

G. I. Rebuilds Rare Wurlitzer

As reported in the November 16, 1963 issue of "The Stars and Stripes" by James Gunter, S. & S. Berlin Bureau, with additions to ATOE by Pfc. Marvin E. Merchant.

An American soldier who used to tinker with player pianos for a pastime as a boy in Kansas City, Mo., has just rebuilt a burned-out organ in West Berlin which German specialists said was beyond repair.

Pfc. Marvin Merchant, 23, has worked nights and weekends since last February to put the big theater organ back in condition. The complicated instrument, only one of its kind left in Germany, is a Wurlitzer and was manufactured in Tawanda, N.Y.

A fire which started in electric switches behind the console destroyed the organ July 21, 1962. It is located in the Siemens Palace, part of the former residence of Werner von Siemens, the German electrical magnate, and is now owned by the German government.

Merchant, who is interested in such things, learned through a theater organ club that five of the big Wurlitzer theater organs were sent to Berlin at various times before World War II. When he was stationed here, he set out to find them, but learned that four had been destroyed in the war.

"The fifth Siemens organ had been burned out when I found it," Merchant said. "German organ builders said it couldn't be fixed, but I offered to do the job. They let me do it because they figured I couldn't hurt anything and I agreed to buy all the parts myself."

Merchant rebuilt all the electrical contacts and installed much new material which had been charred in the fire. He drew on his experience in repairing player pianos as a hobby in Kansas City.

Siemens had a big Wurlitzer installed in his palatial home in 1929 at a cost of \$85,000. Two upper rooms are filled with pipes and instruments for special effects like thunder, tympani, cymbals, gongs, wood blocks and castanets. One stop turns on a big row of brass trumpets.

The brains of the organ, a maze of wires and electric relays, are located in the basement near two big wind machines which supply columns of moving air for the pipes.

The soldier plans to add a personal touch: he will add a device which can make the sound of surf.

Merchant enjoys playing the organ himself, and he sat at the console, demonstrating the various sounds it will make as he played a tune called "Days of Wine and Roses."

"I hope the German government will use it for German-American concerts," he said. "I understand it may be used for broadcasts on German radio."

Merchant will get out of the Army in 1965, but he doesn't know whether he will go into business as an organ builder or just keep it as a hobby.

Thanks to S/Sgt. Stephen B. Tillman for sending us the copy of "Stars and Stripes."

Specifications of Wurlitzer Opus 2064, as copied from the relays by ATOE Member Marvin Merchant.

8 Cello	8 Violin Celeste
8 Concert Violin	8 Oboe Horn
8 Vox Humana (2)	8 Quintadena
8 Gamba	(Percussion)
16 Diaphone	Chimes
8 Tuba Horn	Marimba Harp
8 Clarion	Glockenspiel
16 Ophicleide	Tympani (Tuned)
8 Tibia Clausa	Xylophone
8 Brass Trumpet	Sleigh Bells
8 Clarinet	Chrysoglott
16 Lieblech Gedeckt	
16 String	Snare Drum
8 String Celeste	Bass Drum
8 Orchestral Oboe	Crash Cymbal
16 Flute	Castanets

Fire that started in the electric blower switches behind the console did this to Wurlitzer Opus 2064 in 1962. Thanks to Marvin Merchant, Germany once again has a Wurlitzer pipe organ playing.



Pfc. Marvin Merchant rebuilt the big organ and it's now a showpiece in the Siemen's Palace.