

THE FORGOTTEN CRAWFORD SPECIAL

By
Lloyd E. Klos

When one mentions the term "Jesse Crawford Special" to any theater organ enthusiast, it evokes a response of knowing of the ultimate in cinema organ design. It is generally thought that the five Crawford Specials were alike in size. However, one is of greater size than the other four.

Grand-daddy of them all, of course, is opus #1458 installed in the New York Paramount Theater in 1926. Designed by the Poet of the Organ, Jesse Crawford, this instrument, amid a scene of gingerbread garndeur, was used by Jesse for songfests and musical interludes, but not for recording. Recording technique in those days was not advanced to the state it enjoys today, because vibration from the big diaphones would send the recording stylus jumping off the master disc. Therefore, a smaller Wurlitzer was installed on the 8th floor of the Paramount Building for recording purposes.

The second Crawford Special was #1894 installed in the Detroit Fox in 1928. Restored a few years ago by enthusiasts, the organ was featured in the 1960 AGO convention by Ray Shelley. As a result, the organ was recorded by him, and the subsequent disc was well-received by enthusiasts.

A third JCS, #1997, is in the Fox Theater in St. Louis, and has been used during the past few years between shows, played by Stan Kann. As far as is known, the organ has never been recorded.

The fourth organ of this class was #2012 in the late Fox Theater in San Francisco. Now owned by legislator Frank Lanterman, it is in storage awaiting the day for home installation. Recorded by Tiny James, Everett Nourse, and George Wright, the organ will remain a fond memory to all who heard it "live" or through recordings.

That leaves the fifth Crawford Special --the one in the Brooklyn Fox Theater. These organs are generally believed to be carbon copies of each other-- 4 manuals and 36 ranks. But, this organ, the "Forgotten Crawford Special" is ironically the largest--one rank larger! The source for this startling statement is organist Hal Beckett, and maintenance man, Ron Bishop who revealed all this to ATOE member, Eric Reeve.

The organ is opus #1904, and shipped to the theater in July 1928. It originally had 2 consoles.

According to Mr. Beckett: "I started at the Fox the first week it opened as



A rare picture of the Brooklyn Fox Wurlitzer showing Hal Beckett at the console of this Crawford Special.

assistant organist to Alexander Richardson. We did not use the dual consoles, but played silent pictures, and later for breaks between stage shows and pictures. The 60-piece symphony was directed by Charles Previn, and the organ sometimes played the overture with the orchestra.

"The organ was *practically* a copy of the Jesse Crawford Special installed in the Paramount, but with one added stop-a dulciana, so that it could be advertised as 'The Largest Wurlitzer'. There the resemblance ended, because Crawford got a beautiful installation, whereas the builders of the Fox put the pipes in 3 unusual places, some above the proscenium arch, which was very high. The theater is tall like the Paramount, but the organ never had the quality of the Paramount job".

The master console has 15 combination pistons on each manual and 6 general combination pistons on the great. Pedal combinations are on toe pistons, and there are 7 expression pedals; 4 for expression on each manual, a great pedal capable of handling any or all the shutters, a crescendo pedal, and a small sforzando pedal to give full organ at a touch. There are pizzicato second touch on several manuals, and also a sustaining device which didn't work too well.

The traps included a grand piano, which was installed several years after the organ was opened; 2 xylophones;

bells; marimba; castenets; drums of all sorts; and tune tympani which were individual metal drums and called "ash cans" because of the sound.

There was a full-size 32-foot diaphone which had to lie on its side, because the chambers weren't high enough.

The ranks are as follows, according to Mr. Beckett:

- 1 Bombarde
- 1 Clarinet
- 2 Diapasons
- 1 Dulciana
- 1 English Horn
- 3 Flutes
- 1 Horn Diapason
- 1 Kinura
- 1 Krumet
- 1 Oboe
- 1 Post Horn
- 1 Saxophone
- 4 Tibias
- 2 Trumpets
- 1 Tuba
- 1 Tuba Mirabilis
- 3 Vox Humanas
- 2 Violins
- 1 Celeste
- 1 Salcional
- 7 other strings
-
- 37 Ranks

The organists who played the largest of the Crawfords were Alexander
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CRAWFORD SPECIAL**

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Richardson, Hal Beckett, Robert Leech Bedell, Bob West and Rosa Rio, the last playing it shortly before organ use ended.

This instrument was heard a few times on radio many years ago. It was used for theme music to introduce John J. Anthony and his famous "Good Will Hour", sponsored by Ironized Yeast. The program featured the problems of the distressed, and was run from the theater stage. Indeed, Mr. Anthony, who always admonished the unfortunates: "Do not grab the microphone, please", was the equivalent of today's "Dear Abbey."

Another radio show utilizing the organ was "Dr. IQ, the Mental Banker." The original Dr. IQ, Lew Valentine, liked organ music, and used it in all theaters he visited throughout the country to play his theme before awarding silver dollars to "the lady in the balcony" or to the "gentleman on my right downstairs" for concert answers to "The Thought Twister," Biographical sketches etc. For incorrect answers, boxes of Snickers, Mars Bars, Milky Ways and Forever Yours candy bars were given. In later years, Valentine and his successor, Jimmy McClain dubbed in Hammond music from a studio.

According to ATOE'r Eric Reeve, rumors are rife about the Brooklyn Fox organ, as all things are when lost to the public eye for years.

The master console is covered and lying deep in what must be a 10-foot pit, and it is guarded most jealously. Small wonder. Some "enthusiasts" were given permission to work on it years ago, and the lift was broken. Fate of the second console is unknown. The foundation organ might be dead, and there is rumor of pipes missing from this section. As a result, no one can see the organ without being escorted by the electricians, and no pictures can be taken of it.

Thus is the information about the "Forgotten Crawford Special." It is hoped that some ATOE member close to the scene can come up with further information about this instrument. After all, it is the largest of a famous class of theater organs.

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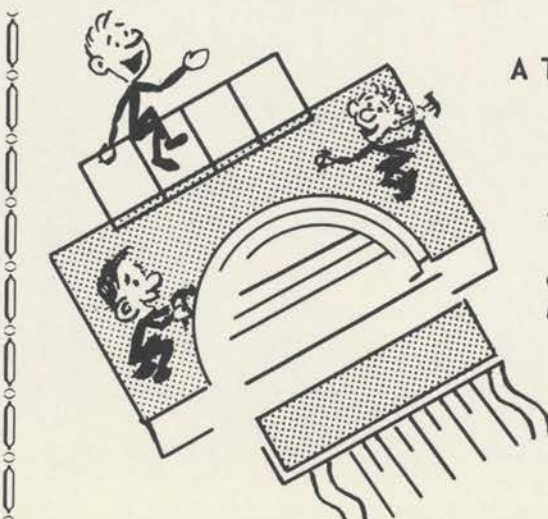
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Summer '65



David L. Cross at the console of the 4/19 Wurlitzer in the Regent Theatre, Melbourne. Picture was taken during the first full live presentation ever to be shown at the Regent. The show was a French Revue titled "Ca C'est Paris". At the present time, the organ is being used each night by Tony Fenelon.



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