



Hooking up wires to the console of the Academy's new organ is an intricate task.

Organ has 4102 pipes. This is one of five portable units.

BY SAMUEL L. SINGER

Papa Liked Organs

So Mrs. Zimbalist gives Academy world's biggest portable

THE world's largest portable pipe organ will complement the majestic sounds of the Philadelphia Orchestra when the Academy of Music reopens the end of next month.

One hardly thinks of the king of instruments as being portable. The famous multiple-keyboard organs in Philadelphia's John Wanamaker store and Atlantic City's Convention Hall—the two largest in the world—fill thousands of cubic feet. Indeed, either would completely fill a small hall!

But in the case of the Academy of Music, it was a case of portable organ or no organ. A permanently fixed instrument would need an area approximately 50 feet wide, 12 feet deep and 15 feet high. This is as much space as the symphony orchestra itself occupies. Moreover, opera and ballet companies need backstage space, just as much as on stage in view of the audience.

The problem of housing was solved, finally and in desperation, when Eugene Ormandy, music director of the Orchestra, and Stuart F. Louchheim, president of the Academy, discovered a little-used scenic storage area adjoining the stage. Could the organ be movable? It could.

There are many small portable pipe organs, complete in a single unit and quite transportable. A somewhat larger instrument, of two manuals, was constructed for the Henry and Edsel Ford Auditorium in Detroit, by the Aeolian-Skinner Organ Co., designers and builders of the Academy organ. But

the Academy's organ is much larger than the Detroit instrument, and posed many more problems.

The century-old stage could not support much weight. So the ten-ton instrument will be on five movable platforms, to spread the weight across the reinforced stage. The stage—as ballet dancers and other performers know only too well—slants (as do European stages) upstage at the rate of three-eighths of an inch per foot. Would the organ roll into the laps of the audience? The builders promise it won't happen.

Donor of the organ is Mrs. Efreim Zimbalist, founder and president of the Curtis Institute of Music. The gift is in memory of her father, Cyrus H. K. Curtis, noted Philadelphia philanthropist and publisher (*Saturday Evening Post*, the *Philadelphia Ledger* and *New York Evening Post*). It continues a family tradition of love for the king of instruments and donations of pipe organs.

"The first organ bought by my parents after they had purchased the necessities of daily living was a little

hand-organ for their home," Mrs. Zimbalist recalls. "I remember that organ. Father was a devotee of the organ because of a friend of his father who came from Germany to live in Portland (Maine). This man, Herman Kotschmar, was the organist of the Congregational Church in Portland for about forty years. . . . Little Cyrus Curtis (his middle initials were added in honor of the organist when Cyrus Curtis was 8 years old) was forever sitting in that church listening to the beautiful music of Herman Kotschmar."

Young Cyrus Curtis soon learned to play the pipe organ, and remained fast friends with Kotschmar until the latter's death.

"Organs and Father seemed to come together naturally," Mrs. Zimbalist continued. "As his business flourished, it was Father's joy to give a beautiful organ to various churches, both in Philadelphia and in Maine, where they are still being played.

"I have grown up in the atmosphere of organs. With the new birth of the Academy of Music, I thought that, had

my father been living, he would have felt the Academy of Music and the City of Philadelphia should have a truly great organ.

"That's how it all came about, a father's influence on his daughter."

Another large organ here is also named for Curtis—the four-manual instrument in Irvine Auditorium of the University of Pennsylvania. It had been built for the Sesqui-Centennial Exposition here in 1926.

The Academy's organ, with three manuals and pedalboard, will have 73 stops, 28 couplers and 4102 pipes. A pipe organ is hardly less complicated than a Univac machine: there will be 1,500,000 possible key and stop combinations. And the myriad of internal wires, electrical contacts, pipes and bellows would fascinate an Einstein.

The portability of the organ also spells versatility. The instrument may be placed in different ways, according to needs for recital, symphony concert, choral or opera accompaniment. Usually it will provide a handsome visual background as well. It has not yet been booked for any jazz concert.