

Earl's Diary - Thursday - February 27, 2014

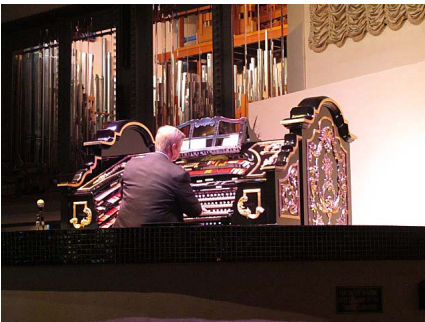
Dear Loyal Readers, wherever you may be;

Right now I am in Anthem, Arizona, visiting with Greg, Janea, Dalton and Kate. Last year Janea knew I have played the organ at church for over 40 years. She thought I would be interested in hearing about a special pizza restaurant that has an organ that rises out of the floor. That certainly got my attention! I have been looking forward to that all year. This year when I arrived at Greg and Janea's I mentioned that the priority was a visit to that pizza restaurant.

Tonight we set out for the very special place. Now, you ask, why would anyone travel 50 miles for pizza? With excitement building, we traveled south on I-17 (through downtown Phoenix) and even endured the 45 minute rush hour slow-down as we drove stop and start for 10 miles through the I-17/I-10 freeway merge. We were headed for the town of Mesa.

We finally arrived to a full parking lot. (We had to park in the very back of the lot.) The sign at the entrance said "Organ Stop Pizza". I sure wasn't prepared for the hoards of people that were on hand. The first stop inside the building was to order the pizza. The next step was not so easy to accomplish - finding a table to sit at. It seemed as though every table was occupied. You have to understand that this building is a huge structure with seating downstairs, and seating upstairs on a balcony that runs around 3 sides of the building.

We finally found a table that would seat the 5 of us. While we waited for our pizza to be ready, we waited expectantly along with the (at least) several thousand other people in attendance. Suddenly!! With lots of noise and fanfare, a huge Wurlitzer theatre organ started to rise in center stage with Lew Williams sitting at the console. The turntable rotated 360 degrees so we got a good look at the whole organ. As you can see from the pictures the whole front wall of the building houses over 6,000 pipes that make the sounds of the organ! My! What beautiful music coming from that instrument! We were surrounded by sound.

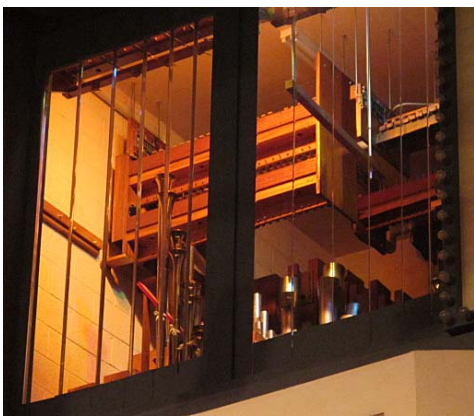




We enjoyed listening to music of every genre while munching on pizza that had finally arrived. For the next 30 minutes I was thoroughly engrossed in shooting pictures while still trying to eat. It was all so exciting! Thirty minutes later, after playing a rousing rendition of America the Beautiful, the organ slowly descended into its cave for a 15 minute rest. Then, again, after 15 minutes, lots more fanfare, the organ once again rose and more enjoyable music. The audience was encouraged to submit requests. Submit they did. We heard selections from Phantom of the Opera, Star Wars, and the "oldies" - Cruising Down the River, etc. This section ended with a rousing rendition of The Star Spangled Banner.



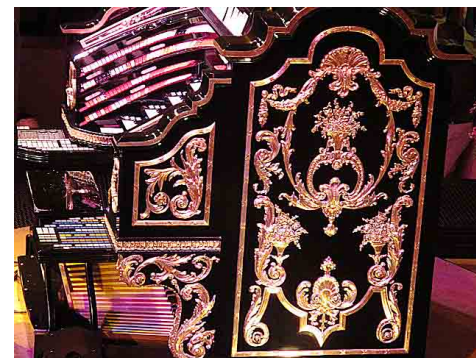
Here's your history lesson for today. Organ Stop Pizza's Wurlitzer theatre organ was built for the Denver Theatre and was installed in 1927. The organ was used regularly until the early 1930's. With the advent of talking pictures and the 1930's depression, the organ was rarely heard. It was silenced when a fire in the auditorium caused damage to the organ's relay.



In the theatre the organ was a style 260, having a three manual console and 15 ranks/sets of pipes. Organ Stop purchased the instrument in the early 1970's and undertook the mammoth task of rebuilding the instrument. Several additions were made to the instrument by acquiring parts from other ill fated Wurlitzers. The resulting 23 rank organ was installed in the original facility in 1975.



The enlargement and improvement of this instrument has been an on-going project. In 1997, a larger four manual console was added. The new console is an exact replica of a Fox Special French cast, ornamented to match the famous Brooklyn Paramount Wurlitzer. This is the largest console type ever designed by Wurlitzer. Through the years, several rare sets of pipes have been added to the organ, including a massive set of 32' wood diaphones. As of today, the organ has nearly 6000



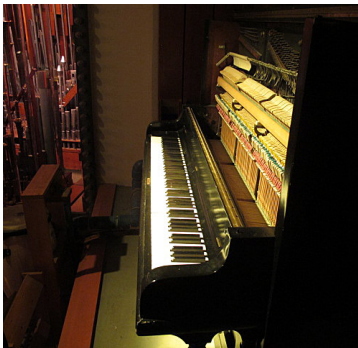
pipes. The massive quantities of wind required for operation are provided by four huge turbine blowers. The resulting instrument boasts 78 ranks, 17 tuned percussions and innumerable traps and effects and is the largest Wurlitzer in the world!







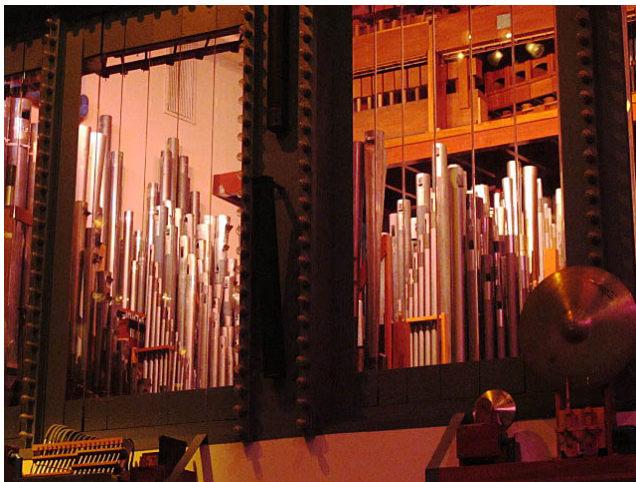
The building's design is expressly for the enjoyment of patrons, with the organ installed in four chambers at one end of the restaurant. Forty-three foot ceilings provide unparalleled acoustic. The console is "presented" on an 8,000 lb. rotating hydraulic elevator. Many of the percussions (such as the xylophones, glockenspiels, drums, etc.) are installed in the dining room for greater audience appeal.



Here's probably more than you ever wanted to know about the organist. He is no rank amateur! Lew Williams is a native of Louisiana. He began playing the organ at age 10 and started formal piano studies five years later. He graduated with several music degrees. From 1979 until 1987 he was a staff organist at Organ Stop in both Phoenix and Mesa. In 1995, Lew rejoined the staff at Organ Stop.



Concert work has taken him all around the U.S. and across the globe.



It was a totally enjoyable evening. It was amazing just looking around to see all the workings of the organ. I can recommend a visit to Organ Stop Pizza if



you are ever within 50 miles of Mesa. Try to avoid rush hour traffic is at all possible. As someone put it, "It's not pretty!" The address is 1149 E. Southern Ave., Mesa, AZ. Telephone number: (480)813-5700.



During the silent film era, theater organs provided the sounds. The theater organ has been described as part military band, part symphony orchestra and part theatrical sound effects. During the late teens and early twenties, nearly every theatre, large or small, installed theatre pipe organs. Though they were manufactured by many companies, the Wurlitzer was considered by far the best. The "Mighty Wurlitzer" enjoyed familiarity with such names as Frigidaire, Victrola and Kodak.

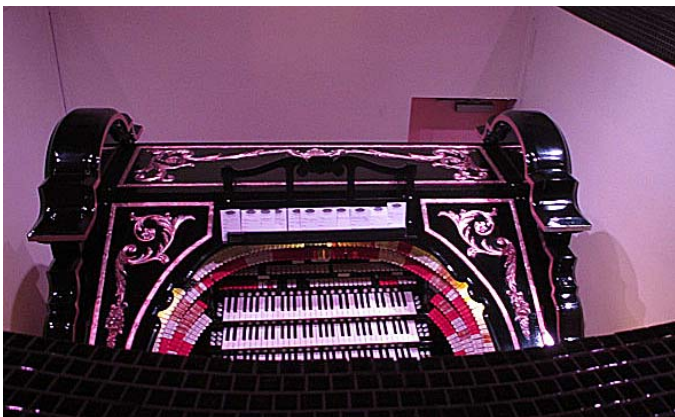




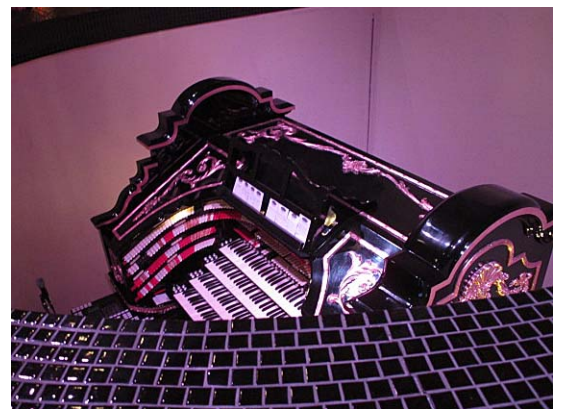
I'm estimating at least 2000 people. In these photos I can count at least 10 tables seating at least 10 people. This is only a portion of the number of tables.



There are many more tables upstairs.



Here is the "Mighty Wurlitzer" taking a 15 minute break down in its cave. Notice the door in the back. This is how the performer escapes for his 15 minute rest.



Thank you Janea for recommending this place. It truly was a most memorable experience and a highlight of this trip. Thank you Loyal Readers for coming along with me on this exciting adventure. - - Earl