

# The Phipps Center For The Performing Arts:

## A Story of A Community's Dedication to The Arts

by Stephen L. Adams  
Photos by Robert Berglund

Wisconsin historical journals are filled with accounts of pioneering lumbermen and the tremendous industry they developed. Before 1900, ten million acres of Wisconsin were covered with a thick blanket of 400-year-old white pines. Numerous sizeable rivers which wound their way to Lake Michigan on the east and the St. Croix River on the west created boomtowns where milling and shipping took place.

Great wealth was accumulated by men who happened to be in the right place, owned the right land and possessed adventurous business minds. Midwestern cities, responding to the Industrial Revolution, called for seemingly

endless quantities of lumber, and the roots of the American growth-oriented economy can be traced to this era.

By the early 1900s most of Wisconsin was completely cleared of white pine, and the environmental devastation that resulted would take generations to heal. Responding to this horror, the Federal Government passed legislation controlling forestation practices, but by this time massive wealth had been accumulated by dozens of Wisconsin families.

Although it is said that hindsight is 20/20 vision, many a Wisconsin lumberman had realized, before 1900, that the reckless harvesting of white pine could, and probably would, turn their communi-

ties into ghost towns. As leaders of these communities, and in ways that far surpassed elected officials, many families dedicated their lives to staving off economic disaster.

One such town, Hudson, is a picturesque community that traces its roots to the 1840s when fur traders settled along the St. Croix River, but it wasn't until the arrival of the railroad and the beginning of the lumber industry that Hudson began to flourish.

In 1873, the Wisconsin State Treasurer's Office sent one of their most valued employees to Hudson to work with the West Wisconsin Railroad in securing land rights. William H. Phipps proved his



*"Phipps remembered Hudson . . . Now Hudson remembers Phipps."*

worth, and at the conclusion of the project was offered a permanent position with the railroad at a salary of \$5000 per year, an exceptional wage for those days. William accepted the job, but not before he returned to Madison to marry Francis Van Bergen that same year.

On November 25, 1878, Stephen C. Phipps was born to Francis and William in Hudson. By this time, William had become well known in the lumber industry for his expertise and was called upon by the Weyerhaeuser family to help establish their company. This began a life-long family association between Seattle, Washington, and Hudson, Wisconsin.

Stephen married Helen Clark in 1913; he served in the military during WWI and subsequently became a director of several companies and a bank. Some time after Helen's death in 1965, he married Francis Coit Loranger. Francis passed away in 1976, and Stephen in 1977 at the age of 99.

In January 1946, Stephen established the Wm. H. Phipps Foundation for the purpose of funding the Hudson Memorial Hospital. When that project was completed, he turned the direction of the Foundation to the arts and education. A community with a strong lineage of arts and entertainment, Hudson lacked an adequate central location where various organizations might meet and display their work. The Phipps Foundation, seeking a suitable memorial for Stephen, began to plan a facility that would bring the economies and energies of the arts under one roof.

Thus it was that the Phipps Center for The Arts was opened to the public on March 11, 1983. Using a structurally sound Elks Lodge as the cornerstone of the building, a three-million dollar, high-tech, regional arts center was constructed along the banks of the St. Croix River. However, unlike many new arts centers, the Phipps Center was designed with chambers for a theatre pipe organ.

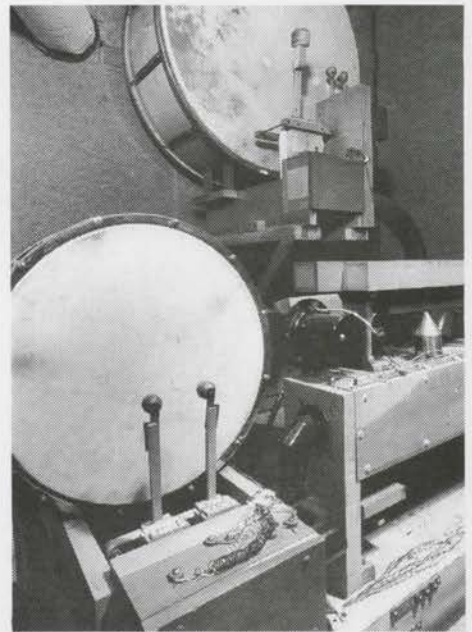
About the same time, several organizations across the river in St. Paul, Minnesota, had been trying to negotiate a donation to their projects of the 3/16 260 Special Wurlitzer (opus 1404) installed at local ABC affiliate KSTP-TV. Hearing this, the Phipps Center contacted station owner Stanley S. Hubbard to see if more attractive terms could be offered by the Phipps Center. They could, and in April 1983 it became official — the Phipps Center now owned a Mighty Wurlitzer.

Opus 1404 was originally shipped to the Capitol Theatre in St. Paul, Minnesota, where it was frequently played by Eddie Dunstedter during the 1920s. The man whose name was most associated with

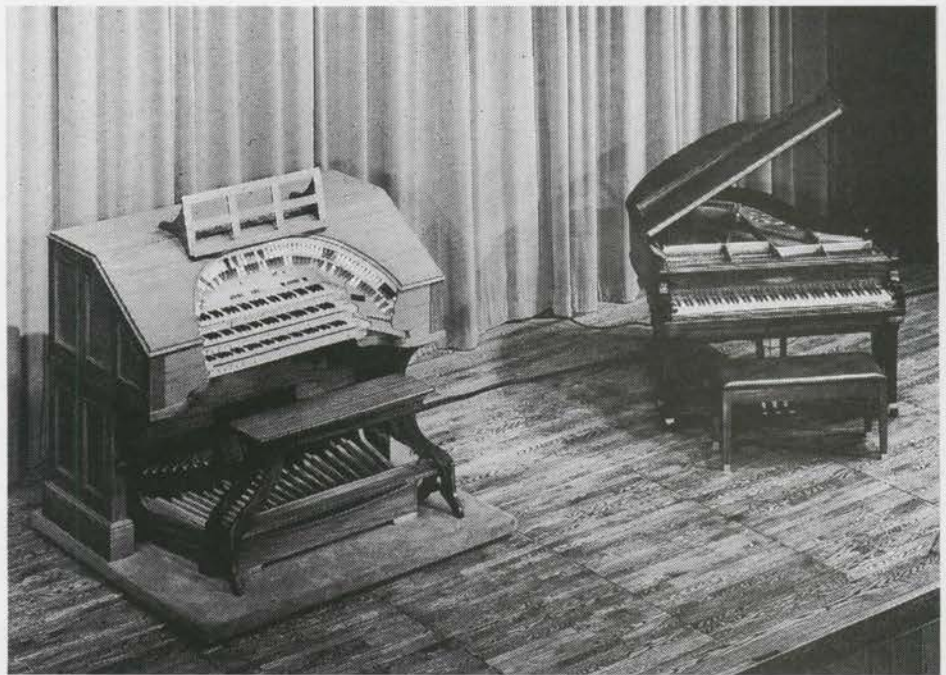
this organ, however, was Leonard Leigh.

Stanley E. Hubbard, President of KSTP-TV and lifelong theatre organ enthusiast, purchased the organ in 1956 and had it installed in his St. Paul television studio. Even though it was played by dozens of famous organists over the years, by the mid-1970s the station no longer found use for the instrument, and when the Phipps proposal was made, Stanley S. Hubbard, son of the retired station founder, agreed to its donation.

Plans were made to remove, rebuild (as necessary), and install the Wurlitzer in the chambers reserved for a pipe organ. Money had to be raised, volunteers rallied and plans made for the use of the Wurlitzer — with no time to spare. Until now, the donation represented only a dream. Now the project was to become a reality. An Organ Committee was established with Hudson native Fred Nagel as Chairman.



*Toy counter in Solo chamber.*

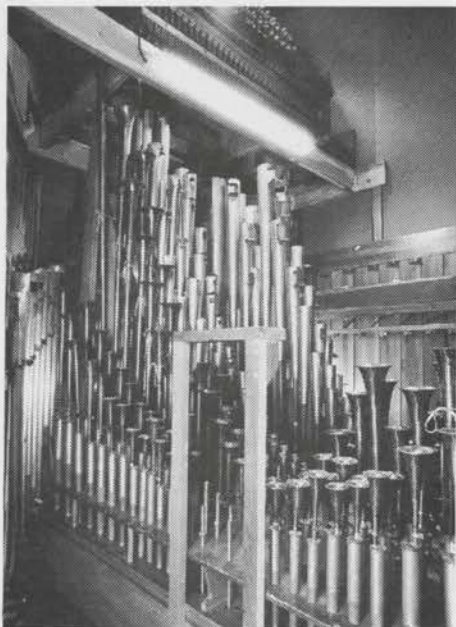


*Wurlitzer console and Chickering Ampico grand on stage at Phipps.*

Twenty-three Land O'Lakes Chapter members volunteered manpower. Bob Hansen's Getty Oil and the Duro Paper Bag Manufacturing Company donated trucks; Keller Construction donated a truck and a Lull Highlifter forklift; Zappa Brothers supplied a lowboy and the Reliance Electric Motor Company serviced the blower at no charge. And perhaps most important, Jerry Orvold was retained to disconnect all components, engineer their safe removal from second-story chambers and then supervise the rebuilding, installation and maintenance of the organ. This year Jerry Orvold will complete his 34th year of watching over this Wurlitzer.

On a rainy April morning, the determined crew arrived at the station. The organ had been dismantled in place by Jerry Orvold, but removal could only take place when the studios were not in use. To further complicate matters, the chambers were on the second floor, requiring the forklift for the heaviest parts.

A shop had been set up in one chamber at Phipps Center to facilitate the rebuilding of percussions and traps which were still operating on original leather. The pneumatic relay was discarded, and a new Z-Tronics solid-state relay installed. The original pressure-operated piano was sold to local organman Terry Kleven to help defray expenses of the installation.



Solo Chamber.

In its place a Chickering Ampico reproducing grand piano was attached and is located on stage. A Peterson four-memory combination-action replaced the original pneumatic system allowing for complete respecification of the instrument. Dennis James, Lyn Larsen and Walt Strony were consulted on specifications and their layout in the console.

Many alterations to the instrument had been made by Leonard Leigh and Jerry Orvold during the years it had been at KSTP to better suit the controlled conditions of a broadcast studio. Most of these changes were reversed at the Phipps, returning the instrument to substantially the same organ that left the Capitol Theatre in 1956.

The Phipps Center is an ambitious undertaking for a city of little more than 6000 residents. The auditorium seats 235 and includes a fully equipped stage with dressing rooms, a scene shop, an elegant grand foyer and an art gallery. The River Room provides a multi-purpose setting for meetings, receptions and dinners. The Terrace Room, with its terrace overlooking the St. Croix River, provides an ideal location for board meetings and smaller presentations. The Art and Dance Studio on the top floor of the complex is lighted by skylights and provides the right feeling for artists and dance instruction. Overall, the Center boasts 32,000 square feet of space, all of which is in constant use.

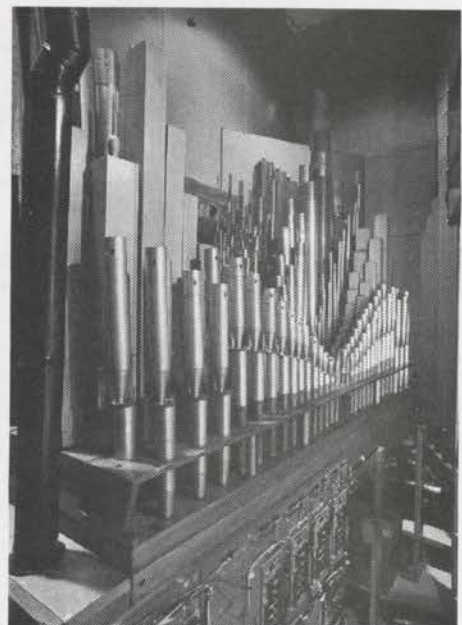
The gala opening nights for the new Phipps Center Wurlitzer featured Gaylord Carter playing for capacity houses. Barely eight months after the Center's opening, and only seven months after the removal of the organ from KSTP, the Wurlitzer was up and playing.

One month after Gaylord's programs, the ever-popular Ramona Gerhard-Sutton played a Christmas concert. Ramona is fondly remembered by Twin City radio audiences for her WCCO broadcasts and annual Christmas concerts in the lobby of Northwestern National Bank in Minneapolis.

With a negotiated donation, removal, rebuilding, installation and two highly successful concerts behind them, both the Phipps Center Organ Committee and the Phipps Wurlitzer concluded a very busy 1983. Based on the success of the organ series, several successful "spin-off" programs have been introduced into the Center's season of events. Rob Calcaterra gave a series of afternoon concerts and silent film presentations for Hudson school system students during the week prior to his March 1985 concert. Nearly 1000 students attended and learned about the theatre organ, being an organist and accompanying a silent film. House organist Tim Stevens demonstrates the organ for groups and visitors and also hosts the Winter Coffee Concert Series and Summer Silents program.

Opus 1404 appears to have come to rest in the most idyllic of settings possible for a 3/16 Wurlitzer. Sixteen ranks in a 235-seat theatre provides plenty of power and color for the skillful artists who appear at the Phipps each year. Since Gaylord Carter's opening in 1983, the list of artists reads as a "Who's Who" of the theatre organ world. Drawing from nearby Minneapolis and St. Paul, the Phipps Center Organ Concert Series is often sold out. The continuing role of this Mighty Wurlitzer in its community is just as much a joy 64 years after first sounding forth at the Capitol Theatre.

*(Author's note: Enthusiasm for the Phipps Center Wurlitzer comes from hundreds of patrons, ATOS members and musicians. Thanks are due to all of these people for preserving this treasure from a grand era. Specific thanks to those who provided background information for this story: Stanley S. Hubbard, David Junchen, Terry Kleven, Fred Nagel, Jerry Orvold, Walt Strony, Bob Swaney and Verna Mae Wilson.)*



Main Chamber.

## Chamber Analysis

### MAIN CHAMBER

Diaphonic Diapason (16' Metal Diaphone)  
Concert Flute (16' Bourdon)

Clarinet  
Viol d'Orchestra  
Viol Celeste  
Salicional  
Salicional Celeste  
Vox Humana

### SOLO CHAMBER

Tibia Clausa (16' Tibia)  
Tuba (16' Tuba)  
Brass Trumpet  
Brass Saxophone  
English Post Horn  
Orchestral Oboe  
Oboe Horn  
Kinura  
Toy Counter

### PERCUSSION

Marimba (Main)  
Xylophone (Solo)  
Chrysoglott (Main)  
Glockenspiel (Solo)  
Sleigh Bells (Solo)  
Chimes (Solo)  
Piano (Chickering Ampico grand,  
on stage)

### BLOWER

10 hp Spencer Turbine (1160 rpm)



*The future of music may not lie with music itself,  
but rather in the way it encourages and extends, rather than limits,  
the aspirations and ideas of the people, in the way it makes itself  
a part of the finer things that humanity does and dreams of.*

CHARLES IVES, 1874-1954

