

Church - Theatre Organs

By Douglas Marion

Now that most of the WurliTzer installation list has appeared in these pages, questions have been asked by ATOE members about the many special church models listed. Some have asked if these were simply theatre organs installed in churches, or straight organs built to conform to more "accepted" standards of church organ construction.

Certainly not in the majority of installations, but in more than one might suspect, there are installed in churches, organs manufactured by WurliTzer, Morton, Kimball and Smith to name just a few. In England and on the Continent, there are similar, though fewer such instruments!

It is not hard to determine when such an installation is a converted theatre organ. These are usually sad to behold (to the theatre organ enthusiast), as all too often an attempt has been made to make a "church organ" out of the instrument. The resulting emasculation creates a lot of nothing! If lower pressures are used, chests and relays are slow to respond. Generally the conversion of a theatre pipe organ to a church installation is rarely successful (musically)! In other cases, many churches wanted a theatre organ, and believe me they got them...most often to the joyful enthusiasm of the entire congregation.

Differing from the foregoing examples are the instruments actually designed by the theatre organ builder as a church organ. The W. W. Kimball Company made many fine church instruments, and the relationship to their theatre organs, while recognizable, was nonetheless apart. To be sure, the selection of pipe ranks, and the almost complete exclusion of mixtures, reflected some of the tastes of the theatre building days. This in turn reversed itself in the specifications of the Radio City Music Hall and the Center Theatre WurliTzers. The latter, now being installed in an Alexandria, Virginia skating rink by ATOE member Jimmy Boyce, has a two rank mixture. The Radio City Music Hall has several mixture ranks, one a four rank with harmonic breaks as in church instruments. But that is another story.

Several Robert Morton church organ installations pretty well established the fact that this builder used theatre organ components throughout, although some voicing was done. In a few instances, smaller scales were used. Traps and percussions were eliminated, except for the chimes and an occasional metal bar harp.

In the case of WurliTzer church organs, a rather unique instrument evolved. Several of these have come to our at-

tention, and so far as can be determined, WurliTzer did not purposely design an organ for church use that was a true theatre organ. One of the late models they installed is the organ in the First Baptist Church in Phoenix, Arizona. It is a good example of this type of organ, and a close examination will reveal its many attributes.

The Phoenix WurliTzer is a 3 manual, 14 rank instrument installed in two chambers located above the choir loft. This would be the equivalent of a proscenium installation in a theatre. The organ speaks through shutters into a long sound chamber, with grilles in the bottom which allow the sound to travel down to the choir and organist below, and also straight forward through grilles into the sanctuary itself. When originally installed, the floor or choir grilles were not opened, and it has been stated that the organ was very muffled to those below.

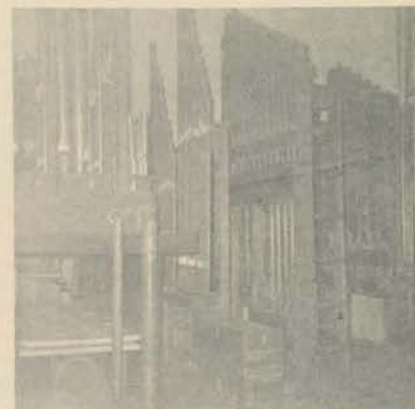
The Swell chamber has 6 ranks and the Great has 8 ranks. The entire organ is built and voiced for 8" pressure, with the exception of the vox Humana which is on the usual 6". This was a common feature of these organs, AND the WurliTzer home installations. While most of the pipe ranks are recognizable cousins of their theatre organ counterparts, the difference in scaling and resulting sound is immediately noticeable. Pipe voices are gentler and less assertive than in theatre organs. Note the difference in the pipe dimensions in the specs which follow.

The console is the standard 3 manual shell, with gothic arched panel sides and back. The stop tablets are white with red or black lettering. The couplers are black with white lettering. The flue stops are lettered in black and the reeds in red. This was standard in church and home organs. In the Phoenix instrument there are many blank stop tablets, and no doubt never realized additions were originally planned. The organ has a very lovely, warm and rich sound, but it is definitely not an organ that would meet present day concert requirements. It is lacking in highs, but suits the church's need admirably.

Other instruments of this type that have been inspected include a 3 manual, 8 rank, which except for the aforementioned scaling appears to be exactly like a Style F, sans traps, of course. An earlier 1924 model on the other hand, was totally unlike the regular seven rank Style E, having the following ranks: Open Diapason, Flute, Salicional, Voix Celeste, Dulciana, Lieblich Gedeckt, and Vox Humana. (Opus 822, St. Paul's, San Rafael, Calif. 5/2/24).



3m/14r Church-WurliTzer, 1st Baptist Church, located in Phoenix, Arizona.



Swell Chamber. Stopped Flute, Voix Celeste, Diapason Phonon, Oboe Horn and Vox, from left to right.



Great chamber principal diapason in foreground, with Gemshorn, Violin Diapason and Tibia Clausa behind.

As far as has been determined, the Cathedral Organ built and installed in Mexico City was one of the largest WurliTzer church models built. There may be others of equal or larger size (and this we would like very much to know for sure), but for the most part,

theatre organ

the Wurlitzer church organs corresponded closely in size with their theatre cousins, for a given size seating capacity. Chamber components, such as chests, reservoirs, tremolos, swell shades, floor frames, etc. are identical with

those in theatre organs, except for minor differences in dimensions to accommodate the smaller scales. Relays are noticeably smaller due to the limited unification.

The fourteen ranks of the Phoenix 1st Baptist organ are as follows: -

| | | | |
|--------------------|----------|----------|-------------------------------|
| GREAT | | | |
| Principal Diapason | 16' - 4' | 85 Pipes | (16' Octave Open Wood Pipes) |
| Gemshorn | 8' - 4' | 73 Pipes | (Special Tapered Pipes) |
| Traverse Flute | 8' - 4' | 73 Pipes | (Concert Flute) |
| Violin Diapason | 8' - | 61 Pipes | (Special) |
| Tibia Clausa | 16' - 4' | 73 Pipes | (Small Scale 11½ x 9 CCC,) |
| Dulciana | 8' - | 61 Pipes | (Standard) |
| Clarinet | 8' - | 61 Pipes | (Small Scale Special) |
| Trumpet | 8' - 4' | 73 Pipes | (Small Scale Special) |
| SWELL | | | |
| Diapason Phonor | 8' - | 61 Pipes | (Std. 6" at 8' CC) |
| Stopped Flute | 16' - 2' | 97 Pipes | (A Lieblich Flute) |
| Salicional | 8' - 4' | 73 Pipes | (Standard Scale) |
| Voix Celeste | 8' - | 61 Pipes | (Standard Scale) |
| Oboe Horn | 16' - 4' | 73 Pipes | (16' Contra Fagotto) |
| Vox Humana | 8' - | 61 Pipes | (Standard Scale) |

The Stop List is as follows:-

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| PEDAL | |
| 32' Acoustic Bass | 8' Dolce (Gemsh) |
| 16' Open Diapason | 8' Gedeckt (Stpd. Fl.) |
| 16' Bourdon (Tibia) | 16' Contra Fagotta (Oboe Horn) |
| 16' Lieblich Gedeckt (Stpd Fl.) | Great to Pedal |
| 8' Octave | Swell to Pedal |
| 8' Cello | Swell Octave to Pedal |
| 8' Flute | Choir to Pedal |

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| CHOIR | |
| 16' Gemshorn | 2' Piccolo |
| 8' Violin Diapason | 8' Clarinet |
| 8' Concert Flute | Sub Octave |
| 8' Gemshorn | Unison Off |
| 8' Dulciana | Octave |
| 4' Traverse Flute (Concert Fl.) | Swell Sub to Choir |
| 4' Gemshorn | Swell Unison to Choir |
| 2-2/3' Dolce Twelfth (Gemshorn) | Swell Octave to Choir |

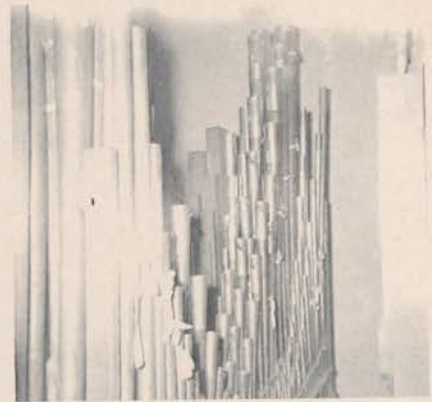
| | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| GREAT | |
| 8' Principal Diapason | Unison Off |
| 8' Tibia Clausa | Octave |
| 8' Concert Flute | Swell Sub to Great |
| 8' Gemshorn | Swell Unison to Great |
| 4' Octave | Swell Octave to Great |
| 4' Traverse Flute | Choir Sub to Great |
| 4' Gemshorn | Choir Unison to Great |
| 8' Trumpet | Choir Octave to Great |
| Sub Octave | Tremulant |

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| SWELL | |
| 16' Bourdon | Unison Off |
| 8' Diapason Phonor | Octave |
| 8' Stopped Flute | Choir to Swell |
| 8' Salicional | Tremulant (Swell) |
| 8' Vox Celeste | Vox Humana Tremulant |
| 4' Salicet | |
| 4' Flute D'Amour | Sforzando Pedal (full organ) |
| 2-2/3' Nazard | |
| 2' Flautino | |
| 1-3/5" Tierce | |
| 16' Contra Fagotta | |
| 8' Oboe Horn | |
| 8' Vox Humana | |
| 4' Oboe Clarion | |
| Sub Octave | |

Great to Pedal Reversible Toe Piston

BLANK STOP TABLETS

| | |
|-------|----|
| Pedal | 5 |
| Choir | 3 |
| Great | 6 |
| Swell | 13 |



Part of Great Chamber in Phoenix church. Small-scale Clarinet in foreground, with Trumpet, Dulciana and Concert Flute (Traverse) behind.

LLOYD KLOS REPORTS

Theater Organ Enthusiasts of Central New York State were treated to a unique program at the RKO Palace Theater in Rochester on January 14. Cavorting on the console of the 4M 21R Wurlitzer was Dr. Edward Bebko of Olean, N.Y., one-time organist at Radio City Music Hall, and veteran of many programs in the golden days of radio. The good doctor began the 3-hour show with semi-classics and popular show tunes. Feature event of the program was the showing of two silent pictures, "Muddled In Mud", featuring the antics of the Keystone Cops, and "First In War", the humorous accounts of that intrepid U. S. Marine, Charlie Chase. Even though he accompanied both pictures "cold", Dr. Bebko did a sterling job, and the audience was enthusiastic in its appreciation of his efforts. This, as far as is known, is the only time that the Palace organ was ever used to accompany silent pictures, the theater being opened when sound was coming in strongly in 1928.

While the featured artist was taking an intermission breather, Harry Radloff, who is in charge of the Palace organ, gave a very creditable performance. Following this, Dr. Bebko resumed his place at the console, and dedicated the remainder of the program to requests from the audience.

A luncheon was held at the Wishing Well following the opening of the first show at the Palace for which Dr. Bebko played. ATOE members came from Buffalo, Warsaw and Elmira for the events.

In a few months, another organ will be available to these enthusiasts. Elmira members Dave Teeter, Lauren Peckham, and Bob Oppenheim have been working for months to get the Elmira Theatre Marr & Colton into tip-top condition. They hope to have it squawking by late summer or early fall.