



JIM TARLING WITH ORGAN'S PIPE ASSEMBLY . . . "all downhill from now on"

—Glenn Baglo Photos

Organ-lover pulls out all the stops

By SCOTT MACRAE

When the building inspectors came around to Jim Tarling's house they thought it was to check out an indoor swimming pool. Not exactly.

In six months Jim expects to have completed the installation of the theatre organ auctioned off when the Capitol Theatre was renovated in 1965.

If you think eight years is a long time in getting around to playing it, then consider some of what he had to go through in that time.

It took Jim, with more than a little help from his friends, three months just to dismantle and remove it from the Capitol.

They had to jackhammer a hole in the theatre wall and lower the pieces to the street. The monster organ lay dormant in his parents' home until he could find a place to put it.

If you remember seeing the Capitol's theatre organ (and the Orpheum still has one) you probably just saw the console. Now, impressive as that is, the greatest part of the organ was invisible.

Jim's solution was to build a special 1,000-square-foot addition to his Burnaby home. Last July — on the day his daughter was born — he began, with the help of his father-in-law and his brother, to build the structure with its 14-foot ceiling and special acoustic properties.

By November the building was complete enough to start hauling in the thousands upon thousands of organ pieces. The organ housing consists of two chambers, each 10 feet by 20 feet, and a smallish room containing a 10 horsepower blower.

Each chamber has 1,000 pipes and the



THE ORGAN'S CONSOLE . . . capable of anything

organ is capable of reproducing an incredible variety of sounds. It even contains a real xylophone and real drums — a mechanical Moog synthesizer.

The surprising thing about Jim Tarling is that he's only 27 and you'd think someone his age would never have even heard a theatre organ.

Not so. He's played his father's since he was 13. He's a member of the American Association of Theatre Organ Enthu-

siasts and very knowledgeable about the whole subject.

His — a Wurlitzer — is one of only 10 of that company's product to come to Canada and the largest of the three remaining in Vancouver. (The others belong to the Orpheum and his father.) There haven't been any made since 1938 when the factory burned down.

The Capitol Wurlitzer was installed in 1927 and cost \$250,000 but, since it was designed to provide sound for silent

movies, its use decreased after the introduction of talkies a couple of years later.

Jim has been lucky in obtaining the advice of Stan Haddon, who was working as an apprentice organ maker and helped install the Capitol's Wurlitzer as part of his training.

When installed in its present home, the organ will be completely enclosed in a sound-deadening housing and the magnificent console will take a corner of what is now Jim's basement. Volume control is purely by means of opening and closing louvred doors at the front of the housing.

"I've done everything I can to acoustically insulate the building, but if that isn't enough I'll have to build another set of walls around this one. Fortunately, the neighbors are not too close," says Jim.

In its present state of completion the organ looks like 40 miles of bad road; thousands of pipes and wood fixtures compete for space with what looks to be the entire B.C. Tel switching system. But Jim figures it's all down hill from now on.

"There were times when I felt like packing it in," he said, "but the thought of actually playing it has always kept me going. It's a perfect instrument — you can use it for anything from rock to Bach."

What does his wife, Wendie, think of all this? "Well, sometimes she thinks I'm a little nuts. But I really think it will be something for my kids to get the chance to play one of these."

What do you do with this mammoth music box?

"I think it would be just great to have a few friends over, hang a screen on the front of the thing and show old Charlie Chaplin movies with the appropriate musical accompaniment."

That's the kind of guy Jim is. Diligent collecting over the years has filled his basement with such memorabilia as old gramophones, theatre posters and a pair of real gems — a fully restored nickelodeon and a 1940 Wurlitzer jukebox.

You hesitate to ask what would ever happen if, say, Jim should get transferred to Chicago and . . .