

"It scared the hell out of them!!"

# AN OLD CALIFORNIA LEGEND

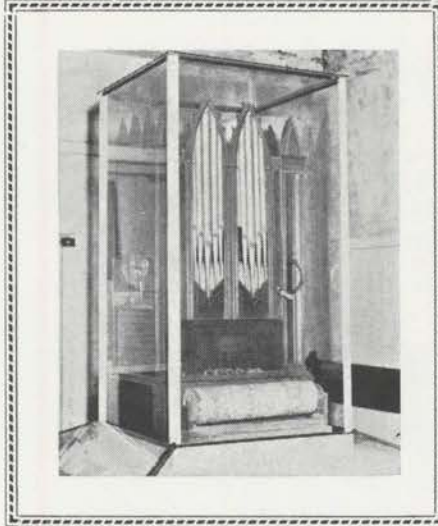
by HARRY JENKINS

"It scared the Hell out of them!" is probably the way Fr. Francisco de Lasuen described the incident later. On a sultry California summer afternoon in 1798 the Franciscan monk learned that renegades were on the way to raid his Mission San Juan Bautista. How could he discourage them? He thought a moment. Perhaps a loud noise. But how to create it? Then he recalled the huge barrel organ given to him by a friendly sea captain six years earlier. The large, spiked wooden rolls weren't programmed for church music so

the instrument hadn't been played much. But the priest recalled that its big Diapason was so loud that it had frightened the mission Indians. Knowing that the raiders would include a number of Indians, Fr. Lasuen opened the windows, and none

"raiders" as they scurried for cover. The priest waited until the horsemen stopped for a brief council of war. Then he let them have it. He pumped the bellows furiously and snapped the cylinder release. A blast of nondescript music filled the quiet afternoon (some of the pins on the rolls had come loose and had been driven back into the wood wherever there was an open space; this resulted in some "variations"). The raiders were stupefied. Nothing like this had ever before assailed their ears. It was unearthly. Besides, it was doing something to the horses. Two bolted, their riders unable to stop them. Another started to buck and threw his rider. There was a great whinnying and neighing from all the horses which provided a somewhat psychedelic obligato to the already dissonant roar of the barrel organ thundering from the windows.

Suddenly a great desire to be somewhere else descended upon the thwarted raiders and they spurred their mounts in any direction which led away from the mission. When the dust had settled and the wail of the hurdy-gurdy had ceased, the perspiring priest went to the mission chapel and knelt in prayer. His words aren't recorded but they probably went something like, "... I thank thee, Lord, for the loud noise thou hast sent me. It really scared the Hell out of thy enemies!"



THE LOUD ONE — Father Lasuen's barrel Organ might not be just the thing for church but its raucous sound once saved the entire mission.

too soon. The sound of horses' hooves loomed and the mission Indians cried

## For The Record, continued

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record of popular classics played on the memorable Wurlitzer.

A large portion of side one is devoted to Bizet's lively *Carmen* suite. They are the familiar Overture, Habanera, Toreador song and Gypsy dance, well played in theatre organ style and registration (only once throughout these classical and semi-classical selections does Brereton try for a "straight, organ" sound and that's for *Trumpet Voluntary*)

With the exception of Chopin's *Polonaise Militaire* (written for the piano) all of the selections are transcriptions of orchestral works, one of the best examples being von Suppe's *Poet and Peasant Overture* which gathers some new sparkle under Brereton's expert touch.

Actually the organ is Brereton's second instrument, the first being the piano. As a pianist he is well known in longhair circles, having played with such distinguished orchestras as the San Francisco symphony under Pierre Monteaux. Yet there is no hint of the pianist in such offerings as Elgar's majestic *Pomp and Circumstance No. 1*. The big finale is Khachaturian's wild *Sabre Dance*.

There's plenty of showmanship in all the selections and the "dowager Empress" has been well recorded. If there is any valid criticism of the result it may be that the Posthorn is used too frequently as a solo reed. But the miracle is that Brereton could handle the complex facilities represented by the console at all; He's been blind since birth.

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