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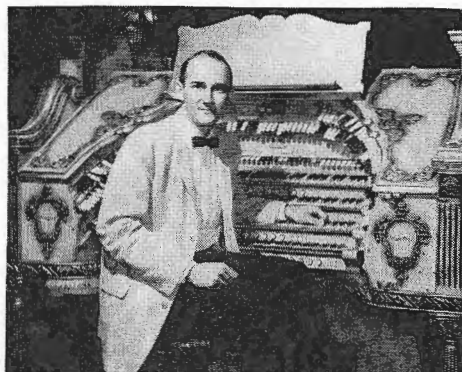
VIRG HOWARD AT THE CONSOLE
OF THE TOLEDO PARAMOUNT
WURLITZER

Paramount Organ Restored

(In the August 1961 issue of the POSTHORN there appeared a column account of the restoration of a water-damaged Wurlitzer which hadn't been heard in its entirety for some 28 years. The story somehow "caught on" and many letters came to the POSTHORN asking for further information. We assigned our wandering reporter to the story and promptly forgot about it. A short time ago we received a huge envelope full of the goodies which follow. It's a story of a cooperative effort sparked by the determination of **VIRG HOWARD**

The Toledo Paramount "Publix No.1" organ was manufactured and installed in the theater during construction of the building in 1928 by the Wurlitzer Company. It was first played publicly on Saturday, Feb. 16, 1929. To play it, Dwight Brown, one of the flashiest organ masters in the country, was lured from the great Palace Theatre in Dallas, where his popularity with the Texans had kept him at their consoles for six years.

It was a large and well appointed theatre, typical of it's era in its ornateness, gold leaf, striking lobby and passageway lighting and its imitation sky ceiling--truly a temple of the cinema. In addition to the starlight ceiling, (complete with projected clouds), which was often beyond the comprehension of moviegoers, there were many other works of art. A Chicago plaster contractor had received a check for \$400,000 for the statues and other plaster gingerbread around the place--of which there is much. The switchboard, operated by Eddie Peters (who went to work for the Paramount in 1928) and sometimes assisted by as many as six additional electricians, generated 200,000 watts of power, more consumption than the average town of 30,000 uses in an evening. There were sunset glows and temple lighting and 2500 bulbs used along stairways, not one of which could be seen by the audience. More than 3,000 lighting combinations were possible with the control panel backstage. The theater in 1928 seated 3450. With the advent of Cinerama many orchestra seats were removed for better vision, and the second and third balcony seats are unused. At the present time the house seats 1250.



Virg Howard at the Console of the mighty **WURLITZER** ORGAN

In 1931 the depression came to Toledo, and in 1933 the rains came to the Paramount. Water leaked through the fabulous blue ceiling with the twinkling stars and the moving clouds, causing extensive damage to the Solo (right) chamber. The water damaged parts were removed at that time and emergency repairs were taken care of by The Toledo Pipe Organ Company. However, in the past 28 years no authorization was ever given to complete repairs (1933 cost went to \$1500.00) and the parts were carefully stored at Toledo Pipe Organ for this period. So, the organ had not been played in its entirety for the past 28 years, and was lacking four ranks of pipes--Tuba Mirabilis, Brass Tu Trumpet, Brass Saxophone, and Solo Tibia. Also, some percussions were damaged by the water.

In 1960 Virg Howard, Sales Manager of the Organ Department at the Bleckner Music Company, stirred up interest in the organ. When the Paramount Theater needed an organ for the opening of Cinerama, they called on Bleckner to provide it. A Wurlitzer Electronic organ, Model 4602, with four Leslie Speakers, was installed in the rising orchestra pit and played for the two-day Premiere showing of "This Is Cinerama", 21 and 22 November 1960 by Mr. Howard. It was at this Premiere that Virg Howard had the opportunity to talk with the Manager and the Owners of the Paramount and presented them with an offer to rebuild the Mighty Wurlitzer Pipe Organ valued at \$55,000-----in 1928.

The Toledo Pipe Organ Company and the Bleckner Music Company, both of Toledo integrated labor and material as well as financial forces into rebuilding the mighty Wurlitzer. In actual pecuniary value, this amounted to about \$2000 in material and at least a similar amount in labor. On a contract basis this job would have cost the theater approximately \$5000. It was only because of the

careful storage of pipes and wind chests at Toledo Pipe Organ and much volunteer labor from both companies that such an undertaking could even be attempted. To further culture in Toledo, the two companies agreed to do the repair and rebuilding of the organ free of charge.

Here's Virg Howard's own account of the repair job. "For the most part repairs went smoothly, just being very time consuming. We refinished the pedals, and while they were removed we discovered that nearly all of the pedal contacts were badly bent and twisted together and required straightening. As we progressed with this job we continually got more ciphers and shorted notes as we went up the scale, (a two day job), but miraculously, as we finished with the last pedal contact every one worked perfectly.

"With the installation of the Cinerama screen which half-circles around the theater, the console would rise directly under the screen. This necessitated moving the console on its elevator. We had just 18½ inches that we could move it to the right and it took three of us one full day to accomplish this. The main problem was to cut a new wind hole through the floor of the elevator platform which was five inches thick (the top inch being hard wood) and the space available only permitted use of a ¼ inch electric drill. It took a lot of ¼ inch holes to cut out a 4x4" square!

"When we finally got to doing some work on the console itself we discovered that all the Great Pistons were "generals" (affecting all manuals) on 1st. touch. After lifting the manuals, we found all contacts were working perfectly and could see no immediate cause for this General operation. By checking further we located extra wiring in the console and determined that someone had gone to a lot (and

I do mean a lot) of extra work, permanently wiring all the Great Pistons to all keyboards. We started by cutting out all of this extra wire (nearly half a bushel basket full) and upon completion of this process the entire combination action worked as it was supposed to. With the great stops acting first, and then functioning as Generals on second touch, we solved one problem by getting rid of a mess of extra wires.

"A similar experience occurred in the relay room. There were a few shorts in the organ so that when you played one note you got another one along with it. (3 of these shorts were on the Great). We discovered an extra cable wired into three or four parts of the relay, and as we cut one of these wires, the shorts would correct themselves, but in turn, this same note would go out on the piano. From this we decided, the piano must have been installed later, or at least the wiring to it was rigged later than the main organ wiring. When we complained about this to the head electrician at the theatre, he asked if we knew about the extra keyboard. Of course, we did not. He then took me to the basement to a prop room and promptly came up with a 61 note manual with four combination pistons on it. This was a homemade device, with the keyboard being from an old Wurlitzer player piano-organ. It took only a minute to find the cable leading back stage, and to discover that many, many wires were shorted at the end of this cable where it had been crudely disconnected and coiled up to get it out of the way. We then cut the entire cable loose at the relay, and again things worked out fine. It was amazing however, that the three notes on the piano that went out as we disconnected this cable were caused by improper adjustment of the magnets on the piano action--strictly coincidence."

All of which, directs attention to the remarkable young man who spearheaded the campaign to rehabilitate the Toledo Paramount "Publix No. 1")

We learned that Virg Howard was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1930, and moved to Columbus, Ohio, in 1940. At the completion of High School in 1947 he worked one year prior to entering college at the University of Cincinnati. It was during this year that he attended the Ohio State Fair and happened upon an exhibit of electronic organs. Arrangements were made and Virg started taking organ lessons the next week--No, he didn't buy one! All practice was done at one of the local churches for the nominal sum

of \$.35 per hour for the use of the largest church organ in the city. Two months after starting lessons he played a wedding at the church. He continued organ lessons for a two year period when not in school, and while in Cincinnati, played the Paramount Theater Organ prior to show-time in the evenings. After two years in Cincinnati Virg transferred to Ohio State University and played Smith's Roller Rink in Columbus to provide additional funds while in college. His major was Industrial Engineering and Industrial Photography which he did for three and one-half years with the U.S. Army as Chief of the Photo Branch of the Army Electronic Proving Grounds in Arizona. While in the service, Virg organized a trio (organ, sax and drums) and played extensively through central and southern Arizona. Upon return to civilian life, Virg moved with his family (wife-Elizabeth, and daughter-Lisa Anne) to Toledo, and accepted a position with the Bleckner Music Company where he is presently employed. So much for the young man who started things moving at the Paramount.

--About the Toledo Paramount Organ CONSOLE--The four manual Wurlitzer console is located to the left of the rising orchestra pit on its own independent elevator and can be brought into view of the audience either by controls at the console or by a similar control located on the main switchpanel backstage. There are buzzer buttons to the projection booth and to the switchpanel backstage that can be operated by the organist to signal the end of his solo:

PIPEWORK--The organ is laid out in two chambers under expression, the Main on the left and the Solo on the right side of the theater. A third open chamber is located on the left side of the theater under the Main pipe chamber. It houses the Master Xylophone and the Piano. The Piano, an upright Wurlitzer of 88 notes, has an electro-vacuum action with four stages of vacuum which varies the piano's volume as the General swell pedal is operated at the organ console. The General Swell Pedal also has the piano sustaining control button on the upper right hand corner. As part of the piano, there is a mandolin attachment, a small wooden rod, hinged on each end of the piano, to which are attached leather fingers, each of which has a small metal clip on the end. The hinged arrangement allows one of the fingers to drop into

place in front of each piano hammer, resulting in the metal clip on the end of each finger being struck by the piano hammer and, in turn, striking the strings and producing a peculiar metallic twang. The mandolin attachment is controlled by the Mandolin stop of the Accompaniment manual and causes the Mandolin to sound on any other manual when the Piano stop is depressed.

PERCUSSIONS--Some of the special effects available on the organ include two harps: Chrysoglott 'Metal Harp' (or Vibraharp if the motor-tremolo is turned on), standard Wood Harp, two Xylophones, a Marimba, Auto Horn, two Bird Whistles, Crash Cymbal, Sand Block, two degrees of thunder, 25 cathedral chimes (undamped, and 25 tuned sleigh bells, plus a full size bass drum and a standard snare drum actuated by depressing certain keys and pushbuttons on the console.

WIND SUPPLY--Located in the basement of the theatre is the blower room with it's 10 H.P. Spencer Orgoblo to provide wind for the pipes and percussion devices of the organ at 15" wind pressure, along with filters (similar to those used in home heating systems) to purify the air before being sent to the pipes.

GENERATOR--Located in the relay room, a motor generator provides the D.C. current necessary for the operation of the organ's hundreds of magnets.

ELEVATOR--The motor on the elevator is a 5 H.P. intermittent duty motor driving a mechanical jack-screw type lift.

ANALYSIS OF RANKS:PARAMOUNT WURLITZER 4-20 Opus 2006, 12-31-1928 Toledo, Ohio

| | |
|-------------|-----------------------|
| MAIN:-- | Tuba Horn |
| Left side | Open Diapason |
| of Theatre | Tibia Clausa |
| | Solo String 1 |
| | Viol D'Orchestra |
| | Viol Celeste |
| | Clarinet |
| | Bourdon-Flute |
| | Dulciana |
| | Vox Humana |
| MAIN | Chrysoglott, Damper & |
| Percussions | Vibraharp |
| & effects: | Chrysoglott |
| | Bird Chirp |

| | |
|------------|-----------------|
| SOLO: | Tuba Mirabilis |
| Right side | Brass Trumpet |
| of Theatre | Tibia Clausa |
| | Quintadena |
| | Oboe Horn |
| | Solo String 2 |
| | Orchestral Oboe |
| | Kinura |
| | Brass Saxophone |
| | Vox Humana |

| | |
|--------------|----------------------|
| SOLO | Sleigh bells & |
| Percussions | Xylophone |
| & effects | Marimba (Harp) |
| | Chimes (25 notes) |
| | Glockenspiel (bells |
| | Re-it) |
| | Bass Drum (2 supple- |
| | mentary beaters= |
| | kettle drum) |
| | Snare Drum (single |
| | strike) |
| | TOM TOM |
| | Tambourine |
| | Castanets |
| | Chinese Block |
| | Sand Block |
| | Bird Chirp |
| | Horses Hoof Beats |
| | Train Whistle |
| | Fire Gong |
| | Auto Horn |
| | Triangel (available |
| | acc. 2nd touch only) |
| OPEN CHAMBER | Wurlitzer Upright |
| On Left | Piano |
| beneath Main | Master Xylophone |

To bring readers up to the minute we contacted Virg Howard just before we went to press. He states that nearly all the "bugs" have been ironed out of the big instrument "which is used for as many performances as I can possibly play for." Best news of all is that the Paramount management is solidly in favor of using the organ and plans a promotion campaign involving it shortly--perhaps a free LP record to every lady attending a given show. What's to be on the LP? Virg Howard at the Mighty Wurlitzer -- naturally.

- Hal Steiner