

Dusty Rhodes .. a Wurlitzer and Memories



Too often, the Theatre Organ enthusiast's interest lies with the big organs in plush movie palaces in the large cities. Certainly a 4-manual Wurlitzer, a Marr & Colton, or a Wonder Morton is more than adequate to satisfy the appetite of any organ lover. However, if an organ sleuth has exhausted his research, he expands his radius of operations until he comes across a small-size organ in a typical theatre in a typical small town. Such was the case not long ago when Lloyd Klos and Jess G. Littlefield visited Batavia, New York.

Learning that the organ in the Family Theatre was still intact, though not played for years, Jess and Lloyd made a trip there which turned out to be very fruitful. The manager, Mr. John Oberle, was most cooperative in showing the instrument, answering questions, and volunteering additional information.

The theatre is not located on Main Street, but on a one-way side street. It is a 1,000-seat affair and is used for local amateur productions and stage shows passing through town. It has a striking interior with balcony, ornate carvings, beautiful curtain, and modern seating. The organ is in typical unused condition...dusty and dirty. A fire near the stage a few years ago resulted in torrents of water being showered upon the console.

It was in 1923 that the management of the Family Theatre decided to completely modernize it. This was rather startling in itself because Batavia at the time listed only 20,000 citizens and there were two other theatres in the city. Included in the renovation was the decision to install an organ. A two-manual, 6-rank Wurlitzer, Style D, was purchased and positioned in front of the stage at the left. Chambers were situated on each side of the auditorium near the stage. The theatre, when reopened, was renamed "The New Family Theatre". While discussing the Family Theatre and its Wurlitzer with the theatre staff and other citizens of Batavia, the name of Dusty Rhodes was mentioned often.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Wurlitzer Shipment List was left out of this issue due to convention reports. It will be resumed in the next issue.

More information concerning the organist, Dusty Rhodes, was obtained from Robert O. Monaghan, a teacher of music at the State School for the Blind. Though blind, he had had experience as an organist in theatres in Wolcott and Fredonia, New York, before going to Batavia. He knew Dusty Rhodes well and used to sub for him at the Family Theatre. Much valuable information was obtained. From the view point of Mr. Monaghan and others with long memories in Batavia, Dusty Rhodes was indeed a fabulous character.

Even though Dusty was being paid the enormous sum for those days, \$250 a week, the management of the theatre was able to realize the cost of refurnishing the theatre in a very short time. The artist built up a tremendous following and several persons have attested that the audience which always packed the theatre did so just to hear Dusty's artistry on the Wurlitzer and without regard to the calibre of the film being shown.

Mr. Monaghan stated, "I maintain a high and respectful regard for his memory and feel that he gave me much which was of value to me in my own career. He was an excellent organist for so relatively small a community and attracted a large audience who came specifically to hear the music. He was, of course, a showman playing in a somewhat spectacular and emotional style, but he drew from the sonorous tones of that organ thrilling effects--warmly sentimental selections, spinningling and stirring march rhythms, rapturous

2/6 Wurlitzer, Family Theatre, Batavia, N.Y., played by Dusty Rhodes.

waltzes, current song hits, fast or slow, but more often the slower ballads. He resorted to rather violent crescendos and diminuendos at times to further the effects he wanted.

"Most valuable and appreciated were the times he permitted me the opportunity to spell him--usually during the news and comics--sometimes by myself and sometimes with a child to read the captions for me. Then Dusty gave me a little coaching, standing beside me as I played, and making terse suggestions (always much to the point as, 'Don't fill up your chords with all the notes each hand can play. I don't know why or-

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SPECIFICATIONS of the COLONIAL THEATRE PIPE ORGAN

<p>MAIN CHAMBER (left) 10'' press. Flute: 97 pipes Tuba: 85 pipes Open Diapason: 73 pipes Clarinet: 61 pipes Chrysoglott: 37 bars Bird Song</p> <p>GENERAL SPECS. 5 H.P. Spencer Orgbbo is directly below console, delivers 19'' pressure to the regulators. Combination setter panel in back of console. Accompaniment: 7 combination buttons, 1 cancel, 1 general cancel Great: 7 combination buttons, 1 cancel Solo: 5 combination buttons, 1 cancel Foot Pistons and Expression: Fire Gong, Siren, Boat Whistle, Auto Horn, Bird Song. Division I, Division II and Master expression, Crescendo, Sforzando. Tremulants: Main, Solo, Tibia, Vox, Blank</p> <p>SOLO CHAMBER (right) 12'' press. Tibia: 85 pipes (15'' press.) String: 85 pipes String Celeste: 73 pipes Vox Humana: 73 pipes (7'' press.) Kinura: 61 pipes Oboe Horn: 61 pipes Marimba Harp: 37 bars Xylophone: 37 bars (reit.) Cathedral Chimes: 20 tubs Glockenspiel: 37 bars Orchestra Bells: (top 25 Glock., Reit.) Snare Drum Bass Drum Kettle Drum (Bass Drum)</p>	<p>Tom Tom Cymbal Triangle Tamborine Castinets Chinese Block Fire Gong Boat Whistle Auto Horn Siren</p> <p>ACCOMPANIMENT Contra Viole (TC)..... 16' Clarinet (TC)..... 16' Vox Humana (TC)..... 16' Diaphonic Diapason..... 8' Claribel Flute..... 8' Tibia Clausa..... 8' Oboe Horn..... 8' Vox Humana..... 8' Clarinet..... 8' Kinura..... 8' Tuba..... 8' Viole de Orchestra..... 8' Viole Celeste..... 8' 2 Blank tabs Flute..... 4' Tibia Clausa..... 4' Violin..... 4' Viole Celeste..... 4' Twelfth..... 2-2/3' Flautino..... 2' Marimba Harp..... 8' Chrysoglott..... 8' Tamborine Castinets Chinese Block Tom Tom Snare Drum Acc. to Acc..... 4' 4 Blank tabs</p> <p>ACCOMP. 2ND TOUCH Tibia Clausa..... 8' Tuba..... 8'</p>	<p>Chimes..... 8' Glockenspiel..... 4' Triangle Solo to Acc..... 4'</p> <p>GREAT Bourdon..... 16' Tibia Clausa..... 16' Diaphonic Diapason..... 16' Ophicleide (Tuba)..... 16' Viole de Orchestra (TC)..... 16' Clarinet (TC)..... 16' Vox Humana (TC)..... 16' Oboe Horn (TC)..... 16' Diapason..... 8' Concert Flute..... 8' Tibia Clausa..... 8' Oboe Horn..... 8' Vox Humana..... 8' Clarinet..... 8' Kinura..... 8' Tuba..... 8' Orchestral Oboe (Syn.)..... 8' Viole de Orchestra..... 8' Viole Celeste..... 8' 2 Blank tabs Principal..... 4' Flute..... 4' Tibia Clausa..... 4' Vox Humana..... 4' Clarion (Tuba)..... 4' Violin..... 4' Viole Celeste..... 4' Nazard..... 2-2/3' Piccolo..... 2' Tierce..... 1-3/5' Tibia Twelfth..... 2-2/3' Tibia Mutation (4 notes, each key) Fifteenth..... 2' Marimba Harp..... 8' Chrysoglott..... 8' Xylophone..... 8' Cathedral Chimes..... 8' Glockenspiel..... 4' Orchestra Bells..... 4' 4 Blank tabs Solo to Great..... 16'</p> <p>GREAT 2ND TOUCH Tuba..... 16' Tibia Clausa..... 8'</p> <p>SOLO Tibia Clausa..... 16' Tuba..... 16' Vox Humana (TC)..... 16' Diaphonic Diapason..... 8' Tibia Clausa..... 8' Oboe Horn..... 8' Vox Humana..... 8' Kinura..... 8' Tuba..... 8' String..... 8' 2 Blank tabs Tibia Clausa..... 4' Cornet (Tuba)..... 4' Xylophone..... 8' Cathedral Chimes..... 8' Glockenspiel..... 4' Orchestra Bells..... 4' 4 Blank tabs</p> <p>PEDAL Resultant..... 32' Tuba..... 16' Tibia Clausa..... 16' Bourdon..... 16' Diaphone..... 8' Flute..... 8' Tibia Clausa..... 8' Tuba..... 8' Cello..... 8' Flute..... 4' Snare Drum 1 Blank tab Acc. to Pedal..... 8'</p> <p>PEDAL 2ND TOUCH Tuba..... 16' Diaphone..... 8' Bass Drum Cymbal Snare Drum Kettle Drum Thunder</p>
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DUSTY RHODES

(concluded)

ganists have to play with big chords. They do not need to. Whenever you can, keep a counter melody running above or below your tune.) By picking up the chord from beneath each other's hands, we made the transition so that most folks did not know there had been a change in organist."

Frequently when the supper hour approached, Bob Monaghan would take over the playing for his idol. When the proper moment arrived Dusty would say, "Take over, Bob. I'm going out for a sandwich." Dusty would edge toward the left of the bench, Bob would place his fingers under Rhodes', and, assuming his spot in the center of the bench, would continue the playing without a hitch.

Each year the management would have a "big name" organist play in Dusty's place as an added attraction. These "big names" were famous throughout the country and were always a hit. However, in Batavia they received only polite applause. Then, when Dusty

Rhodes would return to the console for the film accompaniment the polite applause would break into a crescendo. The people of Batavia considered him their own, and this status remained until the end of his engagement in 1925.

In 1925, Dusty Rhodes left the Batavia scene, according to Lloyd Klos and Jess Littlefield. But where he went is uncertain. Some say he went to Canada for awhile, and beyond that...no one seems to know. But one thing is certain. Of the more than 17,000 people residing in Batavia today, there must be several hundred who still remember the blinking of the console lights in the Family Theatre, the bow of the performer, and the superb artistry which belonged to Dusty Rhodes during the Golden Days of the Theatre Organ in that little New York town.

WHILE THEY LAST

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Was WurliTzer rebuilding a Morton . . . Did they trade it? . . . or . . .? Also noted throughout the entire list...after an Opus Number the cryptic wording "Rep'd". Now the question is....Does this mean repaired or repossessed?

Incidentally, some of the pipework in Robert Morton installations stands up as some of the best built by anyone. Robert Morton also introduced many progressive ideas into the organ builders' art and enjoyed a reputation for having a very reliable, simple action. Oldtime theatre owners also have stated that Morton's prices were very reasonable, which probably accounts for the many smaller theatres installing them.

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