

# The Organ In The Metropolitan Theatre, Boston, Mass.

... by G. Edgar Gress

**W**HEN it was built in 1926, the 4500-seat METROPOLITAN THEATRE was the showplace of Boston. It is still Boston's largest theater. Aside from the usual motion picture programs, it is used occasionally for stage shows and special events. A visit by the New York Metropolitan Opera Company was scheduled for April of this year.

The auditorium is rather long, narrow, and quite high, with a minimum of sound-absorbing draperies and carpeting. The reverberation time runs around two seconds.

A four-manual Ernest M. Skinner organ was originally installed in a big loft on the right side of the theatre. Its 36 voices were duplexed to add flexibility. The great and swell formed one division, the solo and choir the other. The organ contained such luxuries as pedal 32' Bombarde, a full-sized grand piano, a physharmonica, a musette, and a set of sostenuto attachments.

Organists came and went, but few were really happy with the cathedral tones of the big Skinner. In 1930, Arthur Martel succeeded in having something done about it. (*In certain quarters it is rumored that his real reason was that he wanted a gilded console which Skinner had refused to build!*) The organ was sold to the H. J. Heinz Company of Pittsburgh where it was used to form the nucleus of the well-known instrument in their auditorium.

The side walls of the theatre were remodeled internally to provide four new chambers, one above the other on either side. A separate blower room and a relay room were on the right. The largest Wurlitzer organ in New England was installed in these chambers . . . a four-manual with 26 ranks! This was the identical twin of the one in the Brooklyn PARAMOUNT THEATRE.

Martel was as pleased as could be. For, in addition to a lavishly decorated main console on a turn-table elevator at the left side of the pit, there was an equally lavish duplicate console on the right . . . an ideal arrangement for the Crawfords when they were in town.

But tragedy overtook this fine organ and it was used for only a few years before being dropped from the program. The entire orchestra pit was floored over to accommodate a special traveling bandwagon. The second console was removed and was last seen before the war in a warehouse in Cambridge. This state of affairs lasted until about ten years ago. It is doubtful if the organ was ever turned on during a period of fifteen years.

When the orchestra pit was uncovered in about 1948 or 1949, a local organist, Stanley Cahoon, got it going sufficiently to play it on a few special occasions as intermission music in the 3D picture, "House Of Wax." But again the management lost interest in Cahoon and the organ. John Kiley, another Boston organist, managed to record it for a small local company.

Learning something of this past history when I moved to Boston in 1957, I decided to inquire more deeply. By reputation, this was an extremely difficult organ to see, and the current rumors had it that the management took some degree of pleasure in getting rid



Ed Gress at the 4/26 Wurlitzer, Metropolitan Theatre, Boston

of organ enthusiasts. Even the sound itself carried discouragingly poor memories. The basic stoplist, however, was very attractive. The organ was said to be in good condition.

## A Good Deal

Max Naylor, manager of the METROPOLITAN THEATRE had been approached before. He had estimates from several professional organ builders. The cost of restoring this instrument had been estimated to range into thousands of dollars. Perhaps that is why it had remained as it was. But when confronted with an offer that included all the labor and an agreement to keep it in good condition in exchange for the right to use it, an old showman like Max knew he had a bargain and accepted it. The theatre was to provide the cost of materials. This arrangement was completed without so much as a peep at the organ!

The following weekend provided opportunity for inspection of the Mighty Wurlitzer. Everything was where it was supposed to be, and in beautiful condition. The chest leather could have been put there yesterday . . . not a sign of zephyr skin in sight. There were two places that needed leather, however — in the combination piston relay located in a hot dry basement room, and on the hammer pneumatics of the chrysoglott. The organ was riddled with dead notes . . .

almost one in ten of the magnets was dead! Dead magnets were everywhere; there were 75 in the console alone. And getting 300 good Wurlitzer magnets in this day and age was no small chore.

Tonally, this instrument sounded something less than exciting. It reminded one of two small organs playing in the far distance. When this sort of thing was encountered in England, it was assumed that it was the result of design. But here in Boston . . . well, there had to be another explanation. Evidence now seemed to indicate that there was more to getting the real Wurlitzer tone than just setting the pressures and tuning the pipes. Several of the old-time Wurlitzer men said that one must not be afraid to handle Wurlitzer pipes in a much more radical way than in the usual straight organ. Accordingly, with the help of Howard Silva and Steve Misir, and armed with a sharp bung-hole reamer, the job was begun. The solo Tibia was first and the difference was unbelievable. It proved that given a thorough regulation, the organ would sound beautiful.

It turned out to be a simple matter of four or five nights a week for some six months to get everything in playing condition. After the mechanical troubles were licked, the tonal quality was studied and improved.

#### Changes In Ranks

The changes are detailed in the accompanying specifications. But a word or two on the results may

not be out of order. Today, to us, the organ resembles more the tonal qualities of the New York PARAMOUNT, and the acoustics of the two theatres are rather similar, also. Both have in common the desirable feature that it is not necessary to use big masses of stops to fill the building. Everything can be heard clearly. The general effect is one of lushness. Even with the tremulants off nothing seems harsh or forced. Great care was taken with the regulation of each single stop, to keep the organ as well balanced as possible.

The original brass trumpet was replaced with a Moller theatre organ French trumpet. The tuba horn is even more useful than before in the orchestral chamber where there are other excellent voices with which to combine it.

The great part of the work has been completed. There will be routine maintenance, to be sure but the joy of having this organ to play should more than offset any such task. Not too many organists have the continuing opportunity to sit down at an organ of this size and tonal excellence. Several organists plan to use this organ for recordings. Preliminary tests prove it is excellent for the purpose.

Thankful acknowledgement must be given to Max Naylor for his interest in this project, and to Steve Misir and Howard Silva, without whose patient help, the job could not have been completed.

*(Specifications on page 16)*

## Delaware Valley Chapter Saves Organ

**A**LLENTOWN, Pennsylvania is like many another city in this great country. Among the community betterment projects is a Civic Little Theatre. This group, more fortunate or enterprising than some, found itself the owner of a theatre organ when it purchased the NINETEENTH STREET THEATER building. However, not everyone in the Little Theatre group realized just what a wonderful instrument had fallen to the organization.

In looking over the building, it seemed desirable to extend the stage over the orchestra pit and it was here that the old console got in the way. So it was decided to get rid of the obstacle . . . just like that. But A.T.O.E. has an especially sympathetic ear when it comes to old theatre organs. One of these dearly beloved creatures can call for help on the salicional with shutters closed and be heard across the traffic roar.

Thus it was that three members of the Delaware Valley Chapter of A.T.O.E. came to know of the danger of this organ's position and set out to rescue it. First, there was the item of changing the minds of the governing board of the Civic Little Theatre. Good talking, repeated often enough, convinced the skeptics that it was a mistake to forget the organ. But the console had to be moved! It was exactly where the stage had to be extended. After all, the building was purchased for the production of stage plays. Moving an organ console and reconnecting the cable was not the kind of a job an organization takes on eagerly. The Rev. George D. MacNeal, Mel Freund, and his son Frank undertook this job and completed it. Like most enthusiasts, these three people had the usual daytime chores to complete before they could devote any time to their hobby. This meant, in the case of this particular project, that the work had to be done between midnight and dawn, roughly, one night each week.

But of such is the labor of love. The console now rests on a pedestal along one wall instead of in the pit. And in the days to come, when members of the Dela-

ware Valley Chapter recount with pride that "we moved the NINETEENTH STREET THEATER organ," it is barely possible that George, Mel, and Frank will smile knowingly at each other and just listen to the tale of how it was done.



L. to R.: Mel Freund, Frank Freund, and the Rev. George D. MacNeal, all members of the Delaware Valley Chapter.

# Specifications

## 26-Rank Wurlitzer Special 4m. — Op. 2101 — Built 1930

### (As Originally Built)

**Main Chamber** — 10" — wind & tremulant (left side, bottom)  
 Flute 16' 97  
 Viol d'Orchestre 8' 85  
 Viol Celeste 8' 73  
 Dulciana 8' 61  
 Tuba Horn 16' 85—15" w & t  
 Clarinet 8' 61  
 Vox Humana 8' 61—6" w & t  
 Chrysoglott & Vibraphone  
 Bird Call

**Foundation Chamber**—15"—w & t (left side, top)  
 Tibia Clausa 8' 85—15" w & t  
 Diaphonic Diapason 16' 73  
 Gamba 16' 85  
 Gamba Celeste 8' 73

**Solo Chamber**—(right side, bottom)  
 Tibia Clausa 16' 97—15" w & t  
 Open Diapason 8' 61—10" w & t  
 Tuba Mirabilis 16' 85—15" w & t  
 English Horn 16' 73—15" w & t  
 Vox Humana 8' 61—6" w & t  
 All percussions and traps not listed elsewhere

**Orchestral Chamber**—10" — wind, two reservoirs & tremulants (right side, top)  
 Horn Diapason 16' 73  
 Quintadena 8' 61  
 Trumpet 8' 61  
 Saxophone 8' 61  
 Oboe Horn 8' 61  
 String No. 1 8' 61  
 String No. 2 8' 61  
 Orchestral Oboe 8' 61  
 Krumet 8' 61  
 Kinura 8' 61  
 Piano and Mandolin (upright)  
 Master Xylophone  
 Marimba and Harp

### PEDAL

Bombarde 16'  
 Tuba Profunda 16'  
 Double English Horn 16'  
 Diaphone 16'  
 Bass 16'  
 Tibia Clausa (S) 16'  
 Violone 16'  
 Bourdon 16'  
 Tuba Mirabilis 8'  
 Tuba Horn 8'  
 English Horn 8'  
 Octave 8'  
 Horn Diapason 8'  
 Tibia Clausa (S) 8'  
 Clarinet 8'  
 Saxophone 8'  
 Solo Strings II 8'  
 Gamba 8'  
 Cello II 8'  
 Flute 8'  
 Flute 4'  
 Piano 16'  
 Bass Drum  
 Kettle Drum  
 Snare Drum  
 Crash Cymbal  
 Cymbal  
 Accomp. 8'  
 Great 8'  
 Solo 8'  
**PIZZICATO**  
 Bombarde 16'  
**SWITCH**  
 Traps 1st or 2nd T.

### ACCOMPANIMENT Great (cont.)

Tuba Mirabilis 8'  
 Tuba Horn 8'  
 English Horn 8'  
 Diaphonic Diapason 8'  
 Horn Diapason 8'  
 Tibia Clausa 8'  
 Tibia Clausa 8'  
 Clarinet 8'  
 Saxophone 8'  
 Solo String 1 8'  
 Solo String 2 8'  
 Gamba 8'  
 Gamba Celeste 8'  
 Viol d'Orchestre 8'  
 Viol Celeste 8'  
 Krumet 8'  
 Oboe Horn 8'  
 Quintadena 8'  
 Concert Flute 8'  
 Vox Humana 8'  
 Vox Humana 8'  
 Dulciana 8'  
 Gambette 4'  
 Gambette Celeste 4'  
 Viol 4'  
 Octave Celeste 4'  
 Piccolo 4'  
 Piccolo 4'  
 Flute 4'  
 Vox Humana 4'  
 Vox Humana 4'  
 Twelfth 2 2/3'  
 Piccolo 2'  
 Piano 8'  
 Mandolin  
 Marimba  
 Harp  
 Chrysoglott  
 Vibraphone  
 Chrys. Dampers  
 Snare Drum  
 Tambourine  
 Castanets  
 Chinese Block  
 Tom Tom  
 Sand Block  
 Accomp. 4'  
 Solo 8'  
**2nd TOUCH**  
 Tuba Mirabilis 8'  
 Tuba Horn 8'  
 Diaphonic Diapason 8'  
 Tibia Clausa 8'  
 Tibia Clausa 8'  
 Saxophone 8'  
 Solo Strings II 8'  
 Piccolos II 4'  
 Xylophone  
 Glockenspiel  
 Cathedral Chimes  
 Triangle  
 Great 4'  
 Solo 8'  
**PIZZICATO**  
 Solo 8'

### GREAT

Bombarde 16'  
 Tuba Profunda 16'  
 Diaphone 16'  
 Bass 16'  
 Tibia Clausa TC 16'  
 Tibia Clausa 16'  
 Clarinet TC 16'  
 Saxophone TC 16'  
 Solo Strings II TC 16'  
 Violone 16'  
 Vox Humana TC 16'

Tibia Clausa 8'  
 Solo 8'

### PIZZICATO

### BOMBARDE

Bombarde 16'  
 Tuba Profunda 16'  
 Double English Horn 16'  
 Diaphone 16'  
 Tibia Clausa TC 16'  
 Tibia Clausa 16'  
 Tuba Mirabilis 8'  
 Trumpet 8'  
 English Horn 8'  
 Diaphonic Diapason 8'  
 Tuba Horn 8'  
 Open Diapason 8'  
 Tibia Clausa 8'  
 Tibia Clausa 8'  
 Orchestral Oboe 8'  
 Kinura 8'  
 Clarinet 8'  
 Saxophone 8'  
 Solo String 1 8'  
 Solo String 2 8'  
 Gamba 8'  
 Gamba Celeste 8'  
 Viol d'Orchestre 8'  
 Viol Celeste 8'  
 Krumet 8'  
 Flute 8'  
 Vox Humana 8'  
 Vox Humana 8'  
 Piccolo 4'  
 Piccolo 4'  
 Gambette 4'  
 Gambette Celeste 4'  
 Viol 4'  
 Octave Celeste 4'  
 Flute 4'  
 Vox Humana 4'  
 Vox Humana 4'  
 Tibia 12th 2 2/3'  
 Tibia 12th 2 2/3'  
 Twelfth 2 2/3'  
 Tibia Piccolo 2'  
 Tibia Piccolo 2'  
 Fifteenth 2'  
 Piccolo 2'  
 Tierce 1 3/5'  
 Piano 16'  
 Piano 8'  
 Piano 4'  
 Marimba  
 Harp  
 Bells reit.  
 Sleigh Bells  
 Master Xylophone  
 Xylophone  
 Glockenspiel  
 Chrysoglott  
 Cathedral Chimes  
 Great 16'  
 Solo 16'  
 Solo 8'  
**2nd TOUCH**  
 Bombarde 16'  
 Tuba Profunda 16'  
 Double English Horn 16'  
 Tuba Horn 8'  
 Tibia Clausa (F) 8'

### SOLO

Bombarde 16'  
 Tibia Clausa TC 16'  
 Tibia Clausa 16'  
 Saxophone TC 16'  
 Violone 16'  
 Trumpet 8'  
 Tuba Mirabilis 8'  
 Tuba Horn 8'  
 English Horn 8'  
 Diaphonic Diapason 8'  
 Open Diapason 8'  
 Tibia Clausa 8'  
 Tibia Clausa 8'  
 Orchestral Oboe 8'  
 Kinura 8'  
 Clarinet 8'  
 Saxophone 8'

Solo String 1 8'  
 Solo String 2 8'  
 Gamba 8'  
 Gamba Celeste 8'  
 Krumet 8'

Oboe Horn 8'  
 Quintadena 8'  
 Vox Humana 8'  
 Vox Humana 8'  
 Dulciana 8'  
 Piccolo 4'  
 Piccolo 4'  
 Gambette 4'  
 Gambette Celeste 4'  
 Tibia Piccolo 2'  
 Tibia Piccolo 2'  
 Piano 8'  
 Marimba  
 Master Xylophone  
 Glockenspiel  
 Bells reit.  
 Chrysoglott  
 Cathedral Chimes

### TREMULANTS

Main  
 Tuba  
 Vox Humana  
 Orchestral  
 Solo  
 Tibia Clausa  
 Tuba Mir. and Eng. Horn  
 Vox Humana  
 Foundation  
 Tibia Clausa

### EFFECTS

Swivel Panel  
 Auto Horn  
 Fire Gong  
 Boat Whistle  
 Horse Trot  
 Bird Call (M)  
 Bird Call (S)  
 Surf (switch)

### Acc. Key Check

Telephone Bell  
**Toe Pedals**  
 Thunder  
 Thunder

### SWELL SHOES

Orchestral  
 Solo  
 Foundation  
 Main  
 General (and Piano)  
 (above with indicators  
 and coupler switches)  
 (Piano sostenuto button on  
 General)  
 Crescendo (adjustable)

### PISTONS

10 per division, with  
 masters on 2nd touch of Grt.

Solo to Great 8' coupler changed to Great 4' coupler  
 Bombarde Snare Drum changed to Cymbal.  
 Pedal Pizzicato 16' Bombarde to be changed to Synthetic Bombarde 32'.  
 As now reset, pressures are as follows:  
 Main 11½". Main French Trumpet 16". Main Vox 9½".  
 Foundation 17½". Foundation Tibia 16½".  
 Solo Tibia 20". Solo Diapason 13½". Solo Vox 11". Tuba & E. H. 17½"  
 Orchestral (both chests) 13"  
 All percussions on blower pressure.  
 Solo Tibia increased four notes in scale. Foundation Tibia increased two notes.  
 Moller French Trumpet put on former Tuba Horn chest from 8' up, and Tuba  
 Horn pipes transferred to Orchestral replacing original Trumpet. Solo String No. 2  
 tuned as a celeste rank.  
 Entire organ revoiced and reregulated as necessary to accommodate pressure  
 changes.