately dubbed Myrtle. George Wright said it was absolutely the loudest organ he had ever played. The young lady merrily entertained the whole neighborhood and, through Frank, was introduced to many organists in the area. Firemen in the station-house next door still talk about those rendezvous with Myrtle.

Frank Divorces Myrtle

Having taken unto himself a genuine wife, it became necessary for Frank to decide between her and Myrtle. Obviously, since he was not a bigamist, Myrtle had to go.



View inside chambers showing the French Horn at extreme left with the English Horn next and followed by the Musette.

Now, Joe Chadbourne comes into the picture. He had been persuaded by well-meaning friends that a Wurlitzer installed in the big barn on his fruit ranch would be just what he needed to make life worthwhile. He was introduced to Myrtle, and a romance started. He carted her to his barn floor in home-made trailers and sedans. In the olden days, the elder Chadbourne had been host to barn dances in the old hay mow on the top story of the barn, and over the years the dancers had completely worn out two pine floors, the present floor being the third. The bandstand had to go to make room for Myrtle. The writer arrived on the scene at this point and helped construct an ample sound-proof organ chamber into which was set inwards and bulbs which made up Myrtle. Frank labored long and faithfully with the wiring and when the last blower button was pressed, a transformed Myrtle came to life again. Her voices, enhanced by the old barn with its high raftered ceiling and high burlap counter pane strung all the way around, were superb. But something smelled! What could it be? Myrtle's blower motor was rapidly reaching the melting point. The 50-cycle motor was trying to deliver about three times its rated horsepower. Quite easy to overcome, it was decided. Just remove one of the fan rotors and the increased speed would make up the difference. It didn't work and thus began the saga of the blower. As long as the weather remained below 60° all was well, but at higher temperatures the motor relay would kick

The barn
that is
"Myrtle's" home,
located
in the rear of
Joe's home.



THE TIBIA — Summer, 1957

out at the most embarrassing times. A new 60-cycle motor was finally installed, but for some unfathomable reason it got just as hot as the old one.

Myrtle Readied for Her First Concert

Plans were made for the first concert which resulted in Joe Chadbourne's barn being dubbed "The Carnegie Hall of Suisun Valley." But Myrtle often acted like a spoiled child. Like the time right after the new motor was installed. The night before the concert the weather turned hot and all during the concert it was necessary to apply cold, wet cloths to the overheated motor, the water turning to steam almost immediately. Somehow we struggled through the concert, with one hand on the overloads and the other dipping into a bucket of cold water and pouring it on the motor. The audience did not know the difference, presuming that Joe was sweating from the heat when actually he was wondering if the barn was on fire.

In 1951 a new Musette was installed. The small Tibia was replaced with a large scale Tibia (originally from a Model 235 Wurlitzer in Texas), but proved to be too much for both Myrtle and Joe. The motor would overload in a matter of minutes, even in cool weather. The result was a complete rebuild of the blower. Two new 60-cycle fans, stationary deflectors and a twelve-inch output stack from the Spencer Turbine Co. were installed. New and larger wiring was strung from the power poles; the blower was relocated in a new tiled floor room which was built in the woodshed at the back of the barn to protect it from the orchard dusts and sprays. After all was completed Joe nervously hit the blower button while an unconvinced and unbelieving Bob Jacobus (the writer's partner-in-grime) stood by ready to pull the master switch. Our troubles with Myrtle's lungs were over — she now had air to spare and no time was wasted in adding a 16-foot octave to the Tibia. Myrtle now not only had ample bass, she had seX with a capital X. During all these trials and tribulations, the annual concerts continued, organists coming from as far away as Los Angeles to play her. The crowds grew larger and larger, up to 350 sitting on planks

stretched across fruit boxes. Even in 100° F. they loved every minute of it.

Myrtle Overhauled

After the eighth annual concert it was decided that Myrtle was due for a major overhaul. She was almost completely torn down, and not without considerable consternation on Joe's part, he being fearful that it would never sound the same again. In the process, a small Smith chest that held the Musette and a Robert Morton chest that held the English Horn were removed. In their place was installed a rebuilt-three-rank Wurlitzer chest that came from the Isis Theater in Denver. In the extra chest was planted a newly-acquired French Horn. Reservoirs and tremolos were removed to a special room under the floor and the percussions were relocated above the chamber out in the open. A new Myrtle — quieter, cleaner sounding, and completely gorgeous — blossomed forth. Joe's fears proved to be unfounded.

Myrtle will undoubtedly continue to give pleasure for many more years to scores of organ enthusiasts who make the annual pilgrimage to the "Carnegie Hall of Suisun Valley." As long as there's a Joe Chadbourne, there will be a Myrtle. The two are inseparable and must be considered together simply because Myrtle is Joe's love — part of his very life!

By Her Build Shall Ye Know Her

Myrtle (Opus No. 909) shipped September 23, 1924, was originally equipped with an Open Diapason, an unleathered Tibia Clausa, a fine medium-scale Salicional, a sweetly voiced Concert Flute-Bourdon, a "Style D Trumpet," all on 10-in. pressure, and a Vox Humana on 6-in. pressure. The added sets, all on 10 inches, are the Wurlitzer English Horn, the new Musette which was copied tonally from the San Francisco Fox Wurlitzer set, and the French Horn which is voiced like a "closed horn." The percussions include the usual chrysglott, and the large Deagan Glockenspiel. Also there is a Deagan xylophone which is an octave lower in pitch than is usual. The complete specification follows:

PEDAL

Diaphone	16'
Tibia Clausa	16'
Bourdon	16'
English Horn	8'
Trumpet	8'
Open Diapason	8'
Tibia Clausa	8'
Flute	8'
Cello	8'
Bass Drum	
Kettle Drum	
Cymbals	
Crash Cymbal	

ACCOMPANIMENT

English Horn	8'
Trumpet	8'
Open Diapason	8'
Tibia Clausa	8'
French Horn	8'
Musette	8'
Flute	8'
Salicional	8'
Vox Humana	8'
Octave	4'
Piccolo (Tibia)	4'
Flute	4'
Salicet	4'
Clarion	4'

ACCOMPANIMENT (cont'd).

Piccolo (Tibia)	2'
Snare Drum	
Castanets	
Tambourine	
Chinese Block	
Tom Tom	
Accomp. Coupler	4'

SOLO

Trumpet tc	16'
Tibia Clausa	16'
Vox Humana	16'
English Horn	8'
Trumpet	8'
Open Diapason	8'
Tibia Clausa	8'
French Horn	8'
Musette	8'
Flute	8'
Salicional	8'
Vox Humana	8'
Octave	4'
Piccolo (Tibia)	4'
Flute	4'
Salicet	4'
Vox Humana	4'
Twelfth, (Tibia)	2 2/3'
Piccolo (Tibia)	2'
Tierce (Tibia)	1 3/5'

FRONT BOARD STOPS

Accompaniment

Chrysglott
Chimes (2nd Touch)

Solo

Xylophone
Glockenspiel
Chrysglott
Marimba
Solo Sub Coupler 16'
Solo Super Coupler 4'
Tremolos
Main
Tibia Clausa
Vox Humana
English Horn

Effects

Bird
Fire Gong
Steamboat Whistle
Triangle

Blower 5 HP, 2200-volt, 3-phase, rated at 700 cfm at 15"
One swell pedal, no crescendo
5 pistons under Accompaniment
5 pistons under Solo

RANKS

Open Diapason	16-4'
Tibia Clausa	16-2'
Concert Flute	16-4'
Salicional	8-4'
Trumpet	8'
English Horn	8'
French Horn	8'
Musette	8'
Vox Humana	8'

Pipes

85	10"
97	15"
85	10"
73	10"
61	10"
61	10"
61	10"
61	10"
61	6"

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