

# The Nerve System of the Large Theatre

## Brain and Arms of Showmanship In Phone Link

By CARL J. BEGEMANN



Sid Grauman in his office at the Chinese theatre, Hollywood

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—Among the many mechanical and electrical devices adapted by technicians to the special needs of the modern picture theatre is the communication system developed by engineers of the Dictograph Company with the assistance of leading showmen. This article by Mr. Bege-  
mann describes the practical working of the system in its application to the large presentation theatre as a means of co-ordinating the various technical and artistic elements combined in the elaborate presentations at

these houses. In a less elaborate manner this communication system is also applied to the more modest demands of the smaller theatre, with equal success as a conservator of the manager's time and an agent for accomplishing smoother operations of house routine and program presentations. Any information that may be desired regarding this latter type of installation, we will be glad to furnish to all who will address their questions to The Showman, at the office of Motion Picture News, 729 Seventh Ave., New York City.]

**G**RAUMAN'S Chinese Theatre, the latest achievement of Sid Grauman, impresario and theatre-builder extraordinary, embodies many innovations, both in structure and management. In discussing with the writer the management problem so large a theatre presents, Mr. Grauman said: "The most important problem in the management of a theatre, is, of course, a perfect performance. All units contributing to the audience's entertainment must operate with clocklike precision. There must be no breaks in the program.

"There are several methods of synchro-

nizing these various units of the theatre to assure a smooth performance. The most efficient aid I have in this work is



Instant communication with all parts of the theatre is accomplished by means of the Dictograph system installed at Grauman's Chinese theatre. On the left is shown the instrument at the conductor's desk, above the flush type instrument in the lobby and on the right the organ console speaker, the interesting uses of which are described in the article these photos illustrate.

the Dictograph, an interior telephone system.

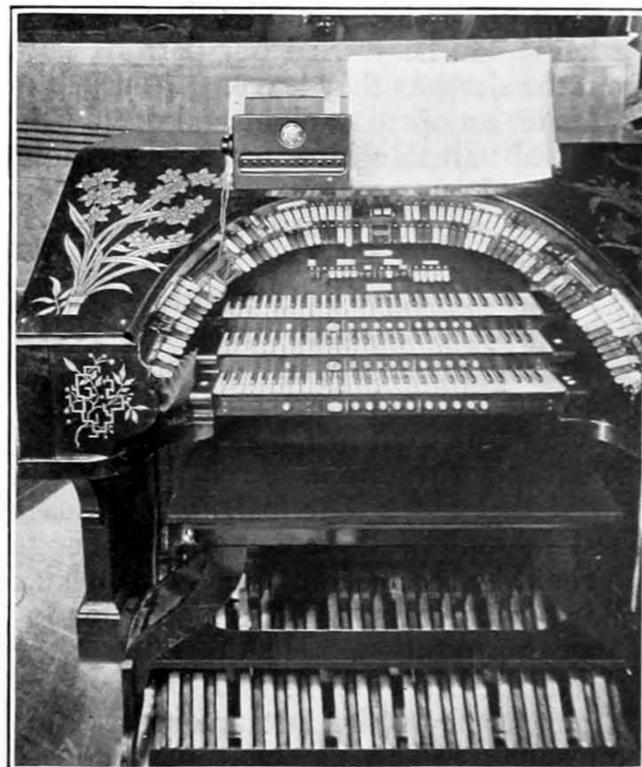
"The Dictograph Products Corporation, which makes this equipment, had several of its engineers spend a good part of a year in studying theatre communication problems. In working out the application of their product to the theatre, I had the pleasure of being a consultant and several of my suggestions are now a standard feature of the Theatre Dictograph."

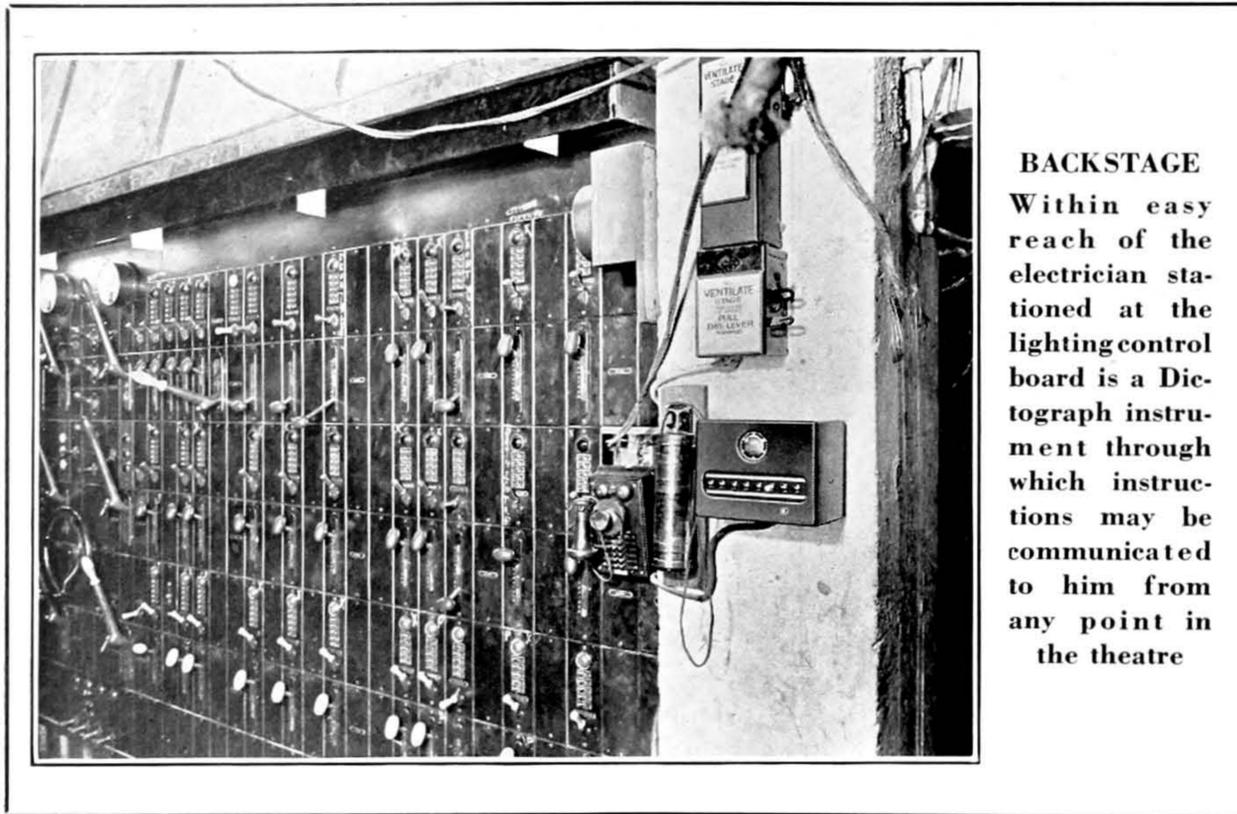
At this juncture, Mr. Grauman was interrupted by a gentle click, not much louder than the tap of a pencil. His stage manager was calling him on the Dictograph. He pressed a key on a walnut finished telephone cabinet. In a moment, he was conversing freely regarding a change in the schedule of productions.

"This little cabinet with its twenty keys gives me a complete control and immediate access to any part of my theatre. It tells me who is calling before I answer; it leaves a memorandum of calls which come in while I am out of the room; it gives me a preferential call throughout the system by a special right-of-way circuit which precludes the possibility of a busy line. This right-of-way feature is exclusive with Dictograph.

"I should like to have Mr. Reed, the manager of the theatre, take you around."

The writer was very much impressed





**BACKSTAGE**  
Within easy reach of the electrician stationed at the lighting control board is a Dictograph instrument through which instructions may be communicated to him from any point in the theatre

with Mr. Grauman's method of introduction. He threw five keys and when all parties were on line, he made a general statement to the effect that he was about to send me on a trip through the theatre with Mr. Reed and requested them to extend all courtesies. In one minute and with one operation he accomplished what would take ten minutes and five operations with a standard telephone. Quite a time saver, this Dictograph Master Station.

Mr. Reed was a very pleasant young man, who has made exceptional progress in theatre management. Pointing to the Master Station on his desk, he said: "This is identical to Mr. Grauman's in all ways except that it connects to different points. This key, for example, is wired to a bank of microphones in the footlights and whenever I wish to hear how the stage performance is getting along, I throw in this key and the loudspeaker brings in the music, dialogue, shuffling dancer's feet, noisy scene shifting; in fact, whatever sound is prevalent on the stage at the time.

"This key," pointing to another, "is wired to a microphone concealed in the paneling of the lobby and by throwing in the key I can hear what our patrons say about the show as they leave. We usually do this on an opening night and often get some real valuable information as to the reception of our program. Sometimes we make changes, based on the comment we have received by this method."

We left Mr. Reed's office and ascended to the projection room, under the roof. The booth was equipped with spotlights, a stereopticon, and three projectors. On either side of each projector was a small Dictograph substation. Mr. Reed explained that these four instruments were wired in multiple and that an incoming call could be received on any one of them, making it unnecessary for the operator to change his position. He does not have to leave the projector he is operating but can answer from the instrument next to the machine in use.

At the orchestra leader's stand was a small Dictograph Substation. Mr. Reed explained that every now and then emergency calls must be made between the conductor and the stage, and occasionally the projection room. To gain time for scene shifting, etc., the stage manager may request him to prolong his overture.

"Infrequent as these occasions may be," said Mr. Reed, "we must have telephone facilities to reach the conductor. With the usual telephone he could only be called by some sound signal. This device indicates an incoming call by a light signal. Do you see this little red lamp next to the white one? It lights up whenever a call comes in. The audience is never distracted by extraneous sounds in the midst of an overture or ballet music."

We then walked to the right end of the platform, to the organ console. The organist was already at his post, tuning his instrument for the afternoon performance.

The organist, seated at the console, ran his fingers over the keyboard. Noticing one which was apparently off tune, he

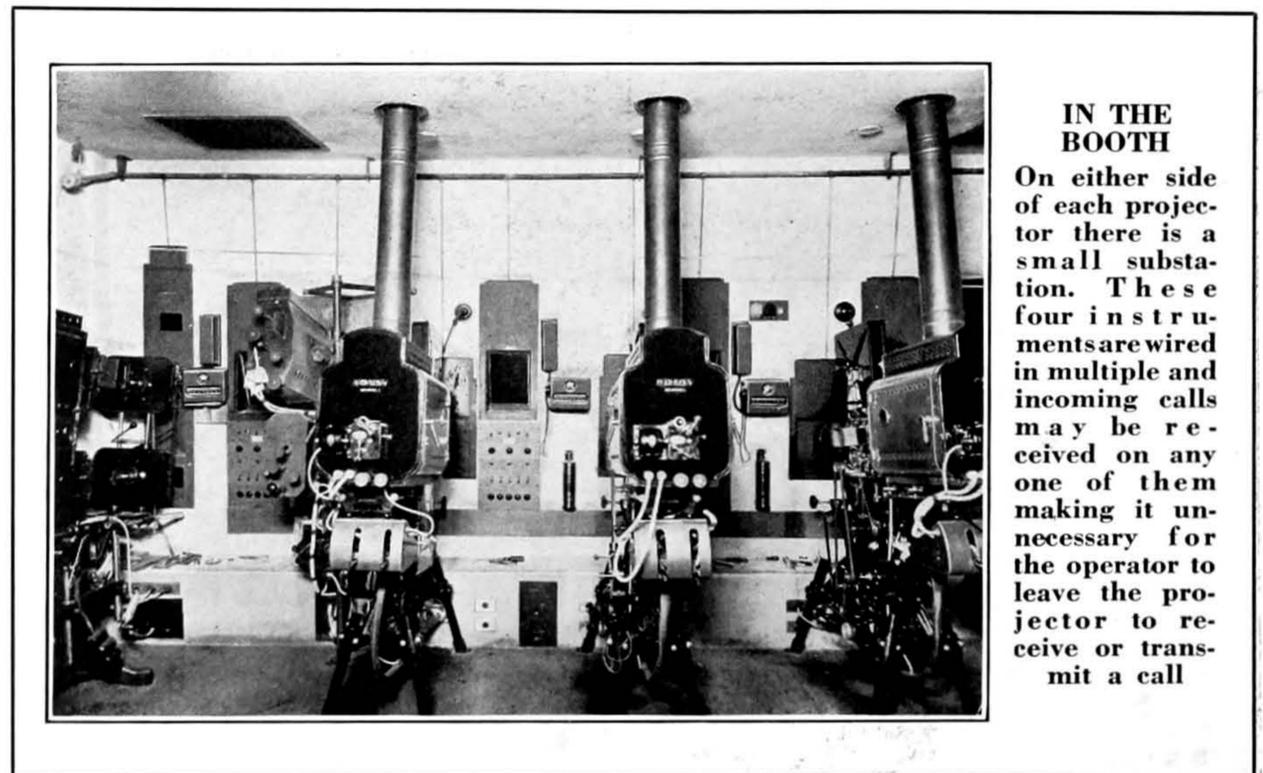
waited until the acoustic had subsided and then pressed a key on his Dictograph substation. "Please make number 8A a bit finer," he said, when he made this connection. In a few minutes there was a buzz on his instrument and he received a call from the tuner in the left to try the same key again.

"The interior of that organ chamber is pretty large. It runs from the floor right up to the ceiling and the adjusting must be done on several floor levels. The sound made by one of the pipes reaches such volume in the confines of the loft that it is impossible for the tuner himself to hear the result of his adjustment. In theatres not equipped with a Dictograph system, it is necessary for the tuner to come out of the loft to hear.

"In six conveniently located spots throughout the organ loft, there are located telephone jacks which are wired in multiple to this substation on my console. The tuner is equipped with a headset and breast transmitter which are attached to a long cord terminating in a plug. By pushing this plug in the nearest jack, he automatically buzzes me and when I lift my receiver we are connected on a regular telephone line. When I call him, a light appears simultaneously on each of the six floor levels, where it is visible from any position in the chamber."

We went to the main lobby, where Mr. Reed pointed to a flush type Dictograph substation. He told me that this was used to get in touch with the head usher. "The policy of this theatre is not to sell more admissions than there are seats available," he said, "and from this instrument the head usher calls from the box office and makes reports regarding the seats available."

After summing up the various innovations he had shown me, he said, "Don't carry away with you the impression that the Theatre Dictograph can only be applied to a massive entertainment enterprise like the Chinese Theatre. Smaller houses throughout the country have been using Dictograph before the era of the large motion picture theatre began."



**IN THE BOOTH**  
On either side of each projector there is a small substation. These four instruments are wired in multiple and incoming calls may be received on any one of them making it unnecessary for the operator to leave the projector to receive or transmit a call