

"THEATRE ORGANS IN THE UPPER MIDWEST"

Part III

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In the year 1920, Hibbing, Minnesota was the Iron Ore Capitol of the World and to make sure that everyone was aware of it, they built a High School at the staggering cost of 4.5 million dollars. It wasn't so much that the high school covered two square blocks and was five stories high, but the entire interior was decorated in the style of the Italian Baroque which was the current style of decorating any structure that was important and was meant to impress the public. The Auditorium was modeled after a cathedral of motion pictures and a contract was signed with the Bartola Instrument Company of Oshkosh, Wisconsin for an organ which would complete the movie palace type auditorium.

Since it was installed, the organ has not seen much use as the high school did not have a steady run of motion pictures and therefore did not use the organ very often. Occasionally a concert was scheduled which attracted people far and wide. The organ is used mostly by students who received instruction in classical literature and since it is the school's only organ, it is played up to eight hours a day just for practicing. One of the unusual features of this organ is the chambers which are lined with thick hair felt. No one seems to know the reason for this but we may guess that it was to make the organ sound mellow and reduce any possibility of a resonant frequency or "standing wave." This felt reduces the power of the organ and coupled with the fact the tone openings are very small, the organ does not have a lot of power.

Following the War, the organ fell into disuse. Some organ buffs in Hibbing decided that such a beautiful instrument should not go to waste. It was decided to search for a man to move to Hibbing and to make it a full time job playing the mighty Barton and the electronic organ in the Androy Hotel. The man they finally chose was Mr. Frank Stanlake of Palm Beach, Florida. It seems rather unusual that a man would move such a great dis-



Hibbing, Minnesota High School Barton 3/12.

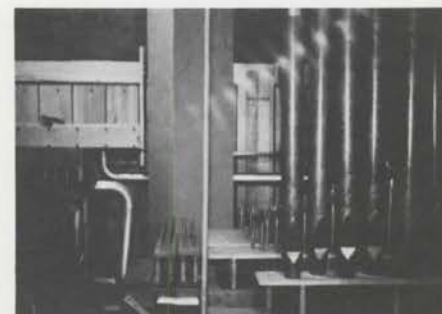
tance to live in the cold North but being Mr. Stanlake was raised in Bessemer, Michigan in the Upper Peninsula, he was more than happy to give the Barton a try. When he arrived in 1953, he found the instrument barely in playing condition and set out to find someone who would be willing to learn the workings of the great instrument. A local musician, Mr. R. Blake was recruited to restore the organ and hundreds of man hours were spent eliminating dead notes and tuning the entire organ. After the two had restored the instrument to respectability again, Frank Stanlake began presenting concerts.

After Mr. Stanlake left his position as resident organist, the organ was again idle with the exception of a handful of students who took lessons on it. Not long afterward, it was decided that the instrument should be maintained on a regular basis and Mr. Arthur Fellows, Casavant representative from St. Paul was engaged on a contract basis to maintain the organ.

About a year ago, it was decreed that the Barton organ should again be heard in public concert. Since in the past, most concerts had been played by local people, this time they would engage an internationally accomplished artist to show off the organ. Mr. Virgil Fox, who is familiar to theatre organ buffs as well as classical musicians, was called to play a concert. Unfortunately, someone forgot to tell Mr. Fox that the Hibbing auditorium organ was a *Theatre* organ or "Effect" organ as Hibbingites call it. When he arrived on the scene he was aghast! He quickly informed the high school staff that unless the organ was adjusted to sound more like a church organ, he would pack up and take the first

plane back to New York. Arthur Fellows was called out of bed in the middle of the night and ordered to head for Hibbing with his men and go to work on the organ. The tremolos had to be reduced in amplitude and slowed down, along with other adjustments and the entire organ tuned so that every pipe was in tune so that it would sound clean with the tremos off. This little task required two nights and a day nonstop to prepare for the concert. Everyone was thrilled with the concert except Mr. Fox. Since he was contracted to play all very formal classical literature, he was not comfortable on the mighty Barton. This is one concert that the Hibbing High School staff would just as soon forget. After Virgil Fox had left, the maintenance men remained for another day to return the organ back to an "effect" organ.

The organ is a three manual with manuals labeled Swell, Great and Solo. The console case is designed with a half horse-shoe and half church organ stop rails. The Barton manufactured quite a few consoles in this style during their early years. Another oddity of the console was that all percussion tabs were mounted in groups by themselves on each side of the Great manual so that they were isolated from the speaking stops. The organ console is on a four poster lift which has been discon-



Swell chamber with Diapason on right, chimes on the left.

nected to prevent students from playing with it and getting injured. The present condition of the organ is remarkably good. There are no dead notes and all equipment is working.

Each of the two chambers contains six ranks. The Swell chamber on the left houses the Gemshorn, Viol D'Orchestra, Clarabella Flute, Diaphonic Diapason, Tuba, Tibia along with the chimes, Orchestra bells, Xylophone, Glockenspiel, Traps, relays and switches and tremolos. The Great chamber to the right contains the Concert Flute, Clarinet, Salicional, Vox Celeste, Quintadena, and Vox Hu-

(Continued on Page 10)



Hibbing High auditorium, showing Barton 3/12 console in the pit.

mana. Also in the Great is a full upright piano and a huge Marimba. The chambers are very large and would hold twice as much organ. All ranks are extended up to 2' so that there are no silent notes on the upper registers. This specification would possibly suggest that the organ was de-

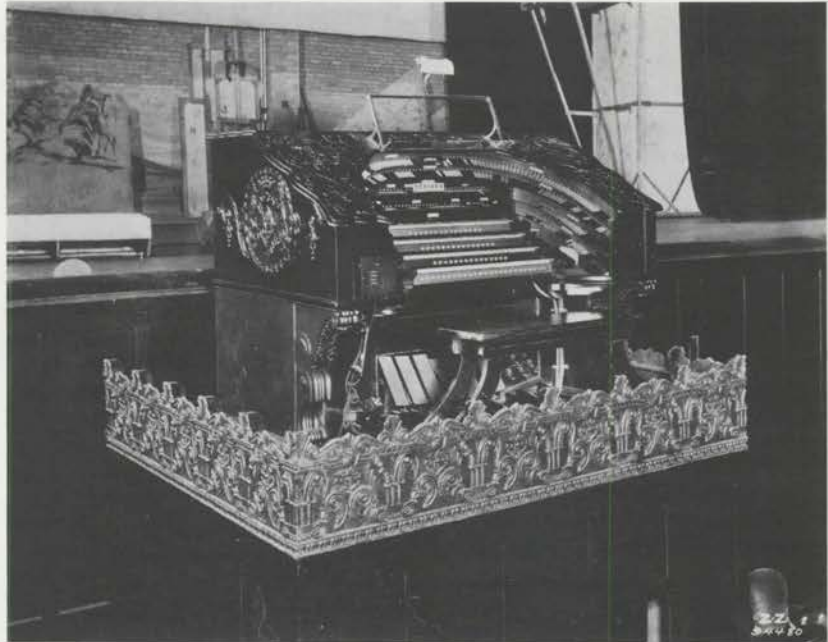


Hibbing Barton showing Great chamber. Left to right is the concert flute, clarinet, strings, quintadena, and vox.

signed to yield church sounds as well as theatrical effects.

Presently the organ is in full glory again especially with the dyed-in-the-wool organ enthusiasts of Hibbing. The theatre organ doesn't seem to offer much to the high school students with competition from the Beatles and Herman's Hermits reigning supreme

1967 NATIONAL A.T.O.E. CONVENTION



Detroit Fox Theatre's Wurlitzer 4/36 Crawford Special shown here, will be one of the 1967 National Convention attractions in Detroit July 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Photo by Manning Brothers

LOEW'S OHIO THEATRE ROBERT MORTON

Don Hall

Until recently, Columbus, Ohio has been untouched by the current renaissance in theatre organ enthusiasm, while right across the street from the state capitol building is the largest theatre organ in central Ohio. Loew's Ohio Theatre is the largest and most ornate in Columbus and like so many other Loew houses, is the home of a Robert Morton organ. This particular Morton is a 4 manual, 18 ranker, installed in March, 1928. Henry Murtaugh was the first organist, Roger Garrett the last regular one. Garrett took over in 1932 and starred for 10 years when the organ was put into semi-retirement and over the years got itself into pretty bad shape. Recently through, two Columbus business men have plunged into the heart of the matter and the Morton is beginning to throb once again. Ohio manager Sam Shubouf, realizing the worth of the instrument, has encouraged the restoration work and use of the organ during weekend evening intermissions.

Carlos Parker heads up the rebuilding project which is now about 80 percent complete. During the week, Carlos masquerades as the purchasing agent for Ross

Laboratories and it is only on weekends that his Hydian nature becomes known. His assistant is Tom Hamilton, vice president of the Diamond Milk Company. Tom usually occupies the Morton's Howard Seat during the weekend organ interludes. Current work by the pair has been centered on releathering the combination action, which is surely a final touch.

The white and gold console sits on a lift at stage right. The organ's two chambers are located one on each side just next to the proscenium and above the boxes. They are hidden behind yards of draperies which somewhat muffle the otherwise gorgeous sound. Whenever the organ is used, Joe Worman, the stage electrician is on hand to provide a changing display of lights on the console, boxes and house curtain.

Also in Columbus is a 3 manual, 14 rank Wurlitzer in the RKO Palace, just a short walk from the Ohio. The Palace instrument was installed on November 8, 1928. With two good organs in theatres and many smaller instruments around central Ohio, it's a wonder there's not a flourishing ATOE chapter there.

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