

## ATOE MEMBERS BLAKE AND AILEEN BRALEY INSTALL A MIGHTY WURLITZER IN THEIR TUCKER, GEORGIA HOME

*Here in Braley's own words is the story of his Mighty Wurlitzer. He titles his story -*

### CAROLINA IN THE MORNING

Back in 1926 a nine year old boy leaned precariously over the orchestra pit rail to marvel at the wonders of a newly installed 2/7 Wurlitzer (Opus 1248) in the new State Theatre in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. He asked many questions of the organist, the late Jack Malerich who later went to St. Paul and Minneapolis. With smiling tolerance Malerich demonstrated its features, accompanying 'silents' and vaudeville acts as well as playing pop numbers between features, transporting the boy, and all others to thrills and mood music of far away places. About the same time the new Egyptian Theatre in the same town installed a 2/7 (?) Kimball, presided at by several organists including the late Ray Berry.

But the same story repeats: talkies entered, vaudeville died, and after 1936, the State and Egyptian organs went into deep slumber, their voices leaving a lasting impression. As the passing years took live theatre organ off the radio airwaves, all that was left was the recordings of the dwindling instruments still functional.

As the boy grows into manhood, with his interest still centered on the mighty Theatre Organ, he becomes a charter member of ATOE's Southeastern Chapter. He learns from fellow member Clay Holbrook in 1962 that there was still a small Wurlitzer in a South Carolina theatre. A hurried long-distance call verified this, and permission was granted to see it and possibly negotiate for its purchase on the following day. After meeting the manager, and climbing the outdoor iron fire ladders to the third story divided lofts, we had to use a hammer to smash open the rusty padlocks. The old rusty fire doors actually started parting from the hinges as they

swung open. Inside there lay Opus 1028 under a solid 1/2 inch of sooty dust, where it had remained silent since 1941 when the generator let go and the power was shut off. Not a pipe was missing or a wire off - - and the toy counter was complete! The only damage was to the Snare and Bass Drum heads, which age and moisture condensation had rotted.

Back down then to the orchestra pit where the console was acting as a post supporting part of the stage that had been expanded for the wide screen. What a sight! Dirt and several coats of paint had been liberally smeared over all the tablets, plates, and keys that hadn't been broken; the combination action was demolished and pieces and corners split off the console - but - the cable HAD NOT BEEN CUT!

After several letters, long distance calls, and anxious days the deal for Opus No. 1028 was consummated. Getting it out was the next problem. The management was most cooperative, allowing unlimited time for removal, and providing us with a small storage room. The only stipulation was that dismantling must not interfere with shows and must be entirely at my own expense.

With my wife greatly amused and only slightly enthused, and my 16 year old daughter Diane ( who still thinks I'm a "nut") we started dismantling. A 5-gallon bucket and 50 feet of rope lowered small pipes and parts to our waiting station wagon; the larger pipes and traps came down singly. After two months of early AM trips before showtime and many night-owl hours in the darkened theater only the heavy pieces remained.

Organ-buddy Arli Sutherland helped marking and coding wires and spreaders as they came off, and then four husky stevedores lowered chests and relay by hand rope and sweat down the 3-story drop with only minor damage to one end of the relay. Soon these pieces and the console and blower were in a U-Haul-It truck, and home came all the loot and a great deal of the dirt. All was stored in the spare bedroom, with boxes of pipes and chimes under the bed and the balance in a garage and shed until it could be rebuilt and reassembled.

An unused storage room was used as a one-room, undivided loft with one set of shutters. In spare time all the chests and offsets were re-leathered, pipes cleaned, airlines and wiring installed, and blower hooked up!

January of this year we touched it off--and it WORKED! Dust, ciphers from dead and dirty magnets, and non-speaking pipes spurred us on. Power to console and magnets is supplied by a 12 volt car battery with charger, replacing the dead generator, to date working perfectly. The Console was refinished beige, keys, pedals, felt and contacts redone by hand and after 2 years work and rough tuning by Sutherland sounds like a real, live Wurlitzer. Tremulants still need work as well as portions of the toy counter and chryso-glott. Xylophone and glockenspiel are re-leathered and will be hooked up soon. All our neighbors are at some distance, so no problem--what little they hear they like. I play only by ear, but in the hands of an expert "CAROLINA 1028" sounds like a beautiful dream come true.



View of Braley Chamber during installation in home.



Blake Braley seated at the refinished console he calls "Carolina".