

from Australia . . .

Performing Arts Centre Will Have Australia's Premier Concert Organ

by Ian B. McLean

Baulkham Hills Performing Arts Centre in suburban Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, will have what could become the country's premier concert orchestral pipe organ. It will basically be the 3/10 British-built Christie originally installed in the Roxy Theatre, Parramatta, New South Wales, which is located just north of Sydney.

The impressive concept and design of the new Baulkham Hills Shire Council's Performing Arts Centre was the reason for owners of the Christie — John Whitehouse, John Andrews and Robert Gliddon, all of Sydney — offering it as a donation. Over the past 19 years, since the three men acquired the instrument, there had been many offers of new homes for it. However, none of the sites met their criteria. Other donations will complement the big gift organ over the four year life of the installation program.

A multifarious array of work will be required for the installation, ranging from meticulous circuit-board wiring to large scale wind trunking and support construction. This will provide those in the community not currently involved in Hills Centre with an opportunity to participate. All-out community effort has been the hallmark of the project. Donations of services, materials and cash have played a major part in making the Centre development a reality.

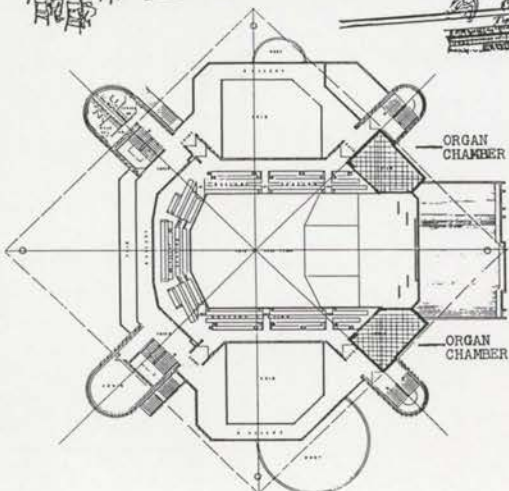
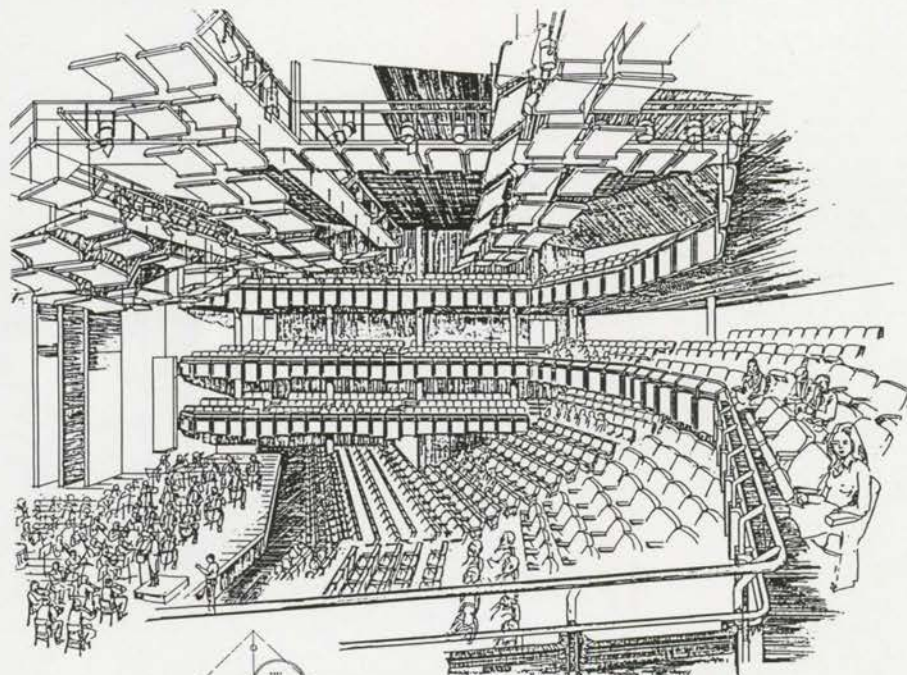
For community volunteers, erecting the organ calls for local plumbers, electricians, furniture restorers, painters, cabinet makers and, indeed, anyone with an interest and useful skills.

Strong community involvement will continue after the Centre is open — even the audience will experience a new involvement. With its unique concert hall concept and design, the ten million dollar facility will provide patrons with an unparalleled feeling of "being there." All 1,500 seats in the main concert hall have an unusually intimate contact with the stage. This is one of the benefits for the organ, organists and audiences of all performances.

The organ's opening in 1992 will be the grand unveiling that will show off the many contributions to the installation, making it one of the world's finest orchestral theatre pipe organs. It is destined to be Australia's largest, and upon completion, the 3/25 instrument will have a value of around \$500,000.



Sydney's second largest — Baulkham Hills Centre for the Performing Arts under construction. Scheduled to open in September 1988, will be Sydney's second largest concert hall. The Centre includes a number of rehearsal halls and other performance facilities.

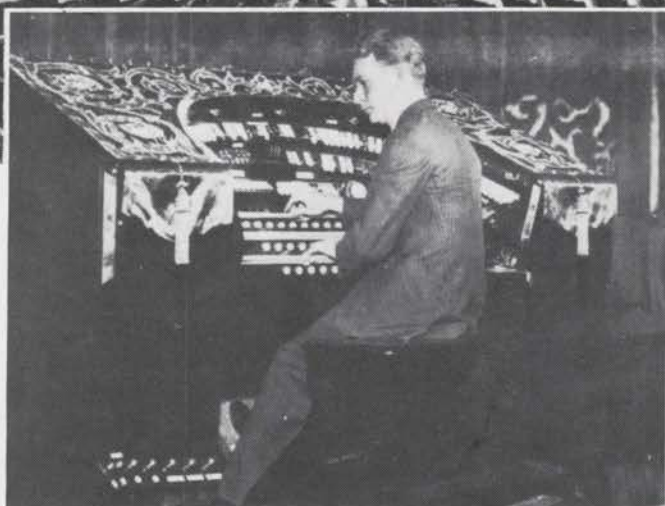


Perspective drawing shows the intimate audience-to-performer relativity in the 1500-seat concert hall. Many performing arts groups have shown interest in making this their headquarters and the name was changed to its present title some months ago.

Two floors of chamber space — Level three shows placement of organ chambers with shutter openings for the stage and auditorium areas. Shutter space is enormous, extending over two floors — levels 3 and 4 — in height and quite wide. It is expected the massive shutter areas and ideal chamber shapes will provide for an instrument of great clarity and dynamic range.



Refinished in white and on a lift, some years later, the Roxy Christie console is shown in concert position in the luxurious Spanish Renaissance-style theatre. For a suburban cinema, the Parramatta Roxy was unusually ornate.



Organist Eddie Horton plays the Christie organ in the Roxy Theatre at Parramatta. Photographed during 1930, shortly after he opened the organ, the console is shown in its black lacquer finish.

All photos and drawings through courtesy of Ian McLean.

History of the Christie

On February 6, 1930, the Roxy Theatre Christie was heard as the theatre opened in a blaze of light and sound to become the largest, most decorative and best appointed suburban cinema in Sydney. Modeled on the Alhambra Theatre in California's Capitol City of Sacramento, the Roxy's interior was done in a rich Spanish Renaissance theme. It seated 1,938 patrons and featured the largest Christie organ ever installed outside of Great Britain and Europe. Its console was gleaming ebony with three gleaming black and white manuals. The organ had the usual percussions and toy counter items. Of such importance was this installation, Christie sent one of their senior directors, Donald Beard, to supervise erection of the instrument.

Some of the many organists heard presiding at the console during its Roxy days were U.S. organist Eddie Horton, and Australians Horace Weber and Knight Barnett. The organ played in the theatre until 1958. At that time Stan Baldwin purchased the instrument and installed it in the very large basement of his Castle Hill home. It remained there until purchased by a consortium, part of which were the present owners; their ultimate ownership permitted them to make the donation to the new Centre.

Its installation calls for an Australian-designed and state-of-the-art electronic relay. The basis of this unit was developed by John Andrews, one of the owners of the Christie. In its 25-rank specification

as planned, the organ will enable any organist to provide the maximum entertainment for individual audiences; it will provide ranks that enhance the Christie's classical performance possibilities, and will be part of many orchestral ensemble and choir accompaniment performances. Consequently, some of the rarer new pipework will consist of beautiful, tonally softer ranks to complement the much more powerful, standard theatre sets.

Baulkham Hills Shire Council has appointed Gliddon, Andrews and Whitehouse as manager of the Hills Centre organ installation project. Who could better supervise such a creation than the ones who have donated the instrument and want it to be the best in the land!