Buffalo Bids Farewell to the Lafayette Theatre and Wurlitzer

Compiled from Material Furnished by Bill Kessel,
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It was late Tuesday evening, October 16, when word reached Irving Toner, president of the Niagara Frontier Chapter of ATOE, that dismantling of the WurliTzer in the Lafayette Theatre would begin on Thursday morning, the 18th.

This left about twelve hours to arrange a farewell concert, and permission had to be first obtained from the theatre management, the building owners, and Don Borden, the new owner of WurliTzer Opus 501, shipped from the factory 1/10/21. It was 10 o'clock the next morning before final permission was obtained for a final concert. Western Reserve Chapter's Don Borden, the new owner, is to be especially thanked for delaying the dismantling, because he was short of time: in just eleven days what was a big well-kept theatre was to become another parking lot.

With such a short time to go, Secretary Laura Thomas, President Toner, Don Hyde, Craig Stoll, Ted Hewson, and many others started phoning as many Chapter members as they could reach, and notified neighboring ATOE chapters of the final concert.

At 11:30 p.m. on Wednesday, October 17, the movie ended, and there were left in the theatre a little over 100 ATOE members and guests, plus a few who stayed over from the final picture performance. Perhaps the small boy in a man's lap down front was one of them.

Other ATOE members arrived from Cleveland, Toronto, and Rochester. Also present was local radio personality Jack Eno, who had plugged the wee-hour performance most of the day. The final concert was opened by Jerry Schwab. Elmer Brost was introduced as former house organist, but did not play because of "Too many memories." Someone in the audience said, "He was the first I ever heard play a theatre organ". Other organists on the program were Bob Bitner, former AGO dean in Cleveland; Max Prusak, Pat Brylski, Irving Toner, with the honor of shutting down 41 years of service (not very active in recent years, of course); and Niagara Frontier Assistant Secretary Grant Whitcomb.

The next day saw Treasurer Joe Thomas, and Secretary Laura Thomas, as well as many other Niagara Frontier Chapter members working in sort of a haze, what with the final number being played about 3:30 a.m.

Theatre manager George Simon was responsible for the organ being in playing condition. He liked to play, and theatre employees Mona Gavin and William Walsh tell of his pre-movie recitals. Al Ullman was responsible for keeping the organ working mechanically.

Plans had originally been explored to keep this organ in Buffalo, but everyone is happy that the instrument went almost intact (the brass Sax and the brass Trumpet were given to a local House of Worship) to ATOE member Don Borden, who plans to build his new home around Opus 501 in Cleveland, Ohio.

Questions and Answers

Q How do you set temper?

A Setting temper means flatting the fifth intervals in the scale. In a scale of true pitch, G sharp and A flat are distinctly different notes. Many years ago some organs were made with the sharps divided halfway along their length, and it was possible to play the true intervals by pressing either the front half or the back half of the note. Obviously, two pipes were used, each tuned to the non-tempered scale. Orch-

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

estral instruments are played to the non-tempered scale, hence the pure sound of the chord structures. The best way for the novice to set temper is to tune to one of the percussions, such as a metal bar harp. The temper is already set in these instruments, and eliminates the necessity of having to set it by ear. It is also possible to buy a set of tuning forks tuned to correct temper for one octave. If, however, you want to try your hand at it, proceed as follows: Set the pitch of Middle C to a reference note on the harp, or tuning fork. Tune the octave C to it. Now tune F between so the beat of it is of almost equal frequency when held with the C above and the C below separately. The beat should be just a trifle faster with the C above. It will be necessary to slightly sharpen F to achieve this result. Now do the same with G, but this time flatting the note as you want to do with the rest of the intervals. Try to fix the speed of the beat in your mind as a reference, and tune the following intervals to each other to the same beat:

Tune D to G; A to D; E to A; B to E; F# to B; C# to F#; G# to C#; D# to G#; A# to D#

Now hold the interval F and A Sharp; having already tuned F, the beat between these two notes should be of the same frequency as the others If it is not, you have not come out "right"! It is then necessary to start over. If, however, each of the intervals that you have tuned seem to have the same beat, hold the minor third chord, C and D# A very rapid beat will be heard. Progress up the scale chromatically with this chord to the chord A sharp and upper C, listening to each one carefully. If your temper is even, the beat will sound the same for each chord except that it will increase slightly as you proceed up the scale due to the higher frequence of the notes. If satisfactory to this point, tune the next octave above in unison to the tempered octave. Now hold the chord Middle C and A sharp. Again a rapid beat will be heard. Progress up the scale chromatically with the two note chord to the upper C and G sharp. If the beats are even, you have it made. If not, check temper again, and try to even out the flat spot. It takes practice to do it right the first time, so keep trying.

Q What is the difference between Open Diapason, Horn Diapason, Diaphonic Diapason and Phonon Diapason?

A In the question, four types of Diapasons are listed. Inasmuch as Phonon is a generic term for all types of diapason pipes which have restricted harmonic development, we need to consider only the other three in detail.

The Open Diapason as found in a Theatre Organ is a stop or set of pipes which is the primary foundation rank of the organ. By foundation is meant that tonal base upon which full organ or "ensemble" combinations are built. In a church or concert instrument, ensemble describes a combination of diapason tones of 8', 4', 2', with a mixture added which may have from two to five or six different pitches together with certain other ensemble building ranks. The mixtures usually contain unison pitches such as 4', 2', 1', ½', etc., plus quint or fifth interval pitches such as 2-2/3', 1-1/3', 2/3', etc. Other pitches utilized in the mixtures are those of the third interval such as 3-1/5', 1-3/5', etc. and even the flat seventh, 1-1/7'. In a theatre organ, mutations are not used to build ensemble as such, most ranks being solo ranks unto themselves which must nevertheless meld together in combination. As a matter of fact, if the word ensemble is used to identify the tonal structure of the concert organ sound, then it cannot accurately be used to identify the theatre organ tonal structure. However, in both cases, the open diapason is the primary foundation rank of the organ. In a theatre organ it is usually a rank of diapason pipes with a leathered lip and producing only a very restricted number of harmonies and is usually a 44 scale pipe (6" diameter at low 8' C).

The Horn Diapason is, roughly speaking the equivalent of a concert organ Violin Diapason, and has some additional development of the upper harmonics, giving it a slight string tone. It is a dmaller scale, usually 5½" at low 8' C, and is softer. It is equipped with a harmonic bridge to steady the tone. In the concert organ, the violin or geigen diapason has a *pronounced* strong tone.

The Diaphonic Diapason has even less harmonic development than the other two, is louder, and in some of the larger organs is larger scale, being 6½" or 7", diameter at low 8' C. It is found on pressures from 10" up to 25", and its tone has almost no harmonic development other than the first two, the octave (eighth) and quint (twelfth).

To summarize, the three types of diapason ranks listed are the backbone of the theatre organ foundation section. Organs up to 11 or 12 ranks have but one, the Open. Organs up to 20 or 22 ranks have either one, a Diaphonic, or two, with the second being a Horn. Some of the larger instruments have all three types. Some enthusiasts make the serious error of removing the diapason from a theatre organ having but one such set. With simple combinations it might not be missed, but when combinations using reeds such as Brass Trumpet, English Horn, are employed, the lack of the foundation stop is sorely missed by the discriminating and informed listener!

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