

TWO NORTH CAROLINA'S



Jane Sparks looks up from a late night practice session at the newly refinished console of the Center Morton.

—Picture by Jim Sparks

CENTER THEATRE, DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA

By

Henry B. Aldredge

Live theater organ returned to Durham, North Carolina in March 1963 after an absence of 13 years with the restoration of the Center Theater's 2/8 Robert Morton.

An 11 pm. concert late in March climaxed almost a year's hard work by Don Hall (Piedmont ATOE) and Clay Ross, both from nearby Chapel Hill.

The Center Theater, which opened in 1939, obtained the Morton from the National Theater in Greensboro, where it was originally installed in 1922. From 1939 until 1950, the organ solo and community sing were regular intermission features, and during W.W. II, a daily program featuring the instrument was broadcast by a local radio station.

In 1950, the staff organist position at the Center Theater was discontinued, and for the next 13 years, the Morton lay unused, although students from neighboring colleges played and worked on the organ for brief periods of time.

In June, 1962, Don Hall, who is an avid theater organ fan, spotted the console one evening. He asked for and was granted permission to play it. The blower fired up beautifully at the first try, but unfortunately so did most of the pipes. Although amazingly free from major damage, the Morton sounded pretty sad indeed. During the first few weeks of work, Don did a little tuning which improved matters greatly, and traced many ciphers to short circuits. By this time, much of the organ was playable, but wiring and some leathers were badly in need of repair.

In October, 1962, Don was joined by Clay Ross and together they succeeded in putting the organ in top shape.

Their first major project was to trace bad connections and broken wiring. Upon completion of this project, many dead notes had been revived and both swell and crescendo pedals worked properly. Tremulants were also in need of adjustment as were the often temperamental traps. The original Morton rubber tubing for the combination action

had long since rotted away and all of this was replaced. The combination action was extensively releathered until it was restored to proper working condition.

By this time it was March. The console was finished in off white and shades rigged for the console lights. (The original shades had long since disappeared) The Morton was now ready for its first public performance in many years.

Local newspapers wrote feature articles on the work of Halland Ross which were released prior to the opening concert, and a Chapel Hill radio station ran a special tape of the newly restored instrument. The concert which featured both Hall and Ross at the console was well received by local citizens.

But work on the Morton was not not finished. Through the summer months Halland Ross tackled leaky swell engines and replaced leather on several

Continued on page 22

ABERNATHY OPUS 1371

Continued from page 21

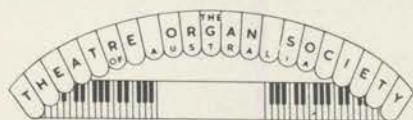
Carolina in November 1926. It was moved to the First Baptist Church four years later after the advent of talking pictures did away with the use of organs in theatres. It is a five rank organ with Flute, Tibia, Trumpet, Vox Humana, and Salicional, with all the percussion missing. Dr. Abernethy has been able to acquire a set of percussions from a Catholic Church in a nearby town that has another theatre organ in storage awaiting installation. The percussions include a Xylophone, Orchestra Bells, Harp, and Chimes, plus a collection of traps including a Bass Drum, Snare Drum, Tom-Tom, Chinese Block, Tambourine, Castanets and Cymbals.

The re-installation job took nearly 9 months to complete using the expert services of E. C. White, an organ technician from Greensboro, plus the amateurish but enthusiastic help of friends with plenty of time to kill. "Considering the age of the organ, it was in real good shape. We spent most of our time just hooking it up and making small repairs on the electrical and air systems", said Abernethy.

When Abernethy built his new home on the outskirts of Burlington, he had made provisions for making his dreams come true, by having the architect design a special room in the basement to hold his prospective 'beast'. This has certainly paid off as there was no major remodeling necessary to install his Mighty Wurlitzer.



Dr. Abernethy 'doctors' the relay and switch stack. —Photo by Jim Sparks



Membership cordially invited - USA - \$3.00 per year, includes a regular news magazine containing news items, record reviews, articles on electronic organs and specifications of theatre organs in all States of Australia.

Address all communications to THE HONORABLE SECRETARY, T.O.S.A., 10 Caloola Road, Wentworthville, N.S.W.

CENTER THEATRE MORTON

Continued from page 20

of them. Leaks in the console were cured and heavy sound absorbers were constructed about the tremulant units. As a result, superfluous noise was eliminated.

Later Hall and Ross cured a rather temperamental second touch and succeeded in rerigging the crash cymbal and tympani which for some reason had never been attached when the instrument was moved to the Center Theater.

Don Hall presented a second concert in August of 1963 and a pre-Christmas concert by guest artist Steve Brown, organist from the Tennessee Theater in Knoxville, completed the 1963 season.

During this past summer, work was once again started on the Morton, this time to take the squeaks out of the Kinura. This stop was of such overpowering

brilliance that it dominated the entire organ, even when played full. The Kinura was winded so that it received air from the same chest which supplied air to the Tibia. The very deep Tibia tremulant would modulate the air' so much that the Kinura would nearly stop functioning with the trem on. It was decided to reroute the air line to the Kinura chest so that it would get air from the lower pressure and more lightly modulated Vox reservoir.

For this first venture in the craft of metal working, Hall was joined by Jim Sparks, a Durham resident whose photographs accompany this article. The old air line was taken loose and the original supply hole covered. Then the line was cut, bent, and refitted to the Vox reservoir. After this work was completed the Kinura was returned to its new wind pressure and now makes a useful contribution to the sound of the Wonder Morton. Hall said, 'It's like



The organ technicians work over one of the pneumatics inside the console.

—Photo by Jim Sparks



Hall tries the Morton to see how the morning's work went while Ross lends his critical ear.

—Photo by Jim Sparks

CENTER THEATRE MORTON

Continued from page 22

having an entire new rank added to the organ."

During October, Don and the author began the job of properly restoring the finish of the console. The console was washed, sanded and filled in with plastic wood and painted with two coats of flat cream enamel. After this had dried, gold enamel antiquing was applied with an air brush borrowed for the occasion. The accompanying pictures will show the improvement in the appearance of the console. At this time a signal light from the projection booth was added to the console to facilitate exact timing for intermission performances, a la Radio City Music Hall.

The organ is now used mainly for the late night and early Sunday morning pleasure of the Piedmont Chapter members and their guests. The organ is frequently played for Saturday night intermissions by Hall, Jane Sparks and the author. A joint concert is planned with the A.G.O. in late April, 1965, with Richard Smith of Baltimore as guest artist.

Robert Morton Organ - 2 manual 8 rank. Originally installed in the National Theatre, Greensboro, N.C. 1922. Moved to Center Theatre, Durham, N.C. 1938.

PEDAL

32 Resultant
16 Diaphone
16 Bourdon
8 Trumpet
8 Diapason
8 Flute
8 Tibia
8 Cello
Bass Drum
Tympani
Cymbal
 Second Touch
Bass Drum
Cymbal
Tympani
Crash Cymbal

ACCOMPANIMENT

16 Bourdon
16 Cello tc
8 Trumpet
8 Diapason
8 Tibia
8 Flute
8 Violin

8 Violin Celeste
8 Kinura
8 Vox Humana
4 Diapason
4 Flute
4 Violin
4 Violin Celeste
2-2/3 Twelfth
2 Flute
Chrysaglot
Snare Drum
Tambourine
Castinets
Chinese Block
Tom Tom
 Second Touch
8 Tibia
8 Trumpet
Chimes

SOLO

16 Bourdon
16 Diapason
16 Vox Humana tc
8 Trumpet
8 Diapason
8 Tibia
8 Flute

8 Violin
8 Violin Celeste
8 Kinura
8 Vox Humana
4 Diapason
4 Tibia
4 Flute
4 Violin
4 Violin Celeste
4 Vox Humana
2-2/3 Twelfth
2 Flute
1-3/5 Tierce
Orchestra Bells
Xylophone
Chimes
 Second Touch
16 Tibia tc
16 Trumpet tc
8 Diapason
 Couplers
16 Solo to Solo
4 Solo to Solo

TREMULANTS

Right
Left
Vox Humana-Trumpet-Kinura



Ross takes his turn at tuning a Trumpet while Hall asks one of the Kinuras to say "Ah." Entrance to this chamber is gained by sliding between the Diaphone resonators and under the Right wind chest.



A Vox Humana in the Right Chamber gets Hall's attention. On the chest in front of him are the Kinura, Vox with off set trumpets behind that and in the foreground.

-Photos by Jim Sparks - Herald-Sun Papers, Durham, N.C.