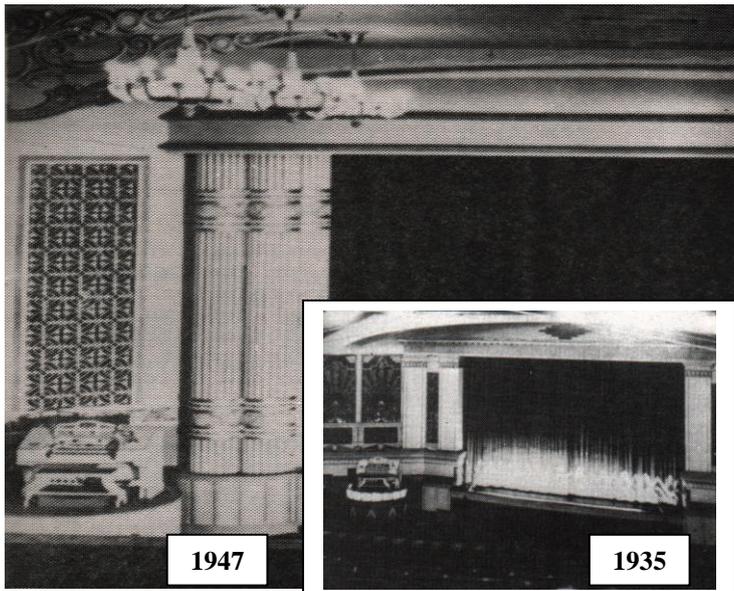


# Rod Blackmore's AUSTRALASIAN THEATRE ORGANS

## *New South Wales section*



*Best known location:*  
**Melba theatre, Strathfield**

**Christie theatre organ**  
Opus No. 2766  
2 manuals, 8 ranks

*previously at Ritz Theatre, Concord as  
2 manuals 6 ranks; later at Christian  
Broadcasting Assn Studio, Five Dock*

***No longer an intact instrument***

The *Melba* theatre, Strathfield, dated back to an original building in 1913. It was rebuilt in 1921, and again in 1927 when it became known as the *Strathfield Cinema*. Western Suburbs Cinemas Ltd. became owners in 1930 and remodelling took place again in 1935. Under the control of *Hoyts Theatres Ltd* in March 1944, by that time again renamed the *Melba*, there was subsequent remodelling in 1947. In the late 1950s patronage dropped and the final programme was screened on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1966. The theatre was demolished in December 1968.

It was during the 1935 alterations that the *Christie* organ (opus no. 2766) was installed. This organ with a "B.2" model console had previously been installed at the *Ritz* theatre, Central Concord (a nearby suburb to Strathfield) in 1931, as a 2 manual 6 ranks instrument (order number 101 in the books of the Australian division of the English organbuilding firm *Hill, Norman & Beard*). It had originally been ordered for the *Gordon* theatre but Gordon received opus 2745 that had been ordered firstly for the Sydney *Lyceum*. The organ had been opened at the *Ritz* by *Knight Barnett*, and was located in two chambers. (The *Ritz* had also come under a lease to Western Suburbs Cinemas in 1934, and later to Hoyts theatres in 1944. It closed on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1960, was used by Hoyts as a warehouse for a number of years, finally being sold in December 1976 - later occupied as a supermarket, but now rebuilt as a restaurant & offices, retaining the *Ritz* name.) At the *Melba* the organ was enlarged to 8 ranks and installed in a single chamber. The console was located on a hoist to the left of the proscenium (see above.) Hill, Norman & Beard's order number for this work was N45. (The additional 2 ranks were Bourdon and Quintadena, each on direct-electric action chests.)

The opening of the *Christie* at the *Melba* was performed by *Paul Cullen*, a well-known New Zealand organist on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1935. Organists of Western Suburbs Cinemas were on rotation. Those who played at the *Melba* included *Les Denley*, *Ray Chaffer*, *Jim Williams*, *Denis Palmistra*, *Norman Robins*, *Clarence Black* and *Jean Penhall*. In 1957 organist Penn Hughes brokered a sale of the organ to the *Christian Broadcasting Association* which had temporary studios in the Presbyterian Church, Five Dock, where it was used in a number of their recorded productions. It had been planned that the organ go into a chapel in new studios nearby. The chapel however did not eventuate and the organ was sold to the organbuilding firm S.T. Noad & Son in 1970. Some ranks went to organist *Arthur Esgate* for his Compton-controlled residence organ (later installed in the *Dallas Brooks Hall* in Melbourne); others, and the console were bought by *George Newell* of Punchbowl who had a project planned in connection with another redundant organ - this ultimately did not take place, and the console at least since 1996 was owned by the *Bendigo Theatre Organ Society*, Victoria, (disbanded in 2006 and assets now taken over by TOSA (Victoria).

**Organ ranks:** Phonon Diapason, Violone, Quintadena, Orchestral Clarinet, Bourdon-Tibia, Celeste, Tuba, Vox Humana.

← Photo to left is interior of the *Ritz* theatre in the late 1930s after the organ had been removed. The spacious organ chambers can be seen.



*Christie console at CBA studios in 1961.  
Note added timber cladding.*