

# The Organ in the Odeon

(formerly the Regal)

Marble Arch,  
London,  
England



Console of the Christie in the Odeon, Marble Arch, London.

By British A.T.O.E. Member  
DAVID H. HAYES

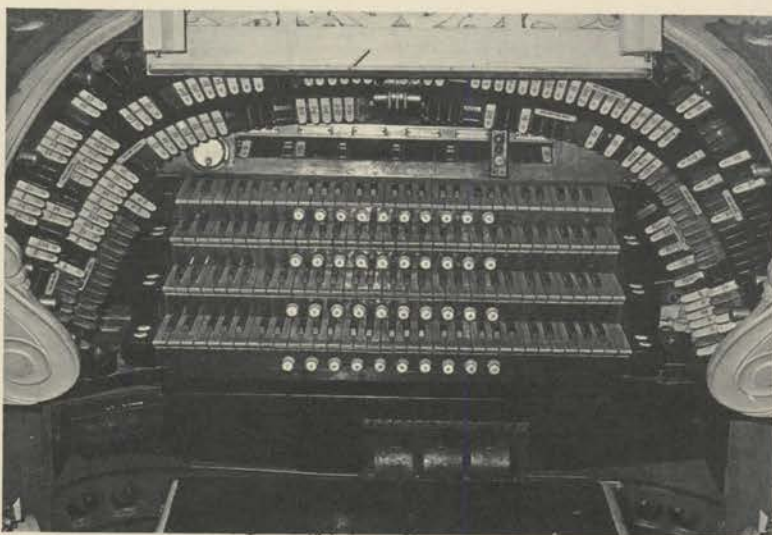
"The organ at the Regal, Marble Arch, is to my mind, one of the most characteristic creations of that great artist, Herbert Norman, and as such it commands the respect and admiration of all organ lovers. The Regal is not a large theatre, and its interior decoration scheme is of an intimate and delicate character: hence the organ partakes of the same nature and blends perfectly with the beauty of its surroundings. Being an unique and individual work of art, built and designed to secure perfection, regardless of expense, it has little in common with the ordinary 'mass production' type of cinema organ, and is a shining example of what can be

done when an organ builder is given a free hand and allowed to express his individuality without being unduly hampered by commercial restrictions".

The above is the opinion of the late Quentin M. Maclean, who drew up the original specifications with Mr. Norman of Messrs. Wm. Hill and Norman and Beard Ltd., well known British firms of straight organ builders and of Christie Unit Organs. Also included in these consultations was the late Arthur Meale, who at that time was one of the most famous recitalists in the country, and official organist at the Methodist Central Hall, Westminster. His nephew and theatre organist Neville Meale has some of the original correspondence relevant to the specification and costing of this organ.

The organ was installed just in time for the opening of the cinema in Novem-

ber 1928, which incidentally was the same year and month as the opening of the first four manual Wurlitzer in Britain at The Empire, Leicester Square (now demolished), but the organ was saved by T.O.C. member Len Rawle. I say 'installed just in time' because behind scenes at most official openings there is usually a panic, but this was more apparent at the Regal. The builders got so behind schedule that they had to work overtime with extra shifts. This in turn put everyone else behind -- the electricians, the furnishers, the decorators, not to mention the organ builders. The chambers were extremely small



Closeup of the Christie Organ.



Gerald Shaw, last resident organist.  
theatre organ

considering the size of the organ, and one had to be quite a contortionist to move around in them, which did not help in trying to catch up on a schedule. The chambers are tall and narrow, and the pipes are stacked in three tiers. Towards the end, the noise of the various workmen made it well nigh impossible to tune the organ during the daytime, so it was decided to tune at nights.

But adjacent to the new cinema was a men's hostel run by a religious organization, and they took their complaint to court and secured an injunction prohibiting the tuning or playing of the organ from about 11 p.m. at night until about 6 a.m. However, the organ was ready for the opening, and it was natural that Quentin Maclean should be the Regal's first resident organist. At this time the big scenery dock shutters were open almost continuously. The injunction still stands, and it was not only because of the preopening noises, but Maclean's midnight recording sessions were also frowned on. Strangely enough, the complaints were mainly against the blower, and not the organ itself.

The cinema is built near the site of the Tyburn Gallows, where two hundred or more years ago countless petty thieves were hanged and buried. Rumor has it that some of their bones were found when the foundations were being dug.

The console is on its own lift in the

centre of the orchestra pit, and the organ is in two chambers both on the same (right) side of the cinema looking towards the stage, and the furthest point from the hostel. The swell shades or shutters opened towards the stage to give, as far as possible, the sound reflected from the screen as the perfect accompaniment for the silent films for which this instrument was primarily designed, hence the large number of softer stops. On the opposite side was a chamber which housed a real Carillon of 32 genuine bells, which alone cost £2000 and was played from the console and operated by some very special pneumatic motors. At the inception of the Regal, the original plan was to have the carillon in the roof, not presumably played from the console, but eventually the bells were hung from the main girders of the building. This worked until 1947 when it was decided (of all criminal things) to put amplification of the organ in that grille. The swell shutters were used for mounting the loudspeakers, and a few bells were unhung, but the carillon is still there.

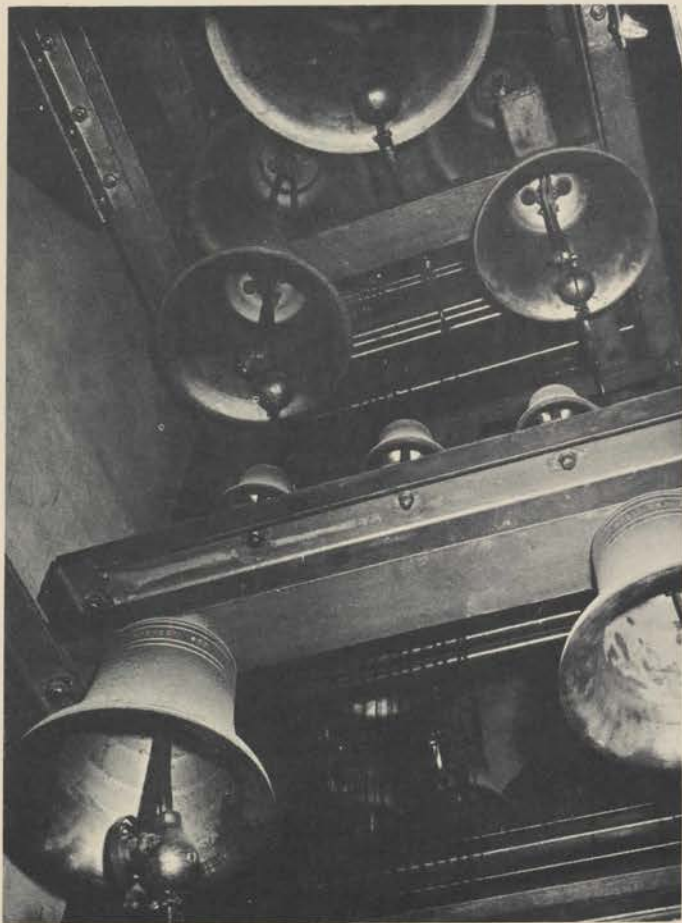
In comparison with many American cinemas, the Regal is not very large (2000 seats), and contrary to expectations full organ is exciting but not in any way overpowering. We all know of some installations where even a small 2/8 can blast patrons out of their seats - this you cannot do at the Regal.

**THE ORGAN.** The 30 units (36 ranks) are housed in two chambers. Chamber "A" - Diapason Phonon, Open Diapason, Hohl Flute, Tibia Clausa, Gedeckt, Strings (2 ranks), Viole, Viole d'Orchestre, Viole D'amour, Saxophone, Vox Humana, Tuba Horn, Fanfare Trumpet, and Ophicleide.

Chamber "B" - Diaphone Horn, Gemshorn, Diapason, Orchestral Flute, Tibia Minor, Violins (2 ranks) Muted Strings (2 ranks), Clarinet, Violincello, Salicional, Quintadena, Musette, Orchestral Oboe, Oboe Horn, Tuba Sonora, Trumpet and 4 rank Cornet de Violes.

Chamber A contains about 1000 pipes, and B about 1500, as well as a very full range of percussions - Cathedral Chimes, Muted Chimes, Tubular Chimes, Sleigh Bells, Xylophone, Vibraphone, Glockenspiel, Orchestral Bells, Harp, plus a full array of drums, cymbals and effects, not to mention an upright piano in the pit which has since 'disappeared'. As many of the ranks went down to 16 ft. and with a 32 ft. base plus all the percussions and effects there was very little speaking room for the pipes so out came the effects, including a realistic 'crockery crash' and a 'thunder' sheet. W.J. Hemsley was instrumental in arranging this, and for moving various chests forward. He wired the 'Diapason Phonon (then only 8') to the piano stop-

\* Please turn to page 8



The carillon on the Marble Arch Christie.

Summer 1963



One of the chambers of the Marble Arch Christie.

Original Specifications of Christie Organ in the Odeon, Marble Arch, London, England

<b>PEDAL</b>		Synthetic cello	8	Cymbal Tap		<b>COUPLERS</b>	
Chamber A		Tuba sonora	8	Tubular Chimes		Accompaniment to Great	
Phonon bass	16	Clarinet	8	Snare Drum Roll		Orchestral to Great	
Tibia Clausa	16	Orchestral oboe	8	Wood Block Roll		Solo to Great	
Bourdon	16	Musette	8			Solo to Great Pizzicato	
Contra viola	16	Orchestral flute	8	<b>Couplers</b>			
Ophicleide	16	Tuba Sonora	4	Solo to orchestral		<b>ACCOMPANIMENT</b>	
Tuba Horn	16	Musette	4	Great to orchestral pizzicato		Chamber A	
Saxophone	16	Orchestral piccolo	2			Bourdon	16
Stop Quint	10-2/3	Piano	8	Manuals: CC to C		Contra viole d'amour	16
Tibia Clausa	8	Harp	8	Pedal: CCC to G		Strings	16
Viola	8	Celesta	4			Open Diapason	8
Bass Flute	8	Tubular chimes		<b>GREAT</b>		Tibia Clausa	8
Tuba Horn	8	Glockenspiel		Chamber A		Gedackt	8
Saxophone	8	Orchestral bells		Contra tibia clausa	16	Hohl flote	8
Flute major	4	(reiterating)		Bourdon	16	Viole d'orchestre	8
Flute minor	4	Vibraphone		Contra Viola	16	Strings	8
		Xylophone		Tuba Horn	16	Viole d'amour	8
Chamber B		Sleigh bells (carillon to solo)		Saxophone	16	Tuba Horn	8
Diaphone Horn	32	Triangle		Diapason Phonon	8	Saxophone	8
Violone	16	Cymbal choke tap		Open Diapason	8	Vox Humana	8
Contra Salicional	16			Tibia Clausa	8	Stopped Flute	4
Bassoon	16	<b>ORCHESTRAL: Chamber B</b>		Gedackt	8	Hohl flote	4
Clarinet	16	<b>String Section</b>		Viola	8	Strings	4
Clarinet	8	Violone	16	Viole d'orchestre	8	Octave viole d'amour	4
Violoncello	8	Muted Strings	16	Strings	8	Stopped twelfth	2-2/3
Salicional	8	Contra Salicional	16	Tuba Horn	8	Piccolo	2
Synthetic Cello	8	Gemshorn Diapason	8	Fanfare Trumpet	8	Flute Mixture	
Piano	16	Violoncello	8	Saxophone	8	Piano	8
Piano	8	Violins	8	Stopped quint	5-1/3	Harp	8
Bass drum tap (soft)		Muted Strings	8	Octave Diapason	4	Celesta	4
Tom-tom		Salicional	8	Tibia Clausa	4	Snare Drum Tap	
		Salicional Quint	5-1/3	Stopped Flute	4	Snare Drum Roll	
Second Touch		Octave Violoncello	4	Viola	4	Tom-tom	
Tibia Clausa	16	Violins	4	Strings	4	Wood Block Tap	
Tuba Horn	8	Muted Strings	4	Tuba Horn	4	Tambourine	
Bass Drum Tap (loud)		Salicet	4	Tibia Twelfth	2-2/3	Castanets	
Bass Drum Roll		Salicet Twelfth	2-2/3	Stopped Twelfth	2-2/3	Jingles	
Crash Cymbals		Salicetina	2	Octave Viole	4	Sand Block	
Cymbal Roll		Echo Mixture		Piccolo	2		
Cathedral Chimes		Cornet de violes		Tierce	1-3/5	Second Touch	
Muted Chimes		Quintadena	8	Brilliant Mixture (selected stops)		Diapason Phorton	8
		<b>Wood-Wind Section</b>		Piano	16	Tuba Horn	8
<b>COUPLERS</b>		Contra Tibia Minor	16	Piano	8	Cathedral Chimes	
Accompaniment to pedal		Bassoon	16	Piano	4	Triangle	
Great to pedal		Tibia Minor	8			Cymbal Tap	
Orchestral to pedal		Oboe Horn	8	<b>Second Touch</b>		Muted Chimes	
Solo to pedal		Clarinet	8	Fanfare Trumpet	8	Snare Drum Roll	
Great to pedal pizzicato		Orchestral Oboe	8	Cathedral chimes		Wood Block Roll	
Solo to pedal octave		Tuba Sonora	8	Glockenspiel			
Carillon to pedal		Tibia Minor	4	Snare Drum Roll		<b>COUPLERS</b>	
		Flageolet	2	Muted Chimes		Orchestral to accompaniment	
<b>SOLO</b>		Contra Trumpet	16	Solo to Great		Solo to accompaniment	
Chamber A		Trumpet	8			Carillon to accompaniment	
Contra Tibia Clausa	16	Clarion	4			(tenor C to G <sup>2</sup> )	
Trombone	16	Snare Drum Tap		<b>ACCESSORIES</b>			
Vox Humana (CC)	16	Snare Drum Roll		10 double-touch combination pistons			
Tibia Clausa	8	Tom-tom		to each manual: first touch giving			
Fanfare Trumpet	8	Wood Block Tap		combination only, second touch			
Saxophone	8	Tambourine		adding suitable pedal combination.			
Vox Humana	8	Castanets					
Tibia Clausa	4	Jingles		Cancel - bar to each manual and			
Vox Humana	4	Sand Block		pedal organ.			
Cathedral Chimes		<b>Second Touch</b>		10 Tremulants			
Muted Chimes		(wood-wind section only)		1 Balanced Swell Pedal with Indi-			
Chamber B		Vibraphone	16	cators			
Contra tuba Sonora	16	Xylophone	16	1 Balanced Stop Crescendo Pedal			
Bass Clarinet	16	Sleigh Bells	8	with Indicator			
Orchestral flute	8	Triangle	8				
Quintadena	8						

## ORGAN IN THE ODEON (Continued from Page 6)

keys, giving an extra Diapason chorus of 16', 8', 4', 2', and some other modifications.

It is still a magnificent cinema organ with many extra tone colours which enable straight and orchestral music to be faithfully rendered. Mac's record of the 'Tocata in F' is the perfect example and a lasting tribute both to the organ and its organist. For a cinema organ the pedal department is particularly impressive (13 stops at 16' pitch), wind pressure varying from 5" to 25". Some of the quieter stops would seem more suited to a church organ, but if the specification does not convey it, the organ is well balanced, with the reeds dominating at full organ.

Access to the chambers is through a room containing the relays and setter boards for the adjustable double touch pistons. Off this room at the opposite end to the chambers is a smaller room containing the motor and generator. The air for the blowers is filtered.

The electro-pneumatic console is very ornate and has some 250 stop keys. It has 16 couplers, 31 second touch facilities, 40 double touch pistons, 10 tremulants, 38 stops for percussion control, 21 percussion stops, 26 effects stops and cancel bars to each section, a feature of Christie organs. Four manuals are Accompaniment, Great, Orchestral, Solo. Swell pedals to each chamber, and a balanced general crescendo pedal with indicator. Gerald Shaw commented that it must be one of the few organs that has 40 pedal pistons! By that he means that you can set 40 different pedal combinations for the second touch of the 40 thumb pistons. **THE ORGANISTS.** First and foremost was Quentin Maclean, whose playing on this organ reached such a high peak of perfection that he set a standard which all other organists and students set out to achieve. His interpretation of orchestral music has never been surpassed. His extraordinary memory for complete scores and great works was uncanny, and his registration of them for the organ was unique. It was not long before he signed a contract with Columbia to record the organ in early 1929, and considering the equipment available in those days, the recording engineers did a wonderful job. Playing his records 34 years later on modern equipment which is very critical, these early Mac recordings still sound very clear and fresh, with full range including a good bass. If your equipment, like mine, can filter out the hiss of the needle, they might have been post war recordings.

Who am I to set myself up as a critic of records? But I can tell you which are my favourites, which I've nearly worn out. For an example of his orchestral playing, 'Flower of Love' and Serenade Berceuse! The backing of the former is 'Suhbi Kazib', an example of silent film music at its descriptive best.

It was in July 1930 that THE record appeared which for ever set the seal of fame for both organ and organist - 'The Ride of the Valkyries' and the 'Tocata in F'. I have played this record to a number of highbrow organists and musicians without warning or introduction. Afterward I asked them to guess who and where. Not only were their answers most illuminating, but best of all was the look on their faces when I proudly announced that the organ in question was in a cinema! The same year Mac recorded Gershwin's 'Rhapsody in Blue', using the effects siren to reproduce the clarinet glissando. About this time the B.B.C. tested the organ for broadcasting and found it unsatisfactory, yet the recording equipment was producing a good job.

When Mac left the Regal to go to the Trocadero, he had set a very high standard for his successor. Looking back now after 33 years, there was really only one man who could have taken over - and he did - Reginald Foort. He was already a regular broadcaster and he had the B.B.C. test the organ again, and with certain modifications it was now approved, and its first broadcast was on Christmas Day, 1930. My first sight of the huge ornate console was a few weeks later. With my colossal nerve (I was only 16 at the time), I called at the stage door. Mr. Foort came down personally to collect me, and he remembered me from an earlier visit to him when at the Regent, Bournemouth. He was never too busy nor too snooty to chat with non-playing enthusiasts like myself, and he was able to pass some of his obvious enthusiasm on to me. When I met him again later when starting out in business, he gave me some sound advice which stood me in very good stead. I went down to the pit when he was due to go up for a 15-minute interlude, and I had a worm's eye view. Foort too made some records on this organ, of which his novelty train number, 'Choo Choo', appealed to me most.

On another visit I was made equally welcome, but this time I was shown to the centre stalls for the interlude, and I was soon to learn why. The main feature ended with the front tabs closing over the screen only to re-open immediately as Reg commenced to play his signature tune. On the screen a film appeared of the top only of an organ console rising out of any pit, which was soon recognised as that of the Regal itself, and the head and shoulders now visible in the film were clearly those of Reg Foort. As the organ came higher into view in the film, Reg at the real console was synchronizing his playing to coincide with the movement of his hands in the film. As the film console came into full view, the film camera moved slowly in for a gradual close-up of Reg, who turned and smiled at the audience. In the dim light reflected from the screen, I could see the real console coming up in complete darkness, no horseshoe or music lights on. At a moment rehearsed with the

operator in the box, the film projector was switched off and a dazzling white spotlight fell straight onto the real console, which had now reached full height, and there was Reg Foort sitting and smiling in exactly the same position as he was seen on the film seconds earlier. This brilliant piece of showmanship brought forth great applause. I noticed he had a microphone on the lift with him, and he proceeded to chat with the audience and announce his titles in his bright and breezy style for which he subsequently became well known.

All this time, a very interested spectator was the pianist and arranger of the Regal Virtuoso Orchestra. With the advent of 'talkies,' he saw only too well the pattern of the future. When the orchestra was disbanded on re-organization due to the advent of sound films, and Reg Foort moved on to open the Regal at Kingston upon Thames, the pianist merely transferred from the piano stool to the organ bench. His name was Sidney Torch, and very soon he established a classy rhythmic style of playing pop music which made earlier attempts sound really corny. He treated the organ for what it was intended - a one man orchestra. He arranged and re-phrased. Using heavy reeds he played staccato like a dance band brass section. The percussions were used correctly. And he established still further the theatre organ as a legitimate instrument.

Of the dozen records he made, I have already worn out the copy of 'Dance of the Blue Marionettes', backed with 'Hot Dog'. This is Torch at his best, with his 'Hotter than Ever' selection of standard hits a close second. He was quick to use the wonderfully expressive swell shades of the Regal organ for flares and slurs popular with the saxophone teams in dance bands of that period.

Torch moved on to open another Regal (also with a Christie Organ) at Edmonton in North London, and he was succeeded by Nelson Elms, then Jack Courtney, Clifford Birchell, Phil Finch, and then Gilbert Handy, who stayed 4½ years until Reginald New arrived in 1943. He made it his first job to get the organ back on the B.B.C., it having been off the air since Foort left.

On leave at this time, I quickly renewed my acquaintance with New and the Christie. My arrival was about five minutes before he was due to go up for an interlude, and although I did not know it at the time, he was notorious for leaving his arrival at the console until the very last second. We stood outside the stage doorkeeper's office and we both kept looking at our watches, but Reg chatted calmly on. In the end I could stand it no longer and pointed out the time, a minute to go, and then he sauntered down. He leaped onto the console, but not in any sense of panic, pressed the motor button (it takes 45 seconds) wiped his hands on his handkerchief, pressed half a dozen pistons, pushed the lift button, went into his signature tune and up. No music,

theatre organ

straight into a selection of popular overtures. Again I had a worm's eye view.

He said nothing to me about his finale, and he did a modulation and seemed to pause rather a long time on a soft chord. Suddenly I heard the hiss of a needle on a record coming through the loudspeakers, and a split second later, the organ and a full orchestral record complete with the guns firing were playing, in perfect pitch and timing, the "1812 Overture." I'll never forget it. As I mentioned at the beginning of my article, the swell shades propelled the sound of the organ towards the stage, and I do not think many in the auditorium were even aware that the whole finale was organ and record perfectly blended.

In 1945, the cinema was taken over by Odeon Associated Theatres and was re-named the Odeon, but to all organ fans everywhere, it will *always* be the Regal. Change of management led to changes of organists, many staying for only a few weeks - Harry Davidson, Harold Coombs, Neville Meale, Cyril Martin, John Howlett, W.J. Hemsley, Leslie Jenkins, Louis Mordish, and finally Gerald Shaw. All who knew Gerald Shaw guessed it would not be long before he got the organ back on the air, and once again the giant Christie was regularly heard both in the regular morning weekly sessions, and also in the late night spot. One morning broadcast took place on a Saturday morning with a large unofficial audience of organ

club members. Gerald Shaw always made a point of maintaining the traditions of those early days by including renditions in the style of Maclean, Foort and Torch. Gerald took a sincere interest in the organ, and when he went there in 1953, all was not as it should have been, due chiefly to lack of use, but by utilizing some of the wiring from removed percussion, he has been successful in keeping everything working.

The organ has stood more or less silent since Gerald Shaw moved to the No. 1 theatre in the circuit in November 1958, The Odeon, Leicester Square, where I am pleased to state he is still in residence. Rumors of closing of the Regal (sorry, the Odeon), Marble Arch, have been circulating for years, but at the moment the biggest cinema organ in Europe stands silent and neglected, its future uncertain. However, it is still serviced monthly.

I apologize if this article appears too personal, but with so many organists and changes of management, my main sources of news and information have been my own diaries and memories. I am also greatly indebted to Mr. Gerald Shaw for reading my draft notes and for supplying some very helpful and interesting information, as well as for correcting a few technical errors, or should I say 'editorial cyphers'?

Editor's Note. ATOE also wishes to thank David Hayes, Gerald Shaw and Ralph Bartlett for their parts in making this article and pictures available.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir:

The following quotation was taken from the May 13, 1963 edition of *Boxoffice*. Center of page SE-2.

"The big pipe organ in Florida State's Olympia Theatre, silent for the past five years, is now in full voice, and according to John Steele of Binder-Baldwin, who reconditioned the 38-year old instrument, sports one of the finest sets of bellows in town . . ."

Ah, there's good news tonight. The three manual Wurlitzer in the Tampa Theatre, Tampa, Fla., was sold to a church a year or so ago. There is a three manual Wurlitzer also in the Florida Theatre, St. Petersburg, Fla. Also one at the Florida in Jacksonville and Orlando, Fla. I understand that some are in playing condition but I haven't been in those cities for some time to hear them. Thought you folks would like to have this good news.

Sincerely yours,  
Ted Garrison

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