

Dream House Remodeled Nine Times For Final Wurlitzer

By Weldon Flanagan

Though the Fort Wayne Paramount Wurlitzer wasn't the largest instrument ever built by North Tonawanda's whistle factory, the most overwhelming surprise when the organ first sounded off in the Flanagan's Dallas residential palace was that it did not blow everything out of the house. Of course there was one deflecting feature — the swell shades did not open direct into the general listening area and caused the musical breezes to circulate against the walls

before hitting the listeners. In some close-quartered installations, the musical draft has been known to cause chills.

One thing is certain, however: when a pipe organ is installed in a residence, the owner is the boss and well able to do anything thought wise — be it wise or wrong.

The reader may notice in the house diagram an owner's idea; the unusual arrangement of the Flanagan Solo Organ. After having played a theatre instrument live for over 10 years, the author has developed a few likes and dislikes that are reflected in the installation of the Fort Wayne instrument.

One concerns the Tibia. This rank requires the greatest amount of area for the sound to develop properly, and is therefore the back rank in the Solo chamber, with the traps and percussions being closest to the shutters. Normally the latter items have a muffled sound in most theatre and residential installations where there are no percussion chambers.

The story of the Wurlitzer really starts back in the early fifties. At that time the organ owned was a 3m/8r Wicks theatre instrument that left much to be desired. There was something else that entered the picture about then that left absolutely nothing to be desired — the future Mrs. Weldon Flanagan. When matrimony became the topic of the day and night the little lady happened to mention that she "was startled to think of all that stuff being in a home."

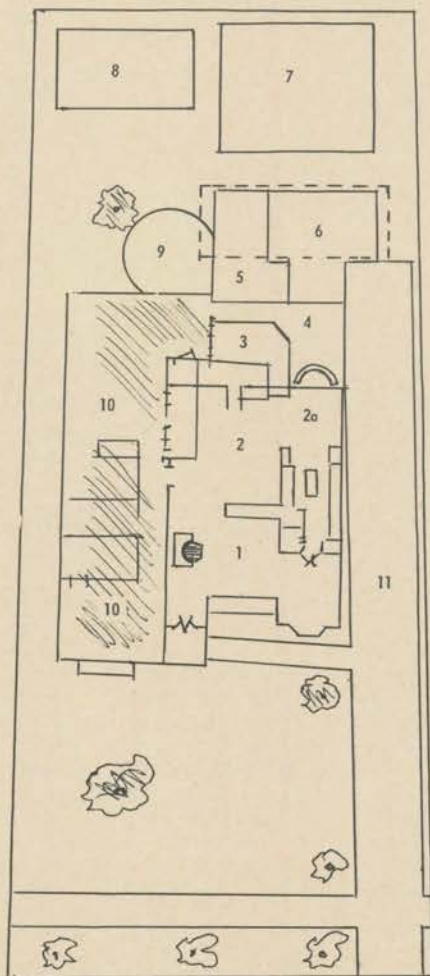
So, the bulk of the Wicks was donated to our church. The theatre equipment was discarded and parts were used with an old 24-rank Hook & Hastings straight organ. Other theatre ranks were sold to friends and pipe organs were forgotten! This was March, 1957. The old Hook & Hastings, with added Wicks, played the wedding march in April of the same year. Life was bliss until July, 1961. Then an organ bug, long dormant, flared up and did a little biting. This caused a suggestion to be made to the effect that a theatre pipe organ be located and installed in the new house. B—O—O—M!!! Mrs. Mary Flanagan quietly cried all night and was upset for several days after.

It must be explained that even though a pipe organ did not live in the house from 1957 to 1961, there were several different makes of electronic instruments boarding there. And the house, which was brand spanking new to begin with, had been remodeled seven times in four years. This was done to achieve certain desired effects for the plug-ins. After all, playing a 4m/20r Publix Wurlitzer every day, three times a day at the Dallas Palace caused certain spoilage of the organist when it came to having just a plain, ordinary electric organ in the house.

Realizing that the disease had re-



Owner Flanagan at console of his Wurlitzer



FLANAGAN IN FULL—On a lot that tapers from 65 feet in front to 55 at the rear, and is 150 feet in depth, Weldon Flanagan has installed his Wurlitzer in his home as shown above. An explanation of the rooms and buildings, by the numbers — 1— Living room where console is placed; 2— Den; 2a— Breakfast room and kitchen area; 3— Planter fireplace; 4— Mixing chamber; 5— Main organ; 6— Solo organ; 7— Blower, generator, air conditioning, heat for blower and chambers; 8— Pool; 9— Patio; 10— Bedrooms and baths area; 11— Driveway and carport.

turned, a restricted okay was given. "If you really want it that bad, it is all right with me, providing this is the last time we will have to remodel." There was a neat little 2m/8r Wurlitzer in Ohio and it arrived in Dallas in jig time. Reportedly an original installation in the Iris Theatre, Detroit, the organ was minus a few things needed to make it a true theatre screamer.

In the meantime the final remodel work was started — construction of a large room on the back of the house. This turned out to be disaster. Money ran out and several ideas had to be abandoned, and there were acrimonious arguments with the City of Dallas when the attempt was made to secure a permit to build the room in the first place. All this subsequently turned to advantage as the reader will see later on.

The little Wurlitzer had no Tibia and numerous other accessories that were wanted. This started a search for extra equipment — and it turned out to be the best thing that could have happened. The organ grapevine led to California and Russ Nelson, who is a national director of ATOE, and, at that time, was in the business of buying and selling pipe organs by the piece or package. Without this used organ dealer, the Fort Wayne Paramount Wurlitzer would have landed somewhere outside of Dallas. Miscellaneous parts were purchased and he was ultimately advised that certain ranks and equipment were still desired.

When the organ in Indiana became available, Nelson sent word that it contained many of the items that were desired for the smaller Wurlitzer. The date was sometime in March, 1962, and three weeks later the organ was safely stored all over the house, after a wall had been removed to get the console in

theatre organ



Location of the console in living room

and later replaced. It isn't difficult to envision one pleased customer and a wife who was beside herself and ready for a nervous breakdown.

The cost of transportation was in excess of what was originally budgeted and a return trip was necessary to the Republic National Bank. The employees of the institution were outspoken in appraising the sanity of the situation when they learned that a 40-foot moving van was on its way to Dallas loaded to the gills with organ parts and the bank balance was literally \$0.00. Banking friends came through just in time. This is all very funny now, but it was not so at the time.

To give credit where it is due, Russ Nelson was not only responsible for aiding in the acquiring of this fine instrument, but his expert care, with the help of Harvey Heck, another California organ buff, in removing the instrument assured proper handling and shipping. There have been hundreds of words of correspondence between that familiar box number in Orange, California, and Dallas, Texas. Descriptions of installations, certain things that should be done, others to avoid - in total, advice that could never have been paid for was available just for the asking.

After the initial shock was over, and calm was halfway restored, the decision was reached to build a house around the organ. The idea had to be discarded, however, for there was a shortage of about \$30,000 in funds necessary to complete the plan.

In the meantime the little "dream house" was in a state of disorder and confusion, with coal dust everywhere. The back door could not be opened to feed the dog or put out the garbage. It was somewhat of an amusing sight to see the house trash being taken to and put out through the theatre stage door, or carried to the trash cans at the music store. Eventually everything was rearranged. Through all this the WurliTzer Widow Flanagan was amazingly understanding.

Spring '64

At this point the house had undergone its eighth remodeling. With an under-standing Father-in-law contractor, a sigh, a tear and a few distressed stares by neighbors, the decision was made to remodel a ninth and final time. It was felt by this time that we would never be able to move and so the plans included changing the kitchen, enlarging the master bedroom and fixing up several other items.

Construction started in August and was completed in November, 1962. There was no kitchen, air conditioning, etc., during this time and it was impossible, for financial reasons, to not live there. With no back walls in the house, the dog running wild, plus the constant worry of protecting organ parts from workmen and rain, nerves were stretched to the breaking point.

Installation of the organ was begun in December, 1962 and progressed very slowly; everything had to be done in spare time. Fortunately, as mentioned above, the first room could not be completed and eventually became organ chamber space. Many cuts and bruises later, with events too disappointing to enumerate, the wind was ready to be turned on. One final problem however was the three phase, 220 volt current necessary to operate the blower. The local power company had agreed to install the necessary service and put in

Editor's Note: Weldon Flanagan is well known to most theatre organ buffs for his lengthy stint at the console of the Dallas Palace 4m/20r Publix WurliTzer. In this issue he tells of the extensive trials and tribulations encountered when he installed the Fort Wayne Paramount WurliTzer in his home. In a future edition of THEATRE ORGAN he will write about his experiences with the Dallas Palace organ. In addition to playing the theatre and residential instruments, Weldon Flanagan manages to tend to business - he operates the large House of Music, Inc., in downtown Dallas.

a special transformer at no charge. Everything was wired in and then it was discovered that two weeks prior the city council had passed an ordinance ruling that no power lines could be installed over a swimming pool. Our pool was in the way.

This was almost too much; however, after talking things over with the city electrical inspector, the wiring was approved and completed. The wind was turned on the third week of April, 1963.

At this writing the organ is practically complete - except for some additions that will be made later. There are no parts scattered about and the house is once more the big-little "dream home" with the added pleasure of "music by WurliTzer." The organ is listed as Opus 2128 and was shipped to Fort Wayne August 26, 1930.

The cat is not at all interested or disturbed by the WurliTzer except when he is moved from his favorite spot, the Howard Seat.

- FACTUALLY SPEAKING -

Relays are located in attic above living room and den areas.

Chambers and blower have a 100,000 BTU heater and three-ton air conditioning unit with separate thermostat from house temperature.

Console regulator is located in hall closet.

Ceiling in mixing room is 14' down to 10'.

Chamber ceiling within dotted area is 19' to 15'.

Blower is located in separate building on individual concrete foundation with no vibration to organ.

The organ is on separate foundation to the house and is solid concrete slab.

Chambers are constructed as follows: outside to inside 1 inch wood, 2 inches air space, 1 inch Celotex, 2 inches sheetrock, 1/2 inch wood, steel reinforcement rod and 4 inches of blown Gunite, both ceiling and exterior walls. (There is no neighbor problems when organ is played).

House is of regular brick veneer construction. Attic is floored and sheetrocked for relays.

Main organ has 14 shutters with 12 movements; solo has same number.

The blower uses air from chambers which is temperature regulated. This seems to have eliminated usual rumbles.

Air pressures used are six, ten, twelve and fifteen inches.



'Hammondite' Flanagan graduates to big WurliTzer.