

THEATRE ORGANS IN THE UPPER MIDWEST

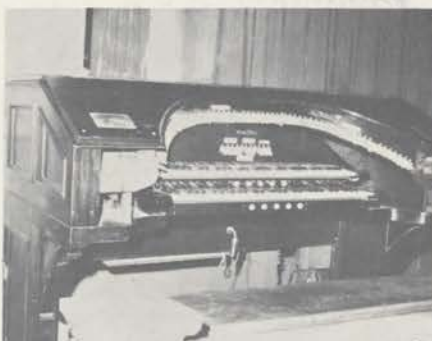
By Lance Johnson

Many theatre organ enthusiasts in the upper Midwest are unaware that there are several theatre organs in North and South Dakota. Although these are rather small instruments, with the exception of the Reiny Delzer 4/21 WurliTzer, they have played an important part in the intertainment of thousands of theatre goers during that fabulous era.

The Minnesota Amusement Company has become increasingly aware of the popularity of theatre organs lately and has set a policy which is most disappointing to area organ buffs. They are down to their last three organs and it looks like these organs will remain in there locations for some time. There is much conjecture as to why the theatre chain has literally "tied up" these organs. One manager explained to me that because of amateurs working on these organs and apparently doing more damage than good, the company does not want anyone attempting to make them fully playable again in the theatres. Another idea is that the chain may use the organs again during intermissions if and when the enthusiasm spreads far enough over the general public to warrant their use. The result of all this is that the Minnesota Amusement Company has set fantastically high prices on these three organs to discourage buyers. One manager pointed out that if the chain were able to sell any of these organs for the high prices set on them, it would help to compensate the organization for the mess involved in taking them out, (damaging theatre property, etc.) and it would help to recover some of the investment in the organs which was lost due to the sudden popularity of talking pictures.

One of these organs, the style E WurliTzer in the State Theatre in Sioux Falls, South Dakota is just barely play-

able. When I approached manager Cliff Knoll last Winter, he seemed delighted in letting an organ builder inspect the instrument. The next morning, the manager, janitor and I went down to the orchestra pit and started it up. Much to our disappointment, the organ barely played.



Console, State Theatre, Sioux Falls, showing damage done over the years.

We tipped the pedal board up and cleaned out the popcorn and candy wrappers only to find that the pedal contact fingers were badly mutilated. I spent the next two hours straightening them out, then to find that the cable connecting the pedals and console junction had been broken. Many of the console parts such as the contacts for the second touch and tremolo tablets and the piston pneumatics were missing. It seems that some College students had attempted to repair the organ about ten years ago and had taken these parts back to their dormitory rooms and they haven't been seen since! Next we inspected the chambers and although they were blackened with soot and dirt, the organ was quite well preserved. All the percussions worked but the tremolos were dead. I got them working again and then checked the relay and switch stack. After removing one of the bungs, I found out why the organ was riddled with dead notes. As I should have expected, the zephyr skin had blown out. There are about 29 of these dead throughout the organ. The pipe work is in very good shape with the

exception of the tibia stoppers which have loosened up and fallen into the pipes. The theatre auditorium has never been modernized but has been repainted. The gold leaf has been redone in red, white and blue! The only modernizing is in the lobby and concessions stand. Mr. Knoll became quite excited when he heard a few boops out of the organ and hinted that it would be fun to have it played for intermissions. However, after he had contacted the Minnesota Amusement Company, they were not interested in having anyone working on the organ.

The organ is a typical style E with seven ranks arranged as follows:

MAIN CHAMBER (Left)

Diaphonic Diapason	85 pipes
Violin	73 pipes
Violin Celeste	49 pipes
Concert Flute	97 pipes
Chrysoglott	

SOLO CHAMBER (Right)

Vox Humana	73 pipes
Tibia Clausa	85 pipes
Trumpet	85 pipes
Traps	
Glockenspiel	
Xylophone	
Chimes	
Relay-switch stack	

The second of these organs is in the Fargo Theatre, Fargo, North Dakota. The theatre and organ is identical to the State in Sioux Falls. The only difference in the theatres is that the Fargo Theatre has been completely remodeled and the old organ grilles have been covered up with a wood louvered screen which restricts the tone opening by at least 50%. The organ is also a style E with the only difference being that the relay-switch stack is in the Main chamber. The organ at present is not playable and the manager, Mr. John McCashin is not interested in having it repaired. The generator belt has been removed and its very likely has many dead pipe pneumatics. The price on this organ has been set at \$3500. Needless to say, organ enthusiasts have lost interest in this instrument. The only theatre organ still being played in this area is the 2/4 Barton at Bud's Roller Rink in Moorhead. (This organ is featured in another article) The former manager, Mr. Ed Kraus, who passed on several years ago, married the Hildegard Oselmann who has organist at the Fargo. Mrs. Krause is a charter member of the Red River Chapter.

Another article, part II will deal with other theatre organs in South Dakota.

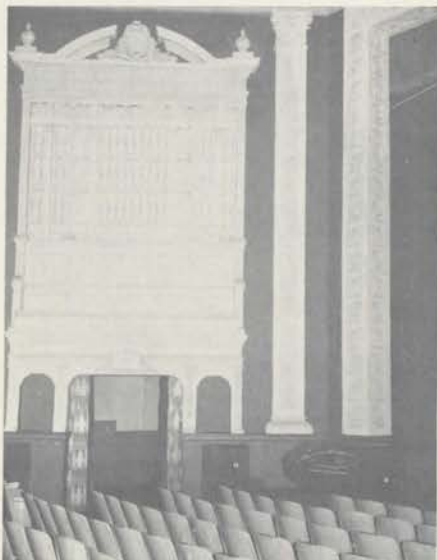
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PRICE \$1.00 each

THEATRE ORGAN

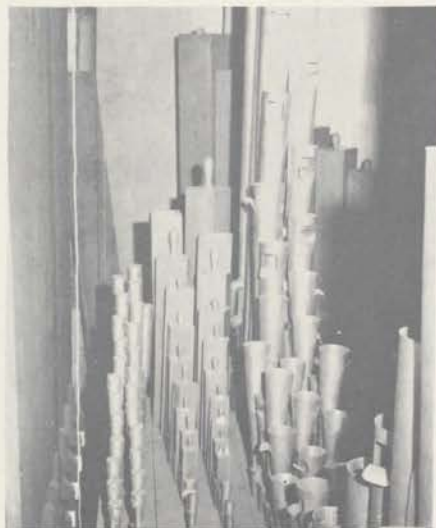
- 1959 - Volume 1, Number 2
- 1962 - Volume 4, Numbers 3 and 4.
- 1963 - Volume 5, Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4.
- 1964 - Volume 6, Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4.

BOMBARDE

- 1964 - Volume 1, Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4.



Main Chamber and console of Style E WurliTzer - State Theatre, Sioux Falls, South Dakota.



Solo Chamber, State Theatre, Sioux Falls. Vox Tibia and Trumpet.