

*Ron Wehmeier
and the Music
Hall 3/31 Wurlitzer
(Photo by Phillip
Groshong)*



AFTERGLOW

The Ron Wehmeier 4/37 Wurlitzer and
the 3/31 Music Hall Ballroom Wurlitzer

BY TIM NEEDLER AND RON WEHMEIER

(All photos by Ron Wehmeier except as noted)

The lad was 12 or 13 when his dad took him in the mid-1950s to hear a super deluxe Hi-Fi system at an audio show in Cincinnati, Ohio.

What caught his immediate attention was hearing an LP recording of George Wright on the Mighty Wurlitzer. “Well, I was hooked” is how Ron Wehmeier describes his introduction to theatre organ. It didn’t hurt that he had grown up with tales of his father’s playing for silent movies on a photo-player (Wurlitzer Style E) at the Royal Theatre downtown, and had a burgeoning aptitude “for mechanical and electrical things” as well as “a great appreciation of good music.”



This fascination later led Ron to work part-time and then full-time with the local Möller pipe organ representative. This Cincinnati area rep, a Mr. Talbert, then sent Ron to work with the Möller representative in Baltimore, and he often accompanied Mr. Meyer to the Möller factory in nearby Hagerstown, meeting all the factory people and executives. This led to a one-year stint in Detroit working for the Möller rep, Guy Lum, and gaining more experience and knowledge. It also allowed “late-night visits to the Detroit Fox 4/36 Wurlitzer and also visits to the Senate Theatre Wurlitzer” exploring chambers, theatre pipe organ ranks, percussions, and gaining valuable knowledge about outstanding theatre pipe organs.

Returning to Cincinnati in 1965, Ron started his own business rebuilding player pianos and reproducing grand pianos (work that continues to this day) while still working for Mr. Talbert and Möller. And when in 1972 Mr. Talbert retired, Ron became the Möller representative for sales, installation and service in the southern half of Ohio, Indiana, and most of Kentucky and West Virginia. At that time, Möller was the “World’s Largest Pipe-Organ Builder” with over 11,600 instruments to their credit, and being their rep was “a considerable honor” as Ron puts it. Although like most classic pipe organ builders of that era, Möller finally went out of business, Ron still services many Möller instruments in his territory and is glad to do any and all rebuilding in his own shop and not be out on the road so much, he says.

The “owner” bug bit Ron in 1963 when he acquired a 2/5 Wurlitzer from radio station WLW, Crosley Broadcasting, Cincinnati.

With his dad’s background playing in theatres in the 1920s, his parents were very supportive of this acquisition that Ron installed in a basement chamber in the family’s large Victorian home originally built by his grandparents in 1875. It was a successful installation, as Ron describes it: “...what a sound for only five ranks, speaking up through the first-floor hall iron grill into the two-story stair hall and music room.” Ron also connected a Möller Artiste roll player to the organ.

That same bug was quiet for about ten years, but in 1973 Ron purchased from Gordon Johnson a three-manual, 9-rank Wurlitzer with French style console built in 1928 for the Plaza Theatre in Kansas City, Missouri. More chamber space in the basement allowed additional ranks to be acquired, enlarging it to 19 ranks ultimately.

Always remembering first hearing George Wright on that Hi-Fi recording years before, Ron had a hankering to have George come and play a private concert on his latest acquisition, and that dream became a reality in 1980 when George came to Cincinnati and played a marvelous concert to select friends of Ron and his family. (Recordings of that concert are still available online.) Some years later, Ron received a “cannot refuse” offer from Dr. Larry Kass of Hinckley, Ohio, and Ron not only sold him the organ but installed it in the Kass residence, having it playing one year later in 1987.

About this same time, Ron heard from his good friend Lyn Larsen about a 4-manual Wurlitzer that Ken Crome had available. It was in Russ Nelson’s home in California, and the console was from the Chicago Southtown Theatre and had 13 ranks from the San Jose Fox Theatre (1927). Russ had been acquiring organs and rare ranks of pipework early in the revival, including a late Brass Sax and 1929 Post Horn from the Circle Theatre in Indianapolis. Ron had collected other desirable Wurlitzer ranks, and Lyn had given Ron a special Murray Harris redwood Tibia. Not having enough room left in the Victorian residence to house this large an instrument, Ron embarked on a major addition to the family home, a music room 35' X 70' with sloping ceiling being 18' at the center down to 12' on either long side.



As a result, the completed Wurlitzer is 37 ranks and has a Steinway AR 7' Duo-Art piano connected. Included in the added ranks are a Solo Chamber 1928 15" Wurlitzer Tibia (the third Tibia in the organ) and a sweet-sounding Wurlitzer Lieblich Gedeckt in the Main. Dick Wilcox personally installed a Uniflex 3000 recently. The music room is at the rear of the lovely Victorian home, and from

ATOS Annual Convention 2020



the street it is not visible. A long driveway leads past the white-frame mansion to the rear of the property where Ron has his office and workshop in the basement of the addition.

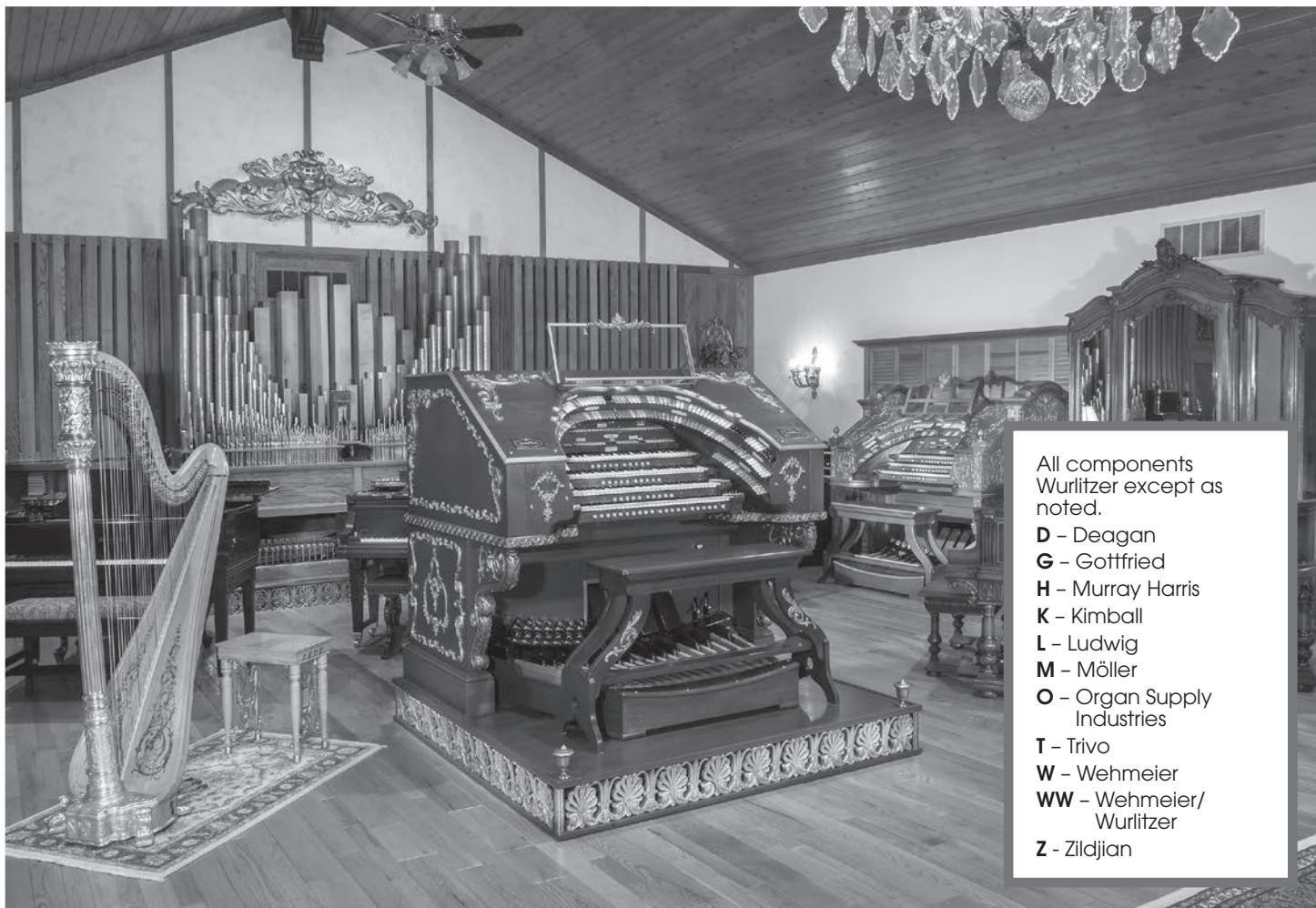
Ron has a sizeable collection of rebuilt 1920s-era reproducing grand pianos (pianos which play fully-expressive rolls cut by famous composers of that time, such as Rachmaninoff, Debussy, Grieg, and pianists such as Arthur Rubinstein, George Gershwin, Frank Milne, Adam Carroll and others). Pianos in the music room include, in addition to the 7' AR Steinway Duo-Art connected to and playable from the organ console, a Chickering 5'8" Ampico, a 1929 Steinway 6'2" Duo-Art with transposer, and a Louis XV Knabe Ampico with rare electric "B" drawer. Ron is also very proud of his concert grand piano, a 1949 9' Steinway, his only piano without a player system but with spectacular sound when played by hand.

The latest acquisition for Ron is one he is especially happy to have acquired after many years of maintaining it for its owners, now deceased. This was originally Mrs. Howard Wurlitzer's 3/15 Balaban III specially designed for the downtown theatre she built and owned in Cincinnati and leased to the Paramount firm. The 2,163-seat theatre was in the midst of a large complex of stores and shops she also owned. In 1960 the Straders of Cincinnati bought the organ from the theatre and installed it in their spacious home, adding three ranks to the original count. When they died, their son offered the organ to Ron who had maintained it for many years, and it is in like-new condition. Visitors to Ron's music room during the Afterglow of the ATOS 2020 Convention will be able to view the Balaban III console now sitting in the music room, the pipework safely stored elsewhere for the time being.

One other interesting addition to the music room is a genuine Wurlitzer Harp built in 1926 that belonged to the lady harpist with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra for many years. It had been lovingly maintained in the lady's parlor, always in top condition, even the gold leaf ornamentation. A few years ago when this lady read a newspaper article detailing Ron's rebuilding and installation of the Albee Wurlitzer in the ballroom of the Cincinnati Music Hall, she called the receptionist at Music Hall and asked to speak with Ron. As he tells the story, "She said, 'Ron, I have a beautiful concert Wurlitzer Harp for sale, would you be interested?' I almost fell down. 'Yes, indeed, been looking for one for 37 years!' Well, I went right over and bought it on sight. What luck! You know the Wurlitzer Harp is regarded as the finest ever made."

In his generous and loving spirit and a Central Indiana chapter member, Ron has opened his home to five previous ATOS Convention Afterglows: 1990 with Walt Strony; 1997 with Chris Elliott; 2001 with Barry Baker; 2008 Jelani Eddington with Donnie Rankin on percussion; and 2014 Jelani Eddington with Justin LaVoie on Steinway concert grand.

This year Mark Herman will be featured in a solo performance at the Wehmeier 4/37 Wurlitzer.



All components
Wurlitzer except as
noted.

D – Deagan

G – Gottfried

H – Murray Harris

K – Kimball

L – Ludwig

M – Möller

O – Organ Supply
Industries

T – Trivo

W – Wehmeier

WW – Wehmeier/
Wurlitzer

Z – Zildjian

The Wehmeier music room (Photo by Phillip Groshong)

Wehmeier Residence Wurlitzer, 4 Manuals, 37 Ranks, Cincinnati, Ohio

MAIN CHAMBER – 17 Ranks

8'	Vox Humana	61 notes
8'	Oboe Horn	61 notes
16'	Tibia (Redwood) (H)	85 notes
16'	Tuba Horn	73 notes
8'	Quintadena	61 notes
16'	Concert Flute	97 notes
8'	Viol d'Orchestre	85 notes
8'	Viol Celeste	73 notes
8'	Flute Celeste	61 notes
8'	Clarinet	61 notes
16'	Horn Diapason	85 notes
8'	Horn Celeste (K)	61 notes
8'	Lieblich Gedeckt	73 notes
8'	Trumpet (Style "D")	61 notes
8'	Violin (K)	85 notes
8'	Violin Celeste (K)	61 notes
16'	Pedal Violone (K)	32 notes
	Mandolin	85 notes
	Chrysoglott	49 notes
	Marimba	49 notes
	Swell Shades	18 blades

Traps and Effects: Crash Cymbals (Z),
Roll Cymbal (Z), Chinese Gong (L),
Bongos, Conga Drum Bass/Kettle
Drum, 18" Bronze Church Bell,
Steamboat Whistle

SOLO CHAMBER – 13 Ranks

8'	Tibia (Solo Scale)	85 notes
16'	Tibia	97 notes
8'	Vox Humana	61 notes
8'	Brass Trumpet	61 notes
8'	Tuba Mirabilis (T)	61 notes
8'	Post Horn	61 notes
8'	Kinura	61 notes
8'	Musette	61 notes
8'	Orchestral Oboe	61 notes
8'	Brass Saxophone	61 notes
16'	Open Diapason	85 notes
8'	Salicional	85 notes
8'	Voix Celeste	73 notes
	Xylophone	37 notes
	Sleigh Bells	25 notes
	Chimes	25 notes
	Glockenspiel	25 notes
	Swell Shades	18 blades

Traps and Effects: Tap Cymbal (Z),
Brush Cymbal (Z), Choke Cymbals
(Z), Splash Cymbal (Z), Finger
Cymbals, Cow Bell, Claves, Wood
Block, Tambourine, Castanets,
Tom Tom, Sand Block, Bird Whistle,
Train Whistle, Surf

UNENCLOSED – 7 Ranks

8'	Pedal Tibia (K)	32 notes
8'	Principal (M)	61 notes
4'	Principal (M)	61 notes
	Mixture IV	244 pipes
	(O) (19-22-26-29)	
	Vibraphone	49 notes
	(Lrg Scale) (WW/D)	
	Piano, Steinway	85 notes
	AR Duo-Art (1929)	
	Bell Tree (W)	26 bells
	Temple Bells (W)	28 tubes
	Zimbelstern (W)	35 bells

GENERAL

Blowers: Two Spencr 7-½ hp,
Cederberg 10hp Phase converter
Tremulants: 13
Chests and regulators all Wurlitzer
Console: 4-manual (Chicago
Southtown, 1926), 265 Syndyne
actions (48-volt), Hesco stop tabs
Uniflex 3000 control system

More Afterglow Highlights

Union Terminal

Cincinnati Museum Center

In the 1920s Cincinnati had five different train stations in the city handling seven different railroad lines, and something desperately needed to be done. So, from 1928 to 1933, construction took place of a Union Station of some 500,000 square feet at a cost of \$228 million, a shrine to Art Deco with glass mosaic murals and moderne aluminum light fixtures. Over the years since, much damage occurred to the exterior walls and interior structure, and a total restoration lasting three years was just completed in 2018. The renovated train station also houses the Cincinnati Museum Center, as well as an Art Deco restaurant where our convention-goers will have lunch, and an ice cream parlor with authentic original Rookwood tiling. In addition, in the main rotunda is installed a classic E.M. Skinner pipe organ that we will hear via its playback capability as we tour the building.



The Cincinnati Music Hall Ballroom Wurlitzer

In the 1920s, Cincinnati was an important and growing city on the Ohio River with Indiana and Kentucky close by. A branch of the Wurlitzer family had settled in the area, and on December 27, 1927, the RKO theatre chain opened its Thomas Lamb-designed Albee Theatre in downtown Cincinnati, built at a cost of \$4 million, and containing a Wurlitzer theatre pipe organ, reputedly costing \$55,000 (Opus 1680, a 3/19 260SP). The theatre was named for its builder, E.F. Albee, who owned many vaudeville theatres and was related to famous playwright Edward Albee. After the swift onset of talking pictures, the organ was then mainly used for stage shows the Albee Theatre produced.

In the late 1960s, RKO donated the unused but intact organ to the Ohio Mechanics Institute that owned the Emery Auditorium where the organ was then subsequently installed. The organ was rebuilt and played for audiences until 1999 when the Emery Theatre closed and the Wurlitzer placed in storage under the auspices of the Ohio Valley chapter of ATOS.

In 2003 a donor who wished to remain anonymous came forward to fund the rebuilding of the organ and eventual installation

in Cincinnati's Music Hall Ballroom. Local organ technician Ron Wehmeier was contracted in 2007 to begin restoration and expansion of the instrument and subsequent installation in two chambers he had constructed in the west end of the Ballroom. With pipe rank additions the 3-manual former Albee Wurlitzer has grown to 31 ranks (ranks added: Post Horn, Salicional, Voix Celeste, Flute Celeste, Solo String Celeste, along with classical division: Principals 8', 4', and 2', plus IV-rank Mixture).

The 31 ranks are very well balanced in the ballroom, and the organ gets much use from public concerts, weddings and other such functions in the Music Hall Ballroom. Ron added a Steinway Duo-Art 6'6" grand piano playable from the console and all is operated through the solid-state relay system. The chambers are largely hidden behind gold-colored grillwork, and the decorative center of the grillwork is actually from the Albee Theatre.

Performing the final concert of the 2020 ATOS Convention Afterglow on the Albee Music Hall Wurlitzer will be Walt Strony.



The Music Hall Wurlitzer console and Steinway grand piano (Photo by Phillip Groshong)

Music Hall Wurlitzer, 3 manuals, 31 ranks, Cincinnati, Ohio

MAIN CHAMBER – 18 Ranks

8'	Vox Humana	61 pipes
8'	Tibia	85 pipes
16'	Diaphonic Diapason	73 pipes
16'	Tuba Horn	73 pipes
8'	Clarinet	61 pipes
16'	Concert Flute	97 pipes
8'	Viol d'Orchestre	85 pipes
8'	Viol Celeste	85 pipes
4'	Flute Celeste	73 pipes
8'	Salicional	73 pipes
8'	Voix Celeste	73 pipes
8'	Principal	61 pipes
4'	Octave	61 pipes
2'	Super Octave	61 pipes
	Mixture IV	244 pipes
	Chrysoglott	49 notes
	Zimbelstern	
	Temple Bells	

SOLO CHAMBER – 13 Ranks

8'	Vox Humana	61 pipes
8'	Brass Sax	61 pipes
8'	Quintadena	61 pipes
8'	Brass Trumpet	61 pipes
8'	Oboe Horn	61 pipes
8'	Kinura	61 pipes
8'	Orchestral Oboe	61 pipes
8'	Solo String	73 pipes
16'	Tibia	97 pipes
8'	Tuba Mirabilis	61 pipes
8'	Solo String Celeste	61 pipes
16'	Open Diapason	73 pipes
8'	Post Horn	61 pipes
	Xylophone	37 notes
	Marimba	49 notes
	Chimes	25 notes
	Glockenspiel	37 notes
	Sleigh Bells	25 notes

Traps and effects, 21 units

UNENCLOSED

Piano, 1925 Steinway Style OR – 6'6"
Duo-Art

GENERAL

Thumb Pistons: 15 General, 10 Solo, 10 Great,
10 Accompaniment, Set, General Cancel,
Range

Divisional Nameplates cancel division

Toe Studs: 6 (1 - 5 Combination, #6 32' Rev.)

Expression Pedals – 3 (Piano, Main, Solo/
Master)

Sostenuto/Piano Sustain switch on Solo/Master
Crescendo Pedal

Piano Levers, Upper (1st Touch / 2nd Touch)

Roll Cymbal/Crash Cymbal
Snare Roll/Bass Drum & Crash
Piano Levers, Lower (single touch)

Crash Cymbal
Chinese Gong

15hp Spencer Blower, 3,000 CFM, 27" WP

44 Expression Shades

14 Tremulants

215 Stop Tabs

Uniflex 3000 Control System

19 Regulators/Reservoirs

A River Cruise to End The Day

Before returning to the Westin Hotel in Indianapolis, the Cincinnati Afterglow Day will end with relaxing cocktails and delicious buffet dinner and dessert while enjoying an Ohio River cruise on the majestic stern-wheeler BB Riverboat before boarding the buses for a comfortable two-hour ride to Indianapolis.

