

The Little Ranker That Grew

WURLITZER AIDS "WIDOW" TO ACQUIRE DREAM HOME

Every now and then, as she walks past the white and gold three manual Wurlitzer console in her Altadena, California living room, Connie Brown gives the beautiful keydesk a fond pat, smiles and goes about her housewife duties humming tunes from the previous evening concert by hubby Ben.

She is one Wurlitzer widow who appreciates the little pipe organ that grew and helped her realize a dream--that of owning one of the larger, older type mansions that are still numerous in suburban areas of Los Angeles. And the little ranker has grown from five to 10 ranks, and will continue to sprout until it reaches the grand total of 19!

The organ, a prime factor in the life of its owner, LA ATOE member Ben Brown, was removed from the Fox West Coast Fairfax Theatre, Beverly and Fairfax, Los Angeles. A single chamber installation, it was a late model Wurlitzer and bears the opus number 1849. Used but a short time before sound films silenced it for good in the theatre, this organ is not the only one owned by the lanky, native-born Californian. Ben explained his previous organeering thus:

"I bought a full size church model Hammond in May, 1947; one of the first that came out after the war. With ownership of this organ, I joined a small electric organ club consisting of seven or eight couples. One of the men was a fellow named Irv Kremer, who was an engineer for North American Aviation. He disclosed that he had read about an organ advertised for sale for the low price of \$750. This was a pipe organ and he urged me to get it.

"Never had I thought of owning a pipe organ, but I drove to Lakewood--it was in a home there--and ended up buying it. The organ was a sorry mess, and had some type of two manual console of no known make or vintage without combination action. But it did have a four-rank Wurlitzer chest and relay, plus a blower without a motor. I hauled it home to Arcadia, where we were living at the time, and stored it in the garage--for three years! The ranks of this instrument were Tibia, Salicional, Flute and Vox Humana, with everything on one regulator. The chest and relay are in the present organ.

First Home for Pipe Organ

"In 1960 I moved my family into another Arcadia home, selected for one reason so that I could have a garage where the organ could be installed. Just prior to this I had met through a Brother Elk an organ man by the name of Ed MacDonald. He agreed to help me put the organ together. We had been working on the instrument two months when



VISITOR VIEW - Upon entering the Brown residence, the visitor's first view of the Wurlitzer console is seen through entry hall, which is two stories high. This area also permits excellent mixing of organ and gives the impression of entering a regular theatre. Large living room and adjacent dining room also adds to fine flow of sound.

MacDonald told me I needed something better and said he would look around for another organ. His search finally centered on a choice between the Wurlitzers in the South Pasadena Rialto and Fairfax Theatres. When John Curry heard about it, he made tracks to the head office of Fox West Coast and I ended up with the Fairfax Wurlitzer, (Curry is the man responsible for rebuilding the Rialto organ, a 216 that has become rather famous--Ed). MacDonald, in the meantime, had discouraged me from making an attempt to buy the Rialto organ due to the severe water damage and difficult removal problems that would be encountered. Anyway, the Fairfax Wurlitzer was a bit cheaper! With just five ranks, and being a single chamber installation, the organ was removed with ease.

"It had not been played much; the foot pedals showed little if no wear. In addition to the five ranks there were three percussions: Glockenspiel, Xylophone and a set of 18-note chimes. The organ was removed in May, 1960 and the first note, B above middle C, on the flute rank was played in December of that year.

In setting up the organ, provision was made for nine ranks, but one of the string ranks was equipped with a board so there would be two holes leading down from each hole in that particular chest. Brown secured a rank each of Viole

D'Orchestre and Viole Celeste and put them on this chest. "It meant you couldn't separate them on the console. Each had one tab instead of two, but I very seldom play them separately and didn't mind," he explained.

This organ had a Salicional, Flute, Tibia, Tuba (style D trumpet), and Vox Humana. It also had the 16-foot octave diapason. It was classified as a five-rank organ, even though the relay was set up for six. There were switches for a diapason, and the console had blank tabs where a diapason would go, but it was never installed.

Brown added a diapason, and, with the other two ranks, brought the instrument up to a total of eight. He then picked up a solo string from the Graumen's Chinese Wurlitzer that had been removed and donated to a church. He later sold the Salicional from his first organ. Eventually he added a 37-note Kilgen Kinura, and when the family moved from this residence to the Altadena mansion in December, 1962, the organ was up to 10 ranks. To say that it was a compactly installed instrument in the Arcadia garage is understatement--the 10 ranks were crammed in a space about 18 feet long, five feet wide and up to a peak height of about 14 feet. Even for the lanky owner, tuning some ranks was almost an impossibility. The blower was

put out in the back yard with a small house over it for protection against the elements, and the wind line was placed in a duct under the driveway.

Wind Line Wilts Him

Putting in the wind trunk brought Brown to the front door step of the place where golden organs are a daily feature in the lives of angels--or so he thought. "In the course of putting the organ together", he said, "I was rash enough to think I could do the work of installing the transite pipe under the driveway. A friend helped me, and in digging I wrenched my arm and shoulder. I had to hold the arm in the air and couldn't bring it to a restful position because of the excruciating pain. I went to the doctor. He gave me immediate relief and then x-rayed the shoulder area. I returned later to receive chilling news that I had a spot in my arm the size of a silver dollar and that it was possibly a bone tumor."

An operation revealed nothing serious and only one week was spent in the hospital. But, somewhat ruefully, he disclosed that this was the week during which time the Los Angeles Paramount Theatre was auctioned off. For putting in the pipe he "won" a six-inch scar and lost out on bidding for the 4m/33r Wurlitzer. He later purchased a Wurlitzer piano from Bill Brown in Phoenix--this came originally from an Oregon Theatre--who had purchased it from organ dealer Russ Nelson.

Buy New Parts, He advises

Asked if he experienced many problems during the initial installation that he might recount for buffs who are currently erecting instruments of their own, Ben Brown stated emphatically that he could deliver a lengthy lecture on them. One bit of sage advice offered: it doesn't pay to use old pipe parts or end collars because new flexhaust pipe and galvanized pipe and collars are so easy to work with instead of trying to get solder to adhere to old materials. It is also much easier fitting collars that are new. Brown bought his materials from Durst and Organ Supply. The cost is low. But the time saved and struggling and frustration eliminated more than offset even the small amount of money spent.

One other recommendation made by Brown: The modern plastic coated wire, or any stranded wire is almost impossible to work with when it is necessary to thread it into Wurlitzer equipment. Parafined cotton-coated wire such as Wurlitzer employed is unbeatable. It is available without the enamel coating.

New Home Found For Wurlitzer

The Brown family had talked about moving and were out looking at income property when they heard of the place they now call home. With no idea of buying it, they decided to take a look

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Ben Brown is area Native

Benjamin D. Brown is a one-package deal--a native Californian. Born in Los Angeles in 1914, he has lived his entire life in the metropolitan area of the great western metropolis. His boyhood was spent in the Hollywood area and from his earliest recollection, he has always enjoyed theatre pipe organ music.

Hunley's Theatre on Hollywood Blvd. happened to be the place he heard his first organ music. He knew owner Hunley personally and was taken on a guided tour through the projection booth and the rest of the theatre. The next movie house he attended was Grauman's Egyptian to see the first film presented at the theatre, "Robinhood". He remembers he saw it twice.

His most visited theatre was Bard's Hollywood (now the Vista). He lived one block from the theatre and delivered handbills for which he was given six passes that covered three shows each week for two week periods. He recalls going to the theatre not only to see the films, but to hear the girl organist (believed to be Ella Miller, one of Bard's solo artists who played most of the houses in the chain--Ed).

He played his first organ when about 14 years of age, a two manual reed organ in a neighbor's home. His education was in Hollywood primary and elementary schools and finally famed Hollywood high. He obtained his Bachelor's Degree at UCLA and then attended the USC Law School. He now has an extensive practice in Hollywood.

From the time he was 19 years old, Brown helped pay his way through school by playing in dance orchestras. He had taken piano lessons for eight years from Maude Meserve Falkener, a local teacher of considerable fame at that time in Los Angeles. During the year 1939 he formed his own orchestra and played a great many private and company dance engagements.



THE MANSE - The new Brown home looked like this (above) when the family moved in the day after Christmas, 1962. Within a week, the east porch was being rebuilt to house the Wurlitzer. Organ was playing by February.

PEDAL

16' Tuba
 16' Diaphone
 Open
 16' Bourdon
 8' English Post Horn
 8' Brass Trumpet
 8' Tuba
 8' Diapason
 8' Tibia Clausa
 8' Clarinet
 8' Saxophone
 8' Solo String
 8' Cello
 8' Flute
 4' Octave
 Open
 Open
 Open
 Open
 16' Piano
 8' Piano
 Bass Drum
 Kettle Drum
 Crash Cymbal
 8' Acc. to Pedal
 8' Great to Pedal

ACCOMPANIMENT

16' Tibia Clausa TC
 16' Bourdon
 16' Viol TC
 8' English Post Horn
 8' Tuba
 8' Diapason
 8' Tibia Clausa
 8' Clarinet
 8' Saxophone
 8' Orchestral Oboe
 8' Kinura
 8' Solo String
 8' Morton Violin II
 8' Viol d'Orchestre
 Viol Celeste*
 Open
 Open
 Open
 Open
 8' Flute
 8' Vox Humana
 4' Octave
 4' Piccolo
 4' Solo String
 4' Morton Violin II
 4' Viol d'Orchestre
 Viol Celeste*
 4' Flute
 4' Vox Humana
 2 2/3' Twelfth
 2' Piccolo
 Open
 8' Piano
 Open
 Chrysoglott
 Snare Drum
 Tambourine
 Castanets
 Chinese Block
 Tom Tom
 4' Acc. to Acc.
 8' Solo to Acc.

GREAT

16' English Post Horn TC
 16' Tuba
 16' Diaphone
 16' Bourdon
 16' Tibia Clausa TC
 16' Saxophone
 16' Viol TC
 16' Vox Humana TC
 8' English Post Horn
 8' Brass Trumpet
 8' Tuba
 8' Diapason
 8' Tibia Clausa
 8' Clarinet
 8' Saxophone
 8' Orchestral Oboe
 8' Kinura
 8' Solo String
 8' Morton Violin II
 8' Viol d'Orchestre
 Viol Celeste*
 Open
 Open
 Open
 8' Flute
 8' Vox Humana
 5 1/3' Tibia Quint
 4' Clarion
 4' Piccolo
 4' Solo String
 4' Morton Violin II
 4' Viol d'Orchestre
 Viol Celeste*
 4' Flute
 2 2/3' Tibia Twelfth
 2 2/3' Twelfth
 2' Fifteenth
 2' Tibia Piccolo
 2' Piccolo
 1 3/5' Tierce
 Open
 Chimes
 Sleigh Bells
 Xylophone
 Solo Xylophone
 Glockenspiel
 Orchestral Bells
 Chrysoglott
 16' Great to Great
 4' Great to Great
 16' Solo to Great
 8' Solo to Great

TOE STUDS

3 Pedal Combinations
 Horses Hoofs
 Siren
 Surf
 Snare Drum

CHEEK BUTTONS

Auto Horn
 Steamboat Whistle
 Fire Gong

Percussion Pedal
 Sforzando Pedal
 Crescendo Pedal

SOLO

16' English Post Horn TC
 16' Tuba
 16' Tibia Clausa TC
 16' Saxophone TC
 8' English Post Horn
 8' Brass Trumpet
 8' Tuba
 8' Diapason
 8' Tibia Clausa
 8' Clarinet
 8' Saxophone
 8' Orchestral Oboe
 8' Kinura
 8' Solo String
 8' Vox Humana
 4' Clarion
 4' Piccolo
 2 2/3' Tibia Twelfth
 2' Tibia Piccolo
 Xylophone
 Glockenspiel
 Orchestral Bells
 16' Solo to Solo
 4' Solo to Solo
 8' Acc. to Solo

BACK RAIL

Mandolin

ACC: Second Touch

8' English Post Horn
 8' Brass Trumpet
 8' Tuba
 8' Diapason
 8' Tibia Clausa
 8' Clarinet
 8' Saxophone
 8' Solo String
 Xylophone
 Chimes
 Sleigh Bells
 Triangle
 8' Solo to Acc.

GREAT: Second Touch

16' Tuba
 8' Tibia Clausa
 8' Solo to Great

GREAT

16' Piano
 8' Piano
 4' Piano

SOLO

Open
 Open
 Solo Xylophone
 8' Piano

TREMULANTS

Main
 Tibia Clausa
 Vox Humana

* Both Viol d'Orchestre and Viol Celeste on single tablet.

and see if it might be good for an investment. "Once she saw it, Connie said it was the place she'd always been looking for--she could make like Scarlett O'Hara", Ben said. What he noted a little later was a trifle more explanatory--the mansion had a tremendous porch on the east side of the living room and library, plenty of room for the pipe organ. Built in 1896, it was the winter home of a Mr. West who published law books. This sort of cinched the whole deal; Brown is an attorney and the house had some interest to him for this reason. The couple purchased the home and made plans to move the day after Christmas.

First things first, the porch was ripped up and remodeled into an organ chamber 12 feet high, 12 feet wide and 32 feet long. The organ was moved in during late January and little over one month later it was in playing condition. The neighbor problem is eliminated due to construction of the room and the fact that the house is placed on the equivalent of three lots.

Gets Three Manual Console

In July, 1963 a three manual console was purchased for this organ and has required the better part of a year to recondition. Originally from McVickers' Theatre, Chicago, Brown also purchased at the same time an extra relay to accommodate the additional ranks he intends to install later on. The console, a Hope-Jones unit orchestra model, was some sort of a special job, Brown believes. There were no stops on the back board and only a 13-rank set up plus one extra rank which was unnamed on the organ. It was apparently played as a 13-ranker in the theatre. The second touch was on the lower stop rail, as were the tremulant tabs. He has changed this around to correspond with general Wurlitzer stop rails. He has added 21 tablets on the two rails and put 27 stops on the back board, all of them original Wurlitzer equipment. The keys have been done over and the combination action is still in the process of being rebuilt. All registration at the present time is done manually, which Brown admits is a slow process for him. Refinishing was accomplished before the console was moved into the house. It was taken by truck to a furniture refinishing shop in Alhambra and the work was done by professional painters.

Finds Buried Treasure In Theatre

Along in September, 1962, Brown happened to be talking to MacDonald and was told by the organ man that he had purchased and removed the organ from the Bill Robinson Theatre on South Central Avenue in Los Angeles a number of years back. Because the organ was destined for a church, MacDonald said he had not bothered to take out the percussions and several other items. Going to the theatre, Brown was permitted to climb into the old organ loft space to

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NOT AS BAD AS IT SEEMS – A get well cartoon sent to ATOE Leonard MacClain by Carl Schaller, Delaware Chapter member who studied with the famed organist, was somewhat the antithesis of what really happened – MacClain told those at the recent convention he received many cards from members and chapters and was deeply touched by the kind messages wishing him speedy recovery.

THE BROWN WURLITZER

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investigate. What he found quickened his pulse and made him realize that all treasure is not buried in the sand. Under inches of pure dust he found a complete kinura set, and then poking further he picked out a chinese cymbal. This was just the beginning--the total loot located in the chamber areas added up to: a complete tibia rank and the eight-foot offset chest and pipes; a complete tuba rank including the 16-foot octave with the chest; a toy counter table with snare drum, tambourine, bass drum, tap cymbal, tuned sleigh bells, xylophone, glockenspiel with reiterating orchestra bells, all operating parts and crash cymbal (which was missing from the Fairfax WurliTzer); castanets; a few oboe pipes and clarinet pipes, about 20 of each; an air reservoir with four regulators; all of the swell shades in the solo chamber consisting of two sections plus a host of other odds and ends that come in handy when erecting an organ.

The entire lot was purchased at a price amounting to about one-tenth of what it could have been sold for. Organ buffs Bill Coffman and Bill Field helped Brown remove the find. Another buff, Bob Hanselman, who lives near Brown, has assisted him during the various phases of the building program at the Altadena residence.

As for the future, Brown intends to add a Robert Morton violin rank and a

WurliTzer brass trumpet that came from a theatre in Boston. The trumpet will operate on 15 inches of wind. He also has a WurliTzer clarinet and the celeste rank for the Morton violin.

The windows and glass door of the library have been left in place so that visitors can view the chamber area without going outside and entering through a door on the ground. The main floor of the house is about five feet above the chamber floor.

There are 18 shutters divided into two sets that open into one another to produce a partial divided chamber effect, although the chamber is not divided. They are hidden by light weight drapes that do not hinder degrees of the sound.

Upon walking into the stairway foyer while the organ is playing the listener could easily think it was a theatre being entered, so true is the theatre tone of this instrument. The foyer is two stories tall and, coupled with the large living room and dining room areas adjacent to the chamber, the sound is not boxed in and therefore has a resonance not unlike a motion picture theatre.

Seldom does an organ buff have the good fortune to be able to find a home such as this, and even still more remote is the chance that he happens to have a wife who likes to "make like Scarlett O'Hara" and is happy because a WurliTzer helped her realize her life long dream to become mistress of a large, older type mansion. Ben Brown is indeed a happy man!

Pipe Organs In Business

Bourbon, Scotch and Beer elbow benders--and coke sippers, too--who wend their weary way to San Francisco's west end Lost Weekend do so for two prime reasons; they not only seek spirited uplift in liquid, but refreshing effects of WurliTzer-ized wind as well. For this is the home of a former theatre pipe organ that is in business to entertain the customers and keep them quaffing--in a sobering way, of course.

Located in a rather out-of-the-way area, Lost Weekend is situated on Taraval Street (1940, to be exact) near the Pacific Ocean. Taraval is a semi-business-residential road approximately two miles south of famed Golden Gate Park. An ATOE organ buff who is adept at tracing WurliTzer wiring would experience little trouble finding the Bistro, especially during evening hours when the WurliTzer is being played either by Larry Vannucci or Tony Levay.

According to owners Ernie Herrera and Sam Joseph, the location is not a deterrent to business because the WurliTzer has tremendous drawing power. Vannucci plays most of the week and is spelled by Levay Sunday afternoons, Monday and Tuesday evenings.

A regular summer feature for organ buffs is a special "Cocktails for Two" session. The cocktail lounge is closed to the public and only buffs and their wives are admitted for the evening to relax in the comfortable room, sit back, sip and hear a concert of theatre organ music.

The style F special is installed in two chambers at the rear of the cocktail lounge, while console rests on a raised platform and is backed by a large mirror placed on a slant so that patrons can watch the artist perform. Listed in WurliTzer records as opus 1320, the organ was shipped from North Tonawanda to the Senator Theatre, Oakland, California on April 17, 1926. Used extensively during the silent film era, in 1955 it was removed and re-installed at Lost Weekend by Paul Schoenstein, a member of the Felix Schoenstein and Sons Organ Company, San Francisco.

This little beauty has nine ranks--tuba horn-ophicleide 16', diapason-diaphone 16', flute-bourdon 16', tibia clausa, clarinet, violin, violin celeste, vox humana and english horn.

A list supplied by the owners reveals a host of organists who have played the instrument in the club, either during professional engagements, or on special occasions. Headed by W. 'Tiny' James, the names included are Hal Shutz, Ted Crawford, Scott McAllister, Bob Strelitz, Freida Benz, Leila Grant, Bob Moonan, the late Floyd Wright, Kathy Kettle, Dave Quinlan, Don Anderson, Ethel Langer, Frank Schivo.