

The Theatre Organ in Canada

By Clealan Blakely

Canada! What goes on in the organ world across the border? Clealan Blakely will keep us informed. He went "organ crazy" back in the days when Jesse Crawford was reigning at the Paramount, Times Square. He was there, contracting organ fever, the symptoms from which he has not recovered — nor wants to. An electrician with the Public Utilities Commission, Picton, Ontario, Clealan plans to own a "Mighty Wurlitzer" and perhaps, one day, get back in the business of rebuilding, maintaining, and tuning pipe organs — his real love.

IT MAY SEEM STRANGE that I should attempt to contribute something regarding the theatre Organ in Canada via a detour into the United States. However, as I have just returned with my family from a short vacation in Virginia and several other northeastern states, it seems quite appropriate to mention some of the Organs I was fortunate enough to see and hear.

Our first day of driving on the scenic New York Thruway put us in the New York City area quite early in the evening. It was unthinkable to bypass the Organs here, so, after braving the maddening rush of Manhattan and locating a hotel, we headed for Radio City Music Hall. As expected, this great theatre certainly upheld the standards of excellence that have become traditional here. The Easter pageant was still on — what a tremendous spectacle! This is the first occasion on which I have seen the right console, although in this case it was used for the visual effect only; the left console was used throughout in a very effective accompaniment of the orchestra and chorus. The Organ background, particularly in the 32' and 16' registers proved a real asset, especially for this type of pageant. Leonidoff's production of "Spring Sailing" was beautifully done, utilizing to the fullest extent the splendid stage facilities of the Music Hall. However, for me the highlight of the show was Ray Bohr and the big Wurlitzer. He played for several minutes in his usual brisk tempo and buoyant style; needless to say, I thoroughly enjoyed it. My only criticism was the sudden cut-off at the end; he did not get sufficient time to make a proper bow and they failed to bring up the spotlight on him. A splendid performance of this nature is surely worth more recognition.

The following morning we visited the Paramount theatre just a few minutes before the morning show started. Fortunately Dan Papp was there and I was soon (for the second time) to realize one of my lifelong ambitions — to play, if only for a few thrilling moments, this greatest of all the Wurlitzers, the very Organ on which I had heard my idol, Jesse Crawford, play those mighty melodies twenty-eight years before. Thanks to Dan's loving care the Organ sounded as luscious as ever, and made me fervently wish I were an organist for at least a few minutes. Those tibias surely do something to my spine! It is hard to understand why such a magnificent Organ should not be in regular use in the theatre.

Next day we turned off the Pennsylvania Turnpike and found the opposite extreme from Manhattan, the tiny hamlet of Creamery, Pa. where we spent an enjoyable hour with Bill Moyer and his family. The 4m Barton console is still awaiting re-assembly, though he has a splendid hi-fi outfit and a fine collection of theatre Organ recordings. Bill appears to be an ardent Organ fan.

Our next stop was the captivating and historic Annapolis, Maryland. The Moller Organ in the Naval Academy Chapel was very effective in its ideal acoustical setting. The birdseye maple finish of the console is quite unusual, and most attractive. Arriving in Washington the same night, we attended the evening service at New York Avenue Presby-

terian Church and were surprised to find the same minister who had conducted the service at the Chapel that morning. After an interesting tour of Washington and Mount Vernon the following day we managed to find a door open in the Washington Cathedral, although it was apparently past normal visiting hours. A few lights were on, so we could get a little idea of the beauty of this stately Cathedral. I of course wandered away from the family to look for the Organ, and finding the console open, switched the blower on and began to play. Just as I was beginning to find my way around the console, the caretaker put in a sudden appearance and demanded a cessation of my efforts.

The trip through Virginia was most enjoyable; this is a beautiful state with many places of historic interest, and everywhere we found the people hospitable and friendly. The Jamestown Festival was outstanding, and Williamsburg! Here I made a strategic error by reserving rooms in this area, for I just couldn't manage to drag the family away until the last possible moment. This cut me down to just a couple of hours late in the afternoon in Richmond where I had hoped to see a lot of Organs. However, Harold Warner graciously came down and showed us the Mosque Wurlitzer; this is really a beauty. Thanks to the work he has done, this Organ is in mint condition; I couldn't find a single thing that didn't work. The tonal results of this Wurlitzer are amazing. It sounds more like 30 ranks than 17. Harold Warner put on a real Theatre Organ concert for us; he not only knows this Organ inside out, but he also knows how to get the most out of it. I

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The author, Mr. Blakely, at the console of Shea's, 3-15 Wurlitzer, Toronto, Canada.

Canada Organs

(from page 21)

was disappointed to miss the Byrd and Loew's Wurlitzers, but I wouldn't have missed this experience at the Mosque for anything.

On the way home we found an unusual "organ" in the Luray Caverns. A 3m blond drawknob console is set up in one of these caverns, but this is apparently a dummy, as the guide switches the power on and the music is played automatically from a tape. The tones are produced with electromagnetic hammers striking stalactites of varying sizes on the ceiling, giving an effect resembling chime tone, although in some respects the rapid decay makes it more like a xylophone. As the tone source is from such a wide area over the whole ceiling, the effect is quite uncanny.

Back in Canada, the principal item of interest is Toronto's famous 3-15 Shea's Wurlitzer. This is a Style 260, installed in 1922, and is possibly the best known theatre Organ in Canada. It has been frequently recorded and broadcast, and has been played by many well known organists such as Kathleen Stokes, Quentin Maclean, Al Bollington, and so on. When the City required the site to be cleared to make way for Toronto's new civic square, tenders were called for demolition, which has now been completed. The Wurlitzer was purchased from the Maple Leaf Gardens management, and was removed from the theatre by the Organ Dept. of the T. Eaton Co. The removal took place in the middle of the winter with heat turned off in the building, so with the wreckers breathing down their necks, these Organ men must have encountered slightly adverse conditions. The Organ is now stored at the Gardens awaiting re-installation in this famous sports palace. At the time of writing no start had been made on the installation, and I was told by the management that a start would not be made until a rather extensive escalator installation had been completed.

The Hillgreen-Lane at the Odeon-Carlton is silent again, and Mr. Bobby Jones, the former organist, is at present

in Buffalo, N.Y. Mr. Forsyth, the Odeon manager, states that the Organ will soon be in use again, and there is also a possibility of CBC broadcasts of the Organ from the theatre in the near future. The 3m Legge Unit Organ in the Jarvis Street studios of the CBC is used infrequently now.

In conclusion, I should like to ask all the readers of THE TIBIA who can assist me with historical data or information of any kind on Canadian theatre Organs to please write me. I am especially interested in data on the Canadian-built Warren theatre Organ. Can anyone help me with information from the West, or the Maritimes? Any available data will be greatly appreciated.

—THE EDITOR

Owning Your Own

(from page 15)

work for this application. The working voltage should be rated at 330 volts a.c. or higher.

In actual practice I found that you do not need the inductance as capacitance alone will supply enough push to start the motor, providing the motor is in good shape. I also found that running the motor on single phase a.c. does not detract from its output of air. We have loaded up a three-horsepower blower — which normally blows six ranks — with 12 ranks and full super and bass octave couplers playing full for hours without any loss of speed or excessive heating. All this with Wurlitzer pipes and 10-inch wind.

Below is a schedule of capacitors for the various horsepowers to avoid the need for another lengthy process of calculation:

Horsepower	Capacitor
up to 1	60 mf.
2	80 mf.
3	110 mf.
5	170 mf.

The above table is based upon 220-volt, 60-cycle current for use with a 220 volt, 3-phase, 60-cycle motor.

The capacitors must be rated at an a.c. working voltage of at least 330.

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