

# Rochester (N.Y.) Theatre Marr & Colton Now a Feature of Oregon Roller Rink

From Material Furnished By  
Lloyd B. Klos and Bill Blunk

What was billed as a "\$100,000 organ, and the sixth largest in the United States", when it was built in 1927, has found a new home in the Viking Roller Rink in Astoria, Oregon. The instrument will have been housed in three widely-different structures, and as a result, its 34-year history should be of interest to theater organ lovers everywhere.

In November 1926, the Rochester, N. Y. newspapers carried the plans of the Lafayette Theater Corporation of Buffalo, and of A. A. Fenyvessey of Rochester, to build a \$3 million theater on Clinton Avenue South in the Flower City. The seating capacity was to be 4,000, which was to make it the largest theatre in Rochester.

According to faded clippings, "An orchestra pit will provide room for 30 musicians, and there will be a specially-built concert organ with two consoles (so that two organists may play simultaneously)." Plans called for the theater to be opened in April 1927, but it wasn't until the following November that completion of the work made possible the grand opening.

As can readily be understood by the grandiose features of the new movie palace, the same policy followed through on the organ. According to Harry Radloff, of Buffalo, N. Y., the theater interests placed an order with the Marr & Colton Company of Warsaw, N. Y. for two organs. One was for a 4M/18R instrument for the Roosevelt Theater in Buffalo.

This instrument, restored after 3 years of work by ATOE member Radloff and Niagara Frontier Chapter Past President Heino Olandt, is still used for two organ interludes on Sundays, being played by Harold Jolles. The second instrument ordered was a 5M/24R organ for the Rochester Theater.

As was customary in the golden days of the theater organ, the movie palaces spared no effort or expense to publicize their big organs. One feature article, appearing in the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, had this to say, under the heading "Rochester Theater Organ, Sixth Largest in Country, Being Prepared for Premiere":

"It is the privilege of only a few to peer into the organ chamber of a modern theater organ such as the Marr & Colton, which has been installed in the new Rochester Theater. The cameraman climbed four flights of stairs and steel ladders, hauling a makeshift platform



Rochester Theatre Marr & Colton console prior to installation in theatre in November of 1927.

from which to gain a vantage point to picture some of the pipes and intricate parts of the organ. (A picture was with the article, and showed one chamber of the instrument). "Another chamber containing perhaps twice as much piping and snare drums, cymbals, bass drums and other instruments is located on the opposite side of the house. Taking a picture in this chamber was out of the question as space would not permit setting up the camera. The Rochester Theater organ is one of six largest in the United States and one of few with 32-foot diaphones. The largest pipe is 32-1/2 feet long and four feet in diameter.

"The organ contains five manuals, has more than 2,000 miles of wiring, and 150,000 electrical contacts of sterling silver. The organ is in four sections, two sound-proof chambers at either side of the proscenium arch, each 36 X 20 feet. There is a separate chamber 30 X 8 feet which contains the diaphones, relay and switchboard. The fourth chamber, 12 feet square contains the adjustable combination action.

"The wind is produced by a 25-horsepower blower, the electrical action being supplied through a 100 ampere generator. The organ console is operated by push button control, and can be

lowered or raised by the organist at will.

"The organ contains a full-scale Guatemalan marimba, 2 master xylophones, harp, piano, orchestra bells, glockenspiel, cathedral chimes, 3 snare drums, 2 bass drums, 4 cymbals, a 20-inch Turkish cymbal, and complete traps and effects."

As far as is known, the second console was never installed. Mrs. Harold Reichert who was Kay Marr, daughter of David Marr, the founder of the Marr & Colton Company, vividly recalls the installation of the 32' diaphones at the Rochester. Apparently the Rochester Fire Department possessed the tallest ladders in the city, as they were called to aid installers in lowering the pipes through the roof.

As the opening day approached, the publicity in the daily papers increased in tempo. One news item, appearing during the last week of October 1927, states that "C Sharpe Minor, organist, who will control the Marr & Colton pipe organ has been here during the past week, making the necessary adjustments and changes to ensure a perfect performance. For his program he has promised something new and unusual, and patrons of the new Rochester will undoubtedly have a genuine

please turn to Page 12

Fall, 1962



# SPECIFICATIONS OF ROCHESTER THEATRE MARR & COLTON

Five Manuals 24 Ranks  
Opened November 5, 1927

## PEDAL:

- 32' Diaphone
- 32' Resultant Bass
- 16' Ophicleide
- 16' Bombarde
- 16' Violone
- 16' Diaphone
- 16' English Post Horn
- 16' Contra Tibia Clausa
- 16' Bourdon
- 16' Piano
- 16' Diaphone (2nd Touch)
- 16' Ophicleide Pizz (2nd Touch)
- 8' Tuba Horn
- 8' Tuba Mirabilis
- 8' Octave

## ACCOMPANIMENT:

- 16' Contra Viol TC
- 16' Vox Humana TC
- 8' Tuba Mirabilis
- 8' Tuba Horn
- 8' Diaphonic Diapason
- 8' Tibia Clausa No. 1
- 8' Tibia Clausa No. 2
- 8' Clarinet
- 8' Saxophone
- 8' Viol d'Gamba
- 8' Gamba Celeste
- 8' Solo String
- 8' Viol D'Orchestre
- 8' Viol Celeste
- 8' Salicional
- 8' Oboe Horn
- 8' English Post Horn
- 8' Kinura
- 8' Trumpet
- 8' Quintadena
- 8' Flute
- 8' Vox Humana No. 1
- 8' Vox Humana No. 2
- 8' Piano
- 8' Solo to Accomp. Coupler
- 8' Orch to Accomp. Pizz Coupler
- 8' Solo to Accomp Coupler (2nd touch)
- 8' Saxophone (2nd touch) touch)
- 8' Tuba Mirabilis (2nd touch)
- 8' Tuba Horn (2nd touch)
- 8' Tibia Clausa No. 1 (2nd touch)
- 8' Tibia Clausa No. 2 (2nd touch)
- 4' Viole
- 4' Octave Celeste
- 4' Gamba Celeste
- 4' Flute
- 4' Vox Humana No. 1
- 4' Vox Humana No. 2
- 4' Tibia Clausa No. 1 (2nd touch)
- 4' Tibia Clausa No. 2 (2nd touch)
- 2 2/3 Twelfth
- 2' Piccolo
- 4' Piano

- Reiterating Marimba
- Xylophone No. 1
- Chrysoglott
- Snare Drum (loud)
- Snare Drum (soft)
- Tambourine
- Castanets
- Cymbal
- Chinese Block
- Tom Tom
- Sand Block
- Cathedral Chimes (2nd touch)
- Xylophone (2nd touch)
- Triangle (2nd touch)

- 8' Tibia Clausa No. 1
- 8' Tibia Clausa No. 2
- 8' Clarinet
- 8' Saxophone
- 8' Solo String
- 8' Cello
- 8' Flute
- 8' Orchestra to Pedal Coupler
- 8' Solo to Pedal Coupler
- 8' Great to Pedal
- 8' Accomp to Pedal
- 4' Flute
- Bass Drum
- Kettle Drum
- Snare Drum (loud)
- Snare Drum (soft)
- Crash symbol
- Cymbal

## GREAT:

- 16' Bombarde
- 16' Ophicleide
- 16' English Post Horn
- 16' Diaphone
- 16' Tibia Clausa No. 1
- 16' Tibia Clausa No. 2 TC
- 16' Violone
- 16' Clarinet TC
- 16' Saxophone TC
- 16' Contra Viole TC
- 16' Bourdon
- 16' Piano
- 16' Solo to Great Coupler
- 16' Bombarde (2nd touch)
- 16' Ophicleide (2nd touch)
- 8' Trumpet
- 8' English Post Horn
- 8' Tuba Mirabilis
- 8' Tuba Horn
- 8' Diaphonic Diapason
- 8' Tibia Clausa No. 1
- 8' Tibia Clausa No. 2
- 8' Tibia Plena
- 8' Orchestral Oboe
- 8' Kinura
- 8' Clarinet
- 8' French Horn
- 8' Saxophone
- 8' Oboe Horn
- 8' Viol D'Gamba
- 8' Gamba Celeste
- 8' Solo String
- 8' Viol D'Orchestre
- 8' Viol Celeste
- 8' Salicional
- 8' Flute
- 8' Vox Humana No. 1
- 8' Vox Humana No. 2
- 8' Piano
- 8' Orchestral to Great Coupler
- 8' Orchestral to Great Pizz Coupler
- 8' Solo to Great Coupler (2nd touch)
- 8' Tibia Clausa No. 1 (2nd touch)
- 8' Tibia Plena (2nd touch)
- 4' Horn
- 4' Clarion
- 4' Kinura
- 4' Gambette
- 4' Viole
- 4' Celeste
- 4' Gamba Celeste
- 4' Salicet
- 4' Flute
- 4' Tibia Clausa No. 1
- 4' Tibia Clausa No. 2
- 4' Piano
- 4' Solo to Great Coupler

- 4' Tibia Plena
- 2 2/3' Twelfth
- 2 2/3' Nazard
- 2' Fifteenth
- 2' Piccolo
- 1 3/5' Tierce
- Reiterating Marimba
- Harp
- Orchestral Bells
- Xylophone No. 1
- Xylophone No. 2
- Glockenspiel

## SOLO:

- 16' Bombarde
- 16' Ophicleide
- 16' English Post Horn
- 16' Diaphone
- 16' Tibia Clausa No. 1
- 16' Tibia Clausa No. 2 TC
- 16' Violone
- 16' Clarinet TC
- 16' Saxophone TC
- 16' Contra Viole TC
- 16' Bourdon
- 16' Piano
- 16' Bombarde (2nd touch)
- 16' Ophicleide (2nd touch)
- 8' Trumpet
- 8' English Post Horn
- 8' Tuba Mirabilis
- 8' Tuba Horn
- 8' Diaphonic Diapason
- 8' Tibia Clausa No. 1
- 8' Tibia Clausa No. 2
- 8' Tibia Plena
- 8' Orchestral Oboe
- 8' Kinura
- 8' Clarinet
- 8' French Horn
- 8' Saxophone
- 8' Oboe Horn
- 8' Viol D'Gamba
- 8' Gamba Celeste
- 8' Solo String
- 8' Viol D'Orchestre
- 8' Viol Celeste
- 8' Salicional
- 8' Flute
- 8' Vox Humana No. 1
- 8' Vox Humana No. 2
- 8' Piano
- 8' Orchestral to Solo Coupler (2nd touch)
- 8' Orchestral to Solo Coupler
- 8' Tibia Clausa No. 1 (2nd touch)
- 8' Tibia Plena (2nd touch)
- 4' Horn
- 4' Clarion
- 4' Kinura
- 4' Gambette
- 4' Viol
- 4' Octave Celeste
- 4' Gamba Celeste
- 4' Salicet
- 4' Flute
- 4' Tibia Clausa No. 1
- 4' Tibia Clausa No. 2
- 4' Tibia Plena
- 4' Piano
- 4' Orchestral to Solo
- 2 2/3' Twelfth
- 2 2/3' Nazard
- 2' Fifteenth
- 2' Piccolo
- 1 3/5' Tierce
- Reiterating Marimba
- Harp
- Orchestral Bells
- Xylophone No. 1
- Xylophone No. 2
- Glockenspiel
- Chrysoglott
- Cathedral Chimes

## ORCHESTRAL:

- 16' Contra Tibia Clausa
- 16' Vox Humana TC
- 8' Tibia Clausa No. 1
- 8' Tibia Clausa No. 2
- 8' Tibia Plena
- 8' Concert Flute
- 8' Solo String
- 8' Viol D'Orchestre
- 8' Viol Celeste
- 8' Gamba Celeste
- 8' Viol d'Gamba
- 8' Clarinet
- 8' Oboe Horn
- 8' French Horn
- 8' Kinura
- 8' Vox Humana No. 1
- 8' Vox Humana No. 2
- 8' English Post Horn
- 4' Kinura
- 4' Tibia Clausa No. 1
- 4' Tibia Clausa No. 2
- 4' Flute
- 4' Gambette
- 4' Violin
- 4' Viol Celeste
- Harp
- Xylophone
- Cathedral Chimes
- Shuffle Effect

## BOMBARDE

- 16' Bombarde
- 16' Ophicleide
- 16' English Post Horn
- 16' Diaphone
- 8' Tuba Mirabilis
- 8' Tuba Horn
- 8' English Post Horn
- 8' Trumpet
- 8' Diaphonic Diapason
- 4' Horn
- 4' Clarion
- Reiterating Marimba
- Harp
- Orchestral Bells
- Xylophone No. 1
- Chrysoglott
- Cathedral Chimes

## TREMULANTS

- Tremulant Main
- Tremulant Solo
- Vox Humana No. 1
- Vox Humana No. 2
- Tibia Clausa No. 1
- Tibia Clausa No. 2
- Tuba Mirabilis

## PISTONS

5 - 10 - 10 - 10 - 10

## BLOWER:

Spencer Orgoblo 3-phase  
20 HP 220V

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*of Marr & Colton Story.*





Bill Blunk at the console of his refurbished organ in his Viking Roller Rink, Astoria, Oregon.

surprise in a novel presentation by Minor. While he has never played an engagement in Rochester heretofore, many Rochesterians have had the pleasure of hearing him in New York or at the Lafayette Theater in Buffalo."

Since this opening was a big event, invited guests included Mayor James J. Walker of New York; New York State Police Superintendent Major John Adams Warner; Rochester Mayor Martin B. O'Neil; Buffalo Mayor Frank X. Schwab; Justice Harland Rippey; and Congressman Meyer Jacobstein.

The dedicatory festivities for the 4,000 invited guests began at 7:30 November 5, 1927, and included an inspection of the theater; opening of the musical program at 8:30 with playing of the overture by the orchestra under the direction of Musical Director, Edmund J. Query; playing of the Nation-

al Anthem; and addresses by Justice Rippey and Congressman Jacobstein. Next came a special film, made under the direction of C Sharpe Minor in which the processes in making the \$100,000 organ were shown. The Ballet Russe, headed by Andreas Pavley and Serge Oukrainsky gave a performance, and the program was concluded by the showing of the motion picture "The Magic Flame", featuring Vilma Banky and Ronald Coleman. Vaudeville acts were added to the bill for the public beginning the following week, a policy which was to ensue until the demise of that adjunct of show business.

When the doors opened to the public three days after the dedication, the patrons were spectacularly impressed by the sheer beauty of the interior of the theater, the largest between New York and Chicago at that time. Passing the box office in a lobby of rich Italian marble, they were confronted with a grand staircase of marble, its casings of carved artistic designs. A great chandelier of glass pendants lighted the main lobby, with smaller ones of similar design on the ceilings over the corridors. Inside the auditorium, one's attention was drawn to the immense dome in the center of the ceiling in which the blue of the sky was duplicated by the artist. Gold leaf predominated the interior. Immense paintings adorned the walls depicting scenes from Shakespeare's dramas. Two tiers of boxes graced each side of the theater, enriched with gold decorations, backed by scarlet curtains. Seats were upholstered in Spanish grain leather, with the backs of mahogany, covered with panels of rose-colored velvet. A system of "air-washing" was the first of its kind in the city.

Thus was the setting for the largest Marr & Colton organ. Its console

of ivory with liberal scroll work, was situated on a lift to the left of the orchestra pit. It had two bolsters of stop tabs completely encircling the horseshoe, plus a smaller bolster on each side. Two rows of tabs, controlling the tremulants and second touches were installed on the back board directly above the top manual. Most Marr & Colton consoles were identified by a sort of superstructure above either side which came out to a point, then dropped to the deck. The Rochester console, lacking this feature, looked more like a Wurlitzer, and on the top, a big "R", signifying the theater's name, was emblazoned on each side, surrounded by scrollwork. A glass music rack was a unique feature.

Theaters in those days did not spare the adjectives in describing their edifices. There were daily two-column ads with artist renderings, showing features of the movie palace. One drawing showed C Sharpe Minor in tuxedo, posing at the organ console. The text stated, "The world's Best Organ Entertainment...by the highest-paid organist in the profession!...The melodious music from the pipes of the great Marr & Colton pipe organ with that Master of Organ Entertainment, C Sharpe Minor at the console will make you catch your breath with sheer amazement!" On the day previous to the grand opening, there appeared a full-page ad, exhorting the public to visit the theater where "you will be enthralled with the sumptuous grandeur of the new Rochester... devoted to the highest class of vaudeville and pictures...the incomparable C Sharpe Minor, presenting his own novel entertainment on the mighty Marr & Colton pipe organ, the sixth largest in the United States!...Ronald Colman and Vilma Banky in the "Magic Flame", the renowned cavalier of the films and the screen's blond siren in a new revelation of talents and charm." The Prices? From 12:30 to 6 P.M., 30¢, boxes and loges, 50¢; 6 P.M. to 11 P.M., 50¢, boxes and loges, 75¢.

C Sharpe Minor opened the instrument, and had an engagement of some time, but how long, records don't indicate. He was quite a showman, and was well-known about the country.

One of the subsequent Rochester Theater organists was J. Gordon Baldwin, who, in addition to his theater interludes, did a daily program on WHEC. Baldwin subsequently became staff organist and musical director at WHEC after that station acquired a 3-manual Wurlitzer from the Los Angeles Coconut Grove in October 1934.

Another organist to sit on the M&C's Howard Seat was former Denver organist, Dick Hull. Hull had a stint at the console in 1933 and 1934. and possessed a touch of originality. Every morning as the theater filled prior to the first show, Dick would keep his listeners guessing the titles of selections he played. Theater tickets were awarded for the nearest correct list. Hull pos-

please turn to Page 17

theatre organ



Interior view of Rochester Theatre Auditorium, showing boxes and the grill work in front of Main pipe chamber. The mural to the left was one of those depicting scenes from Shakespeare's dramas.



# BILL BLUNK'S MARR & COLTON

*continued*

essed a rare style in organ technique. This, coupled with his wavy hair and youthful appearance, accounted for his popularity with his fans. His fan mail "often exceeded 30 letters a day", according to the clippings of the time. (It was he who purchased the WHEC organ when the station decided to get rid of it after World War II. The instrument was crated and sent to Denver, according to WHEC officials.)

The Rochester Theater meanwhile became Loew's Rochester Theater in the 30's, having been acquired by the same organization possessing several theaters housing "Wonder Morton" organs.

The Rochester organ fell into desuetude before World War II. Theaters were eliminating the organ from their programs. Along came Robert Griswold of the House of Harmony Music Store in Schenectady, N.Y. His offer to purchase the instrument was accepted by the Loew's Theater management in the late 50's, and the organ was removed, with the exception of five of the 32-foot diaphones. These were built into the theater in such a way that it was impossible to remove them without disturbing the masonry.

The organ was set up in the rear of the store, and the ivory paint was removed with the scrollwork, the console sporting a beautiful wood finish for awhile. Later on, its owner painted it black with ivory trim. Thus the instrument stood, until pressed for space, Griswold advertised that it was for sale. Considerable time elapsed before an acceptable offer was made. Enter Bill Blunk, owner of the Viking Roller Rink in Astoria, Oregon.

Blunk, an organ enthusiast of long standing, was born in Terre Haute, Indiana. His first organ, a small home

model, was purchased at the age of 15 from savings realized in a grocery store job. Prior to his college career, he began playing the organ in various dance halls and skating rinks throughout the state. After beginning a career in higher education at Iowa Teachers College, he transferred to the Chicago Musical College, majoring in piano and organ technology. He continued to play the organ at skating rinks during this period.

After graduation, he purchased the rink in Riverview, Indiana, and enjoyed a most profitable venture due to the eager patronization of the nearby farmers. He also bought a do-it-yourself laundry which he still operates.

Coming to the West Coast on a vacation, Blunk discovered Astoria, Oregon. He established the Blue-C roller rink, and promptly installed a pipe organ, a combination of three he put together! Another innovation was the installation of a plastic skating surface which eliminates dust. In 1957, he sold the Blue-C and returned to Indiana for awhile to remove a 4-manual organ, install it elsewhere, and become the organist. After a couple years, Astoria beckoned again, and discovering that roller skating was dying out there, he took action to revive it.

He purchased the old 600-seat Viking Theater in 1959, removed the seats, leveled the floor, and laid a blue plastic surface on top. On stage was constructed a huge pipe chamber, and pipes which were originally in the chambers on either side of the proscenium, were placed in the stage chamber. Next, his 3-manual Marr & Colton was hoisted into the left chamber so that Blunk could play above the heads of the skaters. Thus things were until the opportunity to purchase the Rochester organ presented itself. He had never seen the in-

strument until he went east with his fellow employee, Rodney Williamson, in July of 1961.

The dismantling process took ten days. At times, Blunk and Williamson had a crew of eight men working from 7 to midnight on the job. It was necessary to tear the roof off the blower room to get the blower and motor out with a derrick and hoist. Twelve hours were needed to disconnect the wiring from pipes to console, with Blunk handling 30 connections an hour. "It was bigger than I imagined," he said. During the dismantling, people came to take a last look at the console. Wearing long faces, they seemed to sense that a good friend was leaving them." Blunk hopes to get the remaining 5 diaphones out of the Rochester Theater within a year, as the theater is slated for extensive remodeling.

So the largest Marr & Colton organ had found a new home, its third. Upon arrival of the giant Marr and Colton in Astoria, Bill Blunk found it would be necessary to close the roller rink in order to find storage space for the organ while it was being unloaded from the railroad car. The smaller organ in the rink was being removed as the big one was coming in. The big organ was stored in the vacated chambers and every other room of the rink that could be used. Within a few days Bill was able to reopen the rink for skating but it was to be 97 days before the Marr & Colton was again playable.

The pipes are now set in two chambers, the main chamber measuring 18' X 20' X 13' high, the solo chamber (right side) is 20' X 24' X 40' high. The Viking Rink was formerly a theatre and the two chambers described above are side by side on what was the old stage while on the left side (formerly the proscenium wall) one of the original organ chambers is utilized to house the Marr & Colton Marimba, Xylophone No. 1, Chrysoglott, Chimes and some of the traps. The balance of the traps are placed on top of the main (left) chamber.

The console, whose finish had deteriorated considerably through the years, was completely refinished in ebony after untold hours of hard labor by Bill Blunk. The entire unit is now mounted on a movable platform which enables it to be rolled from the center of the floor (concert position) to a niche in the wall from where it is played for skating programs.

The organ speaks into a room measuring 100' x 50' x 22' high, which is considerably smaller than the auditorium of the Rochester Theatre, therefore the organ "talks" with complete authority. Owner Blunk says the organ is now in nice playing shape, however there are still quite a few bugs to be ironed out mainly due to damage caused in the removal from the Rochester Theatre.

Any ATOE member desiring to hear (and probably play) the largest Marr & Colton ever built can do so by visiting the Viking Roller Rink in Astoria, Oregon, and looking up the genial owner/organist Bill Blunk.

17



ATOE member Jackie Smith (16) at the Bill Blunk 5m Marr & Colton.