



Fred Hermes Junior and Senior pose with their 5/28 Wurlitzer. *Trimmer Photo.*

## *Hermes Home Houses Giant Wurlitzer Organ*

### A FEATURED ORGAN INSTALLATION OF THE CHICAGO ANNUAL MEETING

The Rudolph Wurlitzer Company built many four manual organs -- from a mere ten or eleven ranks, to the giant 58 rank instrument in Radio City Music Hall. This same company built to Jesse Crawford's specification the Paramount Special 4-36 which was copied four times at Fox Theatres in Brooklyn, Detroit, St. Louis, and San Francisco. BUT, Wurlitzer built three, and three only, five manual theatre organs. Chicago had the distinction of being home to two of these five-rankers -- at the now-demolished Marbro and Paradise and Theatres (18 and 21 ranks, respectively). However, by far the largest of these five manual organs is the 28 rank instrument that was formerly installed in the Michigan Theatre in Detroit. Fred Hermes of Racine, Wisconsin now has this organ installed in his lakeside home.

Fred Hermes has long been active as a theatre organ enthusiast. Prior to

1949 Fred had a two-manual Wurlitzer Model E, which had been augmented to nine ranks, installed in the basement of his insurance agency in downtown Racine. This instrument was later sold to Bill Liggett of Burlington, Wisconsin, and is still used in the ballroom known as the Royal Palm Inn. After removal of the two-manual Wurlitzer, a 4-11 Wurlitzer was obtained from a Madison, Wisconsin church which had acquired it from its original installation in the Strand Theatre in Madison. (Fred had to scrounge to obtain the requisite percussion and toycounter which had not been moved to the church.) This Wurlitzer was ultimately sold to a Chicago recording studio who subsequently sold it to Dr. Ray Lawson of Montreal, Quebec where it is an essential part of the Lawson 4-20 home installation (see Theatre Organ, vol. 3, no. 3).

Even with a four-manual organ play-

ing, Fred Hermes was not satisfied. On hearing that the 5-28 Wurlitzer could be obtained from the Michigan Theatre, Fred Hermes decided he would buy it, if he could. In September, 1955, he was able to purchase the organ. It was then removed in February, 1956 by Fred and three friends working eighteen hours a day. Dismantling required a week. The organ was transported to Racine by two vans.

The organ is presently housed in a room especially designed to accommodate it. The home, 150 feet from Lake Michigan, is built into the side of a hill, thus simplifying some of the excavation problems for a basement of this magnitude. The living portion of the house is on one floor, extending over the top of the organ studio. The main room in the basement, which will eventually seat over 200, complete with balcony, is 30 x 60 feet, by 17-1/2 feet high. Around the front and sides of the room is located six 10 x 20 foot rooms which house the 28 ranks of organ pipes and equipment. The pipes are installed in four chambers just as originally installed in the theatre -- foundation, main, orchestral, and brass. The relays, blower, and tremolo exhausts are in two additional rooms -- thus a gorgeous sound is developed without the distraction of chattering relays and chugging

theatre organ





John Muri at the Fred Hermes Wurlitzer talks about the silent picture he is about to accompany. *Trimmier Photo*



Fred Hermes tuning in the Orchestral Chamber of his ex Michigan Theatre Wurlitzer. *Racine Bulletin Photo*

tremolos. The organ is almost noiseless when not being played.

The organ required about four years to recondition and reassemble, and today it is in fine playing condition. Work is still progressing in the main room, with the balcony presently under construction. The eventual goal is to transform this room into a miniature theatre, complete with a small-scale stage, an organ lift, and projection booth. Although Fred has done the major portion of the rebuilding and reassembly of the 30-ton monster, help has been obtained from William Olle, Charles Spencer, Hugh Burdick, Summer '65

Thomas Rench, Edward Petersen, William Brygger, Peter Charnon, Charles Conrad, Ralph Pater, Charles Steinke, and his son, Fred, Jr.

Even with 28 ranks playing, Fred has extensive plans for improving the Michigan Theatre Wurlitzer. Plans have been made to install twelve additional ranks--Tibia Plena, Voix Celeste, Unda Maris, Quintadena Celeste, Vox Humana, French Horn, Flute Celeste, Gemshorn, Lieblich Flute, Cor Anglais, Style "D" Trumpet, and 4' Octave. Also pedal additions are planned for the Quintadena, Oboe Horn, Solo String, Post Horn, Clarinet, and

Metal Diaphone -- a sixteen foot extension of the Viola is now installed.

Since the installation of the five-manual Wurlitzer, Fred Hermes' home has been a virtual mecca for the present theatre organ greats -- Tom Sheen, John Seng, John Muri, Pearl White, and Kay McAbee are numbered among its players and admirers. Any one who has had the privilege of hearing and playing the 5-28 will acknowledge that Fred Hermes has done the theatre organ world an enormous service in preserving this magnificent instrument.



SUMMARY OF 5/28 MICHIGAN THEATRE WURLITZER, OPUS 1351

Now owned by Fred Hermes, Jr., Racine, Wisconsin

FOUNDATION CHAMBER

| Ranks              | Compass | Pipes |
|--------------------|---------|-------|
| Vox Humana         | 8-4     | 61    |
| Gamba              | 8-4     | 73    |
| Gamba Celeste      | 8-4     | 73    |
| Tibia Clausa       | 16-2    | 97    |
| Diaphonic Diapason | 16-4    | 85    |
| Harmonic Flute     | 4-2     | 61    |

MAIN CHAMBER

|                          |      |    |
|--------------------------|------|----|
| Tuba Horn                | 16-4 | 85 |
| Open Diapason            | 8-4  | 73 |
| Horn Diapason            | 8    | 61 |
| Clarinet                 | 8    | 61 |
| Krumet                   | 8    | 61 |
| Viol d'Orchestra         | 8-4  | 73 |
| Viol d'Orchestra Celeste | 8-4  | 73 |
| Salicional               | 16-8 | 73 |
| Concert Flute            | 16-2 | 97 |
| Dulciana                 | 8    | 61 |
| Marimba Harp             |      |    |

ORCHESTRAL CHAMBER

|                     |     |    |
|---------------------|-----|----|
| Solo Tibia Clausa   | 8-4 | 73 |
| Solo String         | 8   | 61 |
| Solo String Celeste | 8   | 61 |
| Orchestral Oboe     | 8   | 61 |
| Oboe Horn           | 8   | 61 |
| Brass Saxophone     | 8   | 61 |
| Brass Trumpet       | 8   | 61 |
| Kinura              | 8   | 61 |
| Quintadena          | 8   | 61 |
| Solo Vox Humana     | 8-4 | 61 |
| Chrysoglott         |     |    |

UNENCLOSED

| Ranks            | Compass | Pipes |
|------------------|---------|-------|
| Master Xylophone |         |       |
| Solo Bass Drum   |         |       |

BRASS CHAMBER

|                             |      |    |
|-----------------------------|------|----|
| English Horn                | 8    | 61 |
| Tuba Mirabilis              | 16-4 | 85 |
| Piano (Mandolin Attachment) |      |    |
| Marimba Harp                |      |    |
| Xylophone                   |      |    |
| Glockenspiel                |      |    |
| Sleigh Bells                |      |    |
| Cathedral Chimes            |      |    |
| Bass Drum                   |      |    |
| Kettle Drum                 |      |    |
| Crash Cymbal                |      |    |
| Snare Drum                  |      |    |
| Solo Snare Drum             |      |    |
| Cymbals                     |      |    |
| Tambourine                  |      |    |
| Castanets                   |      |    |
| Chinese Block               |      |    |
| Tom Tom                     |      |    |
| Sand Block                  |      |    |
| Horses Hoofs                |      |    |
| Fire Gong                   |      |    |
| Bird I                      |      |    |
| Bird II                     |      |    |
| Auto Horn                   |      |    |
| Surf Effect                 |      |    |
| Siren                       |      |    |
| Doorbell                    |      |    |
| Boat Whistle                |      |    |

TREMULANTS

Main, Tuba, Foundation, Diapason, Vox Humana, Solo Vox Humana, Tibia, Solo Tibia, Brass, Orchestra.

COUPLERS

PEDAL

Accomp to Pedal 8  
Great to Pedal 8  
Bombarde to Pedal 8  
Solo to Pedal 8

ACCOMPANIMENT

Accomp to Accomp 4  
Solo to Accomp 8  
Solo to Accomp 8, 2nd Tch.  
Solo to Accomp 8, Pizz

GREAT

Great to Great 16  
Great to Great 4  
Solo to Great 16  
Solo to Great 8  
Solo to Great 8, 2nd Tch.

BOMBARDE

Great to Bombarde 8  
Great to Bombarde 4  
Solo to Bombarde 16  
Solo to Bombarde 8

SCLO

Accomp. to Solo 8

Fred Hermes Jr. entertains ATOE members to climax a wonderful Convention. *Trimmier Photo.*



Talented Kay McAbee does an outstanding job at the Hermes Wurlitzer. *Trimmier Photo.*