



Style 216 Wurlitzer in the Rialto Theatre, Pasadena.

B'hené & Kaufmann Archives

The Rare Breed

by Tom DeLay

The late summer of 1925 saw the first shipment of a scarce two-manual, ten-rank style of Wurlitzer theatre pipe organ. Much has been said over the years about the style 216 Wurlitzer, but not since the early 1960s has much been seen in print about what makes a style 216 such a different breed. At that time, Gordon Kibbee included the 216 in his excellent series on Wurlitzer style specifications. (THEATRE ORGAN, Fall 1960, page 9)

Unknown, except by reputation, outside the confines of California, many 2/10 Wurlitzer organs have been called style 216, but other than those in California, none were found. Well-known theatre organist Frank Lanterman played for many years Southern California theatre organs that were generally known as 2/9 style 210 and 2/10 style 215. He was disgusted with the rather puny stoplists of these or-

gans, often with only an 8' manual Tibia Clausa. As late as 1928, Wurlitzer produced a style 210 2/9 with only an 8' Tibia — no 4' Piccolo, let alone Tibia Twelfth or Piccolo 2'. As an organist for Fox West Coast Theatres he carried some degree of weight and persuaded the Wurlitzer Company to respecify their style 210:

MAIN

Flute 16-2
Viol 'd Orchestre 8-2
Open Diapason 16-4
Viol Celeste 8-4
Clarinet 8
Orchestral Oboe 8
Chrysoglott

SOLO

Vox Humana 8
Tuba Horn 16-4
Tibia Clausa 8
traps/tonal
percussions

Note: Wurlitzer produced 51 style 210 instruments and a mere 14 style 215 organs. The more common style H (also a 2/10 or 3/10) saw much greater production with 2 and 3 manuals.

In addition to keeping the same basic list of ranks, he specified the ubiquitous English (post) Horn added to the Solo, and moved the Orchestral Oboe to the Solo from the Main.

For an organ designed in 1928, it had a surprisingly modern stop layout. However, by today's concert standards the Tibia Clausa's appearance at only 8'-4' might seem unthinkable, it was a major improvement towards the present day expectations of a theatre organ.

Wurlitzer produced a mere 12 of these style 216 instruments, with all but one installed within the area of Southern California. This one exception made its way to the Senator Theatre in Oakland, and then for many years was in San Francisco's Lost Weekend Lounge where it was played by Larry Vannucci. As far as is known, only opus 1320 remains fully intact.



Style 216 Main Chamber. L to R: Clarinet Viol Celeste, Open Diapason, Viol d'Orchestra, and Flute. This is a fairly typical Wurlitzer Main. DeLay photo



Style 216 Solo Chamber. L to R: Vox Humana, Tibia Clausa, Harmonic Tuba, English Horn, and Orchestral Oboe — though this example has a Kinura in place of the Oboe. Most often when a 216 can be found, it is the English Horn and Oboe which are likely to be missing. DeLay photo

The Style 216s were installed as follows:

Opus	Theatre	City	Year	Disposition
1142	Rialto	Pasadena, CA	1925	OI, less Solo church; then to a private party
1149	West Coast	Huntington Park, CA	1925	Parts
1164	1st & Vermont West Coast	Los Angeles, CA	1925	Parts
1220 SP	Maclay (only 'special' opus)	San Fernando, CA	1925	Unplayable
1276	New (FOX)	Taft, CA	1926	Parts
1294	West Lake	Los Angeles, CA	1926	Partially broken up for parts
1320	Senator	Oakland, CA	1926	intact-storage
1620	Garrick (sent to Cal Theatre San Diego)	Los Angeles, CA	1927	Unknown
1636	Tower (later moved to Los Angeles Theatre)	Los Angeles, CA	1927	Unknown
1850	Fairfax (California)	San Bernardino, CA	1928	Original installation
1973	West Coast	Redlands, CA	1928	enlarged 3MN in a church hall
1998	West Coast	Riverside, CA	1928	parts

Of these, only opus 1850 remains in its original location, minus its English Horn, removed some years back by the "mid-night organ supply." Two of the instruments were recorded; the excellent recording of 1965 of George Wright on Pasadena's Rialto organ and an early 1960s recording of Ann Leaf at opus 1636, by then long since moved to the Los Angeles Theatre on Broadway. Opus 1636 is also an instrument known for other reasons, having been "stolen" from the theatre in the late 1970s. The late Bill Thompson also made a recording at the Rialto circa 1968. The Rialto 216, alas, lost its Solo chamber in a sad fire in the early 1970s, but prior to this was heard in many superb George Wright "evening concerts" and the 1968 Los Angeles-hosted National ATOS Convention. It is sorely missed. One 216, most of Opus 1924 is now installed as the Sequoia Chapter's organ in the Hanford (CA) Theatre. With another 216 "Solo" this organ is restored as a 216 organ in the Hanford Theatre. The Solo of opus 1294 is now installed in a well-known North Hollywood "Philharmonic Organ."

Even though Frank Lanterman specified these organs as more unified and varied stoplists than their rather colorless 210 and 215 brethren, at least one of these 216s provided only an 8' Tibia Clausa (with no further extension of it), the very objection Lanterman had against the previous styles of organs (Westlake 1294 Wurlitzer factory blueprints).

The five-rank Main chambers were fairly typical of most 8- to 10-rank Wurlitzers; all five-ranks on one tremulant (including 16-8 offset chests) and a separate regulator for the 12" pressure required for the Chrysoglott and shades. The Solo chamber was another story.

The manual Tubas were voiced on 15" pressure, the standard 6" Vox Humana, and what equalled the Solo-tremulated stops, Orchestral Oboe, English Horn, and Tibia Clausa, all trying to shake with the Tibia's needed amplitude. Heavily tremmed English Horns were perhaps more widely accepted than by today's ears. What is unthinkable to us today was probably not too much of a concern in the mid-1920s. In addition to the organs' well-equipped tonal percussion department (Marimba/Harp, Chrysoglott, Sleigh Bells, Glockenspiel, 25-note Chimes, Xylophone), the rather small 216 unit provided the organist some versatility that was virtually never found on two-manual Wurlitzer theatre organs — well-equipped manual couplers. These were Accompaniment Octave, Solo to Accompaniment, Solo Sub, Solo Unison Off, Solo Octave, and an Unison Solo to Accompaniment second touch. Compared to other Wurlitzers of the day, the 216 had a unique second touch specification provided for the Accompaniment. Besides the coupler, also found were Clarinet 16tc, Harmonic Tuba 8', Piccolo 4', Marimba, Chimes, Glockenspiel, and Triangle. A Crescendo pedal seemed to be an option. At least one organ (opus 1142) was installed with the Main and Solo chambers in the reversed position; that is Solo on the left and the Main on the right.

As the years have gone by, gradually the style 216 has all but disappeared as a complete organ. Opus 1276 partially burned in a theatre fire, others have "simply" disappeared (1620, 1636). Most recently 1220 was traced to a church where it remains waterlogged and unplayable.

Others have been partially destroyed (1142, 1294), while some have scattered for parts (1998, 1276, 1164). As an ultimate

two-manual organ they were superb. While some of their unification may seem a bit dated by today's standards, they could, for the most part, still be considered a viable smaller form of concert instrument. As our 1989 Organist of the Year put it when asked if he minded playing a concert on a two-manual organ, Ron Rhode replied, "... not at all! I may have to work a bit harder, but provided it all works, it is no problem."

It is a sincere hope that the scant few remaining 216 Wurlitzer theatre organs will remain intact for future generations to see and hear and not be allowed to succumb to pipe organ cancer — "expansionitus." A rare breed to begin with, it is now all but fully gone — but not forgotten.

Many credits to information research of Dave Junchen and the Wurlitzer Shipment List by Judd Walton. Without these two historians, much theatre organ information might be lost for all time.

The dispositions on the list of style 216s should not necessarily be considered up-to-date nor necessarily correct. Over the last 20 years or so the organs have been moved, broken-up, added to and so on. We invite any corrections, additions, or deletions to the list.

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An interesting aside regarding the style 215: Most were installed in Southern California again with one exception. Opus 1558 shipped in January 1927 is still installed in its original home, Bellingham, Washington Mount Baker Theatre. It is the only 215 still in its original home.



Style 216 console in the Rialto Theatre.

B'hend & Kaufmann Archives

Wurlitzer's Style 216 (2-manual, 10-rank) Organ

During the period Frank Lanterman was chief organist for West Coast Theatres in the Southern California area, he played many of the two-manual instruments that were installed in the chain's various houses and became resident at the Alexander Theatre in Glendale. A style 215 Wurlitzer was installed there. In this era, from 1925 until the advent of sound motion pictures, West Coast started expanding rapidly, taking control of theatres that were already in operation and blue-printing many others to be built throughout the region.

In his position as chief organist, Lanterman was called on to recommend the type and size of instruments to be ordered. He had never been completely satisfied with the Wurlitzer in the Alex and decided to prepare a specification that offered greater flexibility. What ultimately became Wurlitzer's Style 216 was his creation. But Wurlitzer wasn't impressed and politely rejected his ideas.

He readily solved the problem by making two telephone calls — one locally to the Robert-Morton Organ Company in nearby Van Nuys, and then a long distance call to North Tonawanda, New York. The latter call was to inform Wurlitzer that Robert-Morton would be happy to build a two-manual, ten-rank style organ for the new West Coast houses.

Lanterman, in later years, recalled that Wurlitzer rather hastily reconsidered and decided the firm would be quite pleased to use his specification and turn out what became designated as the Wurlitzer Style 216. Many of the new West Coast theatres were equipped with this new model, one of the most successful Wurlitzer styles ever produced.

In fact, George Wright concertized and made famous the Style 216 in the Rialto Theatre in South Pasadena, California, for several years before the instrument was partially destroyed on October 28, 1971, in a blaze believed to have been started by an overheated soldering iron.

Tom B'hend

Specification of the 2/10 Style 216 Wurlitzer pipe organ.

Pedal — Three pistons		Flute	4	Tibia Clausa	8	Second Touch	
Tuba Profunda	16	Vox Humana	4	Clarinet	8	Tuba Profunda	16
Diaphone	16	Twelfth	2 ² / ₃	Orchestral Oboe	8	Clarinet	8
Bourdon	16	Piccolo	2	Viol d'Orchestre	8	Tremulants	
Harmonic Tuba	8	Harp		Viol Celeste	8	Main	
Diaphonic Diapason	8	Marimba		Concert Flute	8	Solo	
Tibia Clausa	8	Chrysoglott		Vox Humana	8	Tuba	
Clarinet	8	Snare Drum		Harmonic Clarion	4	Vox Humana	
Cello II	8	Tambourine		Octave	4	Crescendo Pedal	
Flute	8	Castanets		Piccolo	4	Traps sforzando	
Octave	4	Chinese Block		Viol	4	1st/2nd touch —	
Bass Drum		Octave		Octave Celeste	4	piano pedal	
Kettle Drum		Solo to Accompaniment		Flute	4	Auto Horn	
Crash Cymbal		Second Touch		Twelfth	2 ² / ₃	Fire Gong	
Cymbal		Clarinet (TC)	16	Fifteenth	2	Steamboat Whistle	
Accompaniment —		Harmonic Tuba	8	Piccolo	2	Bird Effect	
Ten pistons		Piccolo	4	Tierce	1-3/5	Door Bell - push button	
Contra Viol (TC)	16	Marimba		Marimba		Horse Hoofs	
English Horn	8	Cathedral Chimes		Harp			
Harmonic Tuba	8	Glockenspiel		Cathedral Chimes			
Diaphonic Diapason	8	Triangle		Sleigh Bells			
Tibia Clausa	8	Solo to Accompaniment		Glockenspiel			
Clarinet	8	Solo — Ten pistons		Bell re-it			
Viole d'Orchestre	8	Tuba Profunda	16	Chrysoglott			
Viole Celeste CC	8	Bourdon	16	Sub Octave			
Concert Flute	8	Contra Viol (TC)	16	Unison Off			
Vox Humana	8	English Horn	8	Octave			
Viol	4	Harmonic Tuba	8				
Octave Celeste	4	Diaphonic Diapason	8				

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