

FAREWELL TO THE HOLLYWOOD – A CHAPTER CLOSES!

Thirty two years of music-making in this wonderful cinema came to a close over the weekend of the 29th and 30th of August.

News of the impending sale of the cinema broke shortly after our June show, when the building went on the market. As the Wurlitzer Organ Trust of Auckland turned worried eyes to the future, so the media got hold of the story, with TV3 taking our plight to the world, together with Radio New Zealand and the NZ Herald and Western Leader newspapers.

Once faced with the realisation that we were about to lose this unique artform from the Auckland music scene, Aucklanders rallied round and Jan Denise, our Ticket Secretary, was inundated with people, many first-timers, all determined not to miss the last show! The Sunday August 30 show sold out very rapidly, and sales for the Saturday show began to see the theatre fill up.

The Saturday show was to be a fund raiser, to help build sufficient funds to go towards the removal and safe storage of the organ pending a new home. While Jan was spending literally hours every day dealing with phone calls and emails from people desperate to get seats, the Trust was becoming more and more alarmed at the prospect of removing the organ and the costs of this monumental project.

Support and advice came in from local MP David Cunliffe and Councillor Ross Clow, (Chairman of *The Trust's Community Foundation* that administers funds from the Portage Licensing Trust) The PLT had, from 1996 to 2007, contributed substantial funds towards the organ's refurbishment project, so obviously wanted to ensure those funds were not in vain.

So following advice from Ross, we amassed quotes from all the businesses locally, who would be needed to provide services such as heavy-lifting, transport and of course, storage.

A number of organ builders from the Australian theatre organ community put their hands up, and WOTA took Melbourne's Julien Arnold on board, this following recommendations from Scott Harrison, a name familiar to many of you as a great organist and talented organ maintenance guru. Julien's reputation was already well known to us, he having successfully transplanted many fine theatre organs in Melbourne and beyond, and we knew he would approach the job mindful of the huge passion that many of us have for our Wurlitzer, and the distress that this whole situation was causing all of the team.

John Palmer our Treasurer, set up a "PayPal" account to provide for the international theatre organ community, who were gravely concerned for our plight and knowing the huge costs that would be required, wanted to donate to the cause.

In response to the media publicity, a "Givealittle" account was set up but was much slower to grow, however the Trust directly received a number of very generous donations from our *Friends of the Wurlitzer* members.

As interested parties began to contact the real estate agents to view the property, the message came back loud and clear that buyers would only be interested in the Hollywood as a "live" theatre, not for movies, and as such would require the theatre stage back, this of course fully occupied by the Wurlitzer organ chambers. So the Wurlitzer HAD to go!

This now brings us to the final weekend. With the Sunday show sold out, the Saturday show on August 29th saw the Hollywood $\frac{3}{4}$ full with just on 320 being seated, ready for showtime. The Saturday show was planned as an "entrée" to the "Main Course" the next day, so a shorter program was presented by our Artist Jelani Eddington from the USA. In our audience that Saturday afternoon, were representatives from many of the funding organisations who had supported us for so many years, including people from the local *Whau Community Board* and *The Trust's Community Foundation*, interested to see just how much regard and fondness Aucklanders had, for this Wurlitzer pipe organ. The atmosphere was charged to say the least, and right from the console raiser, Judy Garland's *Get Happy*, the audience were very vocal in their appreciation.

NZ Herald reporter, Eli Orzessek attended the Saturday show and wrote this wonderful review.....

You really haven't lived if you haven't heard the Star Wars theme performed live on a gigantic Wurlitzer organ.

It was a rather bittersweet occasion, but at the weekend US theatre organist Jelani Eddington performed two special farewell concerts at the Hollywood Cinema in Avondale.

One of the last independent cinemas in New Zealand, the Hollywood is soon to be sold and the trust which owns the Wurlitzer organ has been told the organ must be removed by the end of September.

The Wurlitzer originally arrived in New Zealand in 1926 and was first installed at the Regent Theatre on Auckland's Queen St, before being sold to Hutt Valley High School in the 1940s. It moved to the Hollywood Cinema in 1978, which has been its home until now.

Eddington - who also practices law in New York City - first performed at the Hollywood Cinema in 1996 and has since returned every couple of years to play the historic organ.

His August shows were booked before the sale of the cinema had been announced, so a routine show ended up being a final performance.

His congenial personality certainly suited the style of the grand old theatre and his Saturday performance was well-received by the near sold-out audience of organ enthusiastic and Avondale locals.

The concert showed off the range of the instrument and Eddington performed an energetic set of musical theatre classics. There were selections from *West Side Story*, a Bette Midler medley and of course, John Williams' Star Wars theme.

However, the real highlight of the afternoon was a screening of Laurel and Hardy's silent classic *Liberty* - complete with accompaniment and special effects courtesy of the Wurlitzer - which had the audience in peals of laughter, a real trip back in time to the silent era of film.

The theatre is due to be sold soon and a potential buyer has indicated they would like full use of the stage - a large portion of which is taken up by the organ and thus must be moved.

However, the Wurlitzer Organ Trust of Auckland is in talks with another West Auckland location which may adopt it.

Hopefully, with a little bit of help, the Wurlitzer will sing again.

- nzherald.co.nz

It was with a heavy heart that Jelani Eddington and I arrived at the Hollywood Cinema on Sunday morning to prepare for *the* very last show ever by the Wurlitzer pipe organ in this venue. The program that Jelani had tentatively planned for the Sunday changed somewhat, following the huge number of requests he received from people attending the Saturday show and were hoping to hear their favourites again on Sunday. So with a couple of additions, Sunday's audience were treated to some of the gems from Saturday, equally well received with as much acclaim as they had been the previous day!

Sunday's show like Saturday's, saw many first-timers in the audience all of whom were blown away by just how much fun could be had with a Wurlitzer pipe organ. There were also people who travelled quite some distance to attend the show - a former Music Master from the Hutt Valley High School, where our Wurlitzer had presided from 1944 to the late 1960s. Theatre organ enthusiasts from around NZ, and overseas, one being Mr Ross Lange from the *Theatre Organ Society of Australia's* South Australian Division, one of the key people involved with the mighty Wurlitzer at the TOSA owned Capri Theatre in Adelaide. The week before, they had celebrated their 50th anniversary at the Capri!! Ross had heard so much about the Hollywood Wurlitzer from the touring concert organists and the work we were doing at the Hollywood that he decided he had to fly over and hear this "famous" Wurlitzer before it was silenced.

The show was a real celebration of all the Trust had achieved at the Hollywood with the Wurlitzer organ, and the organ sung that afternoon like never before. As we were approaching the end of the show, Jelani took the time to acknowledge many of the unsung heroes of the 32 year life of the Hollywood Wurlitzer. He then brought on stage, members of the Wurlitzer Organ Trust of Auckland, to acknowledge their internationally recognised efforts in promoting what was, a very successful theatre organ venue and maintaining an equally world renowned Wurlitzer pipe organ! The audience lent their voices and applause to reinforce Jelani's tribute.

He concluded the program with a real *tour de force*, the Bacchanale from the opera "Samson and Delilah". Go back twenty years, and our Wurlitzer would never have been able to do justice to such an orchestral masterpiece, however, with Jelani's hands and feet, together with all the additional resources now found on our Wurlitzer, the organ brought this dramatic piece of music to life. At its conclusion the audience acclaim raised the roof and their cries for more brought Jelani back for an encore that included an appropriate *Hooray for Hollywood* and as the console sank for the very last time, the Maori song of farewell, the haunting *Now is the Hour*.

As he climbed down off the console hoist, he and I embraced and shared a few tearful moments, before adjourning to the foyer to greet the over 400, as they departed from a Wurlitzer show at the Hollywood, for the very last time.

Many of our longer serving *Friends of the Wurlitzer* gave me a hug and we too shed some more tears together, as we all realised that it was, really, all over now for the once proud *Hollywood Wurlitzer* 1982 - 2015.

With that Chapter now closed and the tissue box empty, we turn our attentions to the painful part of a new chapter in the organ's life which will hopefully culminate with its installation into a new venue – negotiations still in hand but looking very promising. Will have details next issue.



Bill Ridge brings us these images from the Sunday August 30 "Farewell to the Hollywood" show.



MOVIN' OUT!

Within days of that final show, work began to prepare the way for the removal of the Hollywood Wurlitzer. WOTA Trustee Graham McBain was appointed Project Leader and with the wonderful support of volunteers from the *Friends of the Wurlitzer*, a handful of first-timers from the two shows who felt moved to offer help, and WOTA Trustees, a spirited labour force swept into action. Their task was to attend to the preliminary work in readiness for the arrival of the team from Melbourne, under the leadership of organ builder Julien Arnold.

As this prep-work began, some thrilling news broke! *The Trusts Community Foundation* advised that a substantial grant was to be awarded to the project – when officially paid out; it was the mighty sum of \$25K!! Then news arrived that the *Theatre Organ Society of Australia's* NSW Division and Victorian Division had both made substantial donations to the cause. All of these enabling WOTA to breathe an enormous sigh of relief and more importantly, putting a bit of colour back in our Treasurers cheeks. ☺.

With the backing of this funding, we were able to call on the “big-boys” for all the heavy lifting – such as the piano and console removal from their plinths, the moving of the two big organ blowers and the dismantling of the console scissor lift.

Here are some notes from Graham's diary of work;

After four days of considerable toil, interspersed with moments of great frustration and anxiety, the console and piano are now safely installed in the storage unit, along with the blowers, piano vacuum pump, organ power supply and some of the wind trunking. The storage unit is now already about 30% full.

Work completed so far:

- Blowers, piano vacuum pump and organ power supply isolated, removed and stored.
- Console and piano disconnected, removed and stored.
- The main wind lines have been removed and some of the trunking in the percussion chamber, but Brian and his team have left most of the chamber trunking in place for Julien's inspection.
- Plinth handrails reinstated by Mark and Steve, after removal by Mark and Ron (with a little help from me).
- The organ lift has been largely prepared (by Steve) for removal by Rose Engineering.
- Output boards of the organ control relay removed from relay room wall in one unit, together with the adjacent spreaders, and the multicore cables going to the chambers being cut at the chamber end, identified, labelled and pulled back to the relay/spreader unit, this is a major achievement by Peter, Bruce, Brian, Gordon and Steve.
- A substantial amount of clean-up has taken place under Neil's expert supervision, and there is a growing pile of rubbish behind the old hall (I see a skip on the horizon).
- Mat has fixed the Zip water heater and Mat and Mark have fixed the big backstage working light so it isn't so dim behind the screen any more.
- Marlene and Margaret have provided tasty morning teas and lunches, and set a high standard for future organ projects to live up to!

Many people have contributed greatly to this effort, but I can't stress enough how helpful both Mark Matheson and Mat Mathew have been, both to the removal work and to me

personally, with lots of good advice and truly indispensable practical help when I was at the edges of my own knowledge and competence. Big thanks to you both!

Tomorrow a small team of us will work on removing the unenclosed percussions (cathedral chimes, tower chimes, single-tap xylophone, sand block and roll and crash cymbals), and there may be more preparatory work to be done on the lift.

We are ahead of schedule, despite the delay getting the console and piano down, and well prepared for Julien's arrival tomorrow night.

Should we have a "completion" party when this is all over? Or maybe a wake?

Many thanks to all, Graham

***Steve Crawford
with son James,
begin dismantling
the two big organ
blowers***

(Laurie Mathews)



***The Wurlitzer
piano, with its
mechanical
action removed,
is about to leave
its plinth via
forklift***

**(Laurie
Mathews)**

The organ console is loaded aboard the truck.



LEFT: Gordon McGhie carries one of the Cymbal units out of the chambers

BELOW: Ron Clark, Gordon McGhie, John Kleingeld and Graham McBain wrestle with the Glockenspiel.

With thanks to Laurie Mathews for recording these scenes



Melbourne Organ Builder Julien Arnold, his son Mark and Mark's fiancée Robyn, arrived over the weekend of 12 & 13 September. After casting their eyes over the Hollywood chamber layout, they then visited our proposed new venue and inspected the planned space being offered to house the organ. Julien was of the opinion that with a bit of juggling, the organ would indeed fit, and produce a more stunning sound in this location than it had at the Hollywood!

Monday then saw them together with our mighty band of helpers, as they moved into the organ chambers to dismantle this proud Wurlitzer pipe by pipe, chests, wind-lines, wiring by the kilometre, it all being lovingly wrapped, crated, and transported to our storage facility in Three Kings.

Back to Graham's diary.....

Hello All

This week we have made tremendous progress and are nearing the end of the removal project. With the big and heavy items out of the way the previous week, our three organ specialists from Melbourne made short work of the organ chambers, emptying them in less than four days before moving on to removing the shutters and frames (in less than a day) and even sweeping out the chambers!

A big thank you to Julien, Mark and Robyn, who made this part of the process run like a well-oiled machine, taking so much load off my shoulders! Along the way they have made a few discoveries that should mean that Opus 1475 will be in even better condition (and voice) when it emerges in its new home.

Our team of willing and dedicated volunteers wrapped and crated pipes so quickly and efficiently that there was no work left for them on Friday, and the way they worked so happily together bodes well for the success of future organ

projects (including one that we all want to see completed as soon as possible). My heartfelt thanks to all of them.

Our storage unit is looking pretty full at present and, with a full truckload of organ parts and general detritus still awaiting sorting and transport, I need to spend a day there (with some volunteers) compressing the contents to make more room!

Neil and James will lead the final push to leave our home of 32 years spic and span, and there is still some work to do removing electrical equipment and reinstating the theatre, as agreed previously. With the completion of this work and the delivery of the final load to the storage unit, my job as project manager of the removal project will be over.

Many thanks to everyone who has supported the removal project, in whatever capacity, and let's look forward to a wonderful new life in another venue.

Graham McBain



**Supports the preservation
of Auckland's historic
1926 Wurlitzer pipe organ**



More Images from Laurie Mathews

***In the Solo Chamber,
Mark Arnold passes down
pipes from one of the
String Ranks to Julien***

***BELOW: Lunchtime!
Brian Massey,
John Swales,
Graham McBain,
Tina McNally,
Robyn Adderly,
Mark Arnold, &
Julien Arnold***



***OPUS1475, the former
"Hollywood Wurlitzer",
now crated and ready
to go to our storage
facility.***