

# Rod Blackmore's AUSTRALASIAN THEATRE ORGANS

## *New South Wales section*



*Best known location:*  
**Regent Theatre, Sydney**

**Wurlitzer theatre organ**  
Opus No. 1808  
Style 260  
3 manuals, 15 ranks

*now 3 manuals 16 ranks*  
**at John Atkinson's residence, Hurstville NSW**

The *Regent* theatre in George Street, Sydney, was built by entrepreneurs J.C. Williamson's, opening on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1928 and leased to the *Hoyts* circuit of cinemas. *Regent* theatres were flagships for Hoyts across the nation and were renowned for their lavish adornments.

When the theatre opened it was equipped with a 2 manual 8 ranks Wurlitzer theatre organ, style F, opus no. 1730 but this proved to be too small for the auditorium and was quickly relocated to the *Plaza* theatre, Melbourne (Victoria), there being enlarged to 12 ranks. It was replaced in the same year by opus no. 1808, a Wurlitzer of 3 manuals and 15 ranks which had been on its way to the *Capitol* theatre in Perth (Western Australia.)

The two organ chambers with timber walls were set high up behind the left and right hand sides of the proscenium. The console was originally on its own hoist in the left hand side of the orchestra pit, but when orchestras ceased to be employed in about 1949 the console was moved to centre position on the orchestra hoist. The sounds of the organ filled the auditorium with beautiful tones; to this author's ear it was a sweeter-toned organ than the similar instrument (opus 1813) which was installed the same year at Sydney's *Capitol* theatre. 32' Diaphone pipes were laid horizontally behind the top of the proscenium. The original opening organist had been Roy Devaney, and he was followed by other overseas organists Wallace Kotter, Stanley Wallace, Eddie Fitch, Eddie Ford, and Leslie Harvey. The first Australian organist, who was to remain in residence for 14 years until 1945 was Owen Holland. He was succeeded by Stan Cummins who had come from across George Street at the *Plaza* and remained for 13 years, being followed in 1958 by Reubert Hayes (who had also been a long-term resident at the *Plaza*.) The organ was closed down in May 1960. During Reubert Hayes' era he enhanced the Tibia chorus by making it available at all pitches, utilising the then unused piano stop tabs. (The upright Wurlitzer piano had gone on loan to the *Arcadia* Chatswood.)

In 1953 the theatre built a false proscenium forward of the original to permit installation of the wider *Cinemascope* screen. This entombed the organ console beneath. Organists then had to play without being visible to audiences and by listening to the sound of the organ relayed through a small speaker above the console. That they were able to balance the sounds is a tribute to their musicality. The theatre closed as a cinema in January 1976 but continued until May 1984 as a venue for live stage productions, ultimately being demolished in 1989.

In 1963 the organ was sold. It has since been installed in John Atkinson's residence in suburban Hurstville (1985) and was enlarged to 16 ranks in 1997 by the addition of an English Posthorn. In late 2006 the organ was placed on the National Trust Register. The layout of the Main and Solo divisions is as they were in the theatre, but they are side-by-side in a large single chamber. Small shutter apertures in front of the two divisions control the volume emerging into the music room studio that has décor reminiscent of the theatre. An 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration was held on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2007 at which *Neil Jensen, John Giacci, Alan Tranter and David Parsons* performed.

The disposition of the pipes at the *Regent* was as follows:

**Main chamber:** Diaphonic Diapason, Tuba Horn, Clarinet, Viole d'Orchestre, Viol Celeste, Flute (stopped), Vox Humana

**Solo chamber:** Brass Trumpet, Tibia Clausa, Kinura, Orchestral Oboe, Brass Saxophone, String, Oboe Horn, Quintadena



Atkinson residence

