## Zamous Brgans-

## The Wurlitzer Hope-Jones Unit Orchestra in the Isis Theatre, Denver, Colorado

. . . Roy Gorish

THE YEAR 1915 is notable as the date when the silent movie entered its Golden Age, for in this year D. W. Griffith released his film "The Birth of a Nation" which became widely acclaimed as the world's greatest silent motion picture. This famous twelve-reel epic doomed the Nickelodeon, as the early movie houses with their two-reelers were called, and established the "feature picture." Motion pictures were nationally accepted as a preferred medium of entertainment by this time, vaudeville houses were feeling the effects of the shift, and legitimate theatres were being rented for these feature productions. The time was right for the advent of the "Movie Palace."

In Denver, the enterprising Samuel L. Baxter had already established a house with a seating capacity of 2,000 solely for the showing of motion pictures. He had come to Denver in 1906, purchased a small theatre for the showing of "flickers," progressed rapidly through the Nickelodeon-player piano stage, and finally established the Isis Theatre with music provided by an orchestra and (reportedly) a small straight organ. Located on Curtis Street, it vied with some fifteen other theatres in what was then referred to as "The Broadway of the West." This theatre soon gained much fame and recognition when late in 1914 Mr. Baxter consulted Mr. Farny Wurlitzer on the building of a Unit Orchestra.

A precedent for a Wurlitzer Hope-Jones Unit Orchestra had already been set by the installation in May of 1913 of the thirteen-rank organ in the Paris Theatre located diagonally across the street from the Isis. In addition, the Wurlitzer Company had been consulted about an organ for the Denver Civic Auditorium in the same year; however, the former was to be no rival for the newly proposed Isis organ, and the latter venture was not to see completion until the winter of 1917–18 due to considerable political discord.

Robert Hope-Jones had been dead for three months when Mr. Baxter contacted Mr. Wurlitzer and although Mr. Hope-Jones had not been actively employed as manager of the factory for a year prior to his death, one can readily see how closely his thoughts were adhered to by the Wurlitzer Company. Mr. Wurlitzer wrote to Mr. Baxter on January 4, 1915: "As regards distinctive varieties of tone color for each of the various stops, here we feel none will question our supremacy. Beyond dispute, the Unit Orchestra leads and always has led in providing extreme colors. In this connection, we venture to call attention to the fact that the variety of tone an organ yields depends much less upon the number of its stops than upon the degree of variance of each from all others." Surely, this statement is a concise explanation of the thought behind the Unit Orchestra where the stress is on tone color in an endeavor to emulate the orchestra.

The contract was negotiated on January 11, 1915. The price for the instrument was fixed at \$40,000. Mr. Baxter provided the necessary alterations to the building for housing the organ which brought the total expenditure to \$50,000 for the completed instrument. This amounted to the largest sum ever spent for an organ in a motion picture theatre up to that date.

Mr. Henry B. Murtaugh, who was delighting audiences on the newly-installed Wurlitzer in the Liberty Theatre, Seattle, Washington, was consulted on the specifications, and work on the theatre started immediately. The first shipment left the factory on May 22, 1915. This was followed by two more consignments on June 3rd and 4th—all by railroad from North Tonawanda, New York.

The end product was a specification consisting of twenty-eight ranks of pipes housed in six chambers and controlled by a plain mahogany four-manual console situated mid-way in the orchestra pit, with 156 stop tablets. One of the prime reasons this organ proved a delight to both audience and organist is that they were both actually engulfed in the organ, as you will notice by the following layout.

The Main Organ was located on the left side, and as was the case with all the chambers, it was provided with a "tone reflector" to focus the sound most advantageously into the auditorium. This chamber contained the following ranks and percussions.

16' Tuba Horn	85	Pipes	8'	Salicional	61	Pipes
16' Clarinet	73	66	8'	Viol d'Orchestra	85	66
16' Horn Diapason	73	34	8"	Viol Celeste	73	ii.
8' Open Diapason	73	64	8'	Saxophone	61	11
8' Concert Flute	85	66	8	Krumet	61	66
				Chrysoglott	49	Bars

Noteworthy is the fact that the Horn Diapason was extended down to 16', called "Bass" in the Pedal. The Concert Flute did not extend down to the usual 16' Bourdon. Here, also, we notice the Saxophone and Krumet—stops usually found in the Solo Organ.

The Foundation Organ was situated above the procenium arch and contained these ranks:

16'	Diaphonie-Diapa-			Brass Drum-Tympani (large)
	son	73	Pipes	Snare Drum I
16'	Tibia Clausa I	85	66	Snare Drum II
8'	Gamba	61	66	Tambourine
8'	Gamba Celeste	61	66	Castanets
8'	Vox Humana	61	44	Cymbal, Crash
				Cymbal, Band
				Triangle

The twelve lowest pipes of the Diaphonic-Diapason

extended down to 32', and were located in their own chamber above a false ceiling running lengthwise of the auditorium. Thus, this rank contained 85 pipes in all. No part of this stop was effected by tremulant. The Tibia Clausa I was unleathered.

The Unenclosed Percussion and Effects Chamber was also located above the procenium arch immediately in front of the Foundation Organ with both sharing a common ornamental grill. Here was found:

Wood Harp 49 Bars Wind Machine
Xylophone I (large scale) 37 Bars Fire Gong
Chimes (Tower scale) 25 Tubes Auto Horn
Thunder Sheet Steamboat Whistle
Rain Machine Telephone Bell
Surf Machine

The Wood Harp was a conventional Marimba without reiterating action. It was constructed in the manner of a regular instrument with divided naturals and sharps unlike the chromatic scheme later employed in organs. The Tower Chimes were the largest scale tubular chimes manufactured by Deagan. The lightning effect consisted of an intricate array of electric bulbs (the old hand-blown variety) concealed behind the ornamental grill and put into action through a series of pneumatic motors which operated electric switches. In the top of this chamber was the tone opening for the 32' Diaphone pipes.

The Solo Organ was on the right side, directly opposite the Main Organ. This organ was entirely straight with the ranks available on the Solo Manual only at 8' pitch—to other manuals only through coupling. Here were found:

8'	Trumpet	61	Pipes	Glockenspiel	37 Bars
8'	Orchestral Oboe	61	44	Xylophone II	37 "
8'	Kinura	61	44	Sleigh Bells	25 Notes
8'	Oboe Horn	61	ee	Bells	25 Notes
8'	Tibia Clausa II	61	lt.		
8'	Quintadena	61	"		

The straight Solo Organ seems to have been standard procedure in all Wurlitzer organs of large size at this period. This scheme was abandoned in the case of the larger organ in the Civic Auditorium where the Solo Organ is unified to a degree. The Isis Solo division is identical to that of the early Style 35 of which there were several installations prior to 1915. The Bells were of the tuned door bell variety.

The Tuba Chamber was also located on the right side of the theatre in a position slightly above and partially behind the Solo Organ. Herein was contained the 16' Bombarde-Tuba Mirabilis consisting of 85 pipes. This stop was voiced on 25" pressure and was not effected by tremulant. The lowest eighteen pipes had wooden resonators, but all of the pipes were reeds—not the customary Diaphonic-Bombarde. For some unfathomable reason, one lone percussion was found in this chamber—the Tom Tom. It is known that the Tom Tom, probably the first one ever used in a theatre organ, was an after-thought of Mr. Baxter's; but why locate it with the Tuba Mirabilis?

In the back of the theatre on the right side was the *Echo Organ*. Like the Solo Organ, this organ was also straight except for the Bourdon which was drawn at 16' and 8' pitches. (The entire organ, excepting the

Bourdon, was on one chest and affected by only one tremulant. Everything was voiced on 6" pressure.) Here were found:

16'	Bourdon	44	Pipes	8'	Vox Humana	61	Pipes
8'	Horn Diapason	61	"	8'	Vox Humana	61	**
8'	Gamba	61	ii.	4'	Flute	61	- 44
					Chimes (Class	A) 25	Tubes

The 16' Bourdon and 4' Flute were independent ranks. There is no indication that the second Vox Humana was tuned as a celeste rank.

The organ was officially opened on August 4, 1915; and it was a gala affair. Mr. Wurlitzer had persuaded Henry Murtaugh to come to Denver for the opening of this organ. Carmenza Vander Lezz, employed by the Wurlitzer Company as an official demonstrator, also performed. In the audience were the principals from the Wurlitzer Company, the Mayor of Denver, and many other prominent local dignitaries. There is even the story of the pedal tones causing the fragile electric filaments in the light bulbs to break, plunging the theatre into total darkness for a period.

Mr. Murtaugh apparently remained at the Isis for some time because early newspaper accounts make reference to his daily recitals. The organ was an important and vitally needed addition to the musical life of Denver at this time—a period when organs were called upon to provide the music now available to everyone through radio, recordings, and orchestras. It was acclaimed as a great concert instrument and utilized by the Chamber of Commerce as an example of one aspect of Denver's cultural life. One Denver newspaper stated: "A feature of the city. Something that every visitor must see at least once; and every citizen will want to hear time after time." It is interesting to note that the word "recital" was always used in referring to a performance. The term "interlude" is nowhere to be found.

To quote from the various sources of publicity about the organ seems unnecessary, but two outstanding facts prove beyond any doubt the success of this instrument. Mr. Baxter felt confident that the organ was sufficient alone in its drawing power for him to give up everything else in the way of music; and because of increased



attendance, he was able to pay for this organ many years in advance of the stipulated agreement. \$50,000 is a tremendous sum today, but in 1915 it was a fortune. It seems doubly so when one is aware that admission to the Isis at this period was a mere ten cents!

Through the 1920's, the Isis remained a first-class house; but as the city grew and the years of The Depression descended, Curtis Street found itself too close to the railroad tracks, literally. The city was forced to expand to the east, and the newer section with its modern theatres commanded the attention of the crowds. Thus, Curtis Street was relinquished to a less discerning group.

The organ was last played in 1939. Its "Swan Song" was played by a pert little lady by the name of Mary Dobbs Tuttle. Mrs. Tuttle had been with this organ from the very beginning. By 1939, not only the theatre, but the organ itself was merely a shadow of its former self. In an effort to draw patronage, an over-zealous manager decided to present stage shows. However, the Isis had been designed strictly for motion pictures and it had no dressing rooms. Therefore, a junkman was called in and the Main, Solo, relay and console were literally axed and hammered into scrap to make dressing rooms from the evacuated space. Although the destruction of the organ was a pathetic blunder, yet needless to say, no bribery could cajole patrons into this unpleasant neighborhood.

With the passing of time it was an accepted fact that the Isis Wurlitzer no longer existed. Mrs. Tuttle mentioned to me in a conversation one day in 1952 that she was certain some of the organ was still in the theatre. It was not long before several organ enthusiasts were able to investigate the situation. We discovered that the Foundation Organ, the Tuba, and the Echo Organ were still intact, preserved in an excellent state behind locked doors. What remained was acquired posthaste. With the exception of the 32' octave of the Diaphone and the 8' Horn Diapason from the Echo which was destroyed in an unfortunate accident, all of this material is now again in use or is being stored for future use in various home installations throughout the country.

Thinking of the Isis Wurlitzer as a commercial venture, it must be acknowledged a complete success. As a theatre organ, it must have been superb. Its limited unification, as we may now reflect on more recent instruments, possibly leads us to look askance; but although bigger and more versatile theatre organs have since been built, certainly few ever knew the glory of the Isis. It was the largest of its day and remained close to the top in size even when the last one was installed. Its unfortunate ending is an incident which has been repeated time and again throughout America. Nothing remains of the theatre itself today, for it was condemned and torn down this year.

A complete and authentic stop tablet layout follows.

## SPECIFICATION—Four-Manual Wurlitzer Hope-Jones Unit Orchestra, Isis Theatre—Denver, Colorado

PEDAL (Compass 32 Notes Diaphone Diaphone Bombarde Ophicleide Tibia Clausa I Bass (Horn Diapason) Clarinet Tuba Mirabilis Tuba Horn Octave, (Phonon Diapason) Open Diapason Tibia Clausa I Cello (SalVDOV, Cel.) Flute Clarion Piano Bass Drum Cymbal Snare Drum Pedal Second Touch (with Pedal) Bass Drum Kettle Drum Crash Cymbal Cymbal Snare Drum Fanare Drum Fanare Drum Fanare Drum Fanare Drum Fanare Drum Fanare Drum Friangle	16', 32', 16', 16', 16', 16', 16', 8', 8', 8', 8', 8', 8', 16', 16', 16', 16', 16', 16', 16', 16	Viol Octave Celeste (Viol) Flute Twelfth (Flute) Piccolo (Flute) Piano Harp Chrysoglott Snare Drum Tambourine Castanets Solo to Accompaniment Accompaniment Secon Tuba Horn Diapason-Phonon Tibla Clausa I Glockenspiel Cathedral Chimes Sleigh Bells Triangle Solo to Acc. Second To Solo to Acc. Pizzicato One tablet to cause the and couplers to move nish automatically a su all times. Ten double-touch adju
Pedal Second Touch (middle board) Diaphone Ophicleide, Pizzicato Touch Bombarde to Pedal Great to Pedal Echo to Pedal Three adjustable Toe Pistoris	32' 32'	CREAT (Compass 6 Krumet (Ten. C) Ophicleide Clarinet Contra Viol (Ten. C) Tuba Mirabilis Tuba Horn Diapason-Phonon
ACCOMPANIMENT (Compass 61 Notes) Contra Viol (Ten C) Tuba Horn Open Diapason Horn Diapason Gamba Gamba Celeste Saxophone Clarinet Viol d'Orchestra Viol Celeste Krumet	16' 8' 8' 8' 8' 8' 8' 8' 8' 8' 8' 8' 8' 8'	Open Diapason Horn Diapason Gamba Gamba Celeste Saxophone Clarinet Viol d'Orchestra Viol Celeste Krumet Salicional Concert Flute Clarion (Tuba Horn) Octave (Open) Viol Octave Celeste (Viol)

rysoglott	Octave Coupler Solo to Great
ire Drum	Sforzando Touch
nbourine	
stanets	Great Second Touch
o to Accompaniment	Ophicleide 16 Tuba Mirabilis
companiment Second Touch	Sforzando Touch
pason-Phonon 8'	Solo to Great, Second Touch Solo to Great, Pizzicato Touch
ia Clausa I ockenspiel thedral Chimes	Ten double-touch adjustable comb nation pistons.
igh Bells angle	One tablet to cause the pedal stop and couplers to move so as to fu
o to Acc. Second Touch o to Acc. Pizzicato Touch	nish automatically a suitable bass all times.
e tablet to cause the pedal stops of couplers to move so as to fur-	BOMBARDE (Compass 61 Notes)
h automatically a suitable bass at	
times.	Bombarde 1 Diaphone 1
n double-touch adjustable combi-	Tibia Clausa I
rion pistons.	Tuba Mirabilis
FAT (C CI N)	Diapason-Phonon
REAT (Compass 61 Notes)	Tibia Clausa I
umet (Ten. C) 16'	Gamba Celeste
hicleide 16'	Vox Humana
ntra Viol (Ten. C) 16'	Clarion (Tuba Horn)
ba Mirabilis 8'	Piccolo (Flute)
ba Horn 8'	Xylophone
apason-Phonon 8'	Clockenspiel
en Diapason 8'	Great to Bombarde
rn Diapason 8'	Great Octave to Bombarde
mba 8'	Solo to Bombarde
mba Celeste 8'	Sforzando Touch-1st and 2nd
kophone 8' erinet 8'	Touch
ol d'Orchestra 8'	
ol Celeste 8'	Bombarde Second Touch
umet 8'	Bombarde 1
icional 8'	Mandolin
ncert Flute 8'	One tablet to cause the pedal sto
arion (Tuba Horn) 4'	and couplers to move so as at a
tave (Open) 4'	times to furnish a suitable bass.
tave Celeste (Viol) 4'	Ten double-touch adjustable comb nation pistons.
velfth 2 2/3'	A STATE OF THE STA
ol (VDO) 2'	SOLO (Compass 61 Notes)
colo (Flute) 2'	Tibia Clausa II
erce (Flute) 1 3/5'	Trumpet

iano larp	8'	Orchestral Oboe 8' Kinura 8'
ylophone		Oboe Horn 8'
leigh Bells		Quintadena 8'
hrysoglott		Cathedral Chimes
ells Reiterating		Xylophone I
ctave Coupler		Glockenspiel
olo to Great		Xylophone II
forzando Touch		Sleigh Bells
0120100 10001		Bells Reiterating
ireat Second Touch		Harp
phicleide	16'	Chrysoglott
uba Mirabilis	8'	Six double-touch pistons.
forzando Touch	~	
olo to Great, Second Touch		ECHO ORGAN (Playable from
olo to Great, Pizzicato Touch		Pedal and Great Key boards)
en double-touch adjustable con	ida	PEDAL (Compass 32 Notes)
ation pistons.	HDI-	Bourdon 16'
	Lane	Flute 4'
ne tablet to cause the pedal s nd couplers to move so as to	fur	To Marie
ish automatically a suitable bas		GREAT
Il times,		Horn Diapason 8'
OMBARDE		Camba
		Oboe Horn
Compass 61 Notes)		Vox Humana
ombarde	16'	Vox Humana
iaphone	16'	Flute 4'
ibia Clausa I	16'	Cathedral Chimes
uba Mirabilis	8'	CENTED AT
iapason-Phonon	8'	GENERAL
ibia Clausa I lamba	8'	Five tremulants: Main, Solo, Founda-
iamba Celeste	8'	tion, Vox Humana, Echo.
ox Humana	8'	Four expression pedals and indicating
larion (Tuba Horn)	4'	keys: Tuba, Solo, Main, Foundation.
iccolo (Flute)	4'	One General expression pedal and
ylophone		indicating keys with couplers.
lockenspiel		One balanced crescendo pedal. One thunder pedal for 32' Diaphone.
Freat to Bombarde		One thunder pedal for Reed 16'
ireat Octave to Bombarde		One thunder pedal for Tibia 16'
clo to Bombarde		One double touch sforzando lever:
forzando Touch-1st and 2r	d	First touch—full stops wind,
ouch	IG	Second touch—Full everything.
		One double touch sforzando pedal,
Sombarde Second Touch		First touch—Snare Drum.
lombarde	16'	Second touch—Base Drum, Cymbal.
Mandolin	0.000	Two blowers: 20 HP, 10 Hp.
one tablet to cause the pedal s	tons	
nd couplers to move so as at	all	EFFECTS:
imes to furnish a suitable bass		Rain, Surf, Wind, Lightning, Thun-
en double-touch adjustable con	mbi-	der, Fire Gong, Auto Horn, Steam-
nation pistons.		boat Whistle, Electric Bell, 3
		birds (Solo, Main, Foundation).
OLO (Compass 61 Notes)		Wind, Rain, Thunder and Light-
ibia Clausa II	8'	ning operated from buttons on
rumpet	8'	key cheeks.
TENNING CO.		A CONTRACTOR OF THE CONTRACTOR

Salicional Concert Flute Vox Humana

Octave (Open)