

THE WURLITZER ORGAN IN ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL
PARK, GARDENA, CALIFORNIA

The idea of a theatre organ installed in a cemetery is, perhaps, an accident of both time and place. It could happen only in Southern California. So much for the place. It would seem reasonable also to assume that it could happen only in So. California during the 1920's which takes care of the time. How it happened that a theatre instrument was selected to provide music for funerals has never been explained, but let's be thankful that events shaped up the way they did because the result is a most extra-ordinary instrument, one of perhaps three or four in the super-power class. Robert Hope-Jones, the developer of high wind pressure ranks, had installed a Tuba requiring 50 inches of wind pressure as far back as 1907 in his Ocean Grove, New Jersey Auditorium installation. This was a radical departure when one considers that until the Hope-Jones experiments with various pressures, all organs operated on from 2 to 6 inches pressure, and many still do. The majority of theatre organ ranks are voiced for 10 inches pressure with an occasional Tuba, Diapason or Tibia requiring 15 inches as a solo stop. The Wurlitzer style 285 has a Tuba Mirabilis and perhaps an English Post-horn operating on 25 inches, but pressures beyond are rare in theatre organs. Therefore, the Roosevelt Park organ, with pressures from 15 to 50 inches is unique. Everything in the organ is built to a huge scale. Basically the setup is similar to the pipe complement of a style 260 Special, although the console hints strongly of the early style 285's. But let's begin at the beginning. Following is an item from the April 1925 issue of the DIAPASON.

ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL REACHES LOS ANGELES --
GREAT WORK BY WURLITZER

Large Instrument for Park being Erected
after Interesting Tour from North
Tonawanda Across the Continent

April 1925--The Rudolph Wurlitzer Co. has completed at its factory in North Tonawanda and shipped to the Pacific Coast the large organ constructed by it for Roosevelt Memorial Park at Los Angeles. This instrument has attracted widespread attention because of its size, location and some of its features. It was shipped from No. Tonawanda on February 16 in a special

train of 12 cars and from that time until its arrival in Los Angeles, March 6, was admired by people all along the route across the continent, by way of St. Louis and Kansas City. H. G. Witler, Manager of the Roosevelt Memorial Park accompanied the train and made short talks at various stopping places on the qualities and significance of the instrument.

The organ is to go into four especially built chambers which speak into the open air and the console is to be placed 150 feet from the organ in a building especially prepared for it. The wind pressures on this organ are 15, 25, 35 and 50 inches and the scale of pipes used is large, in proportion to the wind pressure. The instrument is blown by a Spencer ORGOBLO with a 50 horsepower motor.

It has taken almost a year to construct this organ and the result has been very satisfactory. The Diapasons are declared to be remarkable in the full, round foundation tone they furnish. The strings are majestic in quality. The reeds are brilliant and the builders are looking forward to a wonderful success when this installation is completed in the building prepared for it.

The scale of the 32 foot diaphone is 42 inches square at the large end of the tapered CCCC tube. This is one of the stops voiced on 50 inch wind. The organ has an automatic player attachment. It will be installed in its own marble building in the Los Angeles Park and the console will be in another building 75 feet distant, in order that the organist may hear his own music.

The idea of placing an organ in a Park dedicated to the memory of Theodore Roosevelt originated from the fact that he often expressed himself as enjoying an organ more than any other instrument.

The instrument was installed between the time of its arrival in April and August 1925, and the obstacles encountered were many. In charge of the installation was Val Holzinger, aided and abetted by Henry Lytthins and Francis Sullivan. Much of the trouble encountered was due to the high wind pressure features of the instrument.

The factory had evidently assumed that primary valves and magnets designed for use on 10 and 15 inches would work as well on 50 inches of pressure. The installers learned the hard way that performance under such conditions would be erratic at best. Shortly after the organ had been dedicated it was decided that it would never operate properly without some radical changes. The ball was tossed back to Wurlitzer. This resulted in Wurlitzer hiring James H. Nuttall, onetime head voicer for Robert Hope Jones and a veteran of H-J's early work with high pressure. Nuttall decided to get the primary valves and magnets out of the high pressure area. He and Henry Lythins rebuilt the chests so that each had a high and low pressure section, the latter to accomodate those parts designed for 10 to 15 inches of pressure. This move cleared up the worst of the action difficulties. To keep the 50 hp blower cool it was designed to operate with a fine spray of water cooling the air as it fed into the blower intake. The resulting evaporation tended to cool the inside of the blower. The cooling system worked well for awhile, then someone forgot to turn off the water. Result: flooding. By the time the deluge had been discovered, several inches of water had gotten into the wind supply ducts and had been conducted to wooden parts where the water damage was considerable. Worst of all it ran down the wind line to the console pit and the console was found submerged in water. In time, most of the difficulties were overcome and during the '30s the huge instrument was heard quite regularly by Gardenians and visitors.

This installation is a prime example of Wurlitzer's determination to do or die. The instrument sold for \$50,000, only \$3,000 over the price of a standard 14 rank style 260 despite the fact that nearly all parts and certainly all pipework had to be especially designed and built. But the rework, which went on for years after the installation, cost Wurlitzer an additional \$50,000--practically a 200% loss.

Next let's examine the organ's stop-list as submitted by Mike Cahill, the instrument's present organist and protector.
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GAYLORD CARTER AND LON CHANEY STAR IN ANCIENT SILENT SMOCKER

Highland Park, (LA), Calif. Oct 17-- It was old time movie night at the Artisan Music Hall last night with the "Flicker Fingers" presentation of the venerable silent masterpiece, "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" with Lon Chaney playing the monster and Gaylord Carter playing the Artisan. Starring, besides Chaney, lovely Patsy Ruth Miller, brave Norman Kerry and Scheming Ernest Torrance, the heraldry, brutality, beauty and ugliness of those ancient days as produced by Carl Laemmle's Universal Studio over 35 years ago was reflected in the mostly improvised scoring of hard working organist Gaylord Carter at the now 3 manual Artisan theatre organ, with better than 150 watts of audio power to practically raise the roof during the turbulent sequences which were many in this fast paced 1925 silent. For a love theme (Norman and Patsy Ruth) Gaylord used a soaring "Romance" by Rubenstein. However, we caught him slipping in a non-obvious slice of "I Can't Get Started With You" when the course of true love did a flip. His untrem'd cathedral theme, based on a Cesar Franck "Kyrie" was done straight. It was impressive. Gaylord's score was usually broad in scope and often quite loud, especially for this reviewer who parks in the "baldhead" row from force of habit. But interest never lagged. Gaylord milked the picture for all it was worth and it was a million dollar production. The Artisan sounded the best ever, with much improvement in the tremulants (now separated into "trem's" and "vibratos") and in the tuba and big flute sound, thanks to the voicing performed by TOC's Secretary, Frank Candelaria, on the tone generators, a job he completed just before this show. Toy counter and glockenspiel now operate from the manuals, and Gaylord made effective use of them. We were told that the Artisan shop crew (Clarence Hansen, Jim Carr, Frank et al) worked hard and long to get the organ in prime condition for the show. We can report only one inadequacy. Those who know the story of the Hunchback will recall that he was the bell ringer for the huge cathedral. The many scenes which showed Chaney swinging on the bell rope were cued soundwise with a single tubular chime which somehow failed to even remotely suggest the tolling of several huge bells shown in the sequences. But no one minded. It was too satisfying to see a fine film with live musical accompaniment to dwell on trifles, although
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STOPLIST FOR THE 4-17 WURLITZER ORGAN IN ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL PARK

ANALYSTS

MAIN CHAMBER

Clarinet 61
Gamba 73
Vdo 85 25" wind
Gamba Celeste 73
Viol Celeste 73
Flute 85

Horn Diapason 85 35" wind

SOLO CHAMBER

Vox Humana 73 15" wind
Orch. Oboe 61
String Gamba 73
Open Diapason 61
Tibia Clausa 85 35" wind
Tromba 73

FOUNDATION CHAMBER

Tibia Plena 61
Diaphonic Diapason 85 50" wind

BRASS CHAMBER

Tuba Mirabilis 85
English Posthorn 73 50" wind

-STOPLIST-

64' Diaphone (res)
32' Bombard (res)
32' Diaphone
16' Bombard
16' Diaphone
16' Double English Horn
16' Trombone
16' Horn Diapason
16' Tibia Clausa
16' Gamba
8' Tuba Mirabilis
8' English Posthorn
8' Trombo
8' Tibia Clausa
8' Cello
8' Acc to ped.
8' Gt to Ped.
8' Orch. to Ped.
8' Solo to Ped.
Bass Drum

ACCOMP

16' Horn Diapason
16' Vox Humana
8' Tromba
8' Horn Diapason
8' Tibia Clausa
8' Clarinet
8' Viol d'orch
8' Viol Celeste
8' Flute

(accomp continued)

8' Vox Humana
4' Octave
4' Viol
4' Viol Celeste
4' Flute
4' Vox Humana
16' Sub Octave
8' Unison off
4' Octave
16' Orch. to acc.
8' Orch to acc.
4' Orch to acc.
Snare Drum
Marimba
Harp

GREAT

16' Bombard
16' Double English Horn
16' Trombone
16' Gamba
8' Tuba Mirabilis
8' English Posthorn
8' Tromba
8' Diaphonic Diapason
8' Open Diapason
8' Tibia Plena
8' String Gamba
8' Gamba
8' Gamba Celeste
8' Clarinet
8' Flute
4' Tuba
4' Piccolo
4' Gambette
4' Gambette Celeste
4' Flute
2 2/3' twelfth
2' Piccolo
1 3/5' Tierce
Tower chimes
16' acc. tp gt.
8' acc. to gt.
8' orch. to gt.
8' solo to gt.
4' acc. to gt.

ORCHESTRAL

16' Gamba
8' English Horn
8' Tromba
8' Open Diapason
8' Tibia Clausa
8' Orch. Oboe
8' String Gamba
8' Gamba
8' Gamba Celeste

8' Viol d'orch.
8' Viol Celeste
8' Clarinet
8' Vox Humana
4' Piccolo
4' Gambette
4' Gambette Celeste
4' Viol
4' Viol Celeste
2' Fifteenth
16' Sub. Oct.
8' Unison off
4' Octave
Acc. to Orch.
Tower chimes
Marimba
Harp

SOLO

16' Bombard
16' Tibia Clausa
8' Tuba Mirabilis
8' English Horn
8' Diaphonic Diapason
8' Tibia Plena
8' Tibia Clausa
8' Orch. Oboe
8' String Gamba
8' Gamba
4' Tuba
4' Piccolo
16' Orch. to solo
8' Orch. to solo
4' Orch. to solo
PEDAL PIZZICATO
16' Bombard

Acc. 2nd touch

16' Horn diapason
8' Tromba
8' Tibia Clausa
Chimes
Orch to acc.
Orch to Acc Pizzicato Gt.2nd T.
16' Bombard
8' English Horn
8' Tibia Plena
Solo to Gt.

Solo to Gt. Pizzicato
Orch. 2nd touch

16' Gamba
8' English Horn
8' Open Diapason
Acct. to Orch.
Acct. to Orch. Pizz
Tremulants

Brass (2)

Solo (2)
Foundation (2)

Tremulants continued

Main

Vox Humana

Tibia Clausa

Horn Diapason not affected by tremulant.

4 expression pedals with indicators and swell couplers

1 master expression pedal

1 crescendo pedal

1 sforzando pedal

3 thunder pedals: 1. 16' Tibia
2. 16' Bombard
3. 32' Diaphone

Ten double touch pistons on first three manuals, (acc., gt., orch.) The first three manuals also have suitable bass and release on each. Three pedal pistons. The console is standard plain mahogany four-manual with two rows of stop keys. It is situated about 100 feet in front of the chamber building and sunk about 4 ft. in the ground in a greenhouse-type glass-roofed building.

The following article was written for the POSTHORN by Mike Cahill, a young man who "got the bug" only seven years ago. But Mike was hit hard and his life ever since has been a succession of organ rehabilitations, mostly in theatres. He often paid for repair parts out of his own pocket, not to mention the hours and days he devoted to his hobby. His story will be the subject of a future POSTHORN article. Here's Mike's own story of his discovery of the slumbering stentor in Roosevelt Park.

MY SLEEPING BEAUTY WITH THE LEATHER LUNGS

by Mike Cahill

Someone once told me of an organ that they thought was a Wurlitzer that could be heard for five miles. I said they were nuts. It would have had to be out of doors.. ..and that's exactly what I found a few months later when I finally located it.... in a cemetery! Little does anyone know that Los Angeles possesses the Mightiest Wurlitzer of them all. In the Wurlitzer shipping list it is known only as "Opus 998, a 4 manual Special" dated 2/18/25.

It was opened on a Sunday afternoon in August, 1925, by Clarence Reynolds who, because of wind supply troubles, played but one number to a crowd of about 20,000. The first regular organist was Harold Dick who

played from 1925 to 1928, then by TOC member Frank Woode from 1929-1931. Frank was followed by Chase Sweetser Jr. from '31 until the memorable Long Beach earthquake brought down the chamber building roof. Pipes were bent, broken and lost. One of the main wind trunks cracked and blew apart. The giant blower's thermostatic water cooling system on the high pressure output got fouled up and stuck open. Water got into all the 35 and 50 inch wind chests. These sets were out of commission for more than 28 years to come. This deluge was a repetition of one which took place shortly after the instrument was installed. On that occasion, even the console was found floating. In 1939-40 the 32' diaphones acted up, so the wind supply was cut off, the wiring and ground returns pulled out and the cable torn off at the spreader. Around the same time it was decided that the drums and marimba were of no use so out they came. In the late '40s came the Compton earthquake and down came the roof again. Same thing all over. By that time not many ranks played anyway, so those still speaking were used without maintenance--just an echo of its former majesty. In 1959 it was rendered unplayable and was for the first time silent. In August of 1960 I agreed to get it going once more, so that the glory of the mightiest Wurlitzer might be heard once more. What confronted me the first day was enough to make one cry. Pipes missing, broken and never repaired, loose wiring all over. Tremulants not working. About 15% of the organ played and not very well. All the ivories save a dozen had become unglued from their keys. When I started rebuilding I started on the ranks which had been out for so long as a result of the water damage. All the 35" and 50" wind ranks have individual chests of doubly thick wood and clamps to keep them together. That is what saved them from being warped but the pneumatics, some pipe valves and primary valves were beyond repair. All the pneumatics had blown apart and most of the wood cracked or warped. Some had fallen off into the chest. I used what I could salvage or made new ones. Most of the pipes valves were all right but had to be equipped with new leather. So far 7 of the water damaged ranks have been re-leathered and now play perfectly, although the open Diapason is still missing some secondary pneumatics. The console keys

have been re-ivoried, the chimes and marimba reinstalled and rewired. All of the dead console stop keys have been reconnected. The tremulants have been releathered and rewired and now work. The 32' Diaphones have been rewired and rewinded. Those deep tones really sound out across the Park. In fact they started knocking plaster off the ceiling and little pieces kept clogging the Posthorn and Tuba Mirabilis pipes in the Brass and Foundation chambers. The ceilings had to be resurfaced with prestwood. In February, when I got the thing together to the point where it would play I was asked if I'd like the job of organist. I have been playing it for services and Sunday concerts ever since.

Reading all that history aroused the curiosity of ye olde editor. Why not an ear-witness account of one of the Sunday afternoon open-air concerts? So, on the very next Sunday we grabbed our handy-dandy portable tape recorder hopped into our bug and headed through the world's most miserable traffic down the Freeway (freeway indeed--it costs a million a mile) for Gardena. Somehow we made it in one piece. We had no trouble locating the Park; the VW just locked onto the beam being transmitted by a distant Diaphone. But let's relive those tense moments as we approached the great event by turning on the tape recorder:

Voice: We're slowly approaching the organ at Roosevelt Memorial Park by Volkswagen. Perhaps in the background you can hear the organ roaring out across the meadows on a Sunday afternoon, a beautiful sunny autumn day. We enter the park. We pull up to the curb here, park our car under a tree just as Mike Cahill blasts out a final chorus of "If I Loved You". This is an immense instrument and it is really thundering. I have to talk up to hear myself and I am about 150 feet away from it, one of the loudest theatre organs this reviewer has heard. It also has some beautiful soft stuff. I hear some Diapason in there now, and strings. The organ pipework is housed in what appears to be a chapel at the side of the cemetery. It is a long narrow cemetery and the organ chamber building is located over to one side, facing across the parkway. It is an instrument easily heard all over the cemetery and probably in most

parts of the surrounding town. There is a gentle wind blowing out here on this Sunday afternoon in Gardena about 2:30, just a slight wind, otherwise a beautiful day, not too warm. Occasionally an automobile drives by slowly and the driver jams on his brakes to stop and listen. There is a small crowd out here, people who have some probably on account of the article seen in the POSTHORN or heard on the radio. A little knot of the curious has gathered around the console which is in a little cubicle--I don't know what to call it, a sort of glass-topped pyramid about a 100 feet away from the pipework proper, away from the chambers. This organ seems to be mostly under expression. There are some lovely strings swelling up now, and the most colossal bass I have ever heard anyplace. There is a 32' Diaphone in there that really gets out. Mike is playing popular tunes. I have not been able to keep up with all of them, but he is playing in a very Crawford-like style. He seems just to roll from one tone to another. I just took a fast glance down in the console pit--it's in a hole about four feet deep--and there sits Mike at a rather beat-up looking horseshoe console rolling out some thunderous chords on the brass. There is an outstanding posthorn, also quite a few pipes that need tuning badly, especially in the reeds. But the Wurlitzer theatre organ sound is really there. The tremulants seem to be well adjusted and it has a massive effect, despite zero reverb, that one would connect with the old cinema cathedral monsters. The little cubicle that I mentioned which houses the console has a slanted roof with several windows. I don't know at this time how the organist can hear what he's playing in the tiny console house. Perhaps the windows toward the swell shades are open. Yes--they are. There goes some of that brobdingnagian bass again. Some good string tones coming thru--low reeds; this is quite an instrument. I haven't heard any percussions yet, but there comes a vox and string chorus which has an outstanding quality to it. As most of you know this was brought here in about 1925 from the Wurlitzer Co., in North Tonawanda and as it was brought by train across the country there were lectures given about it at many a whistle stop to let the people know what a great instrument was being brought out here to be installed in this Memorial Park. Mike is now thundering

through "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" and he is using a 2 footed pedal part on the giant Diaphone that is just short of deafening at 100 feet. Now a lot more people are coming into the Park. Probably attracted from a distance by the sound of the organ. Some come in cars, some just walking. This is a rather interesting cemetery. There are no headstones in it; it is all perfectly flat. There are plenty of shade trees in the area for hot days, and for a graveyard it's an altogether pleasant place.

There is quite a mob here now, just standing around and listening. There is no place to sit down unless one sits on the grass as we are doing. Now some people are walking right up to the grille-work and looking in. The sound must be ear-shattering! The swell shutters are visible through a screen grille. They are set back about 15 feet from the front of the chapel-like building which contains the organ chambers. Another car just came by filled with people and they all are sticking their heads out of the windows. I wish they would go on by--they are cutting off the music. They are going to pull up and stop. Now they are piling out in droves. Mike is getting real loud now. He's got the swells wide open now and just listen to that blast of music! Now Mike is playing a very familiar arrangement of "Beloved" which seems to come right off the grooves of the old 78 rpm Crawford record. There is a good tuba sounding out on the melody. I forgot to mention one thing about this Park--It's full of ants and they are--well venturesome--a minor annoyance to those of us sprawled on the grass. Mike is between tunes now. He had a momentary cipher on the flutes or tibia during the last selection and now he has the swell shades wide open--testing. He just swacked them a couple of times and there is a great rush of air in evidence. I guess he doesn't have all the air leaks plugged yet. Darn those ants!"

And, so On-ad nauseam. We'll drop the "live" (?) coverage here and summarize. During the remainder of his 2 hour concert Mike Cahill played good and loud versions of "Frivolous Sal", "Three O'Clock in the Morning" (with chimes yet--the first time we heard percussions). "Granada", "Every Little Movement", "Holy City", "Margie", "Dance of the Blue Danube", "Waters of the Minnetonka", "In the Garden" with full tremors and a variety of tunes including the "Eyes and Ears of Paramount" and the Fox Movietone News themes.

After the concert, about four, Mr. Cahill was besieged by a little knot of the curious, those who remained behind to examine the console closely after the main body of concertgoers had left. He graciously offered to let anyone who could play try the organ.

He didn't count on a character in the audience named Stu Green, a guy who, without trying, makes the finest instrument sound like a hurdy-gurdy. When Mr. Green's musical efforts (and we use the words loosely) had ended, only he and Mike remained in the console room and Mike looked a little seasick. Mike invited the few hardy souls remaining outside to look into the chambers. It was a most interesting experience. Everything in the chambers was king size, right up to the huge 32' Diaphone pipes. He showed us the player attachment, a device long out of service but one which Mike hopes to have going in the near future. The chambers are amazingly compact, so much so that it is no place for fat visitors, as Mr. Green soon learned. But best of all is the news that the console is coming out of its hole in the ground. Mike has interested the Park management to the extent that money will be forthcoming to eliminate the pit and install the console in a ground level housing, one which will open at the top to permit the use of an elevator for the console. This is perhaps one of the wisest moves of all. The organ has always been shunned by major recitalists because the player cannot hear what he is playing with any fidelity because what he hears is only what drifts in through the open windows of the little cubicle. There is much to be done to make the fine old instrument recital-worthy, much re-voicing, touch-up work and tuning, much plugging of airleaks. But when it has been accomplished Mike Cahill can look back on a job well worth the effort, a job which will have put one of the mightiest Wurlitzers of them all back into readiness for the "big time" when the public is again ready for it.

-W.S.G.

C O M I N G S O O N

The next issue of the POSTHORN
LOADED WITH LOTS OF LETTERS!!!