

Jack Strader Rescues Famous Wurlitzer

By
E. Jay Quinby

If there was one beautiful Wurlitzer Theatre Organ which SHOULD have been rescued and preserved in operating condition for posterity, it was the fine instrument in the Cincinnati PARAMOUNT Theatre, for this magnificent institution and in fact the entire block on which it stood was owned by Mrs. Wurlitzer. Naturally, when it came to providing an appropriate organ for the establishment, the Wurlitzer organization extended itself and did an outstanding job. With the experience of the entire great Cinema Organ Era at their disposal, they built and installed this 3 Manual, Thousand Pipe masterpiece in 1931, just at the close of that fantastic hey-day of the Movie Palace Organs.

With two major divisions, one at the left and the other at the right of the proscenium arch, this organ boasted one of the handsomest consoles ever designed. Located on an electro-mechanical lift in the best tradition, this console resplendent in Roman Gold would rise out of the left side of the orchestra pit sparkling in the spotlight, while the organist, suitably attired in formal evening clothes, was playing. Joining the orchestra for the overture, the organist would continue after they departed, taking over the accompaniment of the best in feature films of the silent age.

But this combination was short lived, for sound-films were already being produced in Hollywood, and soon the Organist found himself playing only for the introductions and intermissions. Then, with the economy wave born of the depression, the organist was eliminated from the program and the payroll, and the organ lapsed into silence for extended periods, gathering dust.

But contrary to the sad experience of

so many of these fine instruments, this one was never permitted to deteriorate. Periodically it was properly serviced, and every now and then an organist was retained to play it for some gala occasion, some unusual celebration. One of the now famous organists who had access to this instrument was Eddie Osborn, the "Fabulous Eddie" of recording popularity.

A certain young man of whom we were to hear more in later years also had the good fortune to gain access to this delightful Wurlitzer. He prevailed upon the theatre management to let him enter the dark edifice after closing time and practice far into the wee small hours, but his family viewed this procedure very dimly. They felt that he should be home in bed instead of prowling at such unseasonable time. Nevertheless he persevered, and like many another young enthusiast of that age, he developed a keen "feeling" for Theatre Organ technique and steadily improved. This 'teen ager was Jack Strader. From present day perspective, it seems that his family should have been genuinely grateful that he acquired this burning enthusiasm for such a worthy subject instead of developing into a juvenile delinquent. Like many of us who weathered the objections and discouragement of our elders, Jack made up his mind that some day he would own an organ of his own, one that he could play when the spirit moved him, and without any objections.

Jack Strader started out owning Electronic "Organs" after he became of

age, and in the course of this phase of his experience, he surrounded himself with the best of super-power amplifiers, walloping big loudspeakers and fancy grilles of imitation organ pipes to lend atmosphere. But always he was conscious that the illusion was far from complete. Gradually he became aware that this type of rig was not satisfying his musical soul, although it was serving a very useful purpose in providing means for continuing his keyboard improvement and expanding his interest in the organ-type music. He realized that one day he would just HAVE to carry through with his original resolve to have a real Pipe Organ in his residence.

Recently the opportunity presented itself. Having been active in founding the Cincinnati Chapter of the Association of Theatre Organ Enthusiasts, Jack listened with keen interest to the comments of his fellow members to the effect that SOMEONE certainly ought to rescue that wonderful Wurlitzer in the Cincinnati PARAMOUNT. Word had arrived through the underground that the theatre was to be closed down and the property sold with its future very uncertain. Jack agreed that SOMEONE should certainly rescue this, his first love in the Organ Realm.

Dick Simonton and I did what we could to encourage Jack in this venture, which to him seemed as wild, fantastic and preposterous an undertaking as man ever tackled. Nevertheless we did what we could to assure him that it was not beyond the realm of possibility and



A view of the Strader console on its portable platform in alcove of the organ studio.

practicability. Both of us, we pointed out, had crossed such a bridge and had survived to enjoy the better life that resulted - and we assured Jack that he, too, could make it. All he needed, we insisted, was courage, an understanding wife, and a little loose money. Fortunately Jack was possessed of these prerequisites, and together we won him over to the idea. Together we led him, in a slightly dazed condition, right up to the place where he signed the contract on the dotted line.

"What," he asked us soon afterward, "the H-L have you two guys got me into?"

Well, today Jack and his charming, indulgent wife Joan and his lovely, enthusiastic daughter Jackie don't question the advisability of becoming involved in such an outside hobby. The steam-shovels, the rock-drills, the concrete-mixers and the snorting trailer trucks have departed from the Strader premises. In place of their disorderly, decadent cacaphony there is now the magnificent chorus from one of the finest Wurlitzer organs ever built. A two-story masonry addition now graces the original family mansion, designed to harmonize with the original architecture. This addition provides the two large expression chambers for the organ proper, with swell-shades opening into the spacious former sun-porch which in turn opens through large archways into the

ample-sized living room. The curved upper surface of the interior of the organ chambers is designed to project the organ tone into the combined sun-porch and living room, where now stands that beautiful golden console, all freshly re-finished. The nightmare of dismantling, moving, cleaning and overhauling all the component parts such as wood pipes, metal pipes, wind chests, reservoirs, tremolos, relay banks, switch groups, blower machinery, et al, is now but a memory of exhausting effort, often lasting 20 hours out of the day's 24.

I'll never forget the cryptic, descriptive comment of the Strader household help (Lee and his wife Ethel), when we returned via the back door from one of our marathon sessions of dismantling this organ which was deeply encrusted with the accumulated dust and soot of some 20 years. "Y'all look like you been up a chimney," was their observation. Exhausted as we were, we broke into refreshing laughter, and sought warm tubs in which to dissolve our disguise and sooth our aching muscles. To view this pristine installation today, nobody would dream how filthy this equipment was when we first laid hands upon it to remove it from the theatre.

On that first day we had just disconnected the first section of wind-trunk when Eddie Osborn showed up in the coffee-shop next door. "Eddie," I exclaimed, "you've just GOT to come in

and play this organ for the last time before we knock it all down." And Eddie came into the theatre, sat at the console while we PUT BACK that dismantled section of wind-trunk - and how he made that organ talk! It mattered not that electricians, mechanics, carpenters and truckmen stood idly by (on Jack's time) - we and they remained spell-bound while the Fabulous Eddie turned out one of his fabulous programs. Too soon it was all over, the last echo died away, and Eddie was gone. Then, a little sadly it seemed, we fell to the task of ripping out this magnificent organ.

To avoid interrupting our important task, the Strader household staff brought in a huge wicker hamper containing an elaborate chicken dinner, Southern style, with all the FIXIN'S. This they spread out on the big stage to revive our lagging strength. Between courses, Jack Strader surveyed the great piles of pipes and assorted organ parts, with mounting misgivings. Lee, ever alert to anything which threatened to disturb his household routine, eyed the scene with suspicion. "Where we gonna put all this stuff, Boss?" was his melancholy question.

But now all is happiness again in the Strader abode. This organ now enjoys a better installation layout than was possible in the comparatively cramped wedge-shaped chambers at the Para-

STRADER 3 MANUAL 15 RANK WURLITZER

MAIN CHAMBER	Comp.	Pipes	Pedal	2nd Tch	Pizz	Accompaniment	2nd Tch	Pizz	Great	2nd Tch	Pizz	Solo
Flute-Bourdon	16-2	97	16-8-4			16-8-4-2 2/3-2			16-8-4-2 2/3-2-1 3/5			
Diaphonic Diapason	16-4	85	16-8	16		8-4			16-8-4			16-8-4
Viol D'Orchestre	8-2	85				16 (tc) 8-4			16 (tc)-8-4-2(15th)			
Viol Celeste	8-4	73	8 (Cello)			8-4			8-4			
Vox Humana	8-4	61				16 (tc) 8-4			16 (tc)-8			
Clarinet	8	61	8			8	8		16 (tc)-8	8		8
Tuba Horn	16-4	85	16-8		16	8	8		16-8-4	16		16-8-4
Chrysoglott		49				x			x			
SOLO CHAMBER												
Tibia Clausa	16-2	97	16-8			8-4	8		16-8-4-2 2/3-2	8		16-8-4
Quintadena	8	61				8						8
Salicional	8	61	8			8			8			8
Oboe Horn	8	61				8						8
Orchestral Oboe	8	61				8			8			8
Saxophone	8	61	8			8			16 (tc)-8			8
Trumpet	8	61							8			8
Kinura	8	61				8			8			8
Harp		49				Marimba Harp			Marimba Harp			
Cathedral Chimes		25					x		x			x
Sleigh Bells		25					x		x			
Xylophone		37					x		x			x
Glockenspiel		37							Glockenspiel			Glockenspiel
									Orch. Bells			Orch. Bells
Bass Drum			x	x								
Kettle Drum			x	x								
Snare Drum			x	x	x							
Cymbal			x	x								
Crash Cymbal			x	x								
Tambourine					x							
Castanets					x							
Chinese Block					x							
Tom-Tom					x							
Sand Block					x							
Triangle							x					
Couplers			Grt to Pedal Solo to Ped.			Octave Solo to Accomp	Solo to Acc.	Solo to Acc.	Sub-Octave Octave Solo to Great	Solo to Great		Solo to Great

mount. Today there is ample space all around for proper acoustic development and for convenient tuning access and maintenance. The entire organ is air-conditioned so that tuning will not be affected by sudden and wide changes in temperature, and there will be neither too much dampness nor too much dryness to affect the instrument. Guests may enter the chambers and stroll around to admire the beautiful craftsmanship of this creation at close range. The brass trumpets and brass saxophones sparkle brilliant reflections in the bright lighting.

Description of the tonal results achieved by this organ in its new surroundings will be attested by the 56 ATOE Members and their friends who had the privilege of hearing the preliminary test program at the Strader residence Monday, October 30th, 1961, six months after the organ dismantling work began at the theatre. On this gala occasion, Fabulous Eddie Osborn played this organ again. He was joined by Stan Todd, long time friend and former student of Jesse Crawford; Ronnie Dale, popular theatre organist; and Pat Gillick, who played for many silent films in Cincinnati theatres and who is the new Chairman of the local ATOE Chapter. The gracious hospitality of the Strader family included a buffet supper at 7:30 in the evening, and the blower equipment was not shut down until 2:00 a.m. the next morning. The effect must have been impressive, for 10 new ATOE Members were signed up on the spot!

Credits are generously and enthusiastically offered by the Straders to:

The best Wurlitzer-experienced Technicians from both East Coast and West Coast for design assistance and actual installation work.

Henry Pope of Los Angeles for design of the Organ Chambers.

Harry Garrison of the Cincinnati Player Piano Shop who, with his staff, re-leathered the action of the Sleigh Bells, Chrysoglott, Xylophone, etc.

Ray Arnold, Organ Technician, who had installed this Organ in the Paramount Theatre back in 1931.

Mr. and Mrs. Stan Todd, who enthusiastically undertook the vast cleaning task along with Jack, Joan and Jackie Strader.

Robert T. Klensch, General Contractor of Covington, Ky., whose organization moved the Organ from the theatre and landed it in its new location - after having built the addition for it at the Strader residence.

Selden Jorden, Master Carpenter of the above Klensch firm, who so carefully numbered and labeled each pipe and item of equipment so that he would know exactly the relationship of each component in the new layout.

Regal Electric Co. of Cincinnati, for the power wiring for the Blower, the lighting system, control system and much of the Relay circuits.

For the benefit of the dyed-in-the-wool organ enthusiast who wants specific in-

formation about this splendid organ, the table on page 5 is offered. From this data, a quick analysis shows that the organ possesses:

- 1071 Pipes
- 222 percussion notes
- 520 relays
- 21,000 contacts
- 15 ranks of pipes
- 6 ranks of percussions
- 126 stops
- 11 couplers
- 3 manual Console, all double-touch
- 10 hp blower
- 15 inch wind pressure
- 10 preset pistons

Comprehensive "toy counter"
Entire Organ air-conditioned
2 main divisions under separate expression
4 tremolos

During the business session of the ATOE meeting on the above occasion at the Strader residence, Jack Strader was elected vice-chairman of the local Chapter and (Mrs.) Joan Strader was elected secretary-treasurer. It is this writer's prophesy that the beautiful Steinway player piano which is located not far from the organ console will one day find itself being played by remote control from that console. Don't look at me with such surprise, Jack - it's practically inevitable!



Jay Quinby, Gaylord Carter, Dick Simonton and John Strader view assembled parts of Wurlitzer.



ATOE members gathered around the console in the Strader organ studio. Shown at console, left to right: Eddie Osborn; Stan Todd playing; and Gordon Shirley.

theatre organ