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*The Solo Chamber of the Cincinnati Music Hall Ballroom Wurlitzer
(Photo by Phillip Groshong)*

On the Cover: The Cincinnati Albee Theatre Wurlitzer in its new home at the Cincinnati Music Hall Ballroom (Photo by Phillip Groshong)

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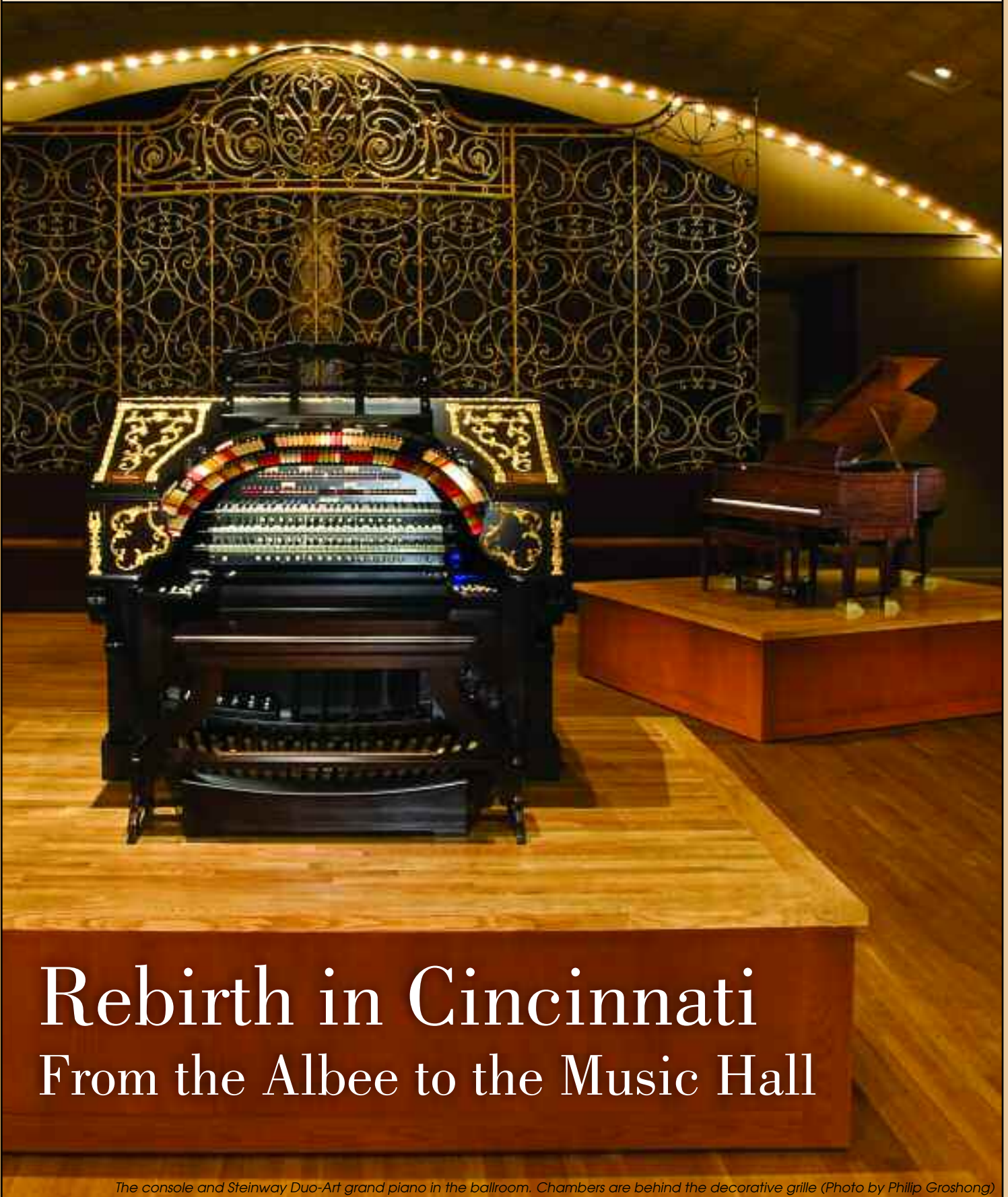
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Over the years, the Albee Theatre Wurlitzer, Opus 1680, has been featured three times in these pages (June/July 1976, February/March 1978, and July/August 2009). In the most recent article, Joe Hollmann described the plan to install it in the Cincinnati Music Hall Ballroom. Ron Wehmeier had the task of rebuilding the organ and the 1925 Steinway. That project is now complete, and what follows is Ron Wehmeier's narrative of his involvement with Opus 1680, from his first encounter in the Albee theatre, through its move to another theatre and then into storage, and finally into its new home in the Ballroom of Cincinnati's Historic Music Hall.



Rebirth in Cincinnati From the Albee to the Music Hall

The console and Steinway Duo-Art grand piano in the ballroom. Chambers are behind the decorative grille (Photo by Phillip Groshong)

The Cincinnati Albee Wurlitzer, Opus 1680, was first installed in 1927 as a 3/19, 260 Special. I first worked on the instrument in the gorgeous 3,500 seat Albee in the mid 60s. Not a whole lot could be done, since the original zephyr skin was in bad shape. I cleaned switches and magnets, removing lots of coal dust in those days, and asked my organist friend, Jack Doll Jr., to play the heck out of it. After some months, it started to sound pretty good, even with more of the zephyr blowing out. The 15" ranks (both Tibias, Tuba Horn, Tuba Mirabilis, and Diaphonic Diapason) all came together making a wonderful full sound with a very big pedal that I remember to this day, even with the heavy drapes covering most of the tone openings.

When the Albee closed, I made a cash offer to buy the organ, as did several others throughout the country. RKO in New York, owners of the Albee, decided to donate the remainder of its organs for tax reasons. So the organ went to a local college, the Ohio Mechanics Institute. The Ohio Valley chapter of ATOS acquired the organ from the college and partially rebuilt the organ over the next few years. It was installed in the Emery Theatre, which was part of the campus. Beginning around 1977, the organ was used for silent film accompaniment and occasional concerts.

In 1999, the organ was removed from the Emery and placed in storage in a warehouse while the search began for a new venue.

In 2003 Dr. David Billmire, a member of the Ohio Valley chapter board of directors, attended a musical event. He ran into David Klingshirn, and during their casual conversation mentioned that he was looking for a new home for the Albee Wurlitzer. David Klingshirn was the President of Memorial



From top: The Historic Cincinnati Music Hall (Wikipedia collection)

Gaylord Carter at the Albee console at the Emery Theatre (Photo by Michael Detroy)

The chambers will replace this small stage area (Photo by Scott Santangelo)



From top: Pipes begin to populate the Main chamber (Photo by Joanne Grueter)

Main chamber regulators (Photo by Ron Wehmeier)

Chamber walls under construction (Photo by Scott Santangelo)

Hall Society, and said he thought he had just the place—Memorial Hall in downtown Cincinnati.

Soon after, Ohio Valley chapter officials Joe Hollmann and Ken Aultz, asked me if I would be interested in rebuilding the Albee Wurlitzer for installation in Memorial Hall. An anonymous donor was ready to give \$50,000 for the project. I inspected the organ, which was in rough shape, and also checked out Memorial Hall. It was a grand old building, restored to perfection, but had no air conditioning. I accepted the job, with the condition I must meet with the donor and ask for additional funding.

I made drawings of the proposed installation, built a scale model, and compiled a list of needed modifications to the building. A nice chamber space was directly behind the proscenium, but the solid ornate plaster would need to be torn out and replaced with tasteful open grille. I made the presentation to the anonymous benefactor and his foundation board. I explained to them what needed to be done to Memorial hall for a good installation, and that just the rebuilding of the Wurlitzer would exceed \$500,000. The foundation's president was an organist, and he loved the Albee Wurlitzer, having heard it as a young person. He and the board were ready to proceed, and agreed to fund the full amount!

In late 2005, David Klingshirn called and asked if he could bring a friend from Music Hall over to see my Wurlitzer. When they arrived in early January of 2006, he introduced Norma Petersen, who was (and is) President of the Society for the Preservation of Music Hall. David said he had some good news...and some bad news.

The bad news was that the Memorial Hall installation was off, since the proscenium plaster cannot be removed. The good news was that officials at Music Hall thought the Ballroom would make a fine home for the Wurlitzer. I said I would check out the Ballroom, since I had never been in the place. I then played several selections on my Wurlitzer for Norma. She was blown away, and offered her full support.

I inspected the Cincinnati Music Hall Ballroom. It is a wonderful, big place 80' wide, 210' long, with a vaulted ceiling 18'6" in the center down to 12' on the sides. It has seating for 1,300 on a hardwood floor, a great computer-controlled lighting system with effects, and many artifacts taken from the Albee were incorporated in the Ballroom. There is a 40' long bar with a kitchen for food preparation, and a fine sound

system. Best of all, there are great acoustics for the Wurlitzer.

A new organ chamber could be built on the west side, 18' deep by 30' wide, replacing the present stage, since another stage on the south side is the most used. I was excited and ready to design the new chamber, but the Wurlitzer installation needed to be approved by the City of Cincinnati, owners of the building, Cincinnati Arts Association, manager of the complex, and Music Hall officials.

After many meetings, which went on for a year, all were in agreement. I proceeded with my drawings and specification, glaserworks Architects was hired and developed working drawings, Messer Construction was given the contract to construct the chambers, console and piano display room and the blower room. Contracts were signed in June 2007, and our benefactor funded the entire project in the amount of \$1,410,000.

Over the years in Emery, some additional ranks had been added, and others had been changed out. With the exception of the Schopp Post Horn, the added ranks were removed to take the organ back to the rank complement that existed at the Albee. One of the original Vox Humanas had been taken out and replaced with an Estey. Ken Aultz had acquired the original, gave it back to Ohio Valley chapter and it is now back in the organ! The chapter had purchased a Salicional and Voix Celeste from Mt. Auburn Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati (Opus 574, a three-manual style CH). Both ranks were stored in trays, in excellent condition, and I used them in the Main. I also made the Concert Flute from the same organ into a Flute Celeste. I bought a 1928 Solo String, and made this the Solo String Celeste.

Our donor had requested a classical division after hearing mine at home. We installed a seven rank division playing on 4-½" pressure: Principal ranks at 8', 4' and 2', and a four-rank Mixture (19-22-26-29), all playable from the Great. That addition provides a good solid foundation for performances of classical numbers, and since there are frequent weddings in the ballroom, it makes the organ just that much more flexible.

Originally the Albee had both the Diaphonic Diapason and the Open Diapason in the Main. The Open was placed in the Solo and extended down into a late Wurlitzer 16' metal Diaphone set.



*From top: Main chamber (Photo by Phillip Groshong)
Solo chamber (Photo by Phillip Groshong)*



There are 4 sets of expression shutters 8'3" tall by 7'9" wide, two for each chamber. It is nice that the Albee had these large shades, as they open up the entire front wall of the chambers. The Wurlitzer is Mighty in this big room.

The 15-hp motor on the Spencer blower was rewound for 208v, and delivers 27" to the chambers via a 16" diameter feed pipe 100' long. The bearings were replaced, the rusty case and fans sand blasted, and the case painted. The fans were balanced, and the 1200 rpm Spencer is a thing of beauty. I built a 2' x 2' x 6' muffler box with adjustable flap valve. This works great, with no loss in pressure.

The blower room, console/piano/computer display room, and chambers have a dedicated HVAC system, to maintain 70°F at 40 percent humidity at all times. Since the large ballroom is only heated and cooled for events, this work works out fine for the instrument.

Due to the tremendous vibration created by the Wurlitzer, I specified extra-heavy construction of the chambers. The outer walls are 2 x 6 studs with two layers of ¾" plywood glued and screwed on both sides. The dividing wall between the Solo and Main has 2 x 12 studs on 12" centers, with the two layers of ¾" plywood on each side glued and screwed. Ceiling construction is the same. The entire ballroom has a finished hardwood floor which is nailed to sleepers, with a concrete floor underneath. Thus the floor acts as a sound board, and transmits the bass of the organ.

All the rebuilding in my shop was done to factory new condition. All valves, gaskets, leather nuts, and pneumatics were done. Hot glue was used throughout, with CPL Hairsheep skins. For the shade pneumatics I used kangaroo skins. For the 14 tremis I used OSI heavy rubber cloth, and medium cloth for the percussions.

I had already rebuilt the 1925 Steinway Duo-Art 6'6" piano, which replaced a junk upright player. The Steinway is now playable from the Wurlitzer console.

Knowing I could not do all this rebuilding work myself and complete the project

From top: Lyn Larsen and Ron Wehmeier during tonal finishing (Photo by Phillip Groshong)

An audience of over 700 at the Dedication Concert (Photo by Phillip Groshong)

Joe Hollmann, Ohio Valley Chapter president, Ron Rhode, Ron Wehmeier (Photo by Phillip Groshong)

in two years, I sent the console and manual chests to Kenny Crome. He also provided the proper size regulators and wind trunks. There are 19 regulators, and three of the large size are used for offsets. Carlton Smith went to Reno and applied the console ornamentation. Rose Crome applied the gold leaf.

Installation of the Wurlitzer began in the ballroom September 10, 2008. The move was done in stages, requiring many trips by my piano movers (three strong guys and a big truck). I also loaded my van with smaller parts every day. After arriving on Elm Street at 6:00am, the parts were moved up to the ballroom on the freight elevator. As we unloaded each day, everything would go directly into the chamber. This way we did not need a staging area in the ballroom. Each part was then installed according to the drawings I had made many months earlier. This was a process I repeated many times over the following months.

When all the chests, regulators, percussions, expression shades, and 16' pipes were in place, I started winding with schedule 40 PVC pipe. This took several months. After the wind pressures were set, we installed the pipes, holding the primary valve wires to blow out the holes.

I ordered the Uniflex 3000 computer control from Tim Rickman, and was sure in a bad fix with his death. Tim was always nice to deal with and glad to help out with any questions on the phone. We all miss Tim! To the rescue came Dick Wilcox, the developer of the Uniflex system. Dick knew I was in the middle of this big job, ready for his driver boards, and had received nothing from Tim. Dick took over, sent me what I needed, and spent hours with me on the phone, instructing me on the new system.

When I had everything wired up, I turned the system on. All the indicator lights lit, and no smoke appeared, but neither did any sound. I called Dick. The next day I picked him up at the airport, and after about an hour on the job, the organ was playing. Dick spent the next several days with me getting out bugs, and converting tunes recorded on my home computer to play on the Music Hall 3000!

The last phase of this project was to invite Lyn Larsen to help me with the final tonal finishing. This important process took just seven days, since Dave Hazelton, my associate for the last 37 years, and I had spent weeks doing tonal work and tuning in preparation for Lyn's arrival. I must say that working with Lyn is a complete pleasure. Since I respect his approach to everything



*Clockwise from top left: Percussion stack in the Solo chamber (Photo by Joanne Grueter)
Main chamber (Photo by Ron Wehmeier)
Ron Rhode at the Dedication Concert (Photo by Phillip Grashong)
Ron Wehmeier touches up a string pipe (Photo by Phillip Grashong)*

Stoplist

SOLO

| | |
|-----------------------|----|
| English Horn | 8 |
| Tuba Mirabilis | 8 |
| Trumpet | 8 |
| Tuba Horn | 8 |
| Diaphonic Diapason | 8 |
| Tibia Clausa (S) | 8 |
| Tibia Clausa (M) | 8 |
| Clarinet | 8 |
| Saxophone | 8 |
| Orchestral Oboe | 8 |
| Kinura | 8 |
| Solo String (2 ranks) | 8 |
| Salicional (2 ranks) | 8 |
| Oboe Horn | 8 |
| Vox Humana (S) | 8 |
| Vox Humana (M) | 8 |
| Piccolo (S) | 4 |
| Piccolo (M) | 4 |
| Solo String (2 ranks) | 4 |
| Salicet (2 ranks) | 4 |
| Vox Humana | 4 |
| Twelfth (S) | 2½ |
| Twelfth (M) | 2½ |
| Piccolo (S) | 2 |
| Piccolo (M) | 2 |
| Tierce | 1½ |
| Piano | 8 |
| Sub Harp | |
| Harp | |

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Xylophone | |
| Glockenspiel | |
| Chrysoglott | |
| Sleigh Bells | |
| Cathedral Chimes | |
| Sub Octave | |
| Unison Off | |
| Octave | |

GREAT

| | |
|----------------------------------|----|
| English Horn (Ten C) | 16 |
| Tuba Mirabilis (Ten C) | 16 |
| Trumpet (Ten C) | 16 |
| Ophicleide | 16 |
| Diaphone | 16 |
| Diaphonic Horn | 16 |
| Tibia Clausa | 16 |
| Tibia Clausa (Ten C) | 16 |
| Clarinet (Ten C) | 16 |
| Saxophone (Ten C) | 16 |
| Orchestral Oboe (Ten C) | 16 |
| Solo String (2 rks) (Ten C) | 16 |
| Viol d'Orchestre (2 rks) (Ten C) | 16 |
| Salicional (2 rks) (Ten C) | 16 |
| Bourdon | 16 |
| Vox Humana (S) (Ten C) | 16 |
| Vox Humana (M) (Ten C) | 16 |
| English Horn | 8 |
| Tuba Mirabilis | 8 |
| Trumpet | 8 |
| Tuba Horn | 8 |
| Diaphonic Diapason | 8 |
| Open Diapason | 8 |
| Tibia Clausa (S) | 8 |
| Tibia Clausa (M) | 8 |
| Clarinet | 8 |
| Saxophone | 8 |
| Orchestral Oboe | 8 |
| Kinura | 8 |
| Solo String (2 ranks) | 8 |
| Viol d'Orchestre (2 ranks) | 8 |
| Salicional (2 ranks) | 8 |

| | |
|-------------------------|----|
| Oboe Horn | 8 |
| Quintadena | 8 |
| Concert Flute (2 ranks) | 8 |
| Vox Humana (S) | 8 |
| Vox Humana (M) | 8 |
| Fifth (Solo Tibia) | 5½ |
| Octave | 4 |
| Octave (Open) | 4 |
| Piccolo (S) | 4 |
| Piccolo (M) | 4 |
| Solo String (2 ranks) | 4 |
| Viol (2 ranks) | 4 |
| Salicet (2 ranks) | 4 |
| Quintadena | 4 |
| Flute (2 ranks) | 4 |
| Vox Humana (S) | 4 |
| Vox Humana (M) | 4 |
| Tenth | 3½ |
| Twelfth (S) | 2½ |
| Twelfth (M) | 2½ |
| Twelfth (Flute) | 2½ |
| Piccolo (S) | 2 |
| Piccolo (M) | 2 |
| Fifteenth | 2 |
| Piccolo (Flute) | 2 |
| Tierce (S) | 1½ |
| Larigot (S) | 1½ |
| Fife (Flute) | 1 |
| Sub Octave | |
| Unison Off | |
| Octave | |
| Solo Sub to Great | |
| Solo to Great | |

ACCOMPANIMENT

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| English Horn | 8 |
| Tuba Mirabilis | 8 |
| Trumpet | 8 |
| Tuba Horn | 8 |
| Diaphonic Diapason | 8 |
| Open Diapason | 8 |
| Tibia Clausa (S) | 8 |
| Tibia Clausa (M) | 8 |
| Clarinet | 8 |
| Solo String (2 ranks) | 8 |
| Viol d'Orchestre (2 ranks) | 8 |
| Salicional (2 ranks) | 8 |
| Oboe Horn | 8 |
| Quintadena | 8 |
| Concert Flute | 8 |
| Flute Celeste (Ten C) | 8 |
| Vox Humana (S) | 8 |
| Vox Humana (M) | 8 |
| Octave (Open) | 4 |
| Piccolo (M) | 4 |
| Solo String (2 ranks) | 4 |
| Viol (2 ranks) | 4 |
| Salicet (2 ranks) | 4 |
| Flute | 4 |
| Flute Celeste | 4 |
| Vox Humana (S) | 4 |
| Vox Humana (M) | 4 |
| Twelfth (Flute) | 2½ |
| Piccolo (Flute) | 2 |
| Piano | 8 |
| Sub Harp | |
| Harp | |
| Chrysoglott | |
| Octave | |
| Solo to Accomp | |

PEDAL

| | |
|-----------------------|----|
| Bourdon (Resultant) | 32 |
| Ophicleide | 16 |
| Diaphone | 16 |
| Tibia Clausa | 16 |
| Diaphonic Horn | 16 |
| Bourdon | 16 |
| English Horn | 8 |
| Tuba Mirabilis | 8 |
| Tuba Horn | 8 |
| Octave | 8 |
| Open Diapason | 8 |
| Tibia Clausa (S) | 8 |
| Tibia Clausa (M) | 8 |
| Clarinet | 8 |
| Solo String (2 ranks) | 8 |
| Cello | 8 |
| Flute | 8 |
| Piano | 16 |
| Accomp to Pedal | |
| Great to Pedal | |
| Great Octave to Pedal | |
| Solo to Pedal | |

KEY CHEEK CONTROLS

ACCOMP BASS END

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Projector | |
| Police Whistle | |

ACCOMP TREBLE END

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Zimbelstern Rev. | |
| Wind Chimes | |

GREAT TREBLE END

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Percussion / Splash Cymbal | |
|----------------------------|--|

BACKRAIL

| | |
|-----------|--|
| Upper Row | |
|-----------|--|

PEDAL

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Bass Drum | |
| Tympani | |
| Crash Cymbal | |
| Tap Cymbal | |
| Triangle | |

ACCOMPANIMENT

| | |
|------------|--|
| Snare Drum | |
| Tom Tom | |
| Tambourine | |
| Castanets | |
| Wood Block | |
| Sand Block | |
| Tap Cymbal | |

GREAT

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Piano | 8 |
| Harp | |
| Xylophone | |
| Glockenspiel | |
| Chrysoglott | |
| Principal | 8 |
| Octave | 4 |
| Super Octave | 2 |
| Mixture IV | |

GENERAL

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| String Celestes Off | |
| Great Flute Celeste Off | |
| Percussion Re-It On | |
| Piano Sustain (Kick Switch) | |

Lower Row

ACCOMPANIMENT 2ND TOUCH

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| English Horn | 8 |
| Tuba Mirabilis | 8 |
| Trumpet | 8 |
| Tuba Horn | 8 |
| Diaphonic Diapason | 8 |
| Tibia Clausa (S) | 8 |
| Clarinet | 8 |
| Piccolo (S) | 4 |
| Piano | 8 |
| Sub Harp | |
| Octave Glockenspiel | |
| Cathedral Chimes | |
| Triangle | |
| Great Octave to Accomp | |
| Solo to Accomp | |
| Solo to Accomp Pizzicato | |

GREAT 2ND TOUCH

| | |
|-------------------------|----|
| English Horn | 16 |
| English Horn | 8 |
| Solo to Great | |
| Solo to Great Pizzicato | |
| English Horn Pizzicato | 16 |

TREMULANTS

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Main | |
| Clarinet | |
| Solo 1 | |
| Solo 2 | |
| Tibia Clausas | |
| Vox Humanas | |
| Tuba / Diapason | |
| Tuba Mirabilis | |
| English Horn | |

Controls in Bass-end drawer

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Fire Gong | |
| Fire Siren | |
| Train Whistle | |
| Train Bell | |
| Horses Hooves | |
| Surf | |
| Acme Siren | |
| Door Bell | |
| Triangle | |
| Splash Cymbal | |
| Wood Block | |
| Chinese Gong | |
| Bird | |
| Klaxon | |

Controls in Treble-end drawer

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Digital Display | |
| Transposer (Up - Unison - Down) | |
| Recorder: Start, Finish, Play | |
| File Up | |
| File Down | |
| Combination Load | |
| Combination Save | |
| Master Expression | |
| Accomp Traps to 2nd Touch | |
| Memory 1-8 | |

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| | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 Posthorn | 1 French Trompette |
| 2 Tuba Horn | 2 Tromba |
| 3 Open Diapason | 3 Principal |
| 4 Tibia Clausa | 4 Gedackt |
| 5 Clarinet | 5 Cromorne |
| 6 Orchestral Oboe | 6 Hautbois |
| 7 Violin | 7 Viola Pomposa |
| 8 Violin Celeste | 8 Viola Celeste |
| 9 Dolce | (same) |
| 10 Dolce Celeste | (same) |
| 11 Concert Flute | 9 Harmonic Flute |
| 12 Vox Humana | 10 English Vox Humana |
| Xylophone | 11 > 14 Mixture IV |
| Glockenspiel | 15 > 17 Mixture III |
| Chimes | Carillon |

Q211SP Theatre Rank Q211SP Classical Rank

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 English Post Horn | 1 French Trompette |
| 2 Tuba Horn | 2 Tromba |
| 3 Open Diapason | 3 Principal |
| 4 Tibia Clausa | 4 Gedackt |
| 5 Clarinet | 5 Cromorne |
| 6 Orchestral Oboe | 6 Hautbois |
| 7 Violin | 7 Viola Pomposa |
| 8 Violin Celeste | 8 Viola Celeste |
| 9 Concert Flute | 9 Harmonic Flute |
| 10 Vox Humana | 10 English Vox Humana |
| Xylophone | 11 > 14 Mixture IV |
| Glockenspiel | 15 > 17 Mixture III |
| Chimes | Carillon |

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