

WURLITZER'S STYLE 165X:

THE *Quintessence* OF THE SMALLER THEATRE ORGAN

by George Baker

Audiences attending theatre organ recitals today often include among their most enthusiastic listeners fans born long after the close of the theatre organ's golden age. This welcome infusion of young blood is a healthy sign, and one that augers well for future theatre organ appreciation and preservation.

Some younger fans reason that because most of today's surviving theatre pipe organs are supersize organs located in large movie palaces that these giants were the dominant types of organs in use during the halcyon years.

A reasonable deduction, but such was not the case. Centerpiece theatre organs, such as the New York Paramount and Shea's Buffalo Wurlitzers, the Atlanta Fox Moller, and the Ohio Theatre Robert-Morton, in Columbus, were the exception, not the rule.

For every dazzling Jesse Crawford Special, there were dozens of small organs busily entertaining audiences in the Bijous, Plazas, and other houses of fewer than a thousand seats.

The fact is that two out of every three theatre pipe organs in the great days were relatively small instruments, usually consisting of from four to six ranks, and played from two-manual consoles.

These smaller organs were the faithful workhorses of the nation's film exhibitors. Most were played steadily for twelve hours a day, seven days a week, in some cases by inadequately trained organists who lacked the skill and musical imagination to develop the full combination and registration potentials of their instruments. The smaller organs and their

organists were seldom, if ever, mentioned in theatre advertising. Under-maintenance of the organs was often the rule, rather than the exception.

Downtown, however, managers of the larger theatres, well aware that proper organ maintenance as well as keyboard talent helped sell tickets, lavished the kind of care on their instruments that was seldom extended to the 2/4 and 2/6 Cinderellas in the smaller houses.

When the nation's film theatres were wired for sound, many of the big organs survived for another decade by presenting organlogues and brief, clear-the-house opening and closing programs between showings of the feature film. At the same time, most of the smaller organs were abandoned immediately after the installation of sound equipment — left to the hazards of neglect, fire, flood, theft, and vandalism.

While some of the faithful workhorses can be found today in the snug havens of residences and private studios, most fell into disrepair or were junked not long after the advent of sound films.

Few people realized it at the time, but with benefit of 20/20 hindsight it is clear that the doom of the theatre pipe organ industry was triggered not by Al Jolson and the Warner Brothers but several years earlier by the successful development of electrical sound recording and development of dependable audio amplifiers and dynamic speakers. In the phonograph industry, Victor and Columbia began early in 1925 to phase out production of acoustic records, and a year later were rushing to keep up with an enthusiastic public demand for the new electrically recorded discs.



*Don Macdonald, President of Piedmont Theatre Organ Society,
at the console of the Earl Gilbert Wurlitzer Style 165X.*

Although the conspicuous signs of the theatre organ industry's decline would not surface until the late 1920s, most film exhibitors were quick to realize that electrically recorded sound was not only welcomed by audiences (unlike acoustic recordings played in theatres, which earlier audiences had jeered), but could result in substantial cost savings as the redundant organists and orchestra-pit musicians were dropped from the house payrolls.

In the early months of sound film production, few producers or exhibitors anticipated any need for recorded speech as part of the giant step in sound technology. In this respect, the industry's adumbration was slightly out of focus. Most moviemakers believed that there was simply no need to record dialogue, that the public preferred to let the camera tell the story with an occasional assist from subtitles. Sound films — so the prevailing wisdom of the day ran — would simply be silent films (no spoken dialogue) with an overlay of recorded background or mood music — the same type of music that organist and theatre orchestras had been supplying for years.

In film studios, musicians would continue to compose and arrange musical scores for pictures just as they had for silent films, but with an important cost savings for the studios — there would no longer be a need for the studio to print and distribute thousands of copies of cued musical scores to the nation's theatre organists and orchestra leaders. ("Cue: Organist or orchestra conductor — A subtitle 'They went thataway, Sheriff,' William Tell Overture, finale, fortissimo, until love scene, etc.")

Some of the most important leaders in the film industry greatly underestimated public demand for spoken dialogue. Speaking at the Harvard Business School symposium on the film industry organized by Joseph P. Kennedy (then a successful film producer and distributor), Marcus Loew, a major exhibitor (Loew's theatres) and producer (MGM), predicted accurately that sound films would make it possible for theatre owners to effect substantial cost savings by dropping their organists and musicians.

But Loew foresaw no demand from the public for talking actors. In his view, the future sounds coming from theatre screens would essentially be the same kind of accompaniment music that organs and orchestras had been playing in movie houses. The only change he envisaged was that accompaniment scores would be recorded by the film studios (either on discs or on film), rather than played by theatre musicians.

Other industry leaders speaking at the Harvard symposium with Loew included Adolph Zukor, Cecil B. deMille, and William Fox. All were of the same general opinion — recorded sound, as far as movies were concerned, was strictly for music, not for speech. Talking actors were not only not needed — they could (and in fact would, in some cases) prove to be an audible embarrassment. A few producers refused to concede that there was any need or demand for either recorded dialogue or music. In their view, the talkies were merely a passing fad.

Fad or not, by 1929 a wave of insecurity was sweeping the ranks of theatre employees. Organists, musicians, stage-

hands, and variety entertainers all averted their eyes from the big marquee banners reading "100% All Talking — See and HEAR!" Once the Western Electric crews rolled the big speakers into position behind the sparkling new perforated sound screens, the organs and their consoles were no longer assets in the eyes of theatre owners and their accountants. Overnight, they became unwanted liabilities. Many were given away or sold for token prices to schools, churches, temples, and professional musicians.

Notwithstanding the stampede to install sound equipment that was well under way in 1929, a few owners of smaller theatres continued to play silent films — with the usual piano or organ accompaniment — until well into the 1930s. Not until 1933 did the studios finally notify film exchanges and exhibitors that the optional silent prints would no longer be available. Exchanges reported that the conversion to sound was, practically speaking, complete. The few remaining holdouts shuttered quietly.

Ironically, the bleak outlook facing the theatre organ industry had arrived on the heels of some significant technical improvements, including advanced unification, that Wurlitzer had begun to offer to potential buyers of smaller organs. In



1928, the short (less than two years) but significant blooming period for Style 165 and 165X organs was at hand.

Just as Maurice Ravel's "La Valse" is generally regarded as the apotheosis of the Viennese waltz, so the Wurlitzer Style 165X theatre organ in the eyes of many theatre organ experts represents the ultimate in development of the smaller theatre organ.

Not familiar with the Wurlitzer 165X? You are not alone. Wurlitzer built only 19 Style 165 (single chamber) and 165X (two chambers) organs — less than one percent of its total output of more than 2,200 theatre organs over a 25-year period. The Style 165 and its related 165X arrived too late (1928) on the theatre organ scene to capture any significant share of the then declining theatre organ market.

What made the Style 165X a standout among smaller organs?

Neglect and vandalism have taken their toll on the console for Wurlitzer Opus 1939, which saw long service in the Dominion Theatre, Hounslow, England, before pipes were destroyed during air conditioning installation. Console is now in storage.

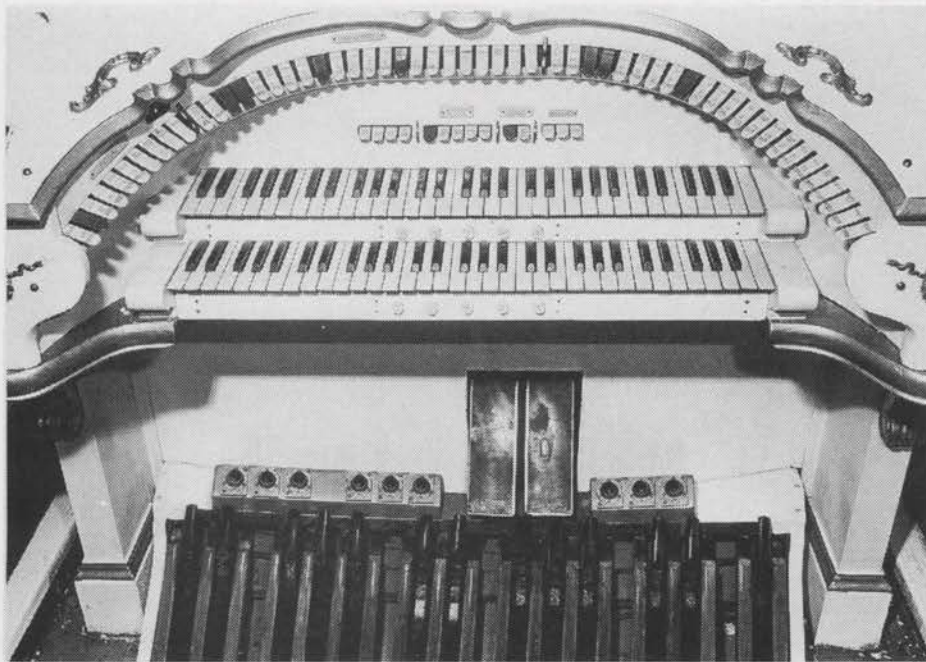
John Sharp photo

First, it was a musically well balanced package of essentials — Flute, Diapason, Salicional, Vox Humana, Tibia, and Trumpet. Second, unification on the Style 165 and 165X was advanced to a degree previously unknown in smaller organs. Both Tibia and Flute ranks were unified at 16, 8, 4, 2-2/3, and 2 feet, thus re-creating the conditions that made possible the famous Crawford tibia sound.

The 165 and 165X — like their predecessor Styles D and DX — had a Tierce — a 1-3/5 foot stop derived from the Flute rank, and sounding two octaves and a third interval above the key depressed, while a twelfth sounds one octave and a fifth interval above the key depressed, thus bringing extra brilliance to the ensemble sound by adding harmonics to the unison pitch stops.

The two-manual Style 165X console, with its 56 stop tabs and 10 combination pistons, was available either in mahogany or a deluxe ivory-and-gold ormolu finish for \$14,850 plus shipping. The ivory-and-gold finish was particularly popular in Britain, where consoles were conspicuously prominent during the organ programs that, by custom, were an important part of British cinema presentation.

The net result of Wurlitzer's perceptive blend of musical



and engineering skills in the Style 165X is a rich, melodic sound previously available only on selected larger organs. Small wonder that the Style 165X quickly became a favorite of audiences (the rich Crawford sound), organists (advanced unification cleared the way for improved performance), and theatre owners (big-organ sound at small-organ cost).

Doctor Donald Macdonald, president of the Piedmont Theatre Organ Society and a practicing physician in Union County, North Carolina, has had a long-running love affair with the Wurlitzer Style 165X that extends over nearly half a century — starting in 1942, when he was engaged as relief organist at the King's Theatre in his native Dundee, Scotland, to play for sing-alongs at Saturday morning children's shows and assist Tom McBride, the regular organist at the King's. Don was then a junior medical student with additional academic credentials in classical organ studies.

"I shall always remember the tingle of excitement over first contact with the Wurlitzer organ in the King's Theatre,"

Don recalls. "I do not believe that Jesse Crawford at the New York Paramount, or Reg Foort with his giant Moller at the Drury Lane, London, could have experienced a greater thrill than I did on my first rehearsal at the King's Theatre in Dundee.

"True, some of the pedal contacts were erratic, the reeds were out of tune, and the action a trifle sluggish, but the baroque red plush and gold auditorium of the King's resounded splendidly with that glorious tibia-vox combination, and I speedily uncovered the mysteries of glock, chimes, Chinese block, crash cymbal, snare drum, and second touch, discovered the beautiful tonal flexibility of extended ranks, and explored a fascinating array of effects on the toe studs."

With the musical stewardship of the Saturday morning children's shows established, Don was next engaged to serve as associate music director with Tom McBride for the wartime Garrison Theatre shows that played from time to time at the King's Theatre in Dundee in the course of touring England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Garrison Theatre shows were essentially prepackaged vaudeville bills, usually consisting of a line of chorus girls, comedians, acrobats, dancers, and other variety turns. But musicians were not included in the entourage. At a typical rehearsal of a Garrison Theatre production at the King's, the individual acts would hand their music to Don Macdonald, often adding oral cue instructions such as "When I twirl my cane twice, give me a four-bar intro, then straight into chorus, verse, chorus, repeating the bridge while I finish my patter, and we come in together on the last chorus."

Illusionists and conjurers were easy — "Over The Waves," or "Destiny," played softly and misterioso.

"Vocalists could be a problem, particularly if they did not understand that their failure to hear the organ on stage was because the organ chamber openings faced the audience, not the stage," Don remembers. "If a vocalist persisted in demanding that I play louder, I got my revenge by doing what was asked — playing at full organ, knowing that little if any of the vocal solo would be heard above the Tibias, Trumpets, and Diapasons of the Wurlitzer.

"The most fun was accompanying the dancing girls, even though they quickly gave me to understand that I did not set the tempo — they did, and I was merely to follow them. A hand twirl meant 'pick up the tempo,' and a hand held palm down meant 'slow it down.' Their bouncy fox-trot numbers gave me plenty of opportunity for snare drum, Chinese block, and xylophone, not forgetting the traditional cymbal crashes on the high kicks. They always got a great reception from the audience.

"Garrison Theatre rehearsals usually ended by 5:30 p.m., and there was just time for a cup of coffee and a sandwich before the house opened at 6:30. Meanwhile, I had to select music for the organ solo program that ran from 6:30 to 7. I generally played a musical comedy medley that ran for about 12 minutes, a novelty, such as 'Teddy Bears' Picnic,' one or two pops, a slow ballad, and sometimes a tango, using the Wurlitzer castanets.

"Just before curtain time, the stage manager would signal me by an inconspicuous yellow lamp on the console to finish

Close-up of console for Opus 1915, now in Peterborough Technical College, England. Signs of wear on expression pedals reflect frequent use by college and visiting organists.

John Sharp photo

what I was playing and prepare for the opening chorus.

"Intermission afforded no rest for the organist of a Garrison Theatre unit. The lowering of the curtain at the end of the first half was my cue to push the 'up' button and let the console rise to 'overture' level for a 15-minute intermission concert. I would play numbers like 'All The Nice Girls Love a Sailor,' and 'There's Something About a Soldier,' and the audience joined in the choruses with gusto. All too soon the yellow lamp would flash — my signal to end the number and take the lift back down to 'picture' level. If I lingered too long, the stage manager would override my lift control and bring me down ignominiously — a fate I suffered once or twice.

"The second half of the program typically included the usual comedy skits, ballads, illusionists, and comics. After the finale, in which the entire company appeared, the curtain fell, and after a moment's silence I played one verse of 'Abide With Me' in E flat — full organ, and no tremos. The entire house of fifteen hundred soldiers, sailors, and airmen and their dates was on its feet, singing.

"Then, after a brief pause, a snare drum roll (careful, don't hit the steamboat whistle by mistake) with shutters open, and 'God Save The King' in the key of F. It was a strong finish. Somehow, audiences seemed to draw a fresh measure of sustenance from the Garrison Theatre shows that would help carry them through another three war years.

"Throughout the war, Gaumont-British (owners of the King's Theatre) continued to contract with Wurlitzer for regular maintenance of the King's 165X, and we did not have a single cipher or other mechanical breakdown.

"The King's Wurlitzer was a little gem of an organ. In the usual pattern of Style 165X installations, it had Diapason, Salicional, and Flute in the Main (left) chamber, and Tibia, Vox, and Trumpet in the Solo (right) chamber. The console, resplendent in ivory and gold ormolu, was mounted on a lift at the left end of the orchestra pit. This little organ was an inspired android that acquitted itself nobly in those dark war years, when the duration and the outcome of the conflict were grim question marks."

The Rise & Fall of 165s

Wurlitzer shipped the first of its 19 Style 165 and 165X organs in May 1928 (to the Krystall Palast, Berlin), and the last in December 1929 (to the Freeport Theatre, Freeport, Illinois). But by late 1929, the party was over for the theatre organ industry, although the winding-down process would continue for several more years.

Theatre owners who in late 1929 had not yet converted to sound were in a stamped to make the change. Organists in large and small theatres alike faced frightful job insecurity at a time when unemployment in all professions was rising ominously. Dismissal notices by the hundreds were tucked into organists' pay envelopes. Organ chambers were padlocked, many for the last time. Thoughtful theatre managers draped Spanish shawls or felt dustcovers over their consoles, but most were left exposed to the ravages of dust, rodents, and vandals.

The Wurlitzer Style 165X, born with bright promise less

than two years earlier, faced the grim, *fin-de-siecle* decline along with the entire theatre pipe organ industry.

Had not sound films dealt a knockout punch to the theatre organ industry in the late 1920s, it is quite possible that the Style 165X organ — which was in brisk demand on Wurlitzer sales reports during 1928 and 1929 — would have surged ahead in sales to replace the long-run popularity of the Styles D and E as favorites among owners of smaller theatres.

Well over half of Wurlitzer's year-in, year-out sales of theatre pipe organs had been for instruments of fewer than ten ranks, with the six-rank Style D and the seven-rank Style E among the leading choices by owners of smaller theatres.

Wurlitzer's combined sales of three- and four-manual organs of fourteen or more ranks accounted for only about one-third of total units sold. The biggest demand from theatre owners was by far for the popular two-manual console with an organ of from four to six ranks. Over the years, these smaller organs were Wurlitzer's consistent breadwinners.

Wurlitzer's Style 165 organ — and the optional (for an additional 10 percent over list price) 165X — thus appeared to be the ideal product for owners of smaller theatres. Improvements in tibia and flute unification invited favorable



comparisons with the famous Crawford tibia sound. Owners of small houses noted that the organ's six ranks could be fitted comfortably into the often cramped areas behind the box seats of converted playhouses, or in the shallow chamber of shooting-gallery type movie houses serving the neighborhood trade. The Style 165 and 165X were indeed worthy successors to the popular Styles D and DX, which for years had been the leaders in sales to smaller theatres.

Advances in Wurlitzer tibia and flute unification were not confined to the 165 and 165X, but were reflected in other models as well, resulting in changes in Wurlitzer model designation. Style B became the Style 150; E became the 175; F became the 190, and so on.

As a Style 165X organ was designed for installation in two chambers — usually on opposite sides of the stage or screen — instead of the customary single chamber most often associated with organs designed for smaller theatres, a patron seated in the center area of a movie house equipped with a

The eye-catching ivory-and-gold ormolu console for Opus 1915, first installed in the Regent (later Gaumont) Theatre, Dudley, England, and now Britain's only playable Style 165X organ, located at Peterborough Technical College. Billboard-style music racks were frequently used in Wurlitzer's British installations.

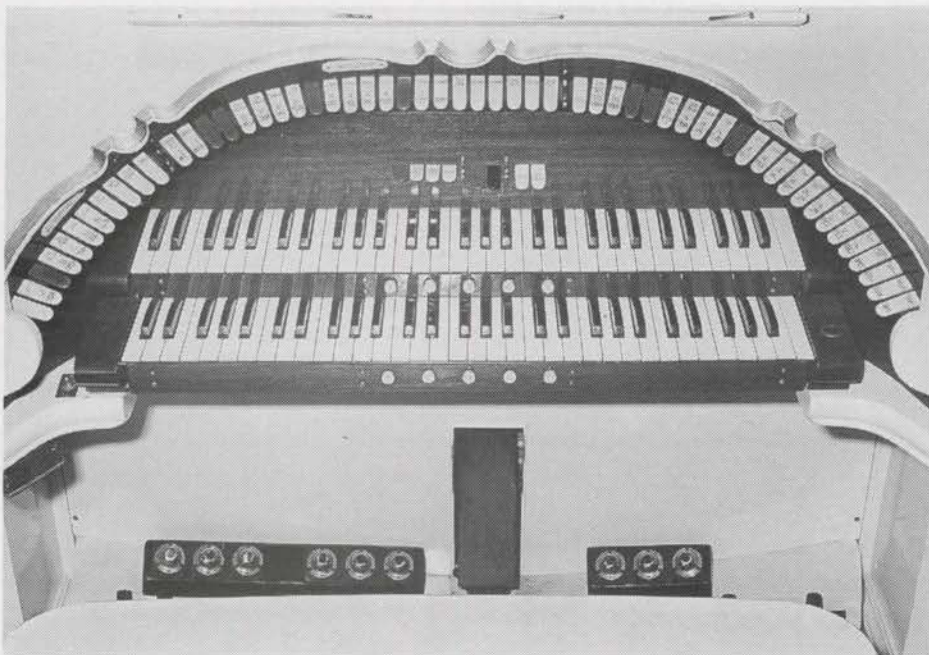
John Sharp photo

Style 165X could enjoy a true stereophonic organ effect — a treat previously enjoyed mostly — but not entirely — by audiences in the deluxe houses. The Style 165 was not the only small organ to be offered with an option for two-chamber installations. Several Style B organs (four ranks) were sold as divided instruments.

In a typical Style 165X installation, the Trumpet, Tibia, and Vox Humana ranks carried the melody in the Solo chamber, while Flutes, Salicional, and Diapason/Diaphone lent accompaniment in the opposite (Main) chamber. Bourdon was derived from the bass pipes of the Flute rank. If the organ was to be installed in a single chamber (Style 165), the Tibia rank was connected to a single tremulant. If the installation was intended for two chambers (165X), the Tibia was connected to the tremulant that also served the Trumpet rank.

Two or more chambers were standard for the big theatres, but prior to development of the Style 165X, the managers of smaller theatres had to make the best possible use of their close quarters, and placement of all organ pipes in a single chamber had been the general rule.

A few Style 165 and 165X organs were designated as Style 165 Special, or Style 165X Special — the “special”



indicating some alteration or addition ordered by the customer, such as Post Horn instead of Trumpet, special percussion or traps effects, or — at least in one case — a three-manual console instead of the usual two-manual keydesk.

A total of nineteen Style 165 and 165X Wurlitzer theatre organs were shipped from the factory at North Tonawanda, New York, between May 1928 and December 1929. Of these nineteen organs, ten were shipped to and installed in smaller theatres in the United States, while nine were exported — five to Germany and four to British venues. Of the five exported to Germany, two were subsequently re-exported to England, where one eventually was reduced to junk as a result of neglect and vandalism, while the other, fifty years later, made its way back to Germany for regular service in a Frankfurt cinema museum.

Where are they now, these nineteen small organs with the big-organ sound, that blossomed late and faded from public view when sound films arrived? Based on Judd Walton's list

of Wurlitzer factory shipments plus independent research by individual theatre organ owners, it is evident that Style 165 and 165X Wurlitzer theatre organs have achieved a somewhat stronger survival rate than have theatre organs as a whole. Ten are known to be playable today. The rest have vanished, in some cases without leaving a trace.

Of the ten surviving Style 165 and 165X organs, none exists exactly as first installed by Wurlitzer crews. The least altered and best preserved of these is probably Opus 1966, now in the Earl Gilbert residence in Getzville, New York. Piano (a Wurlitzer Organette player) has been added, and minor modifications made. The nine other surviving Style 165 and 165X organs all have been altered in varying degrees, some to a point where they now can only be defined as hybrid theatre organs. (See list page 15)

Earl Gilbert's 165X

Although the term “mint condition” is often wildly misused today, it can be applied with accuracy to the Wurlitzer Style 165X owned by Mrs. Stella Gilbert and which was played daily by her husband, Earl, prior to his death in May 1989.

The Gilbert organ's superior condition is a result of several factors that involve technical skill, knowledge of musical principles, good audio perception, and adherence to the tenets of the ATOS preservation clause.

The 2/6, opus 1966, was installed by Wurlitzer technicians during October and November 1928 in two chambers of the medium-size (1,500 seats) Gaiety Theatre in downtown Utica, New York. The good acoustics of the auditorium — a former legitimate playhouse — enhanced the rich sounds emanating from the chambers located behind the box seats that flanked the Gaiety proscenium. The pleasing tones of the Style 165X were welcomed by the theatre's owners as well as by the customers. But it was not to last.

In late 1928, sound films were fast displacing silent movies and theatre pipe organs. The Gaiety was sold and closed. Dust began gathering on the custom-made green velour dust cover that draped the Wurlitzer console.

After a short dormancy, the Gaiety came to life again with a new lessee — Fox Theatres Corp. — and a new name — the Utica Theatre. The still-new Wurlitzer, however had become redundant. The former vaude-film policy was dropped. Organists, the pit musicians, stagehands, and electricians were no longer needed.

“The entire show is on the LIFE-SIZE screen,” Fox trumpeted in Utica newspaper advertising, referring to the huge new screen that nearly filled the theatre's 38-foot wide proscenium opening, dwarfing the old 9 by 12 picture sheet.

But in 1930, movie attendance began a long downhill slide, and by late 1931 had reached critically low levels. The Fox organization, in financial difficulties, gave up its lease on the Utica Theatre.

After a short hiatus, a new lessee reopened the house with a film-plus-organ policy designed to attract customers by using the Wurlitzer to showcase the excellent acoustics of the theatre through sing-alongs and organ interludes presented between showings of the feature film.

Console for Opus 1920 as it appeared during its years at New Beach Holiday Camp, Sussex, England. As the single swell pedal indicates, the organ is a Style 165, designed for installation in a single chamber. Scroll design above stop rail is typical of 1928 Wurlitzer production.

John Sharp photo

John Roblin, of Pittsford, New York, recalls the excitement of the lively organ programs and sing-alongs presented at the Utica in his student days. "The Utica organ had an unusually fine tone, and even customers who knew nothing of music spoke enthusiastically of the Utica Wurlitzer's performance," he reminisces. "The combination of good pictures and the organ programs brought in the ticket-buyers. There was a special quality about the Utica Wurlitzer. By generating a rich overall tone quality in an acoustically lively house, it brought an extra dimension in entertainment that the other downtown theatres lacked."

But by degrees the Utica Wurlitzer fell silent. The console was pushed from its fixed position at the left end of the orchestra pit to the cramped area under the stage apron. Concealed from view by the up-ended pedalboard and its green dustcover in the gloom of the abandoned orchestra pit, the console escaped the scrutiny of vandals, organ dealers, and a procession of theatre managers. As time went by, fewer people knew of the organ's existence. Movie attendance in downtown Utica dwindled, and in the 1950s the house closed its doors for the last time.

But Earl Gilbert knew the organ was still in place, and he suspected — correctly, as it turned out — that the organ and its console probably were in good condition. When the building wrecker's barricades went up outside the Utica Theatre, Earl knew it was time to act. He quickly called on the property owners, and made his bid for the organ.

"They seemed surprised to hear that there was an organ in the theatre," Earl recalled. "But I knew the organ was there, and I made an offer that they accepted."

Removing a theatre organ is not only a difficult job that requires reserves of patience as well as skill, but the most important part of any removal is a careful note-taking and photographing preceding the removal. "Some people, on buying a theatre pipe organ, rush in and start grabbing pipes," Earl observed. "That's all wrong. First, consider that the Wurlitzer crews had good reasons for installing the ranks in the particular pattern that was selected. The important first step is to take photographs, and measure the chambers and the placement of the ranks before you start dismantling anything."

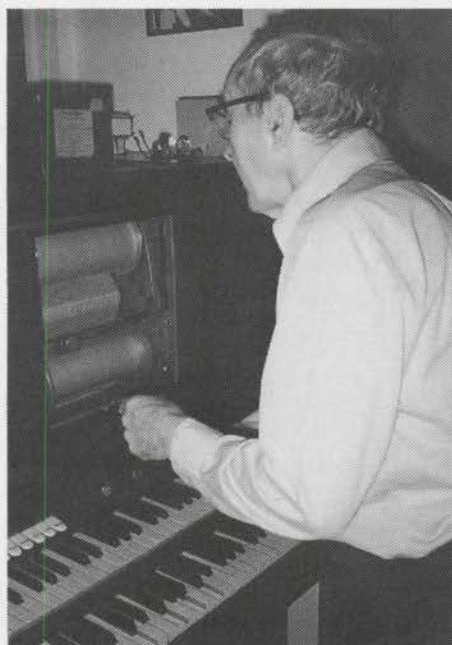
Earl Gilbert believed that the word "preservation" in the ATOS constitution and bylaws means just what it says. He took a dim view of theatre organ owners who try to "improve" their organs with added ranks, manuals, and wind pressure. Such alterations are not "preservation," he pointed out, but merely

genteel vandalism. And there is a matter of simple economics in favor of preservation: The market value of a hybrid is never equal to the market value of an unaltered original.

Pointing out that the Wurlitzer installation specialists in the 1920s knew what they were doing and did not operate on a hit-or-miss basis, Earl insisted that an unrestored Wurlitzer theatre organ is a jewel that needs no "improvement."

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Earl Gilbert adjusts tempo for a Sousa march played on a Wurlitzer 'O' roll.

Proof of the value of this strategy lies in the vibrant, exciting tones of the Utica Wurlitzer, now installed in a specially designed studio at the Gilbert residence in Getzville, New York. Following a brief storage period after its removal from Utica, opus 1966 was installed in 1961 with its original 1928 mahogany console gleaming and unscarred.

The console is centered in a 20' x 12' studio with an 8' ceiling. Chambers, each 12' x 7' x 9' high, are located at opposite ends of the long dimension of the studio. The chamber walls are lined with rock-hard plaster, which (next to concrete, as recommended by Robert Hope-Jones) produces masterful sound reverberation.

The goal of nearly every theatre-organ owner is to achieve "the real theatre organ sound." Some theatre organs in

residences have it; many do not. Earl Gilbert's installation unquestionably has "the real theatre organ sound." "How was it achieved?" Earl explains:

"This organ is a complete and unaltered Wurlitzer organ, direct from the theatre. It is not a 'home installation,' since it is installed in a special building designed just for the organ.

"The back walls of each chamber are covered with the hardest board available. Reverberation starts from these outside walls, which are 34 feet apart — from the outside wall of the Solo chamber to the outside wall of the Accompaniment chamber. The sound hits the solid wall of the closed shutters, and is bounced back to the rear wall about 7 feet back to the real wall of the chamber.

"This is happening in both chambers simultaneously, so the listener hears two dimensions of natural reverberation. Some sound leaks through the shutters to cross the studio and strike the other set of shutters — a distance of 26 feet from the opposite outside wall.

"These additional dimensions now make a total of four dimensions. When the organ is being played, the sound is also reverberating across the studio from one set of shutters to the set on the opposite side of the studio, and thus a fifth dimension of natural reverberation is blended with the other four dimensions.

"In this way, the natural reverberation sound that would be heard in a theatre of the size the organ was designed for is re-created — and the result is 'the real theatre organ sound.'

"I should say the 'real small theatre sound,' because if you listen attentively here or in a small theatre, you will note the absence of overhead reverberation that is present in a large theatre.

"A moderate level of continuous, natural reverberation, flowing in an acoustical environment of planned, overlapping dimensions, is what produces the 'real theatre organ sound' here.

"People sometimes say to me, 'What makes your tibias sound so good?' But there is nothing unusual about my tibias. They are standard Wurlitzer tibias. They were properly voiced, to begin with, and they have not been fiddled with, or 'improved,' as some put it, by people who really don't know what they're doing. The secret — if any — in the good tibia sound here is that the tibia rank is in its own separate chamber, and is permitted to maintain and express its unique personality without having to compete unduly with the Diapason, Flute, and Salicional ranks, as is the case in some installations.

Others have a somewhat different interpretation of the ATOS preservation clause.



Main and Solo Chambers are at opposite ends of the Earl Gilbert studio. Percussions and traps speak from the chamber at rear of Organette (a Wurlitzer roll player designed in the 1920s for theatres seating fewer than 300).

Dave Junchen's Restoration Philosophy

David Junchen, organ rebuilder and author of the *Encyclopedia of The American Theatre Organ*, has mixed feelings about the desirability of trying to recapture the theatre organ sounds of the 1920s.

"The danger of trying to recapture the past is that it can never be done," he states. "In many cases, organs were installed hastily or even incorrectly in order to meet deadlines, and their performance was far from optimum. If an organ did not sound its best following installation, it is pointless to talk about returning it to its 'former glory.'

"Our goal should be to voice and regulate an organ to bring out the best performance — not to try to return to something that never was.

"Keep in mind that the sale and installation of theatre pipe organs was a very competitive business. Theatre owners bought organs from manufacturers who could deliver and install a product at a competitive price and by a date that would match the scheduled opening of the theatre.

"No organ manufacturer ever admitted to cutting corners in the manufacture or installation of the product, but when the heat was on, they did what was necessary to get a contract or to meet a theatre's opening date. This could account for less-than-perfect voicing of pipes, hasty or poorly planned installation in chambers, and inadequate regulation.

"In short, many theatre organs installed in the so-called golden days were performing at far less than optimum. Just as we tend to view the past through rose-colored glasses, we tend to recall certain organs as sounding quite splendid, when the truth is that they often sounded only middling to downright poor in performance.

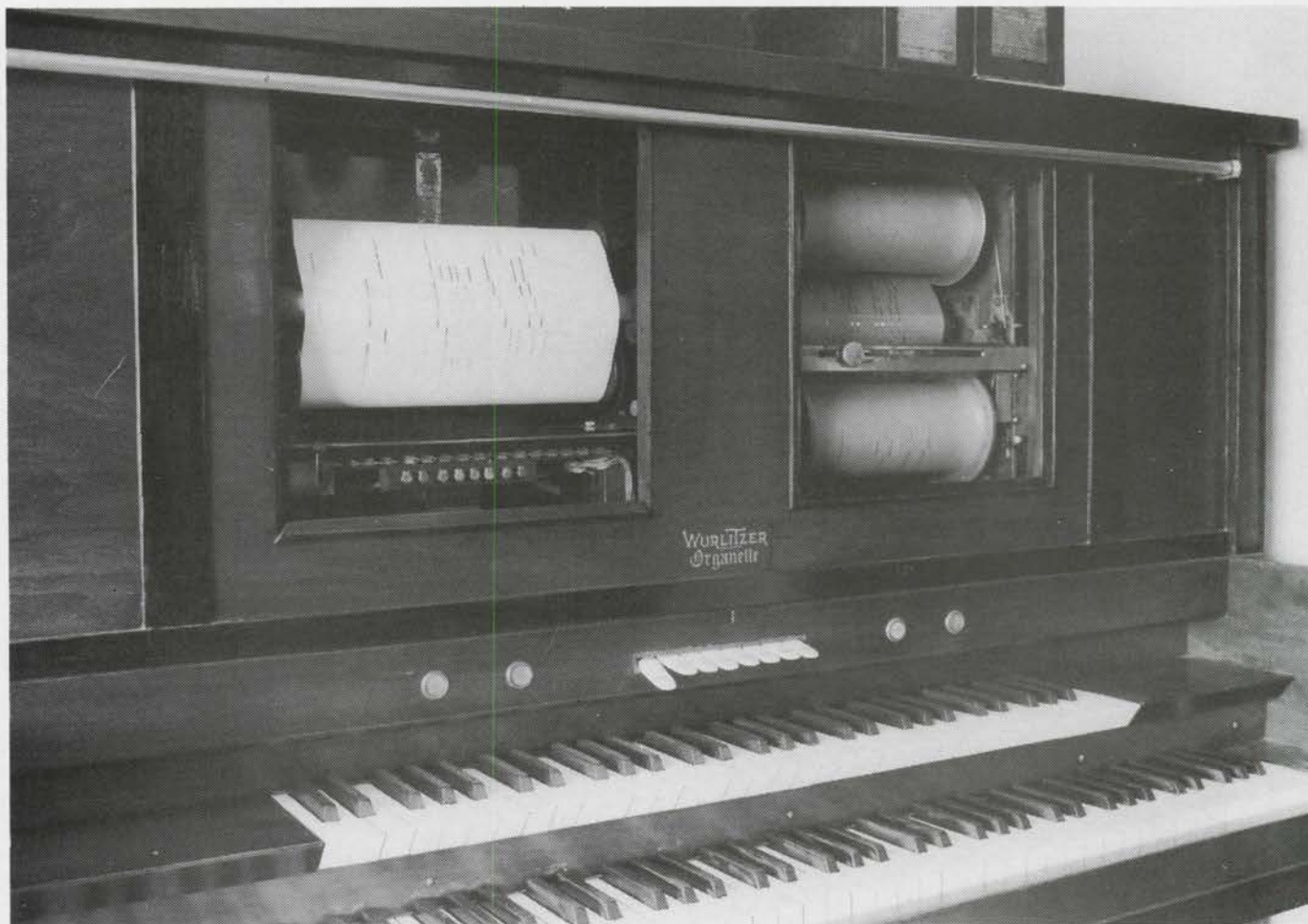
"To be blunt, the word for the performance of many theatre organs in the so-called golden days was 'ho-hum.' The exciting musical sounds that should have been there just were not there in too many cases. And when you add the factor of careless or downright poor musicianship that unfortunately was often the case with some organists, the result was

often a sorry and disappointing performance.

"There were exceptions of course. At the New York Paramount, for example, Jesse Crawford and Dan Papp — the house organ maintenance specialist — worked continuously to achieve and maintain optimum performance. Unfortunately, some theatre owners spent little or nothing on organ maintenance, and the inevitable result was poor performance and a ho-hum response from the audiences.

"You wouldn't buy a new car, and then refuse to have it serviced and checked over from time to time. Yet, this is what some theatre organ owners did, and are still doing.

"Most theatre organs that are still in their original venues sound much better today than they ever did in the so-called golden days. This is because most organs today are in better repair, are better maintained, and are more skillfully played than was the case in the 1920s and early 1930s. Today, the level of musicianship is far superior to the average theatre organ performance of those days.



Originally, Earl Gilbert's Organette player accommodated Wurlitzer 'O' rolls in identical spool boxes (left and right), thus permitting the operator to switch quickly from "hurry" music on one roll to "romantic" music on the other. The left spool box was replaced with a standard player spool box that accommodates conventional piano rolls. Tubing from both tracker bars has been T'd to connect Organette piano with Wurlitzer 165X pipes, permitting melodies generated by either 'O' rolls or conventional player rolls to take on new dimensions expressed by Tibia, Vox, and Flute.

"Good restoration should also mean developing an organ's personality to its full potential."

"Knowledgeable theatre organ audiences today expect what I call an 'enhanced sound,'" Dave continues. "By 'enhanced sound,' I don't mean converting the exciting theatre organ sound into a harsh or strident sound — which, unfortunately, is what some restoration crews have done.

"By 'enhanced sound,' I mean regulating and voicing the organ to perform at its optimum, which often means bringing out subtleties of expression that may have been dormant in the organ for fifty years or more.

"When I hear someone say, 'This organ sounds just like it did when it was first installed,' I sometimes want to reply, 'As bad as that, is it?'

"A good restoration should not mean simply adjusting the organ components to the level of operating efficiency — or inefficiency — that existed in 1928 or 1929.

"Good restoration should also mean developing an organ's personality to its full potential — often a potential that after the dormancy of many years can now be brought up to maximum capability," Dave says in summing up his restoration approach.

Within the community of theatre organ owners today there is room for a wide latitude of philosophies and attitudes toward the remaining theatre organs that have survived into the 1980s. ATOS and most of its member chapters subscribe — on paper, at least — to the principle of preservation of the remaining instruments.

But does "preservation" mean simply maintaining the level of operating efficiency — or inefficiency, as Dave Junchen puts it — that prevailed in the 1920s?

Or, does "preservation" by inference also include skilled voicing, tuning, and placement of components to bring out

the full potential of the organ — in many cases, a potential not previously realized?

Meanwhile, fire, flood, and vandalism — as well as planned destruction, such as the dismantling of organs for parts and the assembling of grotesque consolidations that frequently are merely morasses of musical contradictions and redundancies — continue to take their toll. With each passing year, the total number of playable theatre pipe organs continues to decline.

Only ten of the nineteen Style 165 and 165X theatre organs built by Wurlitzer in 1928 and 1929 are playable today. While the survival rate for Style 165 and 165X organs is better than for most styles and models of Wurlitzer organs, it is a thoughtful and sobering reminder of the growing need for a constructive allegiance and adherence to the ATOS preservation clause. Otherwise, we shall one day have nothing left to preserve.



Rock-hard wall surfaces in the Earl Gilbert chambers help generate "the real theatre sound." Angle of the open louvres indicate prescribed path for the Wurlitzer's rich Tibia-Vox combination.

The nineteen Style 165 and 165X Wurlitzer theatre organs, with Opus numbers, factory shipping dates and disposition:

OPUS 1875. 165.

May 24, 1928, to Krystall Palast, Berlin, Germany. Disposition unknown.

OPUS 1978. 165X.

May 15, 1928, to Del Paso Theatre, Sacramento, California. Junked.

OPUS 1900. 165.

June 28, 1928, to Amazon Theatre, San Francisco, California. In 1959, to George Thompson residence, Salinas, California. Two ranks added; some modifications.

OPUS 1915. 165X.

July 26, 1928, to Regent (renamed Gaumont) Theatre, Dudley, England. Moved to Peterborough Technical College. The sole remaining playable Style 165X in Britain.

OPUS 1920. 165.

July 30, 1928, to Union Theatre, Munich, Germany. In 1932 moved to Lido Theatre, Hove, England. In 1961 moved to New Beach Holiday Camp, Earning-on-Sea, Sussex. In 1973, to Hampshire Theatre Organ Trust. Later, to Edinburgh Organ Club. In 1984, moved to Frankfurt, West Germany, film museum.

OPUS 1937. 165X.

August 21, 1928, to King's (renamed Gaumont) Theatre, Dundee, Scotland. Unknown date, sold for parts.

OPUS 1939. 165X.

August 24, 1928, to Alhambra Theatre, Berlin, Germany. In 1930 moved to Dominion Theatre, Hounslow, England. Pipes destroyed during air-conditioning installation. Console to storage, State Theatre, Grays, Essex, England.

OPUS 1941. 165X.

August 25, 1928, to Rink Theatre, Sydenham, London, England. Destroyed during World War II.

OPUS 1943. 165.

August 28, 1928, to El Campanile Theatre, Antioch, California. In 1957 moved to restaurant. Later moved to a California residence.

OPUS 1944. 165 Special.

August 29, 1928, to Europa Theatre, Dusseldorf, Germany. Disposition unknown.

OPUS 1966. 165X.

October 11, 1928, to Gaiety (renamed Utica) Theatre, Utica, New York. In 1969, installed in Earl Gilbert residence, Getzville, New York.

OPUS 1971. 165 Special.

October 13, 1928, to El Camino Theatre, San Rafael, California. Unknown date, moved to residence. Added ranks; other modifications.

OPUS 1982. 165X.

October 30, 1928, to Muir Theatre, Mill Valley, California. In 1966, to Friends Church, Bell, California. Added ranks; other modifications.

OPUS 1991. 165 Special.

November 12, 1928, to Roxian Theatre, McKeeks Rocks, Pennsylvania. In 1936 console destroyed by flood; organ, with replacement Marr & Colton console, moved to Robert Yates residence, Glenshaw, Pennsylvania.

OPUS 2015. 165X.

January 10, 1929, to Kamera Theatre, Berlin, Germany. Disposition unknown.

OPUS 2025. 165.

February 15, 1929, to Jean Goldkette, orchestra leader, Chicago, Illinois. Moved to WGN radio studio. Added ranks; replacement console.

OPUS 2926. 165 Special.

February 21, 1929, to Coleman Theatre, Miami, Oklahoma. Shipped with three-manual console.

OPUS 2068. 165 Special.

September 16, 1929, to Regent (renamed Gaumont) Theatre, Ipswich, England. In 1961 moved to David Hayes residence, where parts merged with another organ. Console to Kay Gilbert residence, Yoevil, Somerset, England.

OPUS 2090. 165.

December 31, 1929, to Freeport Theatre, Freeport, Illinois. Unknown: date, moved. Disposition unknown.

Specifications: WURLITZER 165X

PEDAL

Bass (Diaphone)	16
Bourdon	16
Trumpet	8
Open Diapason	8
Tibia Clausa	8
Cello	8
Flute	8

On first or second touch via selector switch: Bass Drum, Kettle Drum, Cymbal, Crash Cymbal

ACCOMPANIMENT

Contra Viol (Tenor C)	16
Bourdon	16
Vox Humana (Tenor C)	16
Trumpet	8
Open Diapason	8
Tibia Clausa	8
Salicional	8
Flute	8
Vox Humana	8
Octave Diapason	4
Piccolo (Tibia)	4
Salicet	4
Flute	4
Vox Humana	4
Piccolo (Flute)	2
Chrysoglott	
Snare Drum	
Tambourine	
Castanets	
Chinese Block	
Tom-Tom	
Sleigh Bells	

*On second touch: Trumpet, 8; Tibia Clausa, 8; Cathedral Chimes, Triangle.
Five adjustable combination pistons*

SOLO

Bass (Diaphone)	16
Tibia Clausa (Tenor C)	16
Bourdon	16
Vox Humana (Tenor C)	16
Trumpet	8
Open Diapason	8
Tibia Clausa	8
Salicional	8
Flute	8
Vox Humana	8
Octave Diapason	4
Piccolo (Tibia)	4
Salicet	4
Flute	4
Twelfth Tibia	2 ² / ₃
Twelfth Flute	2 ² / ₃
Piccolo (Tibia)	2
Piccolo (Flute)	2
Tierce (Flute)	1-3/5
Cathedral Chimes	
Xylophone	
Glockenspiel	
Chrysoglott	

*On second touch: Trumpet (Tenor C), 16; Tibia Clausa, 8.
Five adjustable combination pistons.*

TOE STUDS

Horse Hooves, Surf, Bird, Triangle, Horn, Gong (Single), Gong (reiterate), Whistle, Siren.

PUSH BUTTONS

Doorbell on right cheek. Signal to projectionist or stage manager on left cheek.



Harold Flatman and Style 165 Special console are dwarfed by light boxes at the Regent (later Gaumont) Theatre, Ipswich, England. Audiences soon wearied of watching colored lamps behind translucent glass change color with expression variations in the music, and the light boxes were scrapped. Organ was later sold for parts. Console went to storage in Somerset.

John Sharp photo



Len Rawle at the gleaming white console for Opus 1920 when it was in service at a Sussex, England, holiday camp. The Style 165 organ now supplies accompaniment for silent films in a Frankfurt, West Germany Cinema museum.

John Sharp photo



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