

The builder of the University's new organ, Juergen Ahrend, and his wife, Greta, make delicate adjustments while assembling the instrument in the School of Music.

Thousands of parts go into new organ

If you have never seen a large organ before it's assembled—the sight is awesome!

Hundreds of pipes of all sizes fill a big room in the School of Music at the University. The 500-seat Recital Hall of the building is a jumble of framework and the furniture that makes up the exposed sections of the great instrument. In the basement, the blower and bellows and wind tunnels are being installed.

These are all parts of the University's new Ahrend organ that has been financed through a bequest from the late Robert Beall of Central Point, who died in 1961.

The will provided that his estate, then amounting to \$162,000, would go in entirety to the University, with the stipulation that the money be used for the erection and maintenance of a memorial dedicated to the pioneer women of Oregon. The gift was in memory of his mother "who was herself one of the pioneers."

The University Development Fund was appointed as trustee and charged with determining a memorial. Their decision was that the organ would best carry out the concept of the will, for as was pointed out "it was unquestionably the women who preserved, appreciated, and carried the culture of the East across the plains to Oregon and the American West—Music was almost exclusively limited to women, and the parlor piano or organ was a symbol of home and motherhood."

Order placed

Early in 1968 in order was placed with the German organ manufacturing firm of Ahrend and Brunzema. This is a small firm, "a six-man operation," but it is recognized as one of Europe's two great organ builders.

Ahrend and Brunzema had a long waiting list for building organs and for the restoration of old organs. The firm divides its time between these two activities. So it was that, while purchases of materials were made, the actual work on the organ did not start until late in 1971. By that time, the partnership had been dissolved so that it was Juergen Ahrend and his craftsmen who built the University's new organ.

The entire output of the shop for almost ten months was involved in the building of the University's organ. Finally it was assembled this summer.

John Hamilton, professor of organ in the University School of Music, spent the summer in Germany and had opportunities to play on the instrument before it was dismantled and shipped, by air, to Eugene.

Two shipments were made. Parts of a smaller scale were shipped to Seattle and then trucked to Eugene. Larger parts were shipped to Los Angeles and trucked north.

Hamilton believed it may be the first time that a large organ has been shipped by air.

Now that the assemblage of parts is at the University, the builder, Ahrend, and an assistant, Hermann Schmidt, have also arrived on the campus to make the installation. Ahrend has accompanied them to give additional assistance.

One month for completion

They estimate that it will take approximately one month to complete their work. It is a complicated task. While most unassembled organs come with all parts marked for installation, there are no markings on the Ahrend-made parts. The two men know the materials intimately and proceed confidently with the intricate assemblage.

Most of the exposed wood in the organ is of oak, with the frame work in back of and enclosing the keyboard fashioned of Asian palisander. The black keys are from ancient North German oak, dug up from peat bogs where it had seasoned for 1,000 years. Other parts of the organ are of Oregon pine and fir, Western red cedar and Port Orford cedar.

The 2,500 pipes, all hand-cast, are 95 per cent pure tin with lead used as the alloy. The finished pipes are burnished with steel wool. A unique feature of the organ is that part of the pipes are covered at the top. These pipes, Hamilton said, will never have to be tuned, and in fact they cannot be tuned. This is, in Hamilton's words, "a virtuoso feat."

The action of the organ is all mechanical, with only the blower operated by electricity.

When completed the organ will be 21 feet in height and will occupy the entire back stage of the School's Recital Hall. The exposed organ will include the central structure with the keyboard and two free-standing pieces of furniture on either side. These pieces will house the tracker action (mechanical) for the pedal pipes. Only 101 of the many pipes will be exposed.

The builder, Ahrend, has played the organ since he was a child. He is also a virtuoso recorder player. When a student in Gottingen, he became interested in building organs. He became an apprentice of a builder in Gottingen and worked with the builder for seven years before he established his own shop. He has become noted as a leading builder of organs modeled on the great organs of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

His shop is in Leer, in the area of Ostfriesland on the border of Holland.

Five in U.S.

There are in the United States, Hamilton said, only five other Ahrend organs. All of these are on the West Coast and all are small organs.

Hamilton, who is a well-known concert organist, is enthusiastic about the new instrument, which he says will undoubtedly be one of the great concert organs in the nation. There is, he commented, "literally no other organ of this quality in North America."

The Recital Hall of the Music School has been remodeled to make it acoustically right for the new instrument.

The original bequest, invested, now totals around \$230,000. This will cover the cost of the organ, approximately \$133,000, and the remodeling of the Recital Hall.

Hamilton said the organ, which will be completed by the end of September, will be used for student recitals, both graduate and undergraduate, for guest concerts, and with orchestra and symphonic band concerts.

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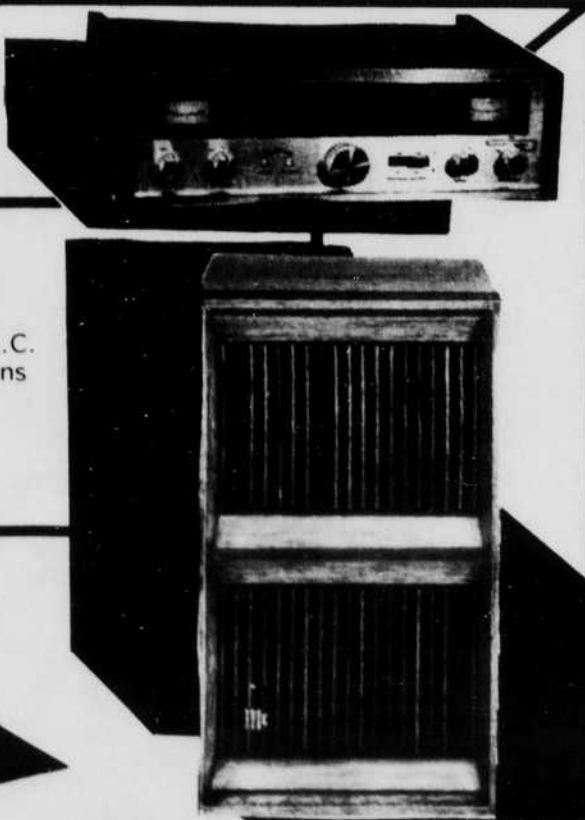


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