

HOW MY MEDIUM-SIZE CONSOLE LEARNED TO CONTROL 26 RANKS IN LESS THAN FOUR MONTHS

We delve into the mysteries of making bigger ones out of already not so little ones — consoles, that is. . .

In Canoga Park, California, John Ledwon was faced with a problem — an intriguing one to organ lovers. For several years he had been collecting additional ranks of pipes, chests, regulators, and tremis, with the idea of eventually adding them to his 3-12 Wurlitzer.

His home installation had served him well but the possibility of taking full advantage of the wonders of unification were limited by the space available on the single stoprail console. Even cramming the additions onto the front board (the usual method) would not allow enough space for what John had in mind. It was a good console and had performed well during its most recent public performance — at the well-remembered “Golden Gate Exposition” on San Francisco’s Treasure Island.

Even John’s basic instrument called for a double stoprail console. It was a Wurlitzer style 235 (3-11) when originally installed in the Duluth, Minnesota, Lyceum theatre. But the original keydesk had been lost in horse trading long the route of several owners. The Exposition console was a fair substitute but no more.

The time was ripe to make the additions because the Ledwon family is planning to build a new home and a large music room could be part of it — if John came up with an instrument worthy of special lodgings.

So, John set out in search of a proper Wurlitzer console, an item harder and harder to come by these days. He found one straight across the country in an upper New York State theatre. The saga of that console’s trip West reads like a comedy of errors. It vanished for long periods of time and the trucking company just couldn’t seem to locate it. Finally, after 59 days, it showed up at John’s front door in Canoga Park, looking a little the worse for wear but happy to be home.

By the time he was ready to go to work, John had enough parts for a 26 rank organ. Even the greater unification of the new console couldn’t absorb all those extra ranks on its two stoprails. There were two possibilities: (1) the usual easy way — sticking all the extras on a well-perforated front board (the flat stoprail beneath the horseshoe which usually mounts tremis and second touch stops), or (2) tear out every stopkey and reinstall the new ranks among the existing ones in

what has become to be known as “proper order.” John made the fateful decision — plan number 2!

The decision was doubly difficult because doing things the correct way meant the complete closing down of his instrument for three or four months. And even when he got the console finished, it would never control 26 ranks in its present home. Not enough room. So, John decided to look far to the future, to build his dream organ and then wait for dad, Ray, to come through with the promised housing.

After taking stock of stopkey arrangements it became obvious that he would need a third stoprail to accommodate the unifications desired of all 26 ranks so John decided to install stopkeys for 18 ranks on the horseshoe in the usual manner then add the rest as an ancillary, a group of stops appearing on the stoprail at one place only and coupled to any manual desired by a single stopkey — “Ancillary to Great” for example.

But let’s let John Ledwon tell his fascinating story of how he enlarged his console’s capacity to control many additional sets. The technical information one can gather is most useful.

* * *

First a little history on the console. It started as a Wurlitzer “Balaban 1A” for the Paramount Theatre, Middletown, New York. The approximate installation time was during the latter part of 1930. A Balaban 1A is basically a style 235 (3-11)



John Ledwon admires his handiwork in transforming an 11-rank console into a control center for 26 ranks.

with somewhat better unification. It had 122 stopkeys when I acquired it as contrasted with a style 260 which had only 128 stopkeys for 14 or 15 ranks. I expanded to 212 stopkeys and also added 6 pistons underneath the lower manual (for the pedal) and added 4 more to the solo to make ten. The rebuilding took about three and one-half months, working a couple of hours every other day or so. Neal Kissel (he has worked on the Los Angeles Shrine Auditorium Moller) assisted me tremendously. He made the Howard seat replica from a boiler plate, steel reinforcing rod, a valve wheel and other miscellaneous parts. The combination action relays were remated so as to leave room in the console for the additional off/on stop boxes. I purchased a 2-manual, five rank console for spare parts and this turned out to be of tremendous help. I used everything on the little console except the manuals and pedals. Even used the little eyelets that hold the bar for the stop keys to pivot on.

Parts that were made and not just rebuilt, or taken off the little console, included a new front board, the chrome divider, blocks for the upper stop rail and all of the round chamber indicators above the stopkeys. I made them out of 5/16” plastic rod using lathe tools to scribe the circle or double circle or dot for each one before cutting it from the main stock. I also made several new contact blocks and dozens of new pneumatics plus other miscellaneous items. One interesting idea which I incorporated was to use the labels over the stopkeys (Solo, Pedal, etc.) as push buttons for cancels for that particular division. Thus, if you push on the “Great” plate, all the stops in that division will cancel. It was done by placing a micro-switch behind each label.

Now to explain briefly the pictures.



LEDWON CONSOLE REBUILD

Figure 1 shows the lower rail being readied for drilling out the channeling for the additions. The upper rail was raised just to get it out of the way. Neal and I used a doweling jig to drill these long channels (about 9”). We then drilled vertically through the board for the holes that went to the pneumatics. The spacing of the stopkeys was arrived at by matching a pair of calipers to the original spac-

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LEDWON CONSOLE REBUILD

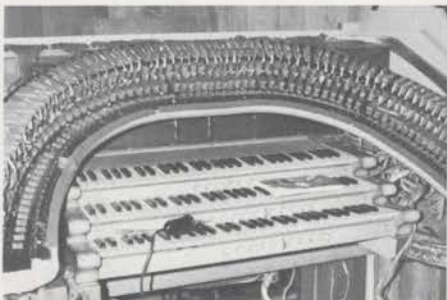
ing and then just going from an existing action as far as necessary for the particular number of stops to be added to a division. Obviously, the final stoplist needed to be known before the expansion could begin.



Figure 2 shows the drilling finished (you can see the untubed holes). The lower pneumatic rail was installed upside down and backwards temporarily to facilitate the drilling of the rear holes. Because the glue pot is visible in this picture, I might as well mention that I glued all 304 pneumatics on the horseshoe rails with hot glue just to discover that they would fall off when touched after a few days. After discussing this problem with Harvey Heck (who experienced a similar catastrophe), I reglued them all with shellac which had been thickened by burning. This seems to have solved the adhesive problem.



In Figure 3 the lower stop rail has been finished, pneumatics glued in place and new contact blocks installed. The upper pneumatic rail has been drilled out at this point. It is not easy to see but the ends of this rail were extended out about 6" to accommodate the pneumatics for the additions. Visible on the lower rail is the second row of tubing I added for the additional stops. The tin tubing came from the 2-manual console.



In Figure 4 the pneumatics are in place

as are the new contact blocks. The new bridals for the upper rail were made from 1/4" twill tape and packing leather dyed black with shoe polish. This picture also shows the original piston layout before it was augmented.



Figure 5. The entire stop list prior to installation in the console. All the additional stopkeys that were needed were old Wurliitzer keys that I cleaned off and polished and then sent to Hesco for engraving. Since I also needed 60 small 2nd touch stopkeys, I made them from beat up long ones. I sawed off the end and then filed the new end round, filed away the now excessive thickness and then polished it with wet-dry sandpaper under water to keep the paper from loading up. I then polished them all on three buffing wheels with different grades of polish. All the stopkeys were polished in order that they might match. Those which had warped over the years were heated in warm salt until just barely soft then straightened and put into cold water. This is a risky business; too much heat causes the stopkey to change shape and become unusable.

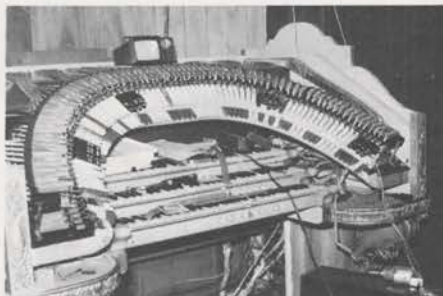
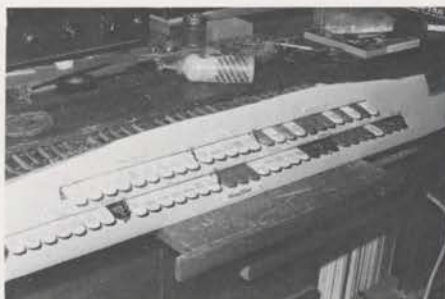


Figure 6 shows the stopkeys installed while Figure 7 shows the completed front board with its 60 stopkeys. The majority



of the keys in this picture were Hesco-engraved. This front board was made by

first making a template of the original and scribing around the template onto the board to be cut. This way you don't get a mirror-image board that won't fit (my first try was this way). The board was cut out of larger stock with a saber saw and then planed down to the proper thickness. The slots for the stopkeys were also cut with a saber saw.

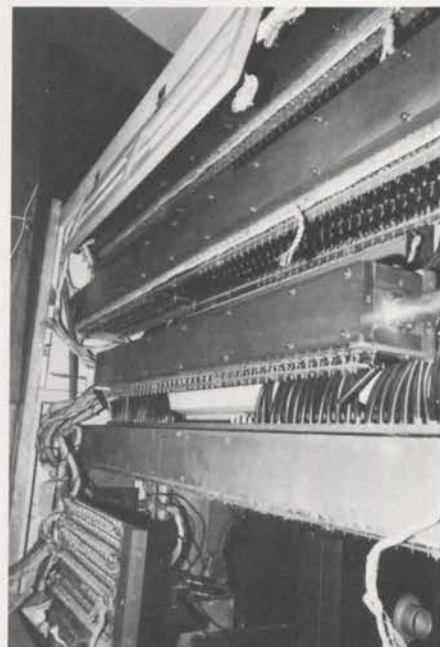


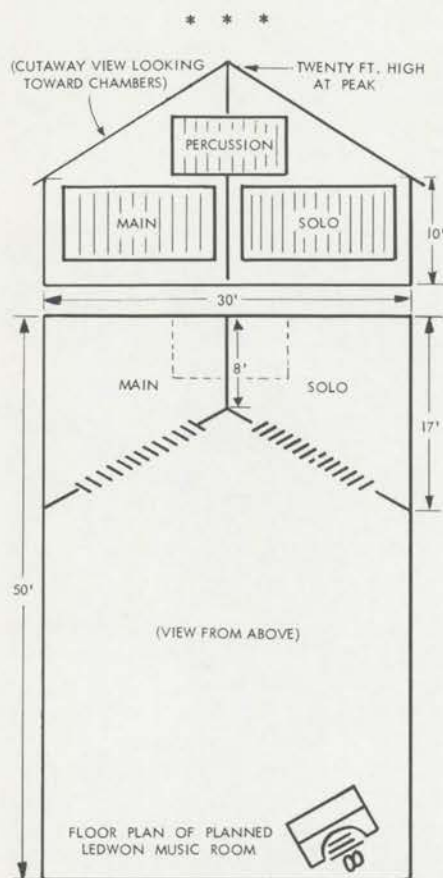
Figure 8. This picture shows the four main action boxes. The lowest one came from the little console. Dick Schroder and I drilled out the channeling for 20 more complete on/off actions and in the process drilled over 600 holes in the box. The tin tubing was used as far as it would go then I switched over to plastic. Altogether over 300 feet of plastic tubing was used. The terminal board at the top contains all the connections for the combination action.

John adjusts contacts on his console.



John Ledwon's console is finished now — and ready to play. But it will not have a chance to demonstrate its new prowess for some time — until a house has been built and it has been installed. But John is willing to trade some time for the kind of surroundings for his instrument that few pipe organ owners come to realize.

Following is a sketch of the music room plan for the new home and the stoplist of the instrument as it will be installed in 3 chambers.



**STOPLIST FOR JOHN LEDWON'S
3-18 WURLITZER PLUS
8-RANK ANCILLARY**

PEDAL

- 16' English Post Horn
- 16' Ophicleide
- 16' Diaphone
- 16' Contra Tibia Clausa
- 16' Double String
- 16' Bass Clarinet
- 16' Bourdon
- 8' English Post Horn
- 8' Diaphonic Diapason
- 8' Tibia Clausa
- 8' String
- 8' Cello
- 8' Cello Celeste
- 8' Clarinet
- 8' Flute
- 4' Octave
- 4' Tibia Minor
- 4' Flute
- 16' Piano (Upright)
- 8' Piano (Upright)
- Pedal Octave
- Accomp. to Pedal
- Gt. to Pedal
- Ancillary to Pedal
- Bass Drum
- Kettle Drum
- Tap Cymbal
- Sizzel Cymbal
- Choke Cymbal
- Crash Cymbal
- 8' Tibia Clausa Pizz.
- 8' Solo to Pedal Pizz.

ACCOMPANIMENT

- 8' English Post Horn
- 8' Tuba Horn
- 8' Diaphonic Diapason
- 8' Tibia Clausa
- 8' Salcional
- 8' Violin
- 8' Violin Cleste
- 8' Clarinet
- 8' Kinura
- 8' Orchestral Oboe
- 8' Quintadena

- 8' Concert Flute
- 8' Vox Humana No. 1
- 8' Dulciana (Main)
- 4' Octave
- 4' Piccolo (Tibia)
- 4' Salicet
- 4' Violin
- 4' Octave Celeste
- 4' Quintadena
- 4' Flute
- 4' Vox Humana
- 4' Dulciana
- 2-2/3' Twelfth
- 2' Piccolo
- 8' Piano (Upright)
- 4' Piano (Upright)
- Chrysoglott
- Harp
- 4' Accomp. Octave
- 8' Solo to Accomp.
- 4' Gt. to Accomp. Octave
- 8' Ancillary to Accomp.
- Snare Drum
- Tambourine
- Castanets
- Maracas
- Tom Tom
- Wood Block
- Sand Block

ACCOMPANIMENT

2nd TOUCH

- 8' Post Horn
- 8' Tuba Horn
- 8' Clarinet
- 4' Piccolo
- Xylophone
- Cathedral Chimes
- Triangle
- Finger Cymbals
- 8' Solo to Accomp.
- 4' Gt. to Accomp.
- 8' Solo to Accomp. Pizz.



The finished console.

GREAT

- 16' Ophicleide
- 16' Diaphone
- 16' Tibia Clausa
- 16' Tibia Minor (Tenor C)
- 16' Contra Viola
- 16' Bass Clarinet
- 16' Vox Humana (Tenor C)
- *8' English Post Horn
- *8' Tuba Horn
- *8' Trumpet
- 8' Tibia Clausa
- 8' Diaphonic Diapason
- *8' Tibia Clausa
- 8' Tibia Minor
- *8' String
- 8' Salcional
- 8' Violin
- 8' Violin Cleste
- 8' Clarinet
- *8' Kinura
- 8' Orchestral Oboe
- *8' Musette
- *8' Quintadena
- 8' Concert Flute
- *8' Vox Humana No. 1
- 5-1/3' Tibia Clausa (Quint)
- 4' Clarion
- 4' Octave
- 4' Piccolo (Tibia)
- 4' Piccolo (Tibiamin)
- 4' String
- 4' Violin
- 4' Octave Cleste
- 4' Flute
- 2-2/3' Twelfth (Tibia)
- 2-2/3' Twelfth (Flute)
- 2' Piccolo (Tibia)
- 2' Fifteenth
- 2' Piccolo (Flute)
- 1-3/4' Tierce
- 16' Piano (Upright)
- 8' Piano (Upright)
- 4' Piano (Upright)
- Marimba (Re-it)
- 16' Sub Octave
- 4' Gt. Octave
- 16' Solo to Gt. Sub. Octave
- 8' Ancillary to Great
- Chrysoglott
- Xylophone
- Glockenspiel
- Bells (Re-it)
- Sleight Bells
- Cathedral Chimes

GREAT 2nd TOUCH

- 16' Post Horn
- 16' Ophicleide
- 8' Post Horn
- 8' Tuba Horn
- 8' Tibia Clausa
- 8' Clarinet
- 8' Solo to Great
- 8' Solo to Gt. Pizz.

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Closing Chord

Cecil Chadwick, cinema organist, died July 20 at the age of 70 in Leeds, England, only three days after playing a concert on the 3-10 Wurlitzer in Buckingham Town Hall. As a former staff organist with Odeon theatres he was resident organist at the Leeds Odeon for several years. Chadwick made well over 500 organ broadcasts for the BBC. He was a polished player of "middle brow" music, reports the C.O.S. Newsletter.

Archibald March, who specialized in voicing string pipes for many major builders, died at 70 on July 26, at his home in Alhambra, Calif., of cancer, thus ending a long and distinguished career of service to pipes. "Archie's"

autograph (or his father's) can be found on the "C" pipe of many a Morton Gamba, Salicional, VDO, VDO Celeste, String, Violin, Cello or Viola, indicating that he finished it back in the 1920s. He was born in England.

Fulton Lewis Jr., news commentator, died in Washington D.C. on August 21. Known to millions as a vocal opponent of liberal elements in politics, few knew he was a theatre organ enthusiast. He had a 2-3 Robert Morton installed in his home which he had rescued from a Tampa, Florida, theatre. He loved to relax at the console and thus provided much musical enjoyment for family and friends. One of his first jobs was playing in a theatre, a position he admitted he got by convincing the auditioning manager that he was doing some impressive pedalling, although the pedals

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SYRACUSE WURLITZER SAVED

By Grant Whitcomb

Syracuse, New York.

About two years ago an organization calling themselves the Syracuse Theatre Organ Society was formed by a handful of local people interested in the preservation of both the instrument and its music. This was prompted to a great extent by the gradual demise of eighteen of these instruments which were originally in the Syracuse area in the early 1900's. As the years went by, time and vermin had taken their toll and by 1964 there were only two instruments left which had been worked on by Theatre Organ enthusiasts, one of which was a 4-Manual Wurlitzer in the Loew's State Theatre, and the other being a 3/11 located in the next block at R.K.O. Keith.

It was a considerable shock to enthusiasts both local and elsewhere in upstate New York when the Loew's State organ was quite suddenly purchased and moved to another area. This left only one instrument which was also possibly doomed by urban renewal which indicated demolition of the R.K.O. theatre in favor of a department store. To their everlasting credit, this small, local group resolved to save this instrument and preserve it in this area. Gaining the support of the local Chamber of Commerce, a new organization was formed, known as THE EMPIRE STATE THEATRE AND MUSICAL INSTRUMENT MUSEUM, INC. When the R.K.O. Keith finally goes next year, the completely restored 3/11 Wurlitzer will be reinstalled in the Harriet May Mills Building at the State Exposition Grounds just a few miles northwest of downtown Syracuse. Here, this fine instrument will become a major part of a special musical museum containing 600 seats and will be available for concerts and other functions.

Of course all of this activity requires money, and the major portion of the fund-raising drive took place on this date with the presentation of a special program at R.K.O. Keith entitled *A Glimpse of the Past*. In anticipation of what turned out to be a truly magnificent program, the theatre was completely sold out on a reserved seat basis at \$2.00 per seat. It was really gratifying to notice the extent of support Syracusians have lent to this project.

Not content with mere Theatre Organ concertizing, this ambitious program included a complete range of nostalgia with Silent Movies, Vaude-

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JOHN LEDWON STOP LIST

(Continued from page 20)

SOLO

16' English Post Horn
16' Ophicleide
16' Tibia Clausa
16' Tibia Minor (Ten. C)
16' Contra Viol
8' Post Horn
8' Tuba Horn
8' Trumpet
8' Diaphonic Diapason
8' Tibia Clausa
8' Tibia Minor
8' String
8' Clarinet
8' Kinura
8' Orchestral Oboe
8' Musette
8' Quintadena
8' Vox Humana No. 1
4' Clarion
4' Octave
4' Piccolo
4' Piccolo
4' Solo String
2-2/3' Twelfth (Tibia Min.)
2' Piccolo Tibia Min.

16' Piano (Upright)
8' Piano (Upright)
4' Pinaw (Upright)
Marimba (Re-it)
Xylophone
Glockenspiel
Bells (Re-it)
Cathedral Chimes
Sub Octave
Unison Off
Octave
Ancillary to Solo

ANCILLARY

*8' String Celeste, 3 ranks
*8' Melodia (from Harmonic Flute)
8' Unda Maris
*8' Horn Diapason
8' Vox Humana No. 2
8' Oboe Horn
4' String Celeste, 3 ranks
4' Harmonic Flute
4' Unda Maris
4' Octave
4' Vox Humana No. 2
8' Piano (Steinway Grand)

REMEULANTS

Main No. 1
Main No. 2
Solo
Tuba
Tibia Clausa
Tibia Minor
Vox Humana No. 1 (Solo)
Ancillary
Vox Humana No. 2 (Main)

GENERAL CONTROLS

Piano Loud
Mandolin
Chime Dampers
Vibraphone
Percussion
Main Solo Open

** Indicates ranks in the Solo Chamber; the Percussions and effects which are in their own chamber.*

Ancillary ranks are located in both Solo and Main Chambers.

THE BRAZEN HUSSY

(Continued from Page 11)

double the fullness of the instrument.

"I'd hardly finished with the job when organ man De Autrey offered me a Wurlitzer piano from the Spokane Liberty Theatre and off I went again. I'll bet you can guess the procedure . . . varnish remover, fill and stain, lacquer, re-leather, fix. Say, how can you put a piano through a trap in the floor that is 1-1/2" narrower than the piano case? Easy . . . Just take the piano . . . and the action . . . and the case . . . apart! Then it only takes six men to lower it down with ropes and a simple job to re-assemble.

But there she is! Augmented to eleven ranks and a piano. She's beautiful and she belts out a song as clear as a Brazen Hussy."

The Robert Burk Wurlitzer 3/11 has the following ranks:

Trumpet, Open Diapason, Tibia Clausa, Clarinet, Orchestral

Oboe, Kinura, Viol D'Orchestra, VDO Celeste, Salicional, Flute, and Vox Humana.



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