

Dear Old Opus 569 Et AL

as told by Franklin Butte

In trying to review the whereabouts and happenings of Opus 569 (et al) for the past 21 years (I bought it from Roman Guenther in January, 1956) one philosophical thought crosses my mind: One man's trash, another man's treasure.

What a pile of junk it was, stashed in a heap at the Guenther Organ Co. on S.E. Holgate in Portland, Oregon. A military surplus ad might have read: "Residue of theatre organ, used, as-is, no guarantees apply." I had just been discharged from the U.S. Army and had a bit of my severance pay augmented with a \$400 loan from Merit Earsley and the

First National Bank of Portland for a grand total of \$1200, the price Roman was asking. He had just recently taken it out of the Apostolic Faith Tabernacle at Third and Burnside where some electronics slicker had gotten to them and advised them the organ was on its last legs. He said the electrical system had gone kaput, and they had better hasten to buy a new electronic from him, which, to my delight, they did. I never have

confirmed it with Roman, but I have a gut feeling that he got it just for taking it out of the place. I still feel \$1200 was pretty cheap for eight ranks.

Nevertheless, three truckloads later, with the help of many friends, we collected the junk and deposited it at my Dad's home in N.E. Portland, where about six months later it was sort-of playing. It came with a homemade three manual console, no combination action, and was built of oak with a straight-church design, probably made by Sandy Balcom of Balcom and Vaughan of Seattle, the firm that moved it to the Apostolic

ABOVE PHOTO — Out of the mouth of babes — in a classic silent film pose, this youngster tells the story as pipes are unloaded at the author's Baxter Road residence.

Faith Tabernacle in 1934. Any and all who have moved and installed similar-sized instruments to their residences will know of the ordinary hassles: laying the 16' Bourdons on their sides, exchanging the three-horse, three-phase blower motor for a single-phase (or some such trick to get wind) — and putting the main chest virtually on the floor where it is absolutely impossible to service. I'll not bore you with the details; they are typical. Suffice it to say, it didn't sound too awfully bad in that environment, squashed in the basement, and speaking through a grill into my Dad's dining room. A slightly less-than-desirable location for a console. This was in June, of 1956.

By the spring of 1957 I was thoroughly disgusted with college. Having held my first class FCC license since age 17, I returned to Juneau, where I had been stationed in the Army (1953-1956), and assumed my first radio station chief engineering position at KJNO, a mighty 1000 watt station. I was scared to death.

The Wurlitzer sat silent until I returned in the fall of 1959 to work for Rodgers Jenkins at Rodgers Organ Company. I was employee number nine. I didn't like it. Stuffing resistors in PC boards was not my idea of organ building, so back to Juneau I went, this time taking the Wurlitzer with me and selling it to the Northern Lights Presbyterian Church. We flew up in the belly of a Super Constellation (speed-pak). Everything but the bells, drums and the homemade console went. (I had picked up a beautiful set of Morton traps for \$25 from Sandy Balcom about 1956.)

Northern Lights had a Reisner console which had been added to their old electrified Kimball "box-car" tubular pneumatic. The electrification was less than satisfactory to put it mildly, so my pipes, blower and relay arrived and Allan Harrah and I worked for several months making a church organ out of 569 again. We lowered the wind pressure, and closed up the Tibias and called them "Gross Flute." It sounded pretty fat in the church.

In July, 1963, I got the call to move to Anchorage, a mere 800 miles northwest of Juneau, to become technical director of a chain of radio and television stations (Northern T.V., Inc.). So 569 and I parted com-



This Reisner console was added to the original tubular pneumatic Kimball at Northern Lights Presbyterian Church in Juneau in 1952.

The Reisner console from the church in the authors Baxter Road residence in 1966.





Young John Guess, son of Gene Guess, speaker of the Alaska State House of Representatives, sits amidst the pipes in Butte's organ, in 1966.

pany again. Meanwhile the church sold out and built a new place of worship and installed a three manual Rodgers. The old church building was to be torn down. I knew very little, if anything, of all this. My verbal agreement with the church was that if they decided to sell the organ at any time, I was to have first refusal. My dear friend, J. Allan McKinnon, was fortunately on-the-spot and employed by the 20th Century Theatre. (See story in THEATRE ORGAN February, 1978). Allan removed 569 to the theatre for storage and subsequent assembly on a portable platform soundbox. But Allan had to trot off to school, or the Air Force, or whatever, leaving 569 stranded and the theatre said to R.E. Garrison, who had taken it in trade for a portion of the Rodgers, "Get it out!"

When Garrison called me, it was the first I had known of its removal from the church. He asked if I wanted to buy it back. I was furious at not having been informed of its being surplused. I packed my bags and spent two weeks flying to and from Juneau, on company travel, to dismantle and pack the instrument, picking up the console and electric chimes that had been added when it went to the N.L. Church. This was in the Spring of 1965, and we again flew the organ et al in the belly of a Super-Conny. Now, if you ever decide to do this, you simply pack all the little pipes inside the big ones, ad infinitum, and on a nine-rank (one rank was added at the church) you'll wind up with about 175 pieces. This upsets the airline a little bit, but if you are pushy, they

will take it as is at "owner's risk," which is a preferred way, as they are super conscientious about all 175 parts, and you may wind up with a few spare airplane parts to boot.

The garage at my Baxter Road residence was converted into an organ chamber, and in about six months, or less, it was playing fairly well. This was a modest residence, and just guessing, I would say about 2000 kids a year came through to see old 569, along with other antique musical devices. About 1971 I started hunting for a bigger place and found one a mere eight miles from the Baxter place. It might as well have been 8000 miles. What a hassle! The 1941 Cadillac limousine hauled about 150 loads of wee pipes and miscellaneous organ plunder, and the piano movers got the rest... windchests, blower and console.

About that time Joe Spurr surplused the old Riviera (Chicago) Style 210 console (Opus 279). It was exactly right for li'l ol' 569, and Dave Junchen and his Dad crated it, put it on a Northwest Orient Airlines DC-10 and it was here in five hours from Chicago. It now graces my living room, and controls 569, coupled with a relay from the Omaha Theatre (via Seattle).

Copious experimentation has happened to poor old 569. The original Tibias were evidently replaced by Mortons in the 1934 move. I have tried balancing and balancing for lo, these 21 years, and never could get the tonal balance on the old studio recordings. After all, the front room



Carol Beery Davis listens to J. Allan McKinnon play Opus 569 in 1959 in Juneau.

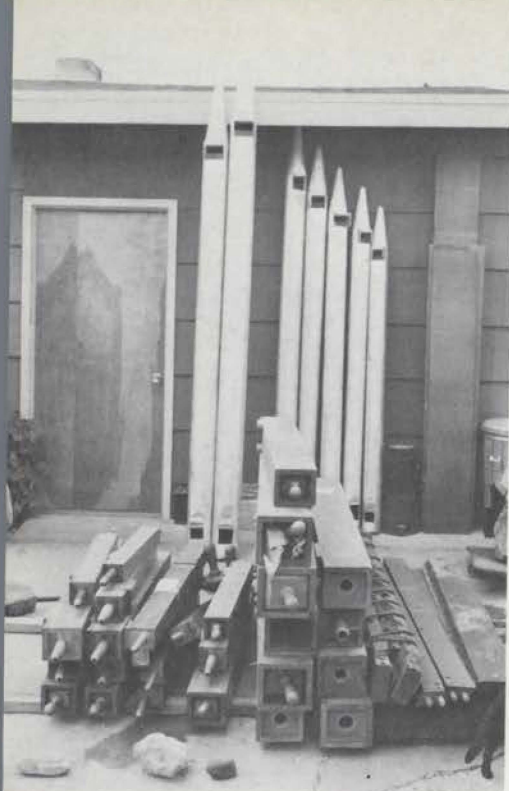
of a home is a lousy reverberation chamber, quite unlike an original theatre installation. My goal was to make it sound like a well-regulated studio installation. Learning is slow, when you have no one to bounce ideas off, especially when you live 2000 miles from the nearest organ buffs (Seattle).

The Tibias have been opened-up and closed-down a dozen times; the strings replaced again and again (I have six ranks of strings, but only two ranks of wind chests). The Diapason was exchanged, with some from CBC (Toronto), Oboe Horns substituted for Style D's, an English Horn added and the Vox's up-and-down and down-and-up.

Returning from a trip to Los Angeles I chanced to find a genuine registered card-carrying Wurlitzer Tibia Clausa pipe in, of all places,

The Style 210 console from the Riviera in Chicago controls Opus 569 in the author's present home in Anchorage.





Opus 569 was moved to Franklin Butte's Baxter Road residence in Anchorage in 1965.

an antique store in Portland. It was \$4, certainly a worthwhile investment for an ornament. I returned to Anchorage, and plugged it into its place (an A, 880 cps), and it went wheew-a-wheew-a-wheew, and I can just see Roger Jenkins going Blaaa and shaking his head as he did when we had stumbled on a new deep vibrato on the prototype Rodgers. What a vast difference to my Mortons (muted horns), even though they were of a larger scale! So, upon close scrutiny, it appeared the mouths were different to the extent that the upper lip was straight on the Wurlitzer and arched on the Mortons, that the inside lip only was knicked on Wurlitzer whereas both were knicked on the Morton, and the air stream was wafer-thin on the Wurlit-

zer and fat on the Morton. After removing caps, and applying about a roll of black electrical tape in layers to seal off the Morton nicks, to make the wind stream wafer thin, the sound is very, very near the Wurlitzer Tibia! Perhaps even louder as they are a larger scale. This also meant the wind hole could be enlarged on the Mortons, and I would hazard a guess the total increase in volume is equal to about 10. This trick also cut down the breathiness of the Mortons, and increased the 2-2/3' component of the tone immensely.

But, back to the 569 Diapasons, and opening up the Oboe horn (Barton's) by cracking their lids open a bit. An overall balance very pleasing to a residence or studio, and the Vox's had to be beefed up a bit to balance, but they are mysteriously at the original factory settings (scratchmark).

The next step is to put the Tibias and Oboe Horns on separate reservoirs and tremulants. That will be done when the whole thing is raised about three feet so the wind chest is level with the shutters. Don't ever put the organ below the shutters! The flues speak into the wall and all you get is the left-overs, and the reeds blast out of their tops and clobber the ensemble. Live and learn. Oh. The electrical tape. When I'm certain that is exactly right, the caps of the Tibias will get ground down to match the Wurlitzer Tibia.

Only on extremely rare occasions do ATOSer's ever get to Anchorage. But, if you are heading this way, drop me a line. I'll be glad to show you the beast, and the Juneau 20th Century Theatre organ in the State Office Building. □