

The Mars Theatre in downtown Lafayette, Indiana opened in 1921 with comedian Ed Wynn headlining the stage show, and local organist "Ding" Kendall at the console of the mighty (well...maybe not so mighty) Smith-Geneva pipe organ. Ed Wynn had a long, great career. The Smith-Geneva was gone by 1924.

It was replaced by a 3/10 Wurlitzer organ. This instrument remained at the Mars Theatre until longtime ATOS president Al Mason purchased it and moved it to his home near Detroit in the early 1960s. That organ is now installed at the Palace Theatre in Marion, Ohio.

When the Mars Theatre became city property, the name was changed to Long Center to honor the family that donated the theatre to the city. And a local sportscaster, working with a retired high school band teacher, had dreams of bringing an organ back to the old theatre.

Carroll Copeland was a teen-aged usher at the Princess Theatre in New Castle, Indiana in the silent movie days. When the organist there found out this young usher played piano, this organist found a way to get out of work early. Copeland started playing the last movies on Sunday nights, and thus was born a life-long dream to manage a theatre. Live long enough and dreams can come true. Carroll was 71 when Lafayette Mayor Jim Riehle asked him to manage Long Center. The pay? \$400 a month. Carroll might have done it for free.

That sportscaster? The author of this piece. In 1979, fund raising work got started on installing an organ, and a lot of hard lessons were learned, including don't schedule a grand opening concert until the organ is installed and playing!

The third organ in the theatre premiered in February of 1982 after two "opening nights" were delayed. It was featured at the 1984 ATOS convention with Tom Hazleton at the console.

The organ was 14 ranks of a lot of stuff but was never quite "right." Thus was born the fourth organ at the 1,200-seat theatre.

The foundation of the instrument is the Detroit United Artists Theatre Wurlitzer style 260, Opus 1824 with several additions, creating a 3/21 mostly Wurlitzer, crammed into a space that once housed 10 ranks. Installed by Ken Crome, and maintained by Carlton Smith, the organ has had both the Lyn Larsen voicing touch, and further work by Smith and Clark

Wilson, creating a beautiful, yet powerful sound, as 21 ranks more than fills that space.

The Wurlitzer has been a popular part of the Long Center. Just prior to the 2020 convention date, yours truly will perform his 38th annual concert, prior to the convention appearance by perennial favorite Ron Rhode.

In the case of the Mars/Long Center, it seems the fourth time was the charm!

# The Long Center and Its Four Pipe Organs

BY KEN DOUBLE



*The Mars Theatre, today the Long Center, in 1921  
(Photo Long Center collection)*

# ATOS Annual Convention 2020



*Ken Double, then and now*  
(Photos courtesy of Ken Double  
and the Long Center)

*The Long Center, today*

