

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Mount Baker Theatre Gears Up for 100th Season with the Restoration of the Wurlitzer Pipe Organ

Bellingham, WA – On Monday, August 18 a team of [JL Weiler](#) organ restoration experts, led by Service and Restoration Technician Toby Washburn, worked hand in hand with Mount Baker Theatre staff to start the process of removing and dismantling the historic 1927 Wurlitzer Pipe Organ (Opus 1558). Washburn and the JL Weiler team will restore the mighty Wurlitzer to its historic splendor in time for MBT's 100th Season. During the removal and restoration process, MBT Board, staff, and some organ enthusiasts had the opportunity to hear Washburn's firsthand insights into the complex removal process, followed by reflections and fascinating historical context from some of MBT's longest-standing employees and volunteers.

When built in 1927, MBT was equipped with the top-of-the-line Style 215 Wurlitzer theater pipe organ. Joy Brown, the original organ player at MBT, rose into full view of the audience, a novel experience for theatre goers of the time. Later, Gunner Anderson also played MBT's Wurlitzer organ as the matinee organist and relief player until the decline in silent films. In the 1950s, Anderson returned to MBT and continued to play. Alongside other organ lovers, Anderson is credited with helping the Wurlitzer become one of the only original and operational theatre organs still in use thanks to his continual playing and care during the 1950s. MBT's mighty Wurlitzer pipe organ was maintained for decades with the help of the Mount Baker Theatre Organ Society, a volunteer group of organ aficionados.

Only 2,143 Wurlitzer pipe organs were created, 14 of which were made specifically for Fox West Coast Theatres such as MBT. MBT's organ is one of only 12 worldwide that is still used in its original venue. When it was installed, the organ was considered the largest instrument of its caliber, enabling the organist to play the equivalent of four instruments at one time.

The Organ Society's final act before disbanding was to raise funds to support the digitization of MBT's organ. They donated the funds to MBT with the understanding that the digitization would allow the organ to continue to be played. In 2012-13 the work was done, and the organ was professionally converted to digital. Air still goes through each historic pipe, but now an infra-red laser beam reads electronic signals instead of the original electrical wiring. Once named one of the top ten functioning organs in the U.S., this magnificent instrument is still played by traveling organist Dennis James several times throughout MBT's season.

In addition to the restoration of the mighty Wurlitzer, MBT recently recarpeted the Lobby to preserve another of the original elements of the luxurious 1927 movie palace that transports patrons. As MBT prepares for the Centennial Season in 2026-2027, we extend our deepest gratitude to the MBT Members, patrons, and volunteers who have helped keep the magic of theatre alive these last 99 years.

MBT is the only survivor of five similar movie palaces built in Whatcom County between 1914 and 1930. This survival is due to the city and county, as well as hundreds of volunteers, businesses, and other donors who contributed to saving, restoring, and renovating MBT along the way. Those interested in becoming more involved with MBT can become a Member at www.MountBakerTheatre.com/Join-Support/Membership

About Mount Baker Theatre

Mount Baker Theatre is a 501(c)(3) non-profit arts organization dedicated to enriching the region's culture through dynamic performances, arts education, inspiring engagement in the community and stewardship of a national historic treasure. Located in the heart of downtown Bellingham's Art District, MBT is the largest theatrical venue north of Seattle in Washington State. Built in 1927, MBT is the only survivor of the five original movie palaces built in Whatcom County between 1914 and 1930. The building itself is a beautifully restored architectural treasure, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Since opening day, MBT has been dedicated to showcasing top touring performing arts events, as well as presenting community-driven events and performances, to audiences in the North Puget Sound and the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

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