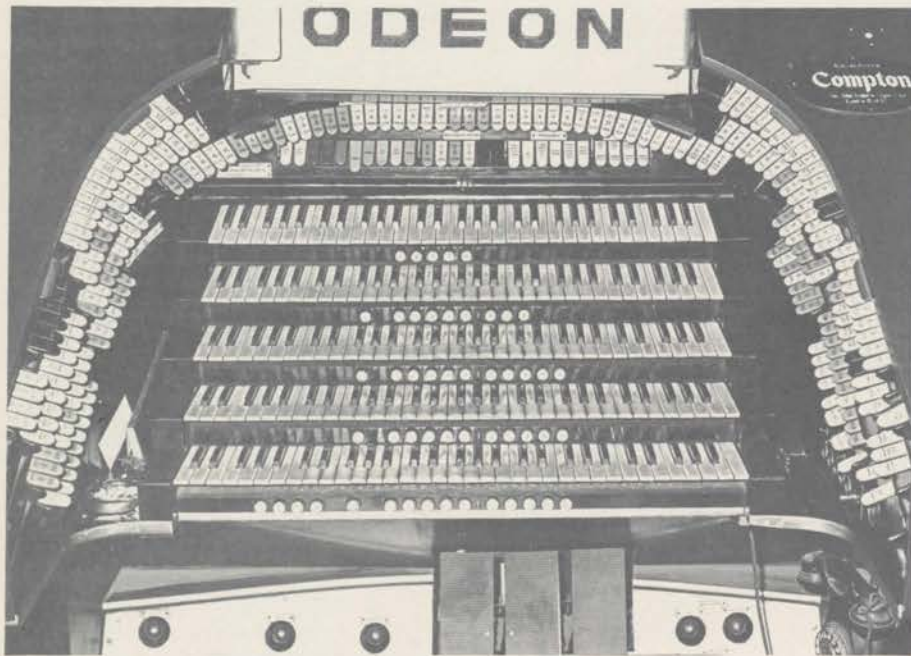


The Odeon, Leicester Square Its Organ and Organists

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

with Photos By
JOHN D. SHARP



Odeon, Leicester Square Compton.

THE COMPTON ORGAN

The five manual console is on a lift in the centre of the orchestra pit, and the organ is in two spacious chambers underneath the stage, and extending the full width of the stage. The 16 ranks or 17 if you count as two units the double rank of strings - In Chamber "A" we have - Diapason, Geigen, Stopped Flute, Salicional, Gamba, Violin, Strings (two ranks) and Posaune. In the other Chamber "B" is - Harmonic Flute, Tibia Clausa, Clarinet, Krumet, Vox Humana, French Horn, Tuba and Trumpet.

In 1952 when John Howlett was resident organist, he made some observations about the organ in No. 24 issue of "Theatre Organ Review" from which I have permission to quote some extracts - "The chorus-reeds contrast well and combine well, and are perhaps the outstanding feature of the job. From the ultra-smooth and faithful French Horn through the fairly bright Tuba and free Posaune to the Trumpet (voiced on Willis lines with brass loads) there is reed tone of more than usual good quality and character, and worthy in every way of Compton voicing at its best. Apart from the saucy Krumet (the comedian of the outfit) the other reeds are Clarinet and Vox Humana.

The medium-powered Harmonic Flute is exceedingly useful, and I feel strongly that it should have a place in every theatre organ. With or without the slow beating tremulant, it is invaluable. The Tibia is of wood, and it is of large scale (what John Howlett did not mention in his article is that it is a Wur-litzer tibia on a Compton chest).

As for Strings; take your choice from the pianissimo Salicional with effective Haskell-bass in the 16 ft. octave, through the placid two rank Strings with slow beats for the Celeste rank, to the rather thin and keen Violin, and broad and very keen Gamba; a well contrasted family and a happy one. The Geigen is an excellent rank complete from 16 ft. T.C. right up to four ranks of mixtures (12.19.22 plus fifteenth) and including a 5-1/3 ft. Quint.

There are the usual 'toy-shop' effects and traps. Originally a grand piano was provided but disconnected because of its size and a marimba substituted. A feature of the Compton Organs are their Melotones, and the one of this organ was completely rebuilt in 1960 and is now the finest example of this stop in the world. As well as the standard loudspeakers for this stop in the chambers, there are two extra loudspeakers (controlled by a switch at the



Gerald Shaw at the Odeon Compton.

console) at the back of the circle, giving a unique 'echo' effect. About 1950 a set of solid tubular chimes were added. The Solo and Orchestral manuals have a sustainer stop.

Another interesting feature of this installation is the depth of the chambers. Most of the chests stand 6 ft. above floor level, making maintenance of the magnets a pleasure. The console lift too goes right down to the chamber floor level, which is below the level of the orchestral lift, which means that when required, it can be covered over so that the orchestra has full use of the entire floor area of the pit, and can be raised or lowered independently. This is one cinema where the console need never be disconnected and removed backstage for the occasional stage shows, a fate which has overtaken many other installations.

THE ORGANISTS

There have only been three resident organists since the Cinema opened. James Bell from 1937 until his untimely death in 1947 - he was actually taken fatally ill after a broadcast, and died almost immediately.

John Howlett took over immediately and remained there until he retired in November 1958. He was succeeded by Gerald Shaw, who has been in residence ever since.

Gerald Shaw with over one thousand broadcasts to his credit, is the son of Capt. Frank Shaw, the well known author of sea stories. After four years as a

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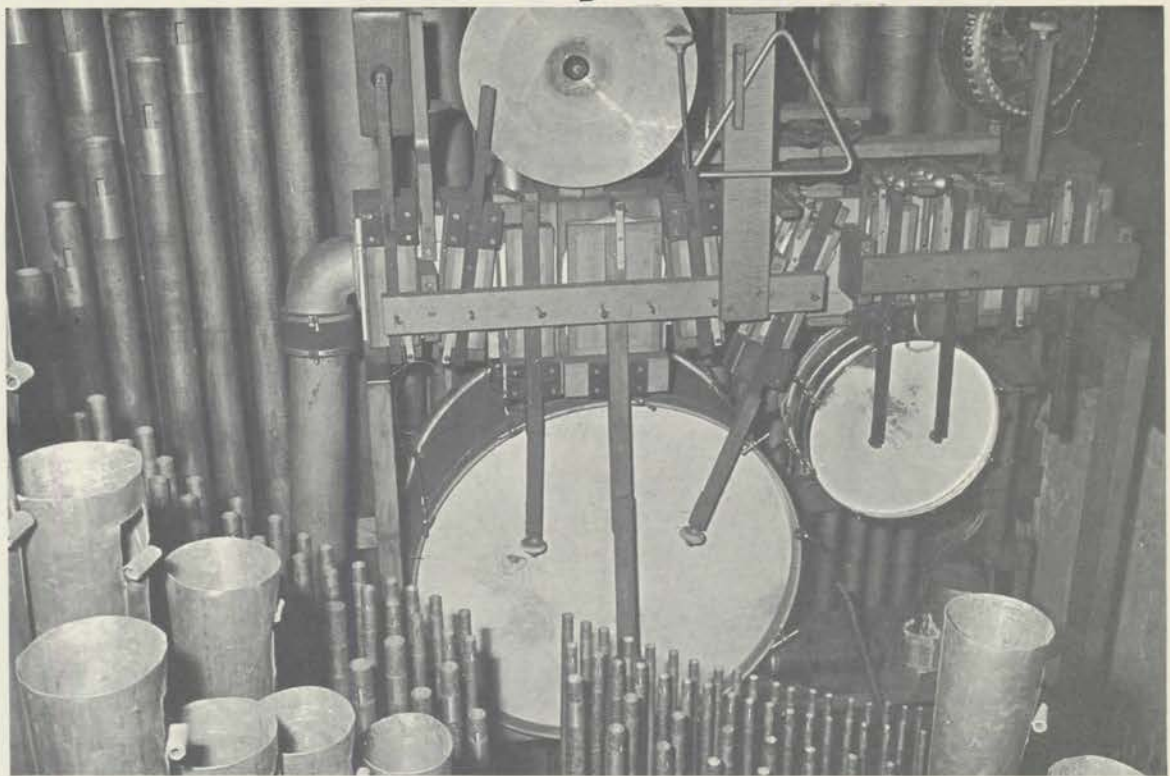
SPECIFICATIONS - 5/17 COMPTON

PEDAL

- 32 Subbas
- 32 Accoustic Bass
- 16 Tuba
- 16 Posaune
- 16 French Horn
- 16 Diaphone
- 16 Tibia
- 16 Salicional
- 16 Bourdon
- 8 Tuba
- 8 Posaune
- 8 Trumpet
- 8 French Horn
- 8 Octave
- 8 Tibia
- 8 Clarinet
- 8 Strings (2 rks)
- 8 *Cello
- 8 Salicional
- 8 Flute
- 4 Tibia
- 16 Marimba T.C.
- 8 Marimba
- 4 Marimba
- Drum F
- Drum P
- Drum Roll
- Snare Drum
- Cymbal
- Crash Cymbal
- Triangle
- Accompaniment to Pedal
- Great to Pedal
- Solo to Pedal
- 4 Orchestral to Pedal
- 4 Orchestral to Pedal
- Traps second Touch
- * Pedal to Manual
- Pistons Second 1
- Touch
- 2 Ditto
- 3 Ditto
- 4 Ditto

ACCOMPANIMENT

- 16 Vox Humana T.C.
- 16 Viola T.C.
- 16 Salicional
- 16 Bourdon
- 8 Tuba
- 8 Posaune
- 8 Trumpet
- 8 French Horn
- 8 Diapason
- 8 Tibia
- 8 Vox Humana
- 8 Clarinet
- 8 Krumet
- 8 Geigen
- 8 Gamba
- 8 Strings (2 rks)
- 8 Violin
- 8 Salicional
- 8 Concert Flute
- 4 Tuba
- 4 Tibia
- 4 Posaune
- 4 Vox Humana
- 4 Geigen
- 4 Gamba
- 4 Strings (2 rks)
- 4 Viola



Accompaniment Chamber (Foreground) Posaune, Gamba, Strings and Salicional
16' Metal Bourdon and Salicional behind traps.

- 4 Salicional
- 4 Concert Flute
- 4 Stopped Flute
- 2-2/3 Nazard
- 2-2/3 12th
- 15th 2
- 2 Piccolo
- 2 Flautino
- III Acuta
- 8 Marimba
- 4 Marimba
- 8 Chrys.
- 4 Chrys.
- Snare Drum
- Castanets
- Tambourine
- Block
- Tom-Tom
- Sleigh Bells
- Sand Block
- Choke Cymbal
- Solo to Accomp.

SECOND TOUCH

- 8 Tuba
- 8 Tibia
- 8 Krumet
- 4 Tibia
- 4 Gt. to Accompaniment
- 8 Solo to Accompaniment

GREAT

- 16 Tuba
- 16 Posaune
- 16 Diaphone
- 16 Tibia

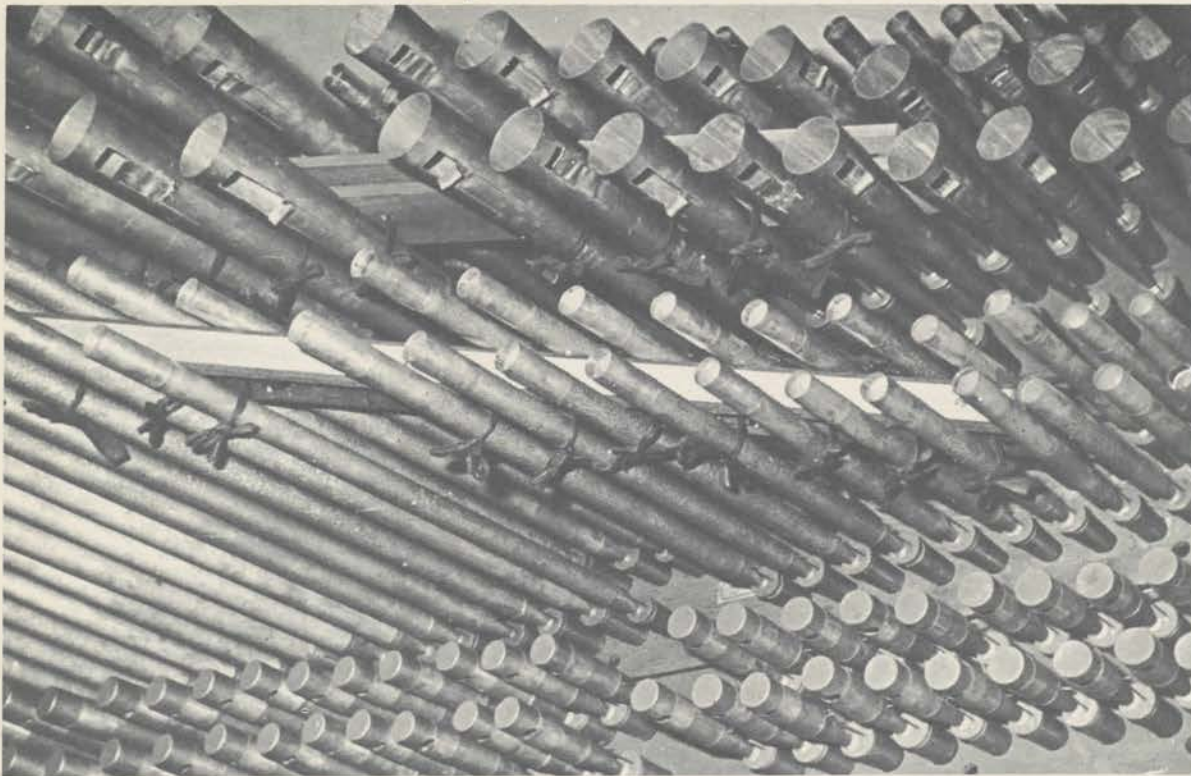
- 16 Geigen T.C.
- 16 Gamba T.C.
- 8 Tuba
- 8 Posaune
- 8 Trumpet
- 8 French Horn
- 8 Diapason
- 8 Tibia
- 8 Vox Humana
- 8 Clarinet
- 8 Krumet
- 8 Geigen
- 8 Gamba
- 8 Strings (2 rks)
- 8 Violin
- 8 Salicional
- 8 Concert Flute
- 8 Stopped Flute
- 5-1/3 Quint
- 4 Tuba
- 4 Posaune
- 4 Trumpet
- 4 Octave
- 4 Tibia
- 4 Gamba
- 4 Violin
- 4 Geigen
- 4 Concert Flute
- 4 Stopped Flute
- 2-2/3 Tibia Twelfth
- 2-2/3 Twelfth
- 2-2/3 Flute Twelfth
- 2 Ocarina
- 2 Fifteenth
- 2 Flautina
- Cornet IV
- 16 Marimba
- 8 Marimba

- 4 Marimba
- I Solo to Great
- II Orchestral to Great
- III Traps to Great

SOLO

- 16 Trumpet T.C.
- 16 Tibia
- 16 Vox Humana T.C.
- 16 Gamba T.C.
- 8 Tuba
- 8 Posaune
- 8 Trumpet
- 8 French Horn
- 8 Diapason
- 8 Tibia
- 8 Vox Humana
- 8 Clarinet
- 8 Krumet
- 8 Geigen
- 8 Gamba
- 8 Strings
- 8 Violin
- 8 Salicional
- 8 Concert Flute
- 8 Stopped Flute
- 4 Trumpet
- 4 Tibia
- 4 Geigen
- 4 Gamba
- 4 Strings
- 4 Violin
- 4 Salicional
- 4 Concert Flute
- 4 Stopped Flute
- 2-2/3 Tibia Twelfth
- 2 Ocarina
- 2 Piccolo

ODEON, LEICESTER SQUARE



Solo Chamber showing Vox Humana, Krummet, and Trumpet.

SOLO (Continued)

III Quartane
1-3/5 Tierce
8 Marimba
Chimes
4 Glockenspiel
4 Cathedral Chimes
Vibraphone
Melotone 8
Vibraphone
Melotone 4
Octave
Sub-Octave

ORCHESTRAL

16 Tuba
16 Posaune
16 Trumpet T.C.
8 Tuba
8 Posaune
8 Trumpet
8 French Horn
8 Tibia
8 Vox Humana
8 Krummet
4 Tuba
4 Posaune
4 Trumpet
4 Xylophone
4 Glockenspiel
4 Orchestral Bells
8 Piano

MELOTONE UNIT

(on Orchestral)
16 Schalmel
8 Melotone
4 Melotone
2-2/3 Melotone
2 Melotone
1-3/5 Tierce
8 Krummhorn

(MELOTONE)
8 Cor Anglais
8 Musette
Chimes
Carillon
Echo Control
Vibrato
Octave
Sub-Octave

MANUAL V

8 Great
3-1/5 Great
16 Solo
5-1/3 Solo
4 Solo
16 Orchestral
8 Orchestral
4 Orchestral
4 Vibraphone
Melotone Off
Melotone
Speaker Switches
1 Organ 2 Circle

TREMULANTS

Tuba
Concert Flute
French Horn
Tibia
Clarinet, Trumpet
Krummet
Vox Humana
Posaune, Diapason
Stopped Flute,
Geigen,
Salicional
Strings, Violin,
Gamba

TRAPS AND EFFECTS

Syren
Auto Horn
Firebell
Railway Whistle
Steamboat Syren
Bass Drum Roll
Cumbal Roll
Surf
Aeroplane
Telephone
Slapstick

PEDAL PISTONS

Bird Whistle
Snare Drum and 2nd
Touch Crash
Crash Cymbal
Solo Sustainer
Orchestral Sustainer
Operator's Cue

Ten pistons each to Accompaniment, Great, Solo; Eight to Orchestral, adjustable at keyboard by patent mechanism each with double touch suitable pedal.

Five general pistons to Manual V. actuating similar pistons on other four manuals.

Four toe pistons to Pedal Organ, adjustable at keyboard, duplicated by pistons at right hand of Acc. Manual.

Two balanced Swell Pedals, with indicators.

Balanced Crescendo Pedal, with indicators.

Continued from page 15

schoolmaster, his first professional appointment was at the age of 21 opening a small Compton 3c/6 in the Regal, St. Leonards, Sussex; thence to the Regal, Glasgow with its larger Compton (3/12). Later he moved south for a short spell at the Astoria, Brixton (Compton 3c/11) then back to Scotland to the Glasgow Paramount (Compton 4c/10) until he joined the army in 1940.

At the end of 1945, Gerald Shaw rejoined Odeons at the Manchester Paramount/Odeon (Wurlitzer 4/20) for a short period and thence to his base cinema, The Odeon Swiss Cottage (Compton 3/8). Other organs at which he was featured for the next few years included the Rivoli, Cairo, Egypt (Compton 4/10) the 3m. Compton electronic Theatre in the Sao Jorge Cinema, Lisbon, Portugal, and the Paramount/Odeon Tottenham Court Road, London (Compton 4c/10).

In March 1953 he moved to the then largest Cinema Organ in Europe, the Odeon (Regal) Marble Arch (4/36) to become its last resident organist, when he soon got the instrument back on the air after 12 years absence. He left in November 1958 to go to Odeon's No. 1 premier cinema, The Odeon, Leicester Square.

NOTE - The small c after the figure denoting the number of manuals denotes that the top manual is only a coupler one.

THE CINEMA

Leicester Square has always been and will probably always be, a centre of

Concluded on page 18

**Conclusion – ODEON
LEICESTER SQUARE
from page 17**

London's entertainment. Many of the theatres which were sited in and around this famous square have gone, and rising up on their sites have appeared showplaces of the various film companies. These were named cinemas to differentiate them from the traditional theatre where live stage plays were performed.

The old Empire Variety Theatre of Victorian days was replaced by the Empire Cinema, where all M.G.M. Films had their British premieres. When the old time Music Hall shows lost their appeal, the old Empire Theatre was pulled down and the magnificent Empire Cinema was built on the site as a showplace for all M.G.M. premieres.

This cinema contained a 4/20 Wur-litzer with some beautiful stops selected for accompanying silent films. Sandy Macpherson was the organist, and he made many records on the HMV Label on this organ as did Jesse Crawford when he was guest organist on his only visit to England. These records are still eagerly sought after by collectors.

The changing pattern again, now this Empire Cinema has been pulled down (its organ purchased by up and coming organist, Len Rawle) and a smaller luxurious but organless Empire Cinema stands on part of the site, the rest of the space now being a large dance hall.

Warner Films have their showplace in Leicester Square, aptly named the Warner Cinema, which stands on the site of Daly's Theatre, and as this article is being written it is undergoing internal structural alterations and modernization, but the fine Compton Organ has been saved and will sound again in the chapel of Christ Church Training College at Canterbury.

In 1936 the Odeon circuit were looking out for a west-end location for their premier cinema, and purchased the old Alhambra theatre, which as the name suggests was of eastern style with many minarets. The theatre extended from Charing Cross Road (where the entrance was situated) to Leicester Square where the stage scenery docks and artistes entrance were found. When Odeons built the present Odeon Cinema, the layout was reversed. The stage is now the Charing Cross Road end, so

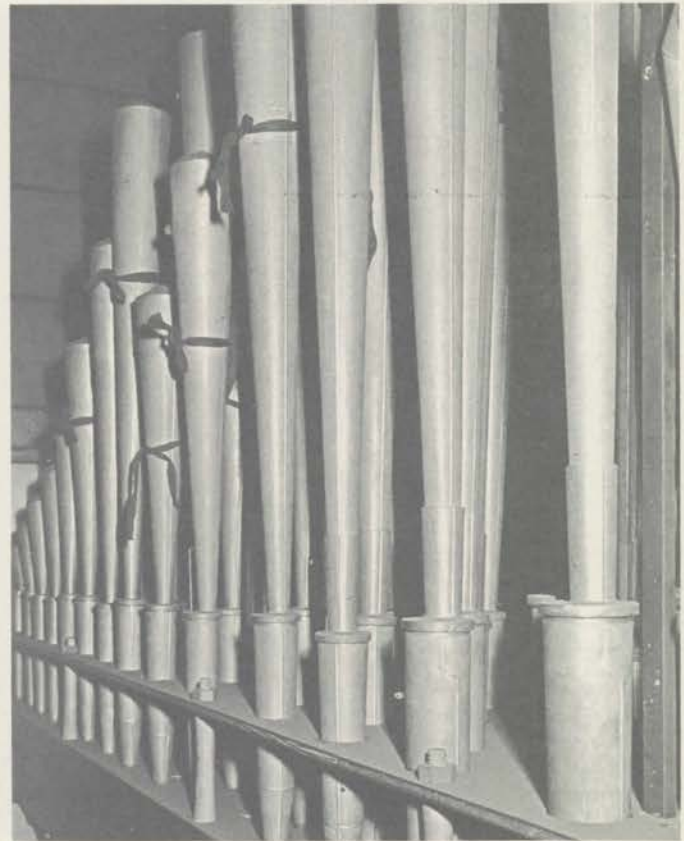
the entrance with spacious foyers is in Leicester Square. The design which was known at that time as the 'futurist' style is in black marble, the whole being dominated by a tower 230 feet high. The interior design is modernistic, and the organ console sides are circular to blend with the theme of the interior wall design scheme. The original seats were covered in leopard skin, but the cinema was completely re-furnished recently, with blue carpeting and the 2066 seats in a rich red cloth. The cinema is still the number one house of the Odeon Circuit, and is regularly patronised by Royalty for Premieres, charity shows, etc.

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Accompaniment Chamber – l to r – Posaune, Gamba, Strings, Salicional.



Tuba (Solo Chamber)



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