

The Mighty Wurlitzer, Official Organ of Toledo Paramount

The Toledo Paramount Theatre was built in the heyday of theatre expansion as practiced by the Paramount Publix Circuit, and like other theatres built by this firm in those never to be forgotten days, was designed to dazzle the populace.

This theatre, when built in 1928, seated 3,500 people, the ceiling was specially designed and featured twinkling stars with moving clouds. The entire theatre was patterned to resemble a Greek amphitheatre. The switchboard as installed was a massive affair consuming over 200,000 watts of power, all lighting was indirect. Over 3,000 lighting combinations were available from the stage board.

Naturally, this magnificent palace featured a Mighty Wurlitzer of 20 ranks and 4 manual console - a Publix No. 1 Model. The Wurlitzer Publix No. 1 model was featured in a number of Paramount's deluxe showcases of the late 1920's. This might be a good place to describe this model which was designed by none other than Jesse Crawford for use in Publix Theatres throughout the world.

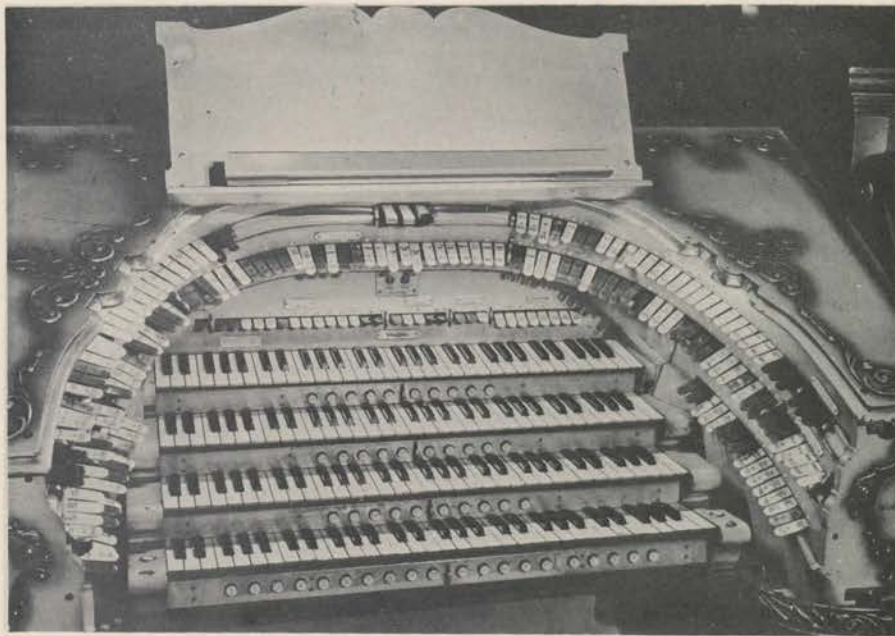
The following is a description of the Publix No. 1 as installed in the Paramount, Toledo, Ohio and is similar to other installations of this same model.

CONSOLE--The four manual Wurlitzer console is located to the left of the rising orchestra pit on its own independent elevator, and can be brought into view of the audience either by controls at the console, or by a similar control located on the main switch panel backstage. There are doorbell type signals to the projection booth and to the switch panel backstage that can be operated by the organist to signal the end of his recital, etc.

PIPE WORK--Twenty ranks comprising:

Tibia Clausa 1	Vox Humana 1
Tibia Clausa 2	Vox Humana 2
Flute	Clarinet
Diapason	Oboe Horn
Quintadena	Orchestral Oboe
Dulciana	Kinura
String 1	Saxophone
String 2	Trumpet
Viole De Orch.	Tuba Horn
Violin Celeste	Tuba Mirabilis

The organ is laid out in two chambers under expression, the Main on the left and the Solo on the right side of the theater. A third open chamber is located on the left side of the theater under the Main pipe chamber, and houses the Master Xylophone and the Piano. The Piano, an upright Wurlitzer of 88 notes, has an electro-vacuum action with four stages of vacuum which varies the piano's volume as the General swell pedal is operated at the organ console. The General Swell Pedal also has the piano sustaining control button on the upper right hand corner. As part of the piano, there is a mandolin attachment. The mandolin attachment is simply a small wooden rod, hinged on each end of the piano, to which are attached leather fingers, each of which has a small metal clip on the end. The hinged arrangement allows one of the fingers to drop into place in front of each piano hammer, resulting in the metal clip on the end of each finger being struck by the piano hammer and in turn striking the strings and producing the peculiar metallic twang so com-



Wurlitzer (Publix No. 1) 4/20, Paramount Theatre, Toledo, Ohio.

mon to this attachment. The Mandolin attachment is controlled by the Mandolin stop of the Accompaniment manual and then causes the Mandolin to sound on any other manual when the Piano stop is depressed.

PERCUSSIONS--Some of the special effects available on the organ include two harps (Chrysoglott 'Metal Harp' or Vibraharp if tremolo is turned on, and standard Harp 'Wood Harp', two Xylophones, a Marimba, Auto Horn, two Bird Whistles, Crash Cymbal, Sand Block, two degrees of thunder, 25 note set of cathedral chimes (Undamped), and a 25 note set of tuned sleigh bells, plus a full size bass drum and a standard snare drum actuated by depressing certain keys and pushbuttons on the console.

WIND SUPPLY--Located in the basement of the theater is the blower room, containing a 10 H.P. Spencer Orgoblo to provide wind for the pipes and percussion devices of the organ at 15" wind pressure, along with filters (similar to those used in home heating systems) to purify the air before being sent to the pipes, etc.

ACTION CURRENT GENERATOR--Located in the relay room, is a motor generator set used to provide the D.C. current necessary for the operation of the organ.

ELEVATOR--The motor on the elevator is a 5 H.P. intermittent duty motor, driving a mechanical jack-screw type lift. No hydraulics are used on this installation.

The organ was installed in 1928 during the construction of the theatre. It was first played publicly Saturday, February 16, 1929. To play it, Dwight Brown, "one of the flashiest organ masters in the country", was lured from the great Palace Theatre in Dallas, where his popularity with Texans had kept him for six years. (Publix, with whom

Brown was under contract, usually shifted its artists from city to city much more often than this.)

As was the case in almost every city of the U.S., the Toledo Paramount organ fell into disuse about 1931. In 1933, as a result of heavy rains the roof leaked, causing extensive water damage to the organ in the Solo (right) chamber. The water damaged parts were removed at that time and emergency repairs were taken care of by the Toledo Pipe Organ Co.. However, in the past 28 years no authorization was ever given to complete the repairs; therefore the removed parts were stored by the organ service company awaiting the word to complete the job. From then on the organ was played minus four ranks of pipes, namely, Tuba Mirabilis, Brass Trumpet, Brass Sax, and Solo Tibia. Percussions were also damaged by water and removed.

In 1960 the Paramount was made over for Cinerama showings, reducing the seating capacity to 1,250 with the huge curved screen covering the entire stage area. At this time Virg Howard, Sales Manager of the Organ Department at The Bleckner Music Company, stirred up interest in the organ to the extent that when the Paramount Theater needed an organ for the opening of Cinerama, Bleckner was called on to provide it. A Wurlitzer Electronic Organ, with Four Leslie Speakers, was installed on the rising orchestra pit and played for the two day-Premiere showing of "This Is Cinerama" November 21 and 22, 1960, by Mr. Howard. It was at this Premiere that Virg Howard had the opportunity to talk with the Manager and the Owners of the Paramount and presented them with the offer to rebuild the Mighty Wurlitzer Pipe Organ.

The TOLEDO PIPE ORGAN COMPANY and the BLECKNER MUSIC COMPANY, both

of Toledo, integrated labor and material as well as financial forces into rebuilding the Mighty Wurlitzer. In actual dollar value, this amounted to about \$2,000 in material and at least a similar amount in labor. On a contract basis the job would have cost the theater approximately \$5,000. It was only because of the careful storage of pipes and wind chests at Toledo Pipe Organ and much volunteer labor from both companies that such an undertaking could even be attempted. To further culture in Toledo, and to have tangible evidence of leadership of local Toledo concerns--the above two companies agreed to do the repair and rebuilding of the Paramount Theatre Organ FREE OF CHARGE to the theater.

(Ed note: Virg Howard volunteered to fix the organ, so we'll let him tell the details).

"For the most part repairs went smoothly, just being very time consuming. We refinished the pedals, and while they were removed, discovered that nearly all of the pedal contacts were badly bent, twisted together, etc. These required straightening, and as we progressed with this job we continually got more ciphers, and more shorted notes as we went up the scale, (a two day job), but miraculously, as we finished with the last pedal contact and again tried the pedals--everyone of them worked perfectly.

"With the installation of the Cinerama screen which circles around the theater, the console would rise directly under the screen. This necessitated moving the console on its elevator. We had just 18½ inches that we could move the console to the right, and it took three of us one full day to accomplish this, the main problem being to cut a new wind hole through the floor of the elevator which was five inches thick (The top inch being hard wood) and the space available only permitted use of 1/4 inch electric drill. It took a lot of 1/4 inch holes to cut out a 4 x 4 inch square.

"When we finally got to the necessary

console work, we discovered that all the Great Pistons were Generals on first touch. After lifting the manuals, we found all contacts were working perfectly and could see no immediate reason for the malfunction, however upon checking further we located some extra wiring in the console and determined that someone had gone to a lot (and I do mean a lot) of extra work, permanently wiring all the Great Pistons to ALL keyboards. We started on this mess by cutting all the extra wiring--nearly half a bushel basket full, upon completion of the cutting, the entire combination action worked correctly.

"A similar experience occurred in the relay room. There were a few shorts in the organ wiring, so that when one note was played you got another along with it. We discovered an extra cable wired into three or four places of the relay. As we would cut one of these extra wires a short would correct itself, but in turn this same note would go out on the piano. From this we decided the piano must have been rigged up after the main organ wiring was in. We complained about this to the head electrician of the theatre. He asked if we knew about the extra keyboard? We didn't know anything about it, so he took me to the basement and presented me with a standard 61 note keyboard with 4 combination pistons on it. This was a homemade device using the keyboard from an old Wurlitzer player piano-organ. It only took a moment to discover the cable attached, was the same cable we had discovered in the relay room. This cable had been crudely disconnected and coiled up which was the cause of the remaining shorts in the organ."

Wire tracing, tuning, rebuilding, and regulating was finally completed and at long last another Mighty Wurlitzer was brought back to life for enjoyment of Cinerama patrons in Toledo, Ohio. Theatre Organ Enthusiasts everywhere are grateful to Virg Howard, The Bleckner Music Company and the Toledo Pipe Organ Company, for the efforts put forth.

CHAPTER NEWS (cont.)

gram was completely unplanned but a great talent was discovered in the person of Dennis Awe of Mineola, New York. His styling and artistry were beyond our greatest hopes and the organ never sounded better than when under the control of this young man.

Mid-evening we were pleasantly surprised by the showing of three sound sing-a-long films featuring Dick Liebert, Don Baker and Lew White at the Paramount Studio Wurlitzer. These were real gems and everyone participated in the singing. An ex-theatre organist of Cleveland, Paul Heideman then took over the console and played for the Keystone Cops' pie-demolishing "Keystone Hotel" comedy, and finally the Our Gang troupe in the "Haunted House".

By this time it was nearing midnight and good-byes were said with the hope that this was only the send-off for a very active and enjoyable chapter.

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PROFILE VIRG HOWARD

Virg Howard was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1930, and moved to Columbus, Ohio, in 1940. At the completion of high school in 1947 he worked one year prior to entering college at the University of Cincinnati. It was during this year that he attended the Ohio State Fair and happened upon an exhibit of electronic organs. Arrangements were made, and Virg started taking organ lessons the next week.

No, he didn't buy one! All practice was done at one of the local churches for the nominal sum of \$.35 per hour for the use of the largest church organ in the city. Having had piano background, the organ work came fairly easy, and two months after starting lessons he played a wedding at this church. He continued organ lessons for a two year period when not in school, and while in Cincinnati, played the Paramount Theatre Organ prior to showtime in the evenings. He also did some outside sales work for the Wurlitzer store in Cincinnati.

After two years in Cincinnati, Virg transferred to Ohio State University and played Smith's Roller Rink in Columbus to provide additional funds while in college. His college major was Industrial Engineering and Industrial Photography which he did for three and one-half years with the U. S. Army as Chief of the Photo Branch of the Army Electronic Proving Grounds in Arizona.

While in the service, Virg organized a trio (Organ, Sax, and Drums) and played extensively through central and southern Arizona, with programs broadcast by the Army featuring his trio aired over a dozen or so local stations. He also appeared as a weekly soloist via tape recording on Concert in Khaki, a half hour radio show sponsored by 4th Army, Fort Sam Houston, Texas, which is aired over more than 100 radio stations throughout the south and west.

Upon return to civilian life, Virg moved with his family, wife-Elizabeth, and daughter-Lisa Anne, to Toledo, and accepted a position with the Bleckner Music Company where he is presently employed. He still maintains his Commission in the Army Reserve and holds the rank of First Lieutenant.



Reprint from
WURLITZER
"FIELD AND FACTORY"

BLECKNER'S REBUILDS MIGHTY WURLITZER FOR TOLEDO CINERAMA THEATER

The Mighty Wurlitzer builds recognition for Wurlitzer and Wurlitzer Dealers year after year. Virg Howard, Manager of the Organ Department of Bleckner Music Company in Toledo, is the official organist for the Paramount Theater Cinerama productions, and he is at the console of this Mighty Wurlitzer practically every evening. When the Cinerama films came to Toledo, the Bleckner Music Company provided organists and Wurlitzer Organs

for pre-show entertainment and for music during the intermission. A later discovery revealed that the Paramount had a Mighty Wurlitzer, installed in 1929, but water had damaged it in 1933, and it had remained idle for over a quarter century. Virg Howard conceived the idea of restoring the organ.

Cooperating with Toledo Pipe Organ Company, Bleckner's effected a complete restoration of this majestic instrument.

