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Theatre Organ Club
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Theatre Organ World Mourns Passing of Jesse Crawford

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VIRG HOWARD AT THE CONSOLE
OF THE TOLEDO PARAMOUNT
WURLITZER
Paramount Organ Restored

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 25 years no authorization was ever given to complete repairs (1933 cost went to $100.00) 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 25 years, and was lacking four ranks of pipes--Tuba Mirabilis, Brass 3rd Trumpet, Brass Saxophone, and Solo Tuba. 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 Cinemas, 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 Cinemas", 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 1962.

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 $20,000 in material and at least a similar amount in labor. On a contract basis this job would have cost the theater approximately $5,000. 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 refinited 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 Cinemas 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 1½ 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 ½ inch electric drill. It took a lot of ½ inch holes to cut out a 4x6" 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 last 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, 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 loose device, with the keyboard being from an old Wurlitzer stage 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 re-habilitate the Toledo Paramount ("public 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 showtime 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 Blecker 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:

PIPECWORK---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.

WIND SUPPLY---Located in the basement of the theatre is the Blower, driven by a 15 HP Spencer Sprogotho 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, 12-11-1928 Toledo, Ohio

MAIN---Tuba Horn
Left side of Theatre Tickla Clausn
Solo String 1
Viol D'Orchestra
Viol Celeste
Clarinet
Bourdon-Flute
Dulciana
Voix Humana

MAIN Chrysozgott, Damper & Perccussions

SOLO---Tuba Mirabilis
Right side of Theatre
Sirenet, Trumpet
Tickla Clausn
Quint-Adenas
Oboe Horn
Solo String 2
Orchestral Oboe
Kinura
Brass Saxophone
Voix Humana
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<tr>
<th>SOLO</th>
<th>Sleigh bells &amp; Xylophone</th>
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<tr>
<td>Percussions &amp; effects</td>
<td>Marimba (Harp)</td>
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<td>Chimes (25 notes)</td>
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<td>Glockenspiel (bells Re-it)</td>
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<td>Bass Drum (2 supplementary beaters= kettle drum)</td>
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<td>Snare Drum (single strike)</td>
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<td>TOM,TOM</td>
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<td>Tambourine</td>
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<td>Castanets</td>
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<td>Chinese Block</td>
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<td>Train Whistle</td>
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<td>Fire Gong</td>
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<td>Auto Horn</td>
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<td>Triangel (available acc. 2nd touch only)</td>
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**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