

PIPE ORGANS and PILOT TRAINERS

As Told to Duane Arey
by E. A. Link, Jr.

In the usual discussion of theatre organs, four or five makes of instruments always dominate the conversation, leading one to believe that no other builders were in the field. This, of course, is not true, as there were several dozen manufacturers serving the theatre industry, including most of the makers of church organs.

If it hadn't been for Al Jolson's "Jazz Singer" on the Vitaphone, it is entirely possible that Link might have been a "name" along with WurliTzer, Robert Morton, Kimball, and others.

E. A. Link Sr. was first associated with the Shaff Bros. Piano Company of Chicago. In 1910, Link sold his interest in this company, and moved to Binghamton, N.Y. where he began the building of the Link piano. Link, like his big competitor, WurliTzer, slanted his production to the musical desires of the masses. In his six-story factory building he turned out a formidable array of musical instruments including coin-operated pianos, nickelodeons, phonographs, and finally Link Pipe Organs.

The Link factory started production of pipe organs for funeral establishments, residences, and concert halls just prior to World War I. True theatre organ production began in the early 1920's. The total pipe organ output, of all types, was approximately 1,000 instruments. Of these, about 200 were theatre organs. Many of them were single manual models with player attachments. The bulk of the production was made up of two manual instruments, a good percentage having the Link Automatic Player. Many of these units were installed in hotels and plush residences. There were only about 12 three manual theatre organs built, and these were not adapted for use with the automatic players.

In later years, besides the Link family, the regular staff of the Link organization included the services of the late C. Sharpe Minor, well-known theatre organ personality and authority. Mr. Minor's influence was reflected in a special model bearing his name. Three organs of this model were installed, one in the Capitol Theatre, Binghamton, N.Y., another in the State Theatre, Ithica, N.Y., and the third in the Haltnorth Theatre, Cleveland, Ohio. This last named "C. Sharpe Minor" model is now the property of Duane Arey of Cleveland, and is described elsewhere in this issue.

Link had a five manual model on the drawing boards but it was never built.

Pipework for the Link Organ was by Gottfried. However, due to production schedules some pipework was furnished by Organ Supply Company of Erie, Pa., under the guidance of Gottfried.

Pipework on the Link closely resembled that of Barton and Page. The Vox pipes have greatly extended boots which give very smooth speaking characteristics while the Kinura is rather refined in tone with not too much "bee in the bottle" resemblance. The Kinura resonators were small and shaped much like small trumpet bells rather than funnels.

The Link Organ was a well designed instrument. Some of the features are not necessarily unique; however, the design showed great far-sightedness and practical sincerity for production of a quality product.

A few worthwhile features were the cast aluminum key frames, adding rigidity and strength to the manuals,

preventing the possibility of warping... the addition of filters to the wind lines in a location before they entered the pipe chests...a very simplified valve action for the windchests, eliminating primaries on all but the largest valves on the largest pipes. (The chests greatly resemble those of the Kilgen design). Another innovation was the adaption of vacuum for the operation of actions on the pouches of the relays, key switches, console combination action, swell shades, tuned percussion, traps, and of course, the piano... special vacuum magnets were used in great numbers, and, as other magnets in the organ, were of very heavy design. The use of vacuum was undoubtedly decided on after many successful years of use on the many assorted automatic instruments built by this firm.

The Link Company was especially proud of its automatic player, and de-

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PARTIAL LIST OF LINK THEATRE ORGAN INSTALLATIONS

Jefferson Theatre.....	Auburn, New York
Lafayette Theatre.....	Charlottesville, Virginia
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Rex Theatre.....	Bessemer, Michigan
Bush's Egyptian Theatre.....	San Diego, California
Bradley Theatre.....	Elko, Nevada
Lincoln Theatre.....	New Martinsville, West Virginia
James Theatre.....	Utica, New York
Elmwood Theatre.....	Syracuse, New York
Clyde Theatre.....	Clyde, New York
Savoy Theatre.....	Buffalo, New York
Ridge Theatre.....	Lackawanna, New York
Astor Theatre.....	Cleveland, Ohio
Plaza Theatre.....	Cleveland, Ohio
Haltnorth Theatre*.....	Cleveland, Ohio
Morenci Y.M.C.A.....	Morenci, Arizona
Capitol Theatre*.....	Binghamton, New York
Merrill & Peralta Theatre.....	Culver City and Downey, California
Fred Whrenberg Theatres.....	St. Louis, Missouri
Capitol Theatre.....	Elmira, New York
Glen Theatre.....	Williamsville, New York
Seminole Theatre.....	Tampa, Florida
Glenwood Theatre.....	Binghamton, New York
Symphony Theatre.....	Binghamton, New York
Warner's Egyptian Theatre.....	Pasadena, California
Schuchert's Theatres.....	Buffalo, New York
Pontiac Theatre.....	Saranac Lake, New York
Valley Theatre.....	Spring Valley, Illinois
Rialto Theatre.....	Edgerton, Wisconsin
Holland Theatre.....	Old Forge, Pennsylvania
Empire Theatre.....	Binghamton, New York
Jensen's Melrose Theatre.....	Los Angeles, California
William Mead Residence.....	Los Angeles, California
State Theatre*.....	Ithica, New York

* Denotes installation of "C. Sharpe Minor" Model

Company records were lost many years ago therefore list is incomplete as to total number of theatre installations. Dates of installation and size of organs, except as noted; are not known.

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THE MISSING LINK (continued)

presented the biggest removal problem. It was located on the Solo side, and since the unit contains all the switches for keys, pedals, pizzicato, second touches, and the pipework unification switches, it measured 6½ feet long,

6 feet high by 4 feet deep. This section took seven days to dismantle down to small units that would pass through the limited access openings. And the thousands of wires interconnecting the various relay - switch components make such dismantling extremely tedious.

Many other problems had to be confronted, such as: how does one get

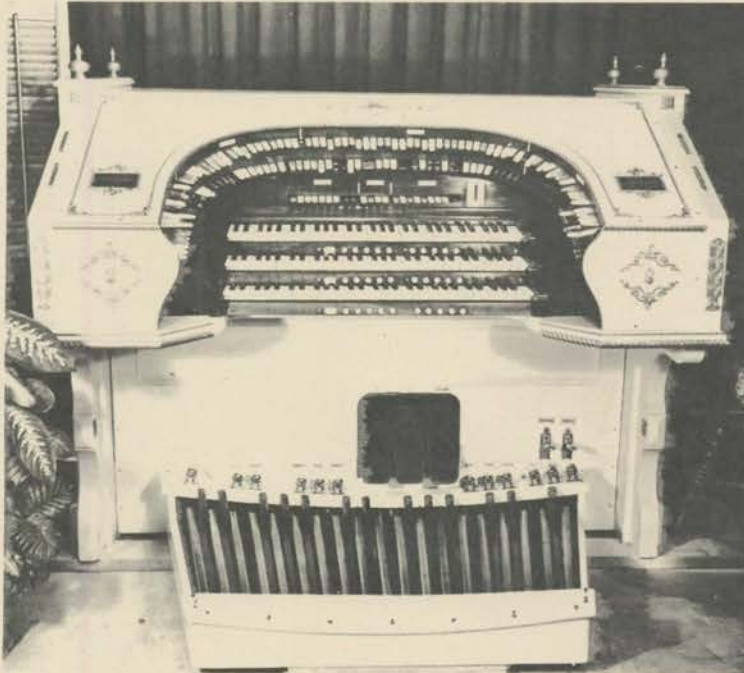
16' tibia pipes to turn corners that are difficult for a person to get around? Or, how do you get a 32" bass drum through a 30" opening???...Duane says it required patience, care, and excellent luck to accomplish the removal, besides 23 days of skinned knuckles and frayed nerves.

The Link was removed completely from the theatre by April of 1960. And now, at the close of 1962, Mr. Arey has the instrument completely worked over, ready for installation. The final installing will be done as soon as Duane completes the construction of a special room to house his "Missing Link".

When the installation is completed, THEATRE ORGAN has been promised that a special welcome mat will be out for all visiting ATOE members who will be able to see and hear an unusual instrument.

Duane Arey is to be congratulated for bringing to life an organ name that has been all but forgotten since the day Al Jolson first spoke into a sound movie microphone.

Arey admits that he could never have kept going on the project if it hadn't been for the help and inspiration given by ATOE member Robert Kagy of Mentor, Ohio; Clay Holbrook of Atlanta, Georgia; Harvey Roehl of Vestal, New York, and E. A. Link Jr.



While in the Haltnorth Theatre, this console was in mahogany finish. Mr. Arey has very carefully refinished it in white with gold trim. The appearance is very striking.



Above is a view of the Link percussion section. Note oldtime movie star posters in background.

PIPE ORGAN, PILOT TRAINERS (continued)

signed an unusual model which was installed on several instruments. This type automatic player used large paper endless rolls which registered the organ, gave full expression and flawlessly reproduced the original artists' playing. The auto player allowed the setting up of as many as four separate rolls with remote control so that music could be switched, on cue, to fit the ever-changing moods on the movie screen.

The rolls were cut at the factory by well known performers and offered to Link Organ owners at nominal fees. Link could furnish music for storms, train wrecks, sing-a-longs or popular tunes of the day. Whatever was needed, for any music cue, was available to the owner of this unusual player attachment.

E. A. Link Jr. was a very young man at the time his father was establishing the Link Organ in theatrical circles. However, his recollections furnish us with the realization that selling and installing an organ in those days wasn't always without frustrations and minor calamities.

A story related by Mr. Link occurred at Jenson's Melrose Theatre, Los Angeles. Approximately six weeks had been spent in erecting the Link in this house, and final tuning was being done the day before the dedication was to

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Gentlemen:

It was most interesting to read letters from fans of P. Hans Flath, organist - till his death - for KMBC, Kansas City. Mr. Keilhack is correct that KMBC's organ was a Robert Morton. However, I recall Mr. Flath saying it had come from a residence or studio, and the organ's light tone and moderate volume would seem to indicate some such origin.

The KMBC organ possessed a second 2-manual movable console to facilitate program accompaniments. I can remember some programs I listened to simply for the organ fill and themes. At one time, Mr. Flath teamed up with Leigh Havens, possibly still in Kansas City, on a program called "Twin Organs." It featured not only organ duets, but also piano and organ numbers.

Mr. Flath's 25-minute program at 11:05 each night was "must" listening

for myself and friends up until the demise of the pipe organ. Occasionally after that, transcriptions of his pipe organ programs were interspersed with live programs on the Hammond. Mr. Flath's style was uniquely matched to his pipe organ, being light, airy, uncomplicated, and quite different from most other T.O. styles.

May I take this occasion to compliment your "Question and Answer" man? These columns have been of utmost interest. Your writer has not only much authoritative information but writes very well besides. Would he like to come forward for a bow?

Hal M. Davison
Washington, D.C.

(Editor's note - Former ATOE President Judd Walton has provided most of the answers to questions submitted by our readers.)

An Open Letter to ATOE Members

With this letter a challenge is hurled to the AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF THEATRE ORGAN ENTHUSIASTS. The time is ripe for this, the only National theatre organ organization, to set up a STANDARDS COMMITTEE for the organ industry. All major organ manufacturers are considering, or already marketing, a line of "Theatre Organs" (the quotation marks are significant). Many mistakes have been made and more will be made. Guidance is sorely needed.

Probably half of the ATOE membership are blinded by their enthusiasm for the authentic theatre pipe organ.

They must be made to realize that the Electronics Industry has the potential to build instruments that are MIGHTY, GREAT and GRANDE. The organists in ATOE seem more aware of this situation than the non-organists.

When the electronic theatre organ is perfected may depend in great measure on ATOE members. If there is help, the time when satisfactory instruments become available can be shortened. The period of development has only begun.

What standards should be set? What should be left to the manufacturers' ingenuity? It takes, as we all know,

take place. Mr. Link Sr. and his crew were to be on hand for the dedication, and after several careful hours readying the organ for the big day they had retired to their hotel for a good night's rest. Fate stepped in, and that very night California was shaken by a mild earthquake. Next morning the Link crew went to the theatre to make a few last-minute adjustments, only to discover that many good-sized chunks of ceiling plaster had been dislodged into the organ chambers and had all but filled the open resonators.

Many famous persons in the movie world were to be on hand for the opening. Therefore, to save the reputation of the Link Organ, putting the instrument in shape was mandatory. The feverish activity of the next few hours can be well imagined. It is reported that the organ was ready for the first cue on time.

Sales of the Link Unit Organ con-

tinued to grow until the advent of sound movies, which, together with the stock market crash of 1929, sounded the death knell of the Link Pipe Organ factory. This combination of events removed the Link family from the field of music.

The Link name did not pass from the manufacturing picture, however, as it is now well known as the developer of the famous Link Aircraft Trainer. Models now designed for the space age are gaining favor as did the first trainer models. These ground-training machines were partially born on principles originally utilized in the company's automatic piano and pipe organ construction. E. A. Link Jr. can take the lion's share of credit for the success, through a perseverant belief in this twentieth century invention, as well as in his current exploits into the development of advanced under-water diving apparatus.

much more than a "horse shoe console" to qualify an instrument as a theatre organ. However, electronic techniques can produce worthwhile effects not possible in the original theatre pipe organ. Where should the line be drawn? What is an Entertainment Organ and what is a Theatre Organ? There is confusion: shall the Theatre Organ be traditional with the "gimmicky" reserved for the Entertainment Organ? Certainly, the AGO has had an important part in standardizing the Classic Organ.

We have all faced the embarrassing moment when seated at an unfamiliar instrument with non-standard (is there a standard?) pedal placement. Physical design of the console is an important consideration. You can think of many more. Color coding of stop tablets should be uniform. Manufacturers justify their choice by, for instance, the statement that "Podunk Theatre Organs had purple piccolo tabs in 1924". What that is traditional can we consider to be standard? Perhaps we should look to the later WurliTzer and Robert Morton techniques?

ATOE members - think it over - then let your Board of Directors know how you feel. Shall we help the industry so that we both can be proud? Shall we ignore them so that we both shall be ashamed of the term "theatre organ"? Let's hope that, some day soon, we will see manufacturers advertise their instruments with "meets ATOE standards of design"!

Dewey Cagle

Have something on your mind? Why not write a "Letter to the Editor"? Do it now!

NEWS AND VIEWS (continued)

what happened to the organ in the Paramount Theatre (Shea's Great Lakes) Buffalo . . . It seems that Brother Redmond was there this summer to see a show and like any good organ enthusiast went down to inspect the orchestra pit and found it empty . . . C'mon, you Buffalo members, give a helping hand . . . Brother Redmond also says that while in Cleveland this summer, he attended a theatre showing the "West Side Story", and upon entering the theatre heard organ music which certainly did not sound like a theatre pipe organ . . . Upon entering the auditorium and looking down to the stage he saw a small electronic organ which made him feel like a child finding no presents under the Christmas tree . . . we wonder how many times this happens ? ? ? ? . . .

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