



A FAMILY AFFAIR

WHEN a theatre organ enthusiast acquires an organ for himself, he never knows what it will lead to.

Usually a home remodeling is necessary, the family has to be convinced it won't take up much space, and the enthusiast has to have answers to dozens of crude remarks made by friends and neighbors. Some untapped funds or bank credit also helps.

Richard Weber of New York State has been through the usual channels of

theatre organ ownership but for him it was only the beginning.

Rolling back the calendar to 1957, Dick Weber, an Art Director for General Electric in Schenectady, New York, acquired a beautiful Wurlitzer Style 260 Special from the North Park Theatre, Buffalo, New York, and moved it to the Weber home in Schenectady. During the winter, Weber faced the lonely project of completely overhauling the instrument in the lower level of his house. Wife, Audrey, began feeling sorry for her husband (a serious mistake) buried in the maze of grotesque organ shapes and decided to join the resurrection of the mighty Wurlitzer.

An assembly line was set up starting in the kitchen, to the dining area, through

The Weber Five together at the console of 'Winifred' after doing a specialty promotion for 'Mary Poppins.'

the living room and, finally, to the powder room for final touch-ups. The Weber's oldest daughter, then only three, became an expert at sanding, gluing, leather cutting and trimming.

The organ was renovated, the house remodeled and the organ installed with additional ranks. During this time, two more daughters were born and Weber now had a complete team.

The Wurlitzer sounded so good that Billy Nalle, the well-known organist made recordings on the organ which were a joy to hear. At the time of the recording sessions, the 260 Special had grown to twenty-two ranks and nearly



The whole Weber family got into the act when the organ was assembled in the theatre. Here, putting pipes into the organ loft, are Nancy, at ladder top; Sharon, below Nancy; and Cindy, at the foot. Dad, Richard, is waiting at the top to receive the pipes for installation.

overpowered the Weber home. A decision was forthcoming which changed the entire lives of the Weber clan.

Dick decided to give up his position and go into 'show biz'—a theatre with plenty of room for the organ and with facilities to present some novel ideas that he had conjured up. His search for the ideal set-up led him to Plattsburgh, New York, a beautiful small city of 20,000 in the heart of the Adirondacks on the shores of Lake Champlain. Here he found the Strand Theatre, seating 1,400 and equipped with a large stage. The theatre was secured and the work began.

Weber enlisted the aid of his brother, Bob, and then started a basement to

roof refurbishing of the theatre. The work included designing and installing a complete air-conditioning plant. The shallow spaces adjacent to the proscenium were enlarged requiring major structural changes in this area to accommodate the organ installation.

Over six months of effort went into the renovation. The theatre now has new wiring, lighting, roofs, floors, ceilings, and walls. Every facet of the work was done by the Weber family. Even the white drapes in front of the auditorium were made by Dick's wife, Audrey.

The theatre janitor, Dick DeLisle, assisted in the project and is now well trained in organ work, including tuning.

The projectionist, Carl Parsons, gave valuable assistance in helping Bob and Dick Weber design and install the organ lift which the theatre didn't have until the Webers invaded the premises.

With the enlargement of the organ chambers, orchestra pit, and allowing for more spaciousness in the seating area, capacity of the Strand was reduced to 1,130.

After completing work on the physical theatre, the organ installation took place. Here again, the entire family participated. Wife, Audrey; and daughters, Nancy (13), Sharon (11), and Cindy (8), have been well schooled in "ringing" out cables, soldering spreaders, and assembling pipes. When totally complete, the organ will have an additional six ranks. A major portion of the Middletown, New York, Paramount organ was donated by Bob Weber which has been combined to make the enlargement possible.

Before the dust of the renovation had time to settle, the Webers began the organ installation. Taking advantage of the deep stage, which is thirty feet deep, Dick placed the 19' Bourdon, 16' Tibia, 16' Diaphone, 8' Vox and the Percussions on stage unenclosed. The balance of the organ is installed in the prepared chambers located on each side of the proscenium.

Special treatment was given the stage section. First, all the building frames and chests, etc., were painted flat black. A black velvet drape hangs behind the assembly. All the pipe work and percussions on stage are specially treated so that when "black-light" is projected on to them they create a multi-colored effect. In using this, the theatre is blacked-out, the curtain is opened, and with the "black-light" being used, everything appears to be suspended in mid-air. Weber uses this effect when doing organ presentations and it never fails to be a breath-taking spectacle. The stage units of the organ are mounted on casters so they can be moved out of the way for stage presentations.

The gala premiere of the Webers' endless months of effort was held November 30, 1966, featuring Leo DuPlessis of Montreal at the console. An original 35mm print of Buster Keaton's, "The General", was presented on the screen and a stage show using local talent was also part of the program.

In preparing for the premiere, we'll let Dick Weber describe it: "Leo DuPlessis, featured artists, made twelve trips from his home in St. Eustache, Quebec, at 170 miles per round trip totalling 2,040 miles. At Friday night's final performance, his entire family including four boys and one girl made a surprise appearance which brought tears to the

(Continued Next Page)

**A Family Affair
continues**



The Weber Family, left to right, Cindy, Sharon, and Nancy with Dad at console singing 'Let's Go Fly A Kite' from a 'Mary Poppins' promo specialty. Console refinished in white and gold for maximum spotlight color effects.

general audience when he received a great hug and kiss from his youngest.

"All schools, city and proclial, dismissed classes for the entire afternoon to attend the special matinee. Separate 'Study Programs' were issued the day preceding as an educational adjunct. John Strader and wife assisted most wonderfully with reference data. Both teachers and principals were emotionally overcome by the unusual reception given by the students. Absolutely amazing! Heads were shaking and handkerchiefs wiped away tears.

"Over two hundred Canadians came down to see the show. Many celebrities were present. Others came in by plane,

Back stage—Bob Weber on ladder putting final touches on 16' Bourdon pipes. Superstructure partially complete for 16' pipework (Large scale Tibia, Bourdon, & large scale metal Diaphone). Diaphone originally from Paramount Theatre, Middletown, N. Y. that Leroy Lewis was so wild about.

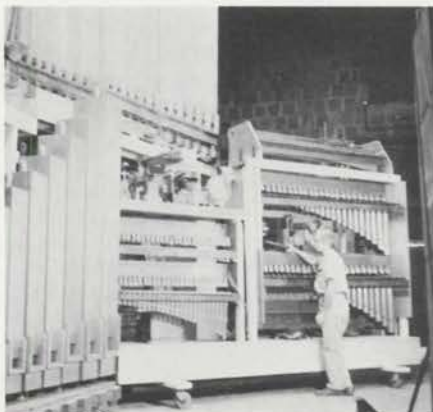


bus and car from Buffalo, Albany, Troy, Schenectady, and New York, not to mention the Vermonters. Even the mayor insisted on making a speech opening night to tell his wonderful feelings of pleasure and surprise that something like this could happen to Plattsburgh.

"The entire program was televised on Channels 2 & 6, Montreal, C. B. C. Station WPTZ television requested a repeat performance solely for a special presentation for a major network.

"Many patrons came to see every performance and still ask for more. Never did we expect such outright enthusiasm in this wild north-country. Some say it's too good for Plattsburgh. Others wonder

Bob Weber tightening screws to hold Marimba upper section in position. Units are located on right stage looking in. 16' Tibia offset seen front left. All percussion units for stage presentation are mounted on large platforms with casters to permit moving off stage when required to make space for large stage shows.



View of organ chamber with Dick Weber checking a reed.

why it ever came to this area. What really did the trick, that even surpassed the most excellent music, was the 'Blacklight Magic'. Hearts literally jumped when the curtain opened in a total blackout, and then disclosing the "blacklight" which spanned the entire stage. The emotional effect cannot be described. This show was scheduled for five performances and played to capacity."

Following the premiere, a special Christmas program was done with Santa Claus, in person, and featuring the mighty Wurlitzer.

On February 15, 1967, Weber presented a variety show as a benefit for the local junior high school to help raise funds for obtaining new uniforms for their band's appearance at Expo '67.

For this program, Weber utilized some excellent talent which included the Four Northcountrymen, a superb barbershop quartet; the Langlois Dancers (Pat and Roland), who did several ballroom dance numbers; the Plattsburgh Male Chorus;



Nancy and Cindy in one of their many sessions locating broken wires or poor contacts using voltmeter in this particular problem in the switch stack. For rewiring and other related electrical work, a 'Ringout' system using doorbell was employed. Literally several thousand rings were heard in the process with ears still suffering from the after effects.

Debbie Boulter, a tap-dancer and the Junior High School Band.

Leo DuPlessis presided at the console, played several medleys, and accompanied the various acts. The entire program, emceed by Ronald Wood, was well put together and, with the artistry of DuPlessis, had a highly professional aura which was fully appreciated by the capacity audience.

Along with all this, Weber has also brought in stage shows from New York such as "The Subject was Roses" with Dennis O'Keefe; "Luv" with Nancy Walker; American Ballet; and Barber of Seville to name a few. On the "Barber" there were thirty performers on stage, forty-one musicians in the pit, and twenty-two stage hands at the props and fly ropes.

To quote Mr. Weber again, "Even though we're still feeling the after effects of all the dust raising, we just have to admit the frustration and nervous prostration was sure worth it. When the organ was in the house, there were always the problems of time—too little—spent with the wife and children. Nothing is worth that kind of sacrifice. Buying a theatre was the only solution in my case. Now the entire family are participants from the tuning in the lofts to the candy booth in the lobby.

"Of the many unusual experiences that we've come to live with since getting into the world of 'show biz' they include a runaway pet monkey that one of our patrons brought into the theatre tucked into his shirt, and it got up into the organ lofts where he was finally located inside the 16' Ophleclide pipe.

"We also had a packed house of kids for the Saturday matinee when tornado warnings were broadcast for the immediate area from radio and TV. All the mothers thought the theatre was the safest place in town, and so did the police. Per usual, the organ got everything into full swing with all kids in fine voice. But then all h--- broke loose. The canvas connection blew off the main blower with a mighty BOOOOM and rushing wild air came out in all directions emitting great clouds of dust . . . as fast as that let loose, so did the kids. But fortunately, and to our great surprise, the kids thought it was just another one of our surprise treatments to try to scare 'em to death and never enjoyed it more. NO PANIC but it sure will be hard to beat for a shocker."

What is even more difficult to beat is the Weber family. The *whole* story is the fact that it has been a family affair—is and will continue to be in all respects. Every program is created by Dick and Audrey Weber. The three girls play a big part, whether out selling tickets, behind the scenes on the fly ropes, or in the organ chambers during perform-

ances checking for possible ciphers. This is one family of a kind . . . endless hours devoted in converting a one-time hobby to full-time "work". They have ideas brewing all the time and with

plenty of hard labor, their aim in making a long hoped for wish and dream come true is being attained with absolutely no thought of retirement from now on. A REAL FAMILY AFFAIR!

Dick Weber's Wurlitzer is affectionately called "Winifred." Originally, she contained the following ranks.

Tibia Clausa
Tuba
Diapason
Flute
Clarinet
Orchestral Oboe
Oboe Horn
Vox Humana
Solo String
Violin
Violin Celeste
Kinura
Quintadena
Dulciana
Unda Maris



"Winifred" has the following added:

Post Horn I (15")
Post Horn II
Trumpet
Tibia II
Tibia III
Viol and Celeste
Solo String II
Vox Humana II
French Horn
Tuba Mirabilis



Leo DuPlessis, left, holds a tambourine while Richard Weber makes an adjustment.

★ LEO DUPLESSIS ★

Following in the footsteps of his godfather, who was a theatre organist during the days of the silent movie, Leo DuPlessis has dreamed of nothing but playing the organ since he was a small boy. His career started very early, for at the age of five he was able to play any hymn or ballad from memory in any key.

Leo attributes his fine musicianship to those early formative years when he studied classical music from eminent professors while attending college.

Finally, when the opportunity to play the organ presented itself, Leo was

there. For the past 19 years he has been that witty organist with a built-in sense of humor that has made him a Canadian favorite at the console of the Forum organ in Montreal.

You can also hear Leo's musical mischief at both of Montreal's horse race tracks. He'll greet a loser with *Who's Sorry Now* or *I'll Never Smile Again* which never fails to leave 'em smiling.

After a 'hard day's night', Leo, at home with his lovely wife and five children, finds complete relaxation by escaping to the basement and of all things . . . working on his true love—a pipe organ!

Leo is reputedly the only organist to set a first in his field as a recording artist.

He recorded three LP records within a twenty-four hour period.

