

The Relay

"It's a Matter of Personal Preference"

TO THE EDITOR:

I was most interested by the comments upon English organs and players, made by your contributors, Jerry Critser and Edgar Gress. I wish I had met them while they were here; a most lively discussion could have ensued!

Their view obviously is that the "American style" of organ playing is the right one. It may be — but who's to say? Personally I abhor what some of us call "slush," slide, or portamento effect — luscious sound; whatever you like ("portman-teau effect," as one organist calls it)! — — — George Wright, I think, is wonderful; Gerald Shaw among the best; and outclassing them all for sheer technical ability is Stuart Barrie. Thus, I'd say, it is a matter of personal preference; in other words, what we have come to appreciate in our musical tastes. Not *all* English playing has been orchestral, though organs may be designed that way.

Again, I have very strong objections to a "divided" instrument. Since only by luck can balance be correct, what happens to the listener seated in front of one of the two chambers? He's lucky if he hears from the others! I've experienced this split-melody, and it can be horrifying. Invariably a solo stop is being completely drowned due to the hearer's location. I used to plumb for "under the stage," but with large audiences the sound is completely absorbed, and fails to fill the auditorium. For this reason I now prefer just such a location as was criticised in remarks on the Southampton Guildhall.

It is not a justification or nullification of an organ to state that the player can or cannot hear it. True, it is unfortunate if he cannot hear; perhaps one or two would not make such a dammed awful row, if they could! Nevertheless these organs bring pleasure to many thousands, when a good musician can be found to play them.

Finally, let me add that even the best organist has his enthusiasm blunted these days. Contributory causes are economy (resulting from the falling-off of cinema takings and heavy entertainments tax), and mass-production of broadcast music hour-after-hour daily until even the most patient of us want no more! Slowly the organist has come to be regarded as a luxury, and from this viewpoint he can do nothing to please the management. Is this not so in America? Are there no organists who play for "three meals a day" — not that I would defend such an attitude! But you must remember that in the past year 400 British cinemas have closed their doors for good.

May I, through your columns, extend an invitation to any organ enthusiasts to "stop by" if they visit Europe. I cannot tell them much in the technical line, but can always feed that hungry body, if not the hungry mind!

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"Matters of Individual Taste"

TO THE EDITOR:

It has been a great pleasure to receive and read succeeding issues of *THE TIBIA* and I feel it is time I should write to express my appreciation of this very worthy publication. I can assure you that it is read with keen interest by theatre organ enthusiasts over here.

Naturally, the references to British theatre organ activities have a special appeal to us, and I have noticed the names of

several friends of mine in the columns of your journal. For many of us, I am sure, the outstanding feature has been the wonderful article by Quentin Maclean, in which so many points have finally been cleared up after years of debate. We are all grateful to Mr. Maclean for giving so much information.

Nevertheless, there are one or two matters raised in the article entitled the "Anglicised Wurlitzer Myth" which I think call for some comment. First, I thought it was common knowledge that the units available from the Wurlitzer factory were all "catalogue lines" of standard pattern, and that variations from the several stock models were also frequently to be found. This does not, of course, detract from the fact that the special models referred to by Mr. Maclean (Kilburn, Watford, and Holloway) show quite radical departures from the usual run of things. But it is the case that in England there are several instances on record of minor variations from the standard pattern being made following requests to do so. For example, the Model F design was changed a good deal during the last few years before the war. Harold Ramsay was responsible for several Wurlitzers in which the Tuba Horn and Vox Humana were replaced by French Trumpet and Saxophone respectively. On the Granada circuit and elsewhere will be found small 8-unit Wurlitzers in which the Viol and Viol Celeste units are replaced by Gamba and Gamba Celeste. The 14-unit organ at the Gaumont, Manchester, has the same units as the older instrument at the Granada, Tooting, but the layout is entirely different. Mr. Maclean himself mentions in his article that Horace Finch specified a Tibia Plena for the Opera House, Blackpool.

Apart from these facts, it may be of interest to note that there are several instances in this country of subsequent alterations being made to Wurlitzers already installed. Thus, at the Gaumont, Manchester, there is a Tibia rank now wired to give a Tierce. At the Empress Ballroom, Blackpool, the 13-unit Wurlitzer has a set of five Great-to-Solo couplers, in Unison, Octave, Quint, superoctave, and Tierce pitches. The effects obtainable from these two organs are most unusual and, carefully handled, very pleasant.

I think the differences of opinion which appear to exist regarding what the theatre organ should sound like, that is, either imitative of orchestral sound or what is described as "lush," really only amount to matters of individual taste. Probably it is a good thing that these arguments continue to rage! Personally, I should have thought that the original conception of Hope-Jones of the Unit Orchestra was pretty conclusive! At any rate, we have generally thought in this country that the theatre organ was never intended to be an ensemble instrument (as is the classic straight organ) but as a collection of solo voices (with a fairly small degree of blending power in combination) played to a group of accompanimental effects. For this reason, all the chatter about the pros and cons of extension are largely irrelevant when considering the theatre organ. It is all a question of the type of music for which the instrument was designed to be the most suitable vehicle. The playing of Quentin Maclean, with a wealth of individual solo voices obtained from single ranks or in small combinations involving the adroit use of tremulants, has always been regarded as an object lesson in this style of performance. On the other hand, I have often wondered, when listening to records of Wurlitzers of 36 units, what a dreadful waste of resources, because that allegedly "lush" splurge of sound nearly always sounds pretty much the same throughout. I admit that it is in some ways an attractive sound; but it is one which begins to pall after a relatively short time. There is the "tibia chorus" sound; there is the "sharp reeds" sound; and not much else. Occasionally, an odd "ping" or two on the chimes. Surely one of the tests of a good theatre organist is the diversity of tone-colour

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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER

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Wurlitzer with piano. Members who so desired were allowed to tape the proceedings. Among those who played this organ were Fred Clapp, maintenance engineer at the Grand Lake Theatre, Dave Schutt of Oakland (a recent owner of a 3-manual Robert Morton), Dave Quinlan from the "615 Club" in Benicia, Bob Vaughn of San Francisco, Don Anderson, now appearing at the Orpheum Theatre, Larry Vanucci from "The Lost Week-End," and many others.

Special credit must be given to Fred Clapp and Dave Schutt for getting this organ in good condition for this event. Also, our thanks to Jack Lucy, manager of the Fox Grand Lake Theatre, for his wholehearted cooperation. We've had outstanding co-operation from Fox-West Coast Theatres, from Division Manager to Theatre Manager to stagehands. All have gone out of their way to be of assistance in these meetings.

We are now eagerly awaiting our January meeting to be held at the Fox El Capitan Theatre in San Francisco. We anticipate an opportunity to try our individual arrangements on this late model 235 Wurlitzer.

—W. "Tiny" James



Larry Vanucci at Console

THE RELAY

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and dramatic effect he can cull from limited resources, and with our smaller organs over here this came to be regarded as an important qualification for any organist aspiring to reach the top.

I could go rambling on, but I must resist the temptation to do so. May I close by wishing you every success in the future, both for the A.T.O.E. and for THE TIBIA. Keep up the good work!

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TO THE EDITOR:

As head of the Organ Department at Pacific Lutheran, and an enthusiastic owner of an 18-set home pipe-organ (and still growing), I was most interested when the owners of the Liberty Theatre in Seattle offered us the marvelous Hope-Jones organ. It is a long story, and perhaps might be of interest to your readers. Briefly, however, the highlights of the story are that about a dozen of my organ students and I removed the organ intact and complete from the theatre, which has since been torn down, and stored it at the college warehouse for a year. This was last year when I had to be in New York for a doctor of music degree. Now we are in the process of installing it in our field house on campus, which is an absolutely ideal situation, even better than the original theatre setup. We have almost completely restored it, including the re-leathering of literally thousands of pneumatics. We are going to restore the organ in mint condition, and even the 32 ft. diaphone is in place. We expect our campus to become a mecca for theatre organ enthusiasts, and perhaps the day will come when we do some fine high-fidelity recording on this historic instrument, which must have

been one of the last of the original Hope-Jones. All the experts tell me that this organ was the gem of them all, even though it only ran to about 27 sets, and as we get it playing, rank by rank, we are in the process of discovering how true this is.

(Mr. Fritts promises a complete story of this famous organ for THE TIBIA. Ed.)

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Anglicised Wurlitzers, Tremulants, and Hope-Jones

TO THE EDITOR:

Vol. 1, No. 4 of THE TIBIA reached me only a few days before I left Bombay for England and whilst the very provocative article "Exploring England — and its Organs" by J. J. Critser and G. Edgar Gress invited — in fact, demanded — a reply my imminent departure prevented me from producing one. Maybe this was all to the good as when I arrived in England a month later Vol. 2, No. 1 awaited me containing an article by no less an authority than Quentin Maclean which effectively disposes of the "Anglicised Wurlitzer" myth.

I also, was told by Harold Ramsay that the Trocadero Wurlitzer was known in the States as "Publix No. 1" but subsequent correspondence with the late Major Wright of Wurlitzer revealed a different story. Unfortunately, I cannot give chapter and verse at the moment as this information is somewhere in 22 packing cases en route to Nigeria (my next assignment) from Bombay. However, these will eventually reach me and I will write again on this point.

In 1937/8 Bernstein (now Granada) Theatres installed six non-stock Wurlitzers, all with the same specification, in Granadas at North Cheam, Surrey; Clapham Junction, London, S.W.; Greenford, Middlesex; Harrow, Middlesex; Welling, Kent, and Slough, Bucks. These have the following eight units: Diaphonic diapason,

Flute, Tibia clausa, Gamba, Gamba celeste, English horn, Tuba horn, and Saxophone. Compared with the eight units of the mellow Model F this is "brashness" with a vengeance.

Whilst acknowledging the kind remarks of Mr. Gress in his letter in Vol. 2, No. 1, I must join issue with him. His statement that I refuse "to approach the theatre organ as an entirely different medium from the straight organ, unbound by straight organ registrational traditions" is just not true as apart from the fact that both theatre and straight organs have pipes controlled from a console, I have always considered them as two completely different, although in some respects related, animals. I believe I am correct in assuming that Mr. Gress has only heard Quentin Maclean on gramophone records and in my opinion these records are not really representative of the Maclean so many of us knew in the theatre and through the medium of the famous series of Wednesday morning broadcasts. Both the Trocadero at Elephant and Castle, and the Granada at Tooting were within easy striking distance of my home before World War II so I can speak of personal experience at both theatres but of one thing I am quite certain — if Quentin Maclean's playing was nothing more than "clever and impersonal" he would not have had such a tremendous following at the Trocadero for nine years from 1930 to 1939.

Which brings us back to tremulants. Mr. Gress writes "without (tremulant) it is the tone of the straight organ, which has about as much utility in theatre playing as 'tremulanted' tone does in church." At best, this statement is a very broad generalisation: at worst, it is bad logic based on a false premise. Comparisons cannot be made between theatre and straight organs as their tonal designs are completely different and they serve completely different purposes. A theatre organ without tremulants is no more straight organ tone than a straight organ with tremulants is theatre organ tone. Let me make it clear that I do not object to tremulants but I do take exception to their use with "full-organ" combinations. As an experiment, put down all the stopkeys on a Wurlitzer Great from 16 to 1 3/5, add all the tremulants and hold a chord — what a shocking noise! Clarify the effect by removing those stops which create muddiness in the lower and shrillness in the higher registers together with those which, by virtue of their softness, add precisely nothing to the tonal effect, and then finally take off the tremulants. I contend that this gives a far more thrilling climax than a vast mass of "lush" tremulanted tone. I can only agree with Mr. Maclean that our American friends speak a somewhat different language. What a pity we cannot get together around the Paramount (New York) console!

In conclusion, I quote notes by two employees of Messrs. Wm. Hill & Son and Norman & Bear Ltd. which came from Mr. Herbert Norman, Director of that organisation, in response to an enquiry I made regarding Hope-Jones.

Quote No. 1. "Mr. Hope-Jones founded the old 'Electric Organ Company' which had a factory in Argyll Street, Birkenhead, as plainly shown on the labels attached to their organs. I am unaware that there were such serious labour troubles as indicated . . . The Union at first objected to female labour introduced by Mrs. Hope-Jones but this was eventually settled. I am under the impression that some of the men left the Union at the time.

"To the best of my belief the 'Electric Organ Company' came direct from Birkenhead to Norwich in about March, 1898.

"Messrs. Norman & Beard had already built organs under licence for Hope-Jones in common with other firms, and Mr. George Beard built a new factory for Hope-Jones by the side of their own Works. In the meantime Hope-Jones occupied temporary premises at Jewson's House, Colegate, and a large room for the girls at Elm Hill.

"Mr. Hope-Jones left Norman & Beard as stated in the advertisement and went direct to Ingram's at Hereford.

"The old Ingram had two sons who started up branches on their own. One at Hereford and one at Edinburgh. The main Ingram factory was at Battersea as stated and maybe they moved from Hereford to Battersea after the fire at Hereford, but they subsequently returned to Hereford, as near as I can remember, since I do know that W. Jones, the Secretary, went from there to Wurlitzer in Tonawanda, N. Y.

"Robert Lamb"

Quote No. 2. "I cannot confirm dates. It was generally accepted by my compatriots that Robert Hope-Jones was at one time organist at St. John's Church, Birkenhead and later rebuilt the organ and fitted his own electric action.

"I have no knowledge of the situation of the Birkenhead Works, but judging by the size of the staff which joined Norman & Beard at Norwich, it must have been a fair sized factory. I have never heard of the alleged dispute with the Organ Builders' Trade Society. I should think the article in THE TIBIA is probably an over-statement.

"The men who accompanied Hope-Jones to Norwich were not 'Union' men, and Norman & Beard's was not a Union Shop though there were no doubt a few members of the Union amongst the staff.

"I should think the word 'Battersea' should read 'Birkenhead.'

"In the early days of the Hope-Jones/Norman & Beard association, organ parts, soundboards, bellows, diaphone-tubes, and other items were made in Norman & Beard's factory at Norwich, while Hope-Jones provided electric action and consoles and completed the instruments. Later, a new large factory was built adjoining the existing Norman & Beard works, and the two staffs merged and worked amicably together in either Works as required. There was certainly no friction between the men and apprentices of the two staffs, and many lasting friendships developed. Any incompatibility that existed must have been in the Board Room (Hope-Jones was notably extravagant and irresponsible).

"An interesting point is that when the amalgamation ended, Hope-Jones' Works Manager and entire staff stayed with Norman & Beard at Norwich. It is true that Hope-Jones later joined Eustace Ingram but I cannot say how long the association lasted. Eventually Hope-Jones left England and joined an American firm, but again, I am unable to fix the date.

E. D. Sayer"

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Owning Your Own Organ

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cribed for the chests; replacing the leather on the bolster pneumatics; re-leathering the piston relay and cleaning and adjusting the contacts; cleaning the setter board contacts; cleaning and adjusting the stopkey contacts; cleaning, re-leveling and readjusting the keyboards and their contacts; cleaning and adjusting the swell and crescendo shoe contacts; cleaning and readjusting the pedalboard and its contacts; cleaning and polishing the outer casework; re-conditioning the wind regulator.

With all this done and the console put back together, feed it air from a vacuum cleaner and trace down any leaks, however small. Often an ill-fitting magnet armature

can make a hiss as annoying as it is hard to locate. Feed the piston system ten volts d. c. from a battery or rectifier, and test all the pistons to make sure that each stop sets on and off properly.

The pipes. These are best left packed up, out of harm's way, until they're needed. However, it may be desirable to give instructions for handling them at this point, so you'll have them when you need them.

Wood pipes are cleaned with a damp rag. Unscrew the caps and brush out the feed and windways.

Metal flue pipes should be washed in a detergent and water, using a long trough. Remove the tuning slides so