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Console of the 3/27 Wurlitzer in the Emery Theatre,
Cincinnati, Ohio. See story starting on page five.
Photo by Lodder

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THE EMERY THEATRE WURLITZER

by E. S. "Tote" Pratt, Director
Organ Restoration and Development
Ohio Valley Chapter ATOS

The Emery Wurlitzer came into being when it was shipped from the Wurlitzer factory to Cincinnati on July 5, 1927, destined for the Fountain Square Theatre. This was a prestigious house seating 3069 situated on Fountain Square, the city's counterpart to Times Square in New York. The name of the theatre was later changed to the RKO Albee.

The original organ, Opus 1680, was a 3/19 Style 260 Special instrument, one of 62 of this style with varied specifications built by Wurlitzer. A basic 260 was a 3/15, which in this instrument grew into 19 ranks by the addition of an Open Diapason, second Vox Humana, second Tibia and a Tuba Mirabilis. Wiring schedule #819 was assigned by Wurlitzer for this instrument. Several other 260 Specials were built having different wiring schedule numbers, indicating a variation in specifications from the Albee instrument. The Style 260 was the largest production three-manual made by Wurlitzer. The Albee instrument was equipped with a 15-hp blower, although a 10-hp unit was standard for a Style 260.

In the Albee, the organ was installed two chambers high adjacent to the proscenium arch on both sides. The Chrysoglott was in the Main chamber and the balance of the tuned percussions and toy counter in the Solo. The console was a scroll design, located on a lift on the left side of the theatre. Between the heyday of the late 1920's and the subsequent demise of theatre organs it was played by such notables, among others, as Lee

Erwin, Hy C. Geis, Johanna Gross and Fats Waller.

The organ became dormant and was rarely used. It could not even be used for practice because the chambers were adjacent to the wall separating the Fountain Square Hotel and the theatre, and by court injunction could not be used between 11 p.m. and 10 a.m. when the theatre was closed. Several of our members, including the writer, over the years were able to try it for very brief periods, but the organ was gradually becoming unusable because of wind leaks, rot-

ting leather pneumatics, stiff trem cloth and leaky regulators. This condition continued until the late 1960's. With a steadily declining patronage this beautiful house became a prime candidate for the wrecking ball, another casualty in the continuing loss of theatrical architectural monuments.

Following the policy of the RKO chain, a suitable recipient was sought to which this Wurlitzer could be donated. The Ohio Mechanics Institute was solicited, a downtown technical school only seven blocks away from

Front of the auditorium, showing stage chambers. Chamber lights are colored spots controlled by a dimmer board.
(Photo by Lodder)



the Albee site, but they did not know what to do with it. They, however, had an acoustically perfect auditorium, once the home of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra but now virtually unused, the Emery Auditorium (now Emery Theatre). The OMI later became a part of the University of Cincinnati, with whom our contract was finally executed. We have nothing but grateful appreciation and thanks to the University for their cooperation and interest in our project.

During the time between the decision to donate the organ and the destruction of the theatre, the Ohio Valley Chapter sponsored a series of silent movie presentations in the beautiful Albee Theatre, using electronic organs loaned by different local dealers, with numerous external speakers to fill the auditorium, and with the good graces of Gaylord Carter we played to full houses every time. This provided two things: money to help the chapter refurbish and install the organ, and exposure to Cincinnati audiences of the silent movie phenomena and theatre organ in general.

Enter the spectre of the wrecking ball — and OVC-ATOS, who agreed to install and maintain the organ in the Emery Theatre, at its expense. The contract in part allowed unlimited free use of the organ by ATOS

The RKO Albee during the first Gaylord Carter concert in 1966 to raise money to reinstall the Wurlitzer in the Emery Theatre. Mr. John F. Steele and the Cincinnati Antique Auto Club provided the old-time atmosphere. (Photo by Blanche Underwood)



members, for movies, meetings and several concerts a year, only OVC-ATOS to be responsible for the organ, to approve use by anyone outside of the chapter, and the organ to become ours for \$1.00 five years from the 1977 dedication by Gaylord Carter. As a result of our work and exceeding the commitment to the University, the chapter now owns the organ, three years ahead of schedule. All other contract terms are still in effect.

After the organ was removed from the Albee in 1969 and moved to the basement of the Emery complex, it was carefully disassembled and three decisions were made: (1) A complete renovation. It was stripped, cleaned, all rubber cloth replaced on tremms, all pneumatics releathered, new magnet coils on relays, tremms, regulators and other critical parts rebuilt, all pipes repaired, cleaned, lacquered and polished; (2) to prepare for increasing the stop list by eight ranks to result in a 3/27 instrument (see specification), add eight cancel pistons, a piano, two tremms, five regulators and four couplers, while not eliminating the existing 260 Special stops and mutations, and (3) utilize all original Wurlitzer components in the new additions where possible. This meant designing and building a new backboard for the console, adding a new upper row of stop keys and lengthening the bottom row to permit more second touch and trem stop keys. Hesco, Inc. of Hagerstown, Maryland, provided the new stop keys using original Wurlitzer templates. This also meant designing and building an auxiliary slider switch setter board, as the original 260 system was almost completely utilized for the existing stops. All of the original pneumatic combination action was retained, but completely rebuilt. The new upper row of stops on the backboard were equipped with a double-acting Wicks Direct Electric stop key action magnet system designed by the chapter and mounted on the backboard rail base on a shelf with aluminum connecting rods to the stop keys. The action is quick, reliable and very quiet on the 12-volt system.

While the materials were being collected and the total refurbishing started on the console, chests and pipe work, we designed our chambers and ordered them built by a local contractor who is a member of our chapter. The Emery stage is shallow and wide and there were no chambers provided

in the building. Several locations were investigated, including the wings of the balcony, the lower arch area on each side and classrooms behind the stage. All were discarded for structural reasons or poor egress of tone. The chambers were built across the back of the stage, heavily insulated with rock wool batts, with openings from five feet off the floor to the top of the chambers and all the way across both Main and Solo chambers. This provided tonal opening for the eight original Albee swell shade frames (88 shades). The tone egress is almost perfect, the only obstruction being the shades themselves. As can be seen from the photograph, the chambers are side by side, with a new added percussion chamber over the center, wherein all tuned percussions and toy counter items are located. The chambers are 22' wide by 24' high by 13½' deep, with stage level access steel doors for each one and a ladder from the Main chamber to the Percussion chamber. The chambers are all lined with Tensolite fireproof panels, hard surface finish. The ceiling of the chambers is slanted toward the audience. In the rare event of leakage on the chambers from the building roof, the water would run off and not into the chambers. The ten tremms are located on a platform under the stage with 18' to 30' wind lines. No trem noise is audible in the theatre.

The left-hand shades in each chamber open facing right and the right-

Chambers under construction.

(Photo by Blanche Underwood)





Emery Theatre exterior at the time of the dedication of the 3/19 Wurlitzer, 1977. (Photo by Blanche Underwood)

hand shades open facing left, unlike the Albee where they all opened toward the audience. This meant reversing four sets of shades, both frames and shades themselves, so that stereo sound could be achieved as in the Albee where the chambers were separated. This was quite a project as the shades in reverse position bound and fit poorly, requiring much planing and sanding to achieve the desired result. The sound permeates the theatre and is excellent at all seats. Best of all, the organist hears the sound as the audience does, not over the top of the auditorium as in proscenium installations.

The Percussion chamber shades were not present in the Albee Theatre two-chamber layout, so a set from the defunct Capitol Theatre, Cincinnati, Opus 383 Wurlitzer was obtained and these were hung horizontally facing down to project the tone into the audience. The results are really effective. The chimes are hung diatonically with the long tube in the center for visual balance.

Two years ago, through the generosity of Jack and Joan Strader, we were given an upright piano playable

from the console, which can be seen in the center of the orchestra pit. It is equipped with a spotlight which goes on two seconds after any Piano stop key is depressed.

The first operation was to completely strip and refurbish the console, remove the swell shade indicator bars, install seven Piano stop keys in their places — a piano division, enlarge the swell pedal opening to encompass an extra swell shoe for the Percussion chamber, add seven new pistons for the cancel system plus a general cancel, build a new backboard to change from a single to a double row of stops for the additions contemplated, and to refinish the console and bench in polished ebony. The original console in the Albee was off-white with red trim, with the keys badly in need of recovering, which was done in genuine ivory. The refinishing of the console was accomplished by member Hubert Shearin's company, The Manual Arts Furniture Company of Cincinnati, whose business involves service to the music industry. The pedal illumination units are Chevrolet step van shielded lights. The suitable bass system has been re-

built and restored to provide help for neophyte organists, for film accompaniment and to show what Wurlitzer designed for the silent movie era.

The cover photograph is different from those in the article because two things have been added since May 1983, when it was taken: The second piston on the right of the Solo manual for "All Trems On," and an extra stop key on the top back rail for the Krumet to be played on the Accompaniment. On the Great and Solo the stop keys will be incorporated on the bow in proper sequence. The telephone shown in this picture connects with the projection booth, backstage and the relay room (an old dressing room backstage) for organ maintenance communication. A Sforzando reversible piston is currently being added to the console.

The close-up photograph shows the new backboard and the added Piano division. The upper row of backboard stops control most of the new ranks added to the organ, plus the added Solo sub- and super-couplers. Manual bow Wurlitzer logos were used on the backboard to show the organist that these are definitely first touch added stops. The toggle switch to the right of the top row selects one of two Solo Tibia tremos, slow or fast regulation; change-over is immediate when the switch is flipped and gives the Tibia two distinct tone qualities. The Piano division occupies the space originally filled with blank bow fillers and the shade indicator bars. To the right of the tremolo toggle switch are three indicator lights: top — Master expression (green), below that — Crescendo (red), and to its right — Wind indicator (white). On the opposite end is a yellow indicator controlled by a limit switch on the vacuum bellows in the Piano, which lights when vacuum is present. Each Piano stop key has a dual contact bussed together which turns on the vacuum pump. As there is about a 1.75-second delay before full vacuum is reached, the light tells the organist the vacuum is actually present. Above was mentioned a Master expression indicator light. This Master expression is operated by the left toggle switch, center backboard, and couples all shades to the Main shoe, disconnecting the Solo and Percussion shoes. The second toggle switch from the left couples the Percussion shades to the Solo shoe, and the third connects the top bank of shades to the



Wurlitzer console before removal from the Albee Theatre, 1969.

(Photo from OVC file)

swell shoes for additional volume. These are normally closed if this switch is off. The third switch selects single stroke or re-it on the Xylophone, affecting all Xylophone stops.

We have combined the VDO and VDO Celeste into one stop key on the Great to gain space so the Musette could be added in its normal position on the bow. A 4' Quintadena was added to the Great which provides upper-work richness. Other additions on the backboard original bottom row were an Accompaniment 8' Post Horn second touch, a Chrysoglott second touch and a super-octave Solo to Accompaniment coupler second touch which makes possible considerable brilliance by adding such things as a 4' Post Horn. On the Great second touch a 16' Post Horn has been added and one additional trem stop, the Solo 2, which affects the Musette, Orchestral Flute and planned-for Krumet. On the top row we have a Gamba and Gamba Celeste played on one stop key, thus requiring no trem. For tuning purposes, there are two switches on the chest which can cut out the ground to each of these ranks.

The pistons that were added (using Reisner modular pistons) were countersunk into the piston rail, with Hesco Wurlitzer-type piston extensions pre-engraved and cut off to Wurlitzer length cemented to the piston units so that the appearance matches the existing Wurlitzer pistons. The new pistons are: Solo manual, left, Solo Cancel and Piano Cancel, and right, Trems Cancel and All Trems On; Great manual, left, Great Cancel and Traps Cancel; Accompaniment man-

ual, left, Accompaniment Cancel and Pedal Cancel, and right, General Cancel. The cancel system is not normally indigenous to this size Wurlitzer, and has given problems because of the massive air requirement when the General Cancel is pushed. Slight variances in the primary valves resulting from high humidity, which is a problem in the Emery, caused some stops to not cancel. So our electrical genius crew member, Don Campbell, designed and built a cyclic time delay relay which cancels one division at a time, starting with the Solo stops, with less than a fifth of a second between them, hardly noticeable but allowing the air to recoup in the system and providing 100% reliability.

In addition to the backboard stop key additions, an Accompaniment to Pedal 8' coupler was added to the bow in proper order, replacing the Pedal division 4' Flute. This is the only stop key that was lost in the growth.

Two toggle switches are mounted at the right end of the upper stop rail, above the Solo percussion stop keys. These are selectors, the one to the left selecting Bells or Glockenspiel when the stop key is depressed; the one on the right selects Harp, Chrysoglott, or both. The original 260 spec had Glockenspiel on one stop key and Bells on the other, thus we added two tuned percussions without adding stop keys or eliminating anything.

All primary and secondary pneumatics in the console were replaced, all new stop key contacts installed, and all key contacts and valves cleaned, re-adjusted and repaired.

The stop key mounts for the Piano division were manufactured with new pneumatics built by the chapter and an additional primary box (Wurlitzer) installed on the inside right side of the console and tubed to the stop keys.

In our master plan we envisioned and prepared for the addition of eight ranks: 8' Post Horn, 8' Gamba, 8' Gamba Celeste, 8' Musette, 8' Dulciana, 8' Orchestral Flute (inverted chimney Rohr Flute), 8' Krumet and a 32-pipe 16' Violone (metal, unmitered). All have been accomplished except the Krumet, which is presently on order (we have the chest, stop keys and switches). These stops have given the brilliance needed and the new medium and soft voices so lacking in Wurlitzer's standard design.

The five Fox Special 4/36 Wurlitzer specifications, including the original New York Paramount, were used by our chapter as the ideal toward which our ultimate specification is aimed. When the Krumet is added ours will be a 3/27. The nine other ranks in the 4/36 are two Voxes, one Tibia, two Strings, one Horn Diapason, one French Horn, one Flute and one Trumpet.

Other changes made in the basic Wurlitzer design were to remove the Main Wurlitzer Vox Humana, as our chambers are right next to each other and the need for identical Voxes on each side of the proscenium arch was no longer there. A beautiful ethereal Estey Vox was substituted which, when used with the softer Main Tibia as an antiphonal or accompaniment effect with the Solo Tibia and Wurlitzer Vox, provides a beautiful contrast. This Vox also blends well with all the medium and soft voices in the organ. For instance, when used in the Accompaniment manual at 16', 8' and 4', with the Musette, Dulciana and Orchestral Flute, it makes an unbelievably beautiful sound.

In the Albee the Solo division was double decked, but our chambers are long enough so that both solo chests were mounted end to end, with all pipe mouths at swell shade height for complete freedom of tone. The main chests are also mounted end to end. The chest bottoms are over four feet off the floor so maintenance is extremely easy. In addition, all Pedal off-set ranks (8') are mounted off the floor on the walls where possible so that again tone egress is assured. So that all 16' pipes except the Bourdon could be on untremmed regulators,

five regulators were added; one for the Gamba/Celeste, another for the Post Horn (untremmed), a Violone regulator, a Solo 2 regulator, and a low pressure pizzicato relay regulator (5"). All main relays are on static pressure, which provides fantastically quick action with the air supply more than adequate, and the contact bars are adjusted to almost touch the relay fingers.

To provide for the additions listed above, another Wurlitzer relay was sought and obtained, originally a Style H (235 3/11) Special from the Kenmore Theatre, Kenmore, New York (Opus 1225). Also acquired were a five-rank Wurlitzer chest, originally from the Royal Theatre in the Bronx, New York (Opus 1420), an 8' String chest from the Regis Theatre in Philadelphia (Opus 1063), an 8' Post Horn chest of unknown origin, two Wurlitzer tremors and the five regulators.

All of this equipment was stripped, cleaned and re-shellacked. Magnets were replaced where necessary, all magnet caps ultrasonically cleaned and new armatures installed. Primaries and secondaries were completely releathered. New cabling was used for the relay and chest from the Royal Theatre. In some cases, such as the Gamba and Gamba Celeste which were placed on Wurlitzer VDO chests, the lower 12 pipes would not fit so top boards were re-channeled and rack boards re-made. In the case of the Kenmore relay, in addition to a complete cleaning as above, including releathering all pneumatics, all new magnet coils (Arndt Organ Supply) were installed in this critical area and Alpha PVC 105 tubing (1/2" clear) was cut to the length of the magnet coil and the magnet inserted and locked in by the bridge, so that the coils are protected permanently from damage. It makes a beautiful, tight fit over the coils and completely protects the coil from chafing.

No professional help, other than the writer who has been a chapter member and has directed the program since its inception, has been used, except for regulation and voicing which was done by Joe Nagle of Cleveland (a long-time friend of the writer), as a gift to us of his talents and interest in our project.

The overall tone regulation was given optimum consideration in the restoration as well as in the additions. Retaining the original Wurlitzer



Close-up of rebuilt and expanded backboard. Changes are described in the text.

(Photo by Lodder)

sound as in the Albee was essential, and as installed in the acoustically superior and smaller Emery it became a prime consideration to carefully regulate each pipe to its maximum potential, individually and in ensemble. This took nine 12-hour days, and the results are worth every minute of the time spent. As examples, the VDO and Celeste were slightly softened and the Tuba Mirabilis was opened up to a full rich tone. The Diaphonic Diapa-

son, though very full and powerful, was retained because, with the addition of a fiery Post Horn, it is needed to fill in the ensemble to prevent an overpowering reed tonality in full organ. The tonal balance is *most* satisfying.

With the added ranks the dynamic tonal range is very effective. The delicate Dulciana (Skinner), the Orchestral (Rohr) Flute, especially built and voiced by Bob Schopp to take a deep

Rebuilt and enlarged console of the 3/27 Wurlitzer in the Emery Theatre.

(Photo by Lodder)



Tibia-type trem accentuating the upper partials and sounding like a soft metal Tibia but more delicate, and a Wurlitzer-scale Musette (Schopp) added for soft reed effects give the organ what is most lacking in many Wurlitzers, soft accompaniment stops without affecting the basic Wurlitzer ensemble sound. Now, from whisper soft to dynamic power in the Post Horn (Schopp), the smooth range of voices combined with the fabulous acoustics makes for a marriage made in theatre organ heaven.

Over the years we have had one great blessing, an unselfish, dedicated and creative crew. There have always been at least ten people available to restore, enlarge and maintain this great Wurlitzer. The crew meets for four hours each Thursday and Saturday morning. Although some have left because of health, moving away or other commitments, many of the same people have been on the crew

since 1970. The chapter owes much to them all. At present we have Don Campbell, Glenn Marriam, Bill Ahlert, Art Kessler, Ed Dooley, Ed Stadelmann, Charlie Wilhelm, Ken Aultz, Rich Kersting, Art Havlovic, Joe Deifel, Phil and Blanche Underwood, and the writer as crew chief.

As the organ is used every weekend for classic and silent movies in the Emery, operated by the chapter on a totally volunteer basis, it is kept in top shape mechanically and is tuned each Friday before the show. One of 13 capable chapter volunteer organists plays before, during intermission and at closing, with a guided tour of the chambers offered at the end of the shows. These willing chapter volunteers include Rodney Barbour, Martin Bevis, Gordon Cornell, Jack Doll, Jr., Claire Lawrence, Glenn Merriam, Gene Ostenkamp, Tote Pratt, Earl Reisdorff, Jack Strader, Dave Weingartner, Gene Wilson and Herb Wottle. Proceeds from the shows go

first to the maintenance and enlargement of the Wurlitzer, and second to help in the refurbishing of the theatre. The Emery is used only sporadically by the University, so access to the theatre and the organ is generally available.

Current plans call for Bob Ralston, who has presented six concerts for us to great public acclaim in the past two years, to play our Wurlitzer for the Afterglow of the 1984 Convention in Indianapolis in July. He knows this instrument well and calls on all its many resources with excellent effect. Hope to see you all here.

We cordially welcome any ATOSers to come, see, hear and play this Wurlitzer at any time. Just give us notice when you can come and we'll do the rest. Call me anytime at 513/861-2869 or Hubert Shearin at 513/681-5821 (day) or 513/542-5437 (night), or write me c/o OVC-ATOS, Emery Theatre, 1112 Walnut Street, Cincinnati, Ohio 45210. □

OHIO VALLEY CHAPTER - A.T.O.S.

SPECIFICATIONS OF 3M/26R (OPUS 1600) WURLITZER - EMERY THEATER - CINCINNATI, OHIO									
CHAMBER									
PEDAL - MANUALS & PITCH OF STOPS DRAWN									
MAIN	COMPASS	NO. OF PIPES	PREST.	PEDAL	ACCOMP	GREAT	SOLO		
TUBA HORN	16'-4"	85	15"	16, B, 160	B	16, B, 4	16s	16, B, 4	
DIAPHONIC DIAPASON	16'-4"	85	15"	16, B, 16s	B	16, B, 4		16, B, 4	
OPEN DIAPASON	8'-8"	61	10"	B	B	16, B, 4		B, 4	
TIBIA CLAUSA	8'-4"	73	11"	B	B	16, B, 4		16, B, 4	
VIOL D'ORCHESTRE	8'-2"	85	10"	ONE STOP KEY {	19, 16, B, 4	16, B, 4, 2		16, B, 4	
VIOL CELESTE	8'-4"	73	10"	B	B	16, B, 4		B, 4	
CLARINET	8'-8"	61	10"	B	B	16, B		B	
BOURDON-FLUTE	16'-2"	97	10"	16, B	16, B, 4, 2 1/2, 2	16, B, 4		B	
VOX HUMANA (KSTEV)	8'	61	6"	-	16, B, 4	B		B	
DULCIANA (SKINNER)	8'	49	6"	-	16, B	-		-	
SOLO									
VIOLONE (AUSTIN)	16'	32	6"	16, -	-	-		-	
POST HORN (SCHOPP)	8'	61	15"	B	-	16s		B	
TUBA MIRABILIS	8'	61	15"	B	-	B		B	
BRASS TRUMPET	8'	61	10"	-	-	B		B	
TIBIA CLAUSA	16'-2"	57	15"	16, B	B	16, B, 4, 2 1/2, 2, 1 1/2	Bs	16, B, 4	
OBOE HORN	8'-8"	61	10"	B	B	B		B	
SOLO STRING	8'-4"	73	10"	B	B	B		B, 4	
ORCHESTRAL OBOE	8'-8"	61	10"	-	-	16, B, 4		B, 4	
KINURRA	8'	61	10"	-	-	B		B	
BRASS SAXOPHONE	8'	61	10"	B	B	16, B		B	
QUINTADENA	8'	61	10"	-	-	B		B	
VOX HUMANA	8'	61	10"	-	-	19, 16, B, 4		B	
GAMBA (GOTTFRIB)	8'	61	7"	-	-	B		B	
GAMBA CELESTE (GOTTFRIB) TC	8'	49	7"	-	-	B		B	
MUSETTE (SCHOPP)	8'	61	10"	-	-	B		B	
ORCH. FLUTE (SCHOPP)	8'	49	10"	-	-	16, B		16, B	
KRUMET (TRAVIS) (PREPARED FOR)	8'	49	10"	-	-	16, B		16, B	
PERCUSSION									
XYLOPHONE		37	15"					X	X
GLOCKENSPIEL		37						X	X
BELLS		-						X	X
CHIMES		25						X	X
HARP		49						X	X
MARIMBA		-						X	X
ELEIGH BELLS		25						X	X
CURVIGLOTT		49						X	X
BASS DRUM		49						X	X
KETTLE DRUM		-						X	X
CRASH CYMBAL		-						X	X
CYMBAL		-						X	X
TRIANGLE		-						X	X
SNARE DRUM		-						X	X
TAMBOURINE		-						X	X
CASTANETS		-						X	X
CHINESE BLOCK		-						X	X
TOM TOM		-						X	X
SAND BLOCK		-						X	X
PIANO (ORCH. PIT)									
		85		16, B	B	16, B, 4		B	
COUPLERS									
TREMULO-10				AB, GB, SB	A4, SB	SB2, S4, G16, G4, SB		SB5, SB6	S16, S4
MAIN									
SOLO									
TUBA MIRABILIS									
(2) TIBIA CLAUSA (S) (FAST)									
TIBIA CLAUSA (M)									
VOX HUMANA (S)									
VOX HUMANA (M)									
TUBA DIAPHONE									
SOLO 2									
3 SWELL PEDALS MAIN/SOLO/PERC 1 CRESCENDO PEDAL 3 SWELL COUPLER SWITCHES - [MATTER TO MAIN PERC TO SOLO TOP INADEL ON] 1 SWITCH-XYLOPHONE - SINGLE STROKE COMBINATIONS:- PEDAL - 3 (FOR STUDY) PEDAL CANCEL ACCOMP - 10 / ACCOMP CANCEL GREAT - 10 / GREAT CANCEL SOLO - 10 / SOLO CANCEL TOE STUDS:- CHINESE GONG FIRE GONG TRAIN WHISTLE HORSE HOOPS PIANO LEVERS:- GRAND CRASH SFORZ THUNDER REED THUNDER DIAPHONE KEYCHECK BUTTONS:- JURY BIRD AUTO HORN SIREN * ONE STOP KEY / 4 RANKS YOO/CELESTE GAMBA/CELESTE 5 SECOND TOUCH PIZZICATO									

TOTAL PIPES - 1701

REVISED JUL., 1983

EMERY THEATRE A VERSATILE HOUSE OF THE PAST AND PRESENT

by Hubert S. Shearin

What is an ATOS chapter doing operating a theatre three nights each weekend (most weeks) that is owned by a state university? That's a fair question. The chapter is the Ohio Valley Chapter. The choice of Emery Theatre as a home for the 3/19 ex-RKO Albee Wurlitzer organ was one of great foresight by the chapter. Emery has the best acoustics of any the-

atre the city has known; its sight lines are such that all stage and screen action can be seen clearly from any seat in the theatre — no poles in anyone's way.

Emery is north of the downtown area, which has seen a steady loss of theatres in the past 15 years so that today only Emery remains, plus Taft Theatre which is a downtown house

catering to road shows. Then there is Music Hall, a 4000-seat gem which is the constantly busy home of the symphony, opera and ballet companies. There is one more small auditorium now being brought back to life, one more suited to chamber groups and such. All three houses are just barely out of the downtown area, all accessible but not subject to the mid-town commercialism.

Emery is like a beautiful lady, but in need of some cosmetic treatment. Academic priorities of the University of Cincinnati, its owner, have limited funds severely for refurbishing purposes. When the Ohio Valley Chapter began operations there in 1977 a complete refurbishing became one of our goals, and still is. But meanwhile the chapter has done so much!

For example, Emery never had a dimmer board though the theatre has long been air-conditioned. Lights in the house or on stage were either "on" or "off," nothing in between! Through the talents of member Lyman Brenneman, an electrical engineer employed by a nearby university as a physical plant administrator, the theatre was completely relit, and those charged with maintenance of the Emery saw lights working for the first time in 17 years. Keep in mind this is not an ex-movie house, but was built to be the home of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, which it was until 1926 when the orchestra moved to Music Hall because of its vastly greater seating capacity.

The electrical work didn't end with relighting the house. A dimmer board was donated by a parochial high school in Akron, Ohio, and was installed by Brenneman and his helpers to cover house lighting and reason-



able stage lighting as well. Later the chapter purchased from the University at an auction a remote-controlled dimmer board that is currently being installed. With this, house and stage lights can be operated from the projection booth as well as from the stage, and the opening and closing of the curtains will be automated and controlled from the booth, using additional equipment scrounged and rebuilt by Brenneman.

With lusty contributions from members Jack and Joan Strader, the theatre boasts the largest fly-type movie screen in Ohio. Through wise purchasing of 35mm Simplex projectors, and then having them rebuilt professionally with Xenon lamps, good movies were assured. Later those were augmented with the donation by another local college of two "low mileage" Super-Simplex projectors. Among the Straders' contributions was a new Philips 16mm projector that would take a three-hour show on one reel. Cinemascope lenses for the 35mm projectors came with the original purchase.

The chapter has now shown movies on 226 weekends since 1978, and always with only unpaid chapter members and outside volunteers. The theatre operating staff is obtained by a personnel manager fondly known as the "Body Snatcher." About 50% of staff are chapter members, 25% are members of the "Friends of OVC-ATOS," and the remainder are volunteers. Most of our non-member staff begin by volunteering through filling out a coupon on one of our monthly schedule bulletins passed out at every show. When they try it and like it many become "Friends"; then a goodly percentage submit full membership applications and become "Actives." Our staff is a mix of people interested in movies and in theatre pipe organ.

We have seven to ten persons staffing the house for each movie show, depending on our expectations for that night. On a really bad snowy, icy night it is possible to operate with a staff of three . . . it happened once! Only one show was ever called off because of bad weather, but customers showed up anyway and we never cancelled again. The staff not being present, we never knew if the customers came that night on ice skates, skis or snow-shoes.

The organist staff, all active OVC-

ATOS members, consists of 12 fine console artists, most of whom have professional experience. Scheduling is done by an organist-officer of the chapter. We have batted 1000, having never had an organist miss a date. We do admit to some close calls, but Emery Theatre and its MIGHTY WURLITZER are just too much a part of its members' lives for "play dates" to be missed.

We can't pass up our concession stand (few of our customers can, either!) and the soft drinks, candy and popcorn popped on the spot furnish a goodly portion of our income. We also operate the stand for other Emery shows, with the income staying with the chapter.

Because of our arrangements with the University we show movies only when the house is not rented at full price for other shows. We've learned it is wise to close from around Thanksgiving through the first of the year because of reduced patronage in that period, plus the need for a break for our staff.

Most of our shows are double-features. The first feature is preceded by a half hour of music on the Mighty Wurlitzer, then about 20 minutes between features (during which visits to the concession stand are encouraged), and usually the organ is played again after the second show for those with real staying power and the desire to take a tour of the chambers and relay room. This gives all doubters the chance to see that Mighty Wurlitzers truly don't have speakers!

Elsewhere in this issue is an article on the Emery organ itself by Tote Pratt. Tote is a true pipe organ professional, with 14 years experience as an organ designer-consultant for the Wicks Organ Co. Pratt began playing theatre organs at the age of 17. Like the work of all other members, Pratt's work has been strictly a labor of love.

One effect of the movie series is that for a \$2.50 admission charge people can see not only two movies of the Golden Days of Hollywood, but hear about 1½ hours of organ music. This much organ music has adversely affected box-office sales for concerts featuring out-of-town artists. Included in the double-feature movies during the year are several silent movies accompanied by members of our own staff, many of whom have become highly proficient in this silent movie art.

The chapter has been dedicated to a complete refurbishing of the theatre and organ enlargement ever since the organ was re-dedicated in 1977. Earnings of the chapter have gone not only for maintenance of equipment, but improvements and additions to the organ and to the theatre equipment, including the stage itself. The University replaced the ceiling under the balcony and the ceiling above the balcony area. Men's and ladies' lavatories on the main floor were rebuilt. Seats in excellent condition were installed in 1977, having been excess at Music Hall following a complete rebuilding of that facility. The chapter added a movie ticket machine in the box office, installed lighted display cases on the front of the theatre, again something Emery had never had. (How can the public know what is going on in a theatre if the front of the theatre doesn't shout it out?)

The relationship with the University has been one of mutual trust and cooperation. Both the chapter and the University have recognized what each was accomplishing. Prior to the installation of the organ by the chapter, Emery's main uses for many years were for occasional union meetings, minor road shows, and infrequent religious meetings. There was a period when a Baptist Church used Emery regularly, following a serious fire at their own church and a period of rebuilding. One thing every Baptist Church needs is a baptistry for immersion of new members. So one was installed under the stage and was made usable by removing a panel of the floor at stage left-center. The baptistry is still there and can be viewed from the level below the stage where the organ tremis and blower are installed.

During Emery's period of relative darkness, even its very existence was forgotten by most of the citizenry. Chapter members were deluged by comments like: "Emery? Is that still there?" and "What's Emery? Where is it?"

By the frequency of our shows and repetitive advertising in the local newspapers in seven ads per week, spot commercials on Cincinnati's "Music of Your Life" station WMLX, and by bulletins mailed to several thousand persons each month, as well as these bulletins being placed in strategic spots in the business community, Emery again is pretty well known. Members are often

shocked when someone says they didn't know about us, and why on earth don't we advertise? (They should see the chapter's ad bills!)

What's the future of Emery? We hope it will continue to be a performing arts facility of the University. Its downtown location means local people can easily find it. Functions on the main University campus don't draw the "locals" as well because they find the campus confusing. Students and UC alumni know their way around the campus; others often hesitate.

Emery seats 1364 persons on two floors. There is an unused gallery that if made usable would bring the house capacity to about 2000 seats.

Another donation of the Straders was the spacious projection booth at

the rear of the orchestra level. Automatically heated or air-conditioned year round, this now houses two active 35mm projectors, the 16mm projector, and a slide projector.

Emery's stage is wide but the installation of the chambers used a lot of the depth. The stage has always been more usable for concert work than elaborately staged productions because the wing space is very limited.

During the six years of movies at Emery, the chapter has seen a steady growth of public support. This can only lead to the chapter being able to do more things to improve Emery, and eventually to participate in a complete refurbishing. Even though not built as a movie house, it is the only remaining theatre in Cincinnati

built in the grand style. (The fairyland of lights in the ceiling and the proscenium arch always attract attention.) Weekend parking at Emery is good; plenty of parallel street parking, and the free use of a lot across the street from the theatre through the courtesy of the Kroger Company.

Ohio Valley Chapter edged into the movie series. It started on a summer trial of 13 weeks. It was repeatedly renewed so that movies at Emery are part of downtown Cincinnati. And what better place can be found to hear a theatre pipe organ than in a large acoustically perfect theatre? The chapter feels they are fulfilling the purpose of ATOS by using their organ with movies. That's where it all started, isn't it? □

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