

Owning Your Own Organ

. . . G. Edgar Gress

This is the fourth of the series of articles designed to help those readers who are desirous of learning the fundamentals of organ construction in terms that can be readily understood and without previous technical experience or knowledge.

Part IV. Reconditioning Your Organ

CONTINUING with the reconditioning job, assuming that you now have completed the chests, reservoirs and blower, your next job is:

The percussions. Handle the various action boxes the same as any chest. Chime hammers will need replacing—these can be obtained from the manufacturer (usually Deagan). Chime tubes and Chrysoglott and Glockenspeil bars should be washed in a grease-cutting detergent and polished with a good metal polishing compound. Xylophone and Marimba bars and resonators, as also the resonators of the other percussions, should be brushed and cleaned with dry rags. Don't forget to check and scrape clean the reiterating contacts on the pneumatics of the Marimba, Xylophone, Sleigh Bells, Orchestra Bells, and the like.

If your organ has a Piano, this will be most likely a vacuum-operated unit very similar to a player piano. In place of the player mechanism, a magnet box containing special vacuum magnets is connected to the organ. The best course is to get the advice of a good piano serviceman as to what is necessary.

The traps. Again, the actual organ actions involved aren't much different from the innards of a chest, so give them the usual treatment. Missing Castanets, Triangles, Drums, and so on, may have to be replaced if the neighborhood kids were too enterprising. Often the drum heads will need renewing. Heads can be had from most good-sized music houses. After a good soaking in water to render them pliable and swell their size, lay them out on a table, lay the mounting ring on top and tuck the edges up and around the ring on the inside. The best tool to use is the handle of a teaspoon. The head should dry, tight and even all around, ready to be clamped on the drum. Clean out the bird whistle and give it a "drink" of glycerin from the corner drugstore, and a new rubber hose.

Miscellaneous parts. The tremulants and shutter motors, for example are handled like the chests insofar as their actions are concerned. The large pneumatics which work the shutters, as well as the small bumper pneumatics, may need releathering. The same goes for the Tremulant leather, which may prevent the tremulant from working properly if too stiff.

The relay — reconditioning and reassembly. Assuming that you have enough of an idea as to where the relay will eventually be placed, your best bet is to get it back in one piece as soon as you can. First of all, the key relays get the usual treatment the same as any chest. In addition, while the main pneumatics are out for releathering, clean all the contacts by scraping gently with a knife blade. Check for any broken-off contact wires. If there aren't many and enough spares have been provided on the blocks, you can wire up a spare instead of replacing the missing one, which saves you the job of taking out the entire block to get a new contact wire into position. Also, scrape each wiper plate clean at the business end.

Notice that one or more contacts on each block are

adjusted higher (closer to the plate) than the others, and are wired to the feed bus from the generator. The idea here is that these should engage the plate before the plate touches the other wires, in order to decrease the tendency of the feed contacts to burn out sooner than the others because of the heavier load they carry.

In readjusting the travel of the pneumatics and wipers, make sure not to leave so much play that the contact wires have to bend too far. Leave enough for positive action — say about 1/8" to 3/16" — and no more, with about another 1/4" before the wiper touches the contacts.

Turning now to the switchboards: their actions get the usual treatment as needed. Sand off the contact bars with fine sandpaper to remove any dirt or corrosion — a flagrant cause of dead notes. Finally, remount the switchboards on top of the relay.

Next, very carefully unpack the switches themselves one by one, check their contacts to make sure they're not bent and that they work freely, scrape the contacts clean, and remount them in position on the boards so that each contact lines up squarely in the center of its bus bar. Hook up the pull wires and the springs in back, and readjust the travel of each switch.

The console. This we've left until last because it's the most delicate job of all. All the experience you've had up to this point will come in very handy one place or the other. A console is a complicated affair to talk about, but it's easily broken down into its component parts: the outer shell, the stop bolsters, the primary boxes, the manuals, the pedals, the swell shoes and crescendo pedal, the wind regulator, and the piston relay and setter boards.

Again referring most especially to Wurlitzer practice: let's assume the console is still in one piece. Begin by removing the front panels, the two top panels, and the two back panels. Pull out the pedalboard and (being careful not to bend the contacts) unscrew the contact bar from underneath and the swell shoes from on top, and get the pedalboard out of the way.

Next, lift up on the front ends of the stop bolsters. If everything is loose as it should be, you'll find that the top one or two rows of stops (depending on the size of the console) will tilt up and back to about a 30 degree angle, complete with their lead tubing and primary boxes.

The manuals, plus the second-touch panel of stopkeys, pull forward as soon as you've disconnected the lead tubes running from the stops back and downward to their primary box. You'll find two matching junction blocks held together by thumbscrews. With the manuals pulled forward, they open up one by one like the leaves of a book.

Your own judgment will have to tell you just how much you'll have to do to get the console working reliably and quietly. The bare minimum treatment would include: removing the primary boxes and reconditioning as des-

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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.

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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

they won't rust. Pipes with leathered lips or wooden rollers will have to be kept out of the water — brushes and dry rags must suffice for them.

Reed pipes. These are the most delicate to handle. Use extreme care not to alter the precise curvature of the tongues. Begin by removing the boots and washing them. Withdraw the wedges with a chisel, using it as a prying tool against the side of the wedge and gradually working it out. Keep the wedges strictly in order! Now remove the tongues and shallots, keeping them also in order. The resonators and blocks can now be washed. Polish the tongues and shallots on a board covered with very fine crocus-cloth, to a mirror-like surface. Be especially careful

to do as little hard rubbing as possible on the tongues! When everything is dry, reassemble each pipe. Make sure the tongue is exactly lined up with the shallot, and that the shallot fits squarely and goes into the block as far as the setting-in mark and no farther. Be certain the wedge is good and tight. Finally, replace the tuning wire and the boot. From now on, resist the temptation to blow sample toots on the reeds. Moisture — from your breath — is the worst thing that can happen to a reed pipe.

In the next installment we'll consider the planning of your layout and get started on the actual installation.

(To be continued)

JUDD WALTON REPORTS

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Even though I had only nibbled at the food and sipped the wine, two puffs on the cigar did the trick, and I knew that we had to leave quickly, albeit greenly. After my humble apologies to the Gilberts, and after enjoying the most beautiful view of Paris we had in our entire visit there (from their balcony) Gilbert hurried us to our hotel and plane where we left for good old U.S.A.

My new-found friends are just as avid in their love for theatre organs as are any of us. Gilbert especially asked to be remembered to the many American Theatre Organ Enthusiasts. He is a real fan of George Wright's. He hopes some day to visit the U. S., and if so, it will be my pleasure to give him a royal welcome.

The visit to his home by Verle and myself was the real high-light of our visit to Paris, and I'll never forget it.

I should have mentioned that I played the extremely old organ in the Pantheon in Rome. This was a genuine thrill and a memorable incident of our trip.



Judd Walton and Gilbert LeRoy at the Gaumont Palace, Place Clichy, Paris

DISCOGRAPHY

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Waltzing cat (*Anderson*), Sleepy lagoon (*Coates*), Alice blue gown (*Tierney*), Stella by starlight (*Washington-Young*), Don't sit under the apple tree (*Brown-Stept-Tobias*), Alleghany moon (*Hoffman-Manning*), Under Paris skies (*Gaunon-Girard-Drejac*), Via condios (*Russel-Pepper-James*), My blue heaven (*Donaldson*), Orchids in the moonlight (*Youmans*).

Palmer, C. L. (Nom de plume)

Cameo (10"-78).

499. 4028. Ruby (*Hoffman*) My song of the Nile (*Bryan-Meyer*)

Melba (10"-78. British label).

Tivoli Theatre

500. 1000. Silent night (*Gruber*) (Vocal refrain). Other side orchestra.

501. 9285. Not for a day but forever (*Heinzman-Newman*), Am I blue? (*Akst*). Vocals.

Parmentier, C. A. J.

Kimball, Studio, Roxy Theatre, N. Y.

Dominion (British label 10"-78).

502. A264. Same as Grey Gull 4284N.

Domino (Canadian label 10"-78).

503. ? Same as above.

Metropole (British label 10"-78)

504. 1264. My old fashioned home () .
Other side John Hassel, organist.

Radiex (10"-78)

505. ? Same as Grey Gull 4284N.

Grey Gull (10"-78).

506. 4282N. Silent night (*Gruber*), Adeste fidelis (*Trad.*)

507. 4284N. Tip-toe through the tulips with me (*Dubin-Burke*). My old fashioned home () .

Picadilly (British label 10"-78).

508. 445. Same as Grey Gull 4284N.

509. 473. Same as Grey Gull 4282N.

Paye, Jean De (See DePaye, Jean)

Pearl, Hal

Wurlitzer, Aragon Ballroom, Chicago, Ill.

Replica (10"-33).

510. 33x502. HAL PEARL AT THE ARAGON PIPE ORGAN: Dizzy fingers (*Confrey*), Malaguena (*Albeniz*), Canadian capers (*Cohen-White-Chandler-Burnett*), Song of India (*Rimsky Korsakov*), Satan takes a holiday (*Clinton*), Espana cani (Sp. folk song), Polly (*Zamecnik*), Flapercette (*Greer-Murray*), Concerto in A minor (*Grieg*).

Peterson, Howard

Smith, Theatre, Geneva, Illinois.

Columbia (10"-78).

511. 587-D. Always (*Berlin*), Just a cottage small (*Hanley-DeSylva*), Too many parties and too many pals (*Henderson*), Oh, how I miss you tonight (*Davis-Burke-Fisher*).

Barton, W.L.S., Chicago, Illinois

Inspiration Sacred Recordings (10"-78).

512. S-3073. The old rugged cross (*Bernard*), Sometimes I feel like a motherless child (*Trad.*) Vocalist Pruth McFarlin, tenor.

Priest, John

Skinner, Skinner Studio, N. Y.

Brunswick (10"-78).

513. 3178. Tell me you love me. (*O'Hara-King*), Reaching for the moon (*Davis-Greer*).

514. 3179. Drifting and dreaming (*Gillespie et al*), After I say I'm sorry (*Donaldson-Lymon*).

"RASTUS" (The original colored organist). Apparently U.S. origin.

Panachord (British label 10"-78).

515. 25062. Old Black Joe and My old Kentucky home (*Foster*).