



The KILGEN STORY

The finest example of a Kilgen organ was the installation in the Piccadilly Theatre, Chicago. Leo Terry, who opened the house, is seen above at the console, in 1927

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KILGEN: here we have a name not too familiar to the readers of THEATRE ORGAN. Perhaps the only previous mention of this famous old name on these pages was in the article which appeared in an early issue of TIBIA about Herbie Koch of WHAS, Louisville, and his studio Kilgen there. Yet the fact that Kilgen did build many theatre organs is attested to in the accompanying list of theatre organ installations. As nearly as can be determined at this time, we find a grand total of 191 installations!

Probably the most heard of these organs was not in a theatre, but at Radio Station KMOX, St. Louis, with Venida Jones at the console. This organ shared time with Ann Leaf from the Paramount Studio on CBS Radio back in the days before a disk jockey was even dreamed of. However, the finest example of Kil-

gen theatre organ was the installation at the Piccadilly Theatre, Chicago. This was their pride and joy, and rightly so, for at the time it was the largest model the Kilgens had built.

The Piccadilly Theatre was built by H. Schoenstadt & Sons at a cost of some \$4,000,000.00 in 1926-27 on the South Side of Chicago in the Hyde Park district. This figure includes the apartment hotel which surrounds the theatre proper, a very imposing building even today. The Piccadilly was designed by C. W. and Geo. Rapp, Architects, who also designed the Ambassador, St. Louis, and many other of the large luxury houses of that era. The organ, built by Geo. Kilgen & Sons, was purchased in April, 1926, at a cost of \$23,500.00, and Leo Terry assisted in the preparation of the stop list along with the Kilgen staff. Terry,

who died just this past year, opened the Piccadilly and also the Rialto (Barton) Theatre, Joliet, Illinois.

The console for the Piccadilly left the factory in the unfinished state shown in the accompanying photograph. The fancy art and scroll work, along with the gold-bronze finish, were applied by the Decorator Supply Company of Chicago, which also finished the Wurlitzer console for the Ambassador, St. Louis. The Baldwin Grand piano, which was to be an outstanding feature of this organ, was also finished in the same bronze-gold color. With the Decorator Supply Company doing both the Piccadilly and the Ambassador consoles, it can be assumed that they worked with the architect and did the finishing job on all of the consoles for the theatres he designed.

The Piccadilly piano had an unique

action and as far as we have been able to discover, was one-of-a-kind . . . this feature not having been used by anyone except Kilgen. Usually, in the U.S., pianos were placed in the chambers, though there are a few exceptions. The motive for placing them there was mainly to obtain the expression afforded by the swell shades. Since the Baldwin grand was to be exposed on the balcony below the chamber, a different arrangement had to be used. The right hand swell pedal on the console has the often-seen piano-sustain button which as usual controlled the sustaining pedal on the piano. However, the action of the swell pedal itself controlled the striking power of the piano action. In other words, with the swell pedal in a closed position the wind pressure on the piano action was low so that the piano wires were struck lightly. As the pedal was depressed to an open position, the wind pressure was increased so that the piano action struck with full force. Thus the force of the striking action varied with the position of the swell pedal. With this arrangement the organist could control the expression of the piano as well as if he were at the piano keyboard.

It may be well to note here that opposite the piano, on the balcony below the opposite chamber, there was placed a stringed harp, spotlighted as was the piano. However, it was a "phony," as the "harp" sound was really a product of a regular xylophone-type harp concealed behind curtains. This xylo-harp was made by Kohler-Liebich, one of the very best at the time.

Then came the opening! Originally it had been scheduled for Christmas of 1926, but for various reasons was postponed until Jan. 23, 1927. The audience was composed of invited guests, some 4000 of them, with the Mayor of Chicago

seated in a choice spot. When Leo Terry played the piano for the first time the audience stood up to get a better look at the instrument way up there on the little balcony and marveled at the wonderful expression obtained by the organist seated at the console in the pit.

But all was not "peaches and cream". Naturally, everything has its little weaknesses, and to go back a few days before the opening, we find evidences of the usual chaos that precedes most important events. To start with, the generator was giving trouble and the Glockenspiel and xylophone hammers were slipping on their shafts. Then the reservoir springs started to snap. A new and larger generator was supplied, the hammers were tightened and heavier springs installed on the reservoirs. Everything finally worked out fine, and on opening night, Kilgen had an instrument they could truly be proud of.

The records fail to reveal how long Leo Terry remained at the Piccadilly console. In looking through old papers of that date, it appears he was soon followed by Mildred Fitzpatrick, who was considered the outstanding woman organist of the time by her male counterparts.

To bring this account of the Piccadilly Kilgen to a close, of interest is a rather novel attachment Leo Terry had rigged up for use during his solos. He sometimes sang as he accompanied himself on the organ. For this he used a separate small keyboard mounted behind him, a little to one side. When he came to this point of his solo he simply swung around, faced the audience, and gave them his all, while accompanying himself on this auxiliary keyboard connected to the main console.

This wonderful instrument, like so many others, was used for less than five years. The coming of the "talkies"

SPECIFICATIONS OF KILGEN ORGAN IN PICCADILLY THEATRE, CHICAGO

along with the depression soon eliminated such "unnecessary" items as organs and organists. Today? The last rumor afloat about the Piccadilly instrument was that it had suffered severe damage from rain and flood. A rather sad ending for such a glorious beginning.

(ED. NOTE: In a letter to Bro. Andy dated Jan. 23, 1960, Tom Garrett of Chicago, Ill. states that he played the organ a few days prior to writing the letter. Other makers also used the same principle described above to control the piano volume. Wurlitzer used a four stage control device.)

Kilgen Family

According to research by the Kilgen family, Sebastian Kilgen fled from France to Durlach, Germany, where he built the first Kilgen organ in 1640. The trade was handed down from generation to generation, and in 1851 the Kilgen craftsmanship was brought to this country by George Kilgen, who set up the first Kilgen factory in New York City. After George Kilgen's death, the business was brought to St. Louis by his son, Charles. That was in 1873, and the next fifty years saw the company grow to be one of the largest, if not *the* largest, organ manufacturers in the country.

Then, in 1932, Charles Kilgen died and the business was handed down to his four sons; Eugene, George, Alfred and Charles, Jr., after which it was operated for a short time, and disbanded. A few of the former employees then organized what was called "Kilgen Associates", which also lasted a short time and disbanded.

In 1939, Eugene Kilgen, with the assistance of his brother Charles, Jr., as plant manager, and Max Hess, another Kilgen veteran, as designer, organized "The Kilgen Organ Company". Shortly after organization, World War II came along and the company put aside organ building and went into the production of gliders. When the war was over, the building of organs was restored and continued until the present time.

The future of the company is questionable, another result of present-day inflationary conditions.

Below: Interior of Piccadilly Theatre, in 1927



CHAMBER & RANKS SOLO CHAMBER	Pres.	Pipes	Compass	Pedal	Accomp.	Acc. 2nd	Great	Gt. 2nd	Bomb.	Solo
Tuba	15"	85	16'-4"	16-8	8	8	16-8-4	16-	16-8-4	16-8-4
Trumpet	10"	61	8'	8	8		8		16-8-4	-8
English Horn	10"	85	16'-4"		8		8			8
Tibia Clausa	15"	97	16'-2"	16-8	16-8-4	8-4-2 2/3	8-4-2 2/3	16-8	16-8	16-8-4-2 2/3
Kinura	10"	61	8'		8		8			8
Brass Saxophone	10"	61	8'	8	16-8	8	16-8		16-8	16-8
Solo String	10"	97	16'-2"	16-8	16-8-4	8	16-8-4-2		16-8	16-8
Vox Humana	6"	73	8'-4"		8-4		16-8-4			16-8
Dulciana	10"	73	8'-4"	8	8-4		8-4			8
Marimba		49			x		16			8
Harp					8-4	8				8
Master Xylophone		49			16 (Mid C'')		x			8
-32' Resultant 10 2/3										
MAIN CHAMBER										
Open Diapason	10"	85	16'-4"	16'-16-8	8	8	16-8-4		16-8	16-8
Tibia Clausa	15"	80	8'-1 3/5'	8	8-4	8-4-2 2/3	16-8-4-2 2/3-2-1 3/5			16-8-4-2 2/3-2
Krumet	10"	61	8'		8		8		16-8-4	8
Clarinet	10"	61	8'	8	8	8	16-8	8	8	8
Viol D'Orchestre	10"	73	8'-4"	8	8-4		16-8-4		8	8
Viol Celeste	10"	61	8'		8-4		8		8	8
Orchestral Oboe	10"	61	8'	8	8		8			8
Oboe Horn	10"	61	8'		8	8	8		16	8
Flute-Bourdon	10"	97	16'-2"	16-8-4	16-8-4-2 2/3-2		16-8-4-2 2/3-2		16-8	16-8
Vox Humana	6"	73	8'-4"		8-4		16-8-4			16-8
Grand Piano		85	16'-4"	16-8-4	8-4		16-8-4		16-8-4	8
Chimes		20				8	x			8
Xylophone		37					x			8
Glockenspiel		37					x			8
Orchestra Bells Re-it							8			8
Chrysoglott		49			x		x			8
Bass Drum				x						
Tympani				x						
Cymbal				x						
Crash Cymbal				x						
Chinese Gong				x						
Snare Drum Tap					x		x			
Snare Drum Roll				x	x					
Tom Tom					x					
Castanets					x					
Tambourine					x					
Chinese Block					x					
Shuffle (air)					x					
Sleigh Bells							4			
COUPLERS										
Pedal to				4						
Accomp. to				8	4					
Great to				8			16- 4		8	
Bombarde to									4	
Solo to				8	8	8	8-4-3rd-5th-7th	8	16-8-4	16- 4

Sustainuto All Stops - No Couplers

GENERAL

- Two Vox Humana Tremulants
- Two Tibia Tremulants
- Two Expression Pedals main and solo
- One Master Swell Switch to be worked by hand lever.
- One balanced Crescendo Pedal entire organ
- One Sforzando Pedal Lock Down
- One Thunder Pedal P
- One Piano Expression Pedal
- Two General Tremulants
- One Tuba Tremulant
- One Thunder Pedal FF
- One Sustainuto Cancel Pedal
- Twelve Master Combination pistons controlling the twelve combination pistons under each Manual including Pedal Stops.
- One Master cancel piston affecting everything.

INDICATORS

- Main Expression Light Indicator
- Solo Expression Light "
- Master Swell Light "
- Crescendo and Sforzando Light Indicator

SPECIAL EFFECTS

- Controlled by Levers located over Solo Manual
- Surf Effect
- Fire Gong reiterating
- Train Whistle
- Telephone Bell
- Loud Siren
- Sleigh Bells two tones
- Factory whistle
- Large Klaxon Horn
- Steam boat Whistle
- Wind and rain effect
- Bird Whistle Two tones one in each chamber
- Aeroplane effect
- Anvil

SPECIAL

- Combination pistons set back of organ console.
- Lights under console also lights to light up console.
- Tablets

- Couplers.....Black
- String.....Amber
- Horns.....Pearl
- Bourdon, Flute and Relative Tablets White
- Reeds.....Red
- Percussions...Blue
- Traps.....Green

Kilgen Unit Orchestra and Theatre Organ Installations

Theatre	Location	Manuals & Ranks	Year Built	Twentieth Century WHT Radio (Moved to WIBO in 1928)			
Alcazar /1	Birmingham, Ala.	2/7	1919	White Palace	"	3/5	1926
Avon	"	2/3	1927	Peart	Gillespie, Ill.	2/3	1927
Bijou /1	"	2/9	1919	Illinois	LaGrange, Ill.	2/3	1926
Lyric	"	2/5	1925	Lido	Maywood, Ill.	3/9	1926
Pantages	"	2/5	1927	Capitol	Rockford, Ill.	3/9	1927
Ritz	"	2/4	1926	Citizens	Brazil, Ind.	2/5	1928
KFPW Radio	Ft. Smith, Art.	2/6	1936	Strand	Crawfordsville, Ind.	3/5	1927
Majestic	Little Rock, Ark.	2/5	1925	Broadway	Gary, Ind.	2/4	1925
Enderts	Crescent City, Cal.	2/3	1927	Orpheum	"	2/4	1926
LaPaloma	Encinitas, Cal.	2/4	1927	Palace	"	3/9	1925
KFVD Radio	"	"	"	Ritz	"	2/3	1927
(Hal Roach Studio)	Los Angeles, Cal.	3/5	1930	Grand	Madison, Ind.	2/4	1928
Radio Station (Nat'l Theatre Sply)	San Francisco, Cal.	2/4	1927	KOIL Radio	Council Bluffs, Ia.	2/3	1927
Unique	Santa Cruz, Cal.	2/3	1927	New Grand	Keokuk, Ia.	2/5	1924
Whittelt	Woodside, Cal.	3/6	1929	Royal	LeMars, Ia.	2/3	1927
KLZ Radio	Denver, Colo.	2/5	1927	Eldorado	Eldorado, Kans.	2/4	1927
Orpheum	Danielson, Conn.	2/3	1928	Zarah	Great Bend, Kans.	2/3	1927
Dreamland	New Haven, Conn.	2/3	1927	Royal	Hutchinson, Kans.	2/3	1926
Palace	Rockville, Conn.	2/3	1928	Miller	Manhattan, Kans.	2/3	1926
Palace	Stamford, Conn.	3/9	1928	Mystic /1	Pittsburg, Kans.	2/7	1915
Strand	"	3/9	1928	Jay Hawk	Topeka, Kans.	3/9	1926
Strand /1	Athens, Ga.	2/7	1919	Orpheum	Wichita, Kans.	2/11	1922
Rivoli	Rome, Ga.	2/5	1928	WHAS Radio /2	Louisville, Ky.	4/14	1936
Aurora /1	Aurora, Ill.	2/8	1919	Grand	New Orleans, La.	2/3	1928
Ritz or Oakwyn	Berwyn, Ill.	3/9	1925	Argonne	Bel Air, Md.	2/3	1928
Atlantic	Chicago, Ill.	3/11	1926	Alpha or Caton	Catonville, Md.	2/4	1928
Clearing	"	2/3	1926	Towson	Towson, Md.	2/4	1927
Criterion	"	2/5	1926	WHDH Radio	Boston, Mass.	2/5	1935
Frolic	"	2/5	1926	Crown	Lowell, Mass.	2/3	1928
Iris /1	"	2/8	1917	Riverside	Medford, Mass.	3/5	1927
Kenwood	"	2/4	1926	Embassy or Moody	Waltham, Mass.	3/9	1927
Lynch	"	3/9	1926	Birds State	Grand Rapids, Mich.	2/4	1927
Metropole	"	2/3	1926	Lyric	Harbor Springs, Mich.	2/3	1927
Milford	"	2/7	1926	Ham /1	Minneapolis, Minn.	4/29	1919
Monogram	"	2/3	1927	Leola	"	2/3	1927
Oak	"	2/3	1926	Lyric /1	"	2/8	1917
Orchid	"	2/3	1926	Loring /1	"	2/9	1919
Piccadilly	"	4/19	1926	Ritz	"	2/3	1926
Steuben Club	"	3/6	1927	Roof Garden /1	"	2/11	1919
				Unique /1	"	2/8	1917
				WAMD Radio /3	"	2/4	1926

THE KMOX ORGAN

The KMOX organ, started as a 2/5 in 1925, rebuilt in 1929 to a 3/10, added to in 1931 to a 3/16, and a new console installed in 1934 to finally make it a 4/16. To the best of our knowledge, it was or is not a Wurlitzer in any part. Its history after it was closed down at KMOX is interesting. During the war when new organs were not being built, this instrument was sold to a church in Illinois, and over a period of several years was being rebuilt along more "churchy lines". Before it was finished, the man doing the work either disappeared or died, and it never was completely revamped.

A few years ago, Fred Pillsbury, president of Century

Electric Corporation in St. Louis, purchased the entire organ, just for the console, which he is understood to be using with electronic components which he is building. At that time he put another 4m church console with the balance of the KMOX organ and donated or sold it to the First Methodist Church, Cuthbert, Ga.

The entire organ has been rebuilt by the Kilgen Company, and is presently awaiting completion of the church for installation. The old stop-list is being retained almost completely, with the tibia, tuba, and even the kinura.

If you ever get to Cuthbert, Ga., stop in and hear the organ, and you may still recognize it!



Standard Kilgen 3 - Manual Console, Double Touch 2 Manuals.

WAMD Radio /3	"	2/5	1927	Cortland	"	2/3	1927
Sheldon Memorial	Red Wing, Minn.	2/8	1926	Dixie	Rochester, N.Y.	2/5	1929
Aston /1	St. Paul, Minn.	2/11	1919	Rivoli	Schenectady, N.Y.	2/3	1927
Capitol /1	"	4/29	1919	Wade	Morehead, N.C.	2/3	1928
Princess /1	"	2/10	1917	Paramount Grand			
Strand /1	"	2/8	1917	or Benbow	Mt. Airy, N.C.	2/3	1927
Strand	Laurel, Miss.	2/6	1926	Lyceum	Canton, Ohio	2/4	1927
Broadway	Cape Girardeau, Mo.	3/8	1925	Lakona	Celina, Ohio	2/3	1927
Star	Hannibal, Mo.	2/3	1925	Montgomery Amuse-			
Alladin	Kansas City, Mo.	2/5	1927	ment Co.	Cincinnati, Ohio	2/4	1927
Empress /4	"	2/9	1917	Mt. Pleasant	Cleveland, Ohio	2/4	1927
Garden /1	"	2/13	1919	Hippodrome	Columbus, Ohio	2/3	1926
J. W. Jenkins Music /5	"	2/3	1926	Oakland	Marion, Ohio	2/3	1928
Ocase	"	2/3	1927	Norwood	Norwood, Ohio	2/4	1928
Colonial	St. Joseph, Mo.	2/3	1927	Broad & Larkin	Sidney, Ohio	2/3	1927
Arsenal /6	St. Louis, Mo.	2/7	1921	Ohio	Youngstown, Ohio	2/4	1927
Capitol	"	2/8	1924	Ritz	Ardmore, Okla.	2/4	1927
Cinderella /7	"	2/10	1917	Glory B	Miami, Okla.	2/5	1925
Columbia /1	"	2/10	1919	WKY Radio	Oklahoma City, Okla.	4/14	1934
Delmonte /1	"	2/9	1920	Lucien Becker			
Empress /4	"	2/9	1921	Studio /1	Portland, Ore.	2/7	1920
Grand Opera House /1	"	2/9	1919	Capitol	Portland, Ore.	2/4	1928
KMOX Radio /8	"	4/16	1934	Seville	Easton, Pa.	3/9	1929
New Grand Central /9	"	3/15	1920	E.W. Albertson's	Kane, Pa.	2/4	1927
Pershing /1	"	3/12	1919	Setzer	Palmyra, Pa.	2/4	1927
Ritz	"	2/4	1925	Forum	Philadelphia, Pa.	3/9	1928
Sixth & Chestnut /1	"	2/5	1920	WFIL Radio	"	4/14	1937
Strand /1	"	2/5	1917	American	Pittsburgh, Pa.	2/3	1927
West End Lyric	"	2/4	1920	St. Mary's	St. Mary's, Pa.	2/5	1928
Rex	Albion, Nebr.	2/3	1927	Strand /10	Scotsdale, Pa.	3/4	1928
Rivoli	Beatrice, Nebr.	2/4	1926	Hope	Providence, R.I.	2/4	1927
Bonham	Fairbury, Nebr.	2/4	1926	Park	Woonsocket, R.I.	2/3	1927
Fremont	Fremont, Nebr.	2/4	1926	Poplar	Memphis, Tenn.	2/3	1927
Rivoli	Hastings, Nebr.	2/4	1926	WLAC Radio /11	Nashville, Tenn.	4/12	1938
Sun	Holdridge, Nebr.	2/3	1927	Capitol	Brownsville, Tex.	2/3	1927
Empress	Kearney, Nebr.	2/4	1926	Majestic /1	Dallas, Tex.	2/8	1921
Granada	Norfolk, Nebr.	2/4	1927	Wells /1	"	2/9	1919
Benson	Omaha, Nebr.	2/4	1926	Majestic /1	Ft. Worth, Tex.	2/9	1922
Corley	"	2/4	1926	Majestic /1	Houston, Tex.	2/15	1922
Lathrop	"	2/3	1926	Majestic /1	San Antonio, Tex.	2/9	1922
Leavenworth	"	2/4	1926	Rivoli	San Benito, Tex.	2/3	1927
Mona Lisa	"	2/3	1926	Woodberry	Cedar City, Utah	2/3	1927
Strand	Hackettstown, N.J.	2/3	1928	(Name Unknown)	Salt Lake City, Utah	2/3	1927
Liberty	Irvington, N.J.	2/4	1927	Eastwood	Madison, Wis.	2/5	1930
Mt. Ephraim	Mt. Ephraim, N.J.	2/3	1929	Cosmo	Merrill, Wis.	2/3	1927
Majestic	Paterson, N.J.	2/3	1927	Ritz	Milwaukee, Wis.	2/5	1926
Westwood	Westwood, N.J.	3/9	1928	Zenith	"	2/7	1927
Paramount	Albany, N.Y.	3/5	1927	Classic	Watertown, Wis.	2/3	1927
Gold	Brooklyn, N.Y.	2/3	1927	Grand	Wausau, Wis.	3/6	1926
Fortway	"	3/9	1927	Mermac	West Bend, Wis.	2/3	1926
Graham (or Gerittsen)	"	3/5	1927	N.W. Conservatory			
Mont Marte	"	2/4	1927	of Music	Milwaukee, Wis.	3/5	1927
Bandbox	Bronx, N.Y.	2/3	1928	WKAF Radio	"	2/4	1926
Metro	"	2/5	1927	LaScala	Vienna, Austria	3/10	1931
Orpheum	Kingston, N.Y.	3/5	1927	Encanto	Havana, Cuba	3/5	1927
Earl Carroll	New York City	3/6	1929				

- /1 These organs are not unit organs, but straight organs, some of which are partly unified. They contained typical theatre stops.
- /2 WHAS Radio, Louisville - 1932 - Original organ - 3m 7r
1934 - Additions - 3m 10r
1936 - Rebuilt - 4m 14r
- /3 WAMD Radio, Minneapolis - 2 organs recorded, but the second may have been the addition of another rank, only. Records are not clear.
- /4 This organ was built for Empress, K.C., Mo. in 1917 - moved to Empress, St. L., Mo. in 1921 - moved to Orpheum, Wichita, Kans. in 1922.
- /5 This organ was probably sold by Jenkins to a theatre. Records incomplete.
- /6 Arsenal, St. L., Mo. moved from Pershing, St. L., Mo. and rebuilt.
- /7 Cinderella, St. L., Mo. moved from Old Grand Central, St. L., Mo. in 1924. Moved to Kingsland, St. L., Mo. 1925.
- /8 KMOX Radio, St. L., Mo. - 1925 - Original organ - 2m 5r
1929 - Rebuilt - 3m 10r
1931 - Additions - 3m 16r
1934 - New Console - 4m 16r
- /9 New Grand Central, St. L., Mo. - 3rd manual on this console controlled the xylophone and harp, only, and no other stops.
- /10 Strand, Scotsdale, Pa. - 3rd manual was a dummy and was not operable.
- /11 WLAC Radio, Nashville, Tenn. - Rebuilt Wurlitzer.