

# BILLY NALLE GREAT IN ROCHESTER RTOS CONCERT

by Rita Becker

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**B**ABY, it was unseasonably cold outside this Saturday night. But not inside the Auditorium Theatre, where Billy Nalle was giving his all for more than 1500 delighted people.

The event was a public concert presented by the Rochester Theatre Organ Society on its 4-21 Wurlitzer, successfully transplanted from the demolished RKO Palace.

The organist, a nationally known TV, radio, concert, and recording artist has a most formidable list of credits and accomplishments to date. This, his first visit to Rochester, had been eagerly awaited by "his own people," for Billy is also a member of RTOS and a "stockholder" in the organ.

He came to town at the beginning of the week, and spent considerable time getting to know this particular Wurlitzer and setting up his combinations. The glittering results after the final countdown kept toes merrily tapping during the flashing rhythm numbers, while the palms were practically being blistered from the thunderous applause. In fact, this writer kept wondering how her aging wristwatch kept running at all after such a barrage of shock-waves. (They made 'em better those days.)

The concert consisted of only 18 numbers, plus one encore, which may not sound like a very long program—if you weren't there. But the accent was on quality, rather than quantity, for there were no medleys at all. Each selection was a big production number, masterfully explored to the fullest degree, as only Billy Nalle does it. Added to this was his pleasant commentary before each tune, so it all totalled up to a full evening of great entertainment. When one is in the presence not only of an outstanding musical genius, but a true intellectual as well, and who has a warm, friendly personality, not to mention a marvelous wit—well now, you just can't hardly get them kind anymore! It was a very special evening to treasure forever in our memory.

At approximately 8:30 p.m. the big ivory and gold console rose to the strains of *That's Entertainment*, and our star was resplendent in a bright red jacket. No Beatle-mop, he. As usual, his close-cropped hair would make him the

winner in any hair-pulling contest. (Excepting Yul Brynner.)

After the tremendous applause finally died down, he spoke warmly of the Rochester brand of hospitality he'd been receiving all week, and gave much praise to RTOS for its fine accomplishment of saving and relocating such an excellent organ.

His second offering was *If I Had A Talking Picture of You*, in honor of Rochester's film influence on the world. Then came *You're the Cream in My Coffee*, and *More*. (Which had a beautiful marimba intro, then moved into a yeasty arrangement, ending with a single chime note.) After this began a cute little piece of business that was kept up as a running gag throughout most of the remaining first half of the program. The number coming up was *Spanish Flea*, and here Billy very carefully "picked up" his invisible little "pet" from the music rack and introduced "her" as the hot-blooded Carmen. Unfortunately Carmen "escaped" soon after, and Billy pleaded with the audience to please be careful that they didn't accidentally crush her if she were out there among them. Occasionally he'd sound a special chirp on the Wurli, trying to lure her back to him, but no luck.

We then heard a most beautiful version of *Shenandoah*, which we earnestly hope he'll record some time. Next came a Nalle original: *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* with Glock spicing and Billy still looking around hopefully for some sign of his missing Carmen. *Falling in Love With Love*, an unlisted number on the program, was followed by *People*. *The Trolley Song* then came rocking along the rails in energetic fashion, and fetched up with 3 hearty clangs and a joyous announcement. With a big grin Billy proclaimed that "She (Carmen) has come home! I tell you, when the children come home, it's such a relief!" Happy day, all was right with his world again! Later we asked Billy if the Carmen bit was a regular part of his repertoire. No; as it happened, it was something he'd cooked up after his arrival in town. It was delightful nonsense.

The first half of the show closed with cymbal-punctuated *I Love You a Bushel and a Peck*.

After intermission, the console again ascended to the bouncy strains of *Put on a Happy Face* (no problem this night!) followed by *Little Girl Blue*, a tender Richard Rodgers tune, beautifully presented. Duke Ellington's *Sophisticated Lady* slinked in and undulated into a spec-



Billy Nalle rehearses for his concert for the Rochester Theatre Organ Society. It's the 4-21 Wurlitzer in the Auditorium theatre.

tacular arrangement. The Lady made quite an impression before she left, including the evening's only cipher problem.

Next on the agenda was *Love and Marriage* in two versions—the contemporary styling of Johnny Mercer's composition, and then a classical W. A. Mozart interpretation. The AGO members in the audience loved it, including one of the newer RTOS members, David Craighead, nationally known classical organist and head of the Organ Department at the Eastman School of Music. Mr. C. was one of those who passed up the last night of the annual Rochester Bach Festival to attend the Nalle concert.

After this dazzling display we breezed over for a romp *On the Sunny Side of the Street*, which closed with a big, cymballed climax. *Fascinatin' Rhythm* certainly was just that, as Billy made generous use of the percussions. These were always tasteful and effective all evening long.

Deep throbbing pedal notes introduced *Old Man River*, a big majestic arrangement as powerful as the river itself. The audience was literally swept along on the rolling, pulsating mood of the piece, a tremendous listening experience.

As the only encore, Billy closed up shop with an unusually bright and joyous version of *Of Thee I Sing*. All too soon the fabulous musical evening ended. However a reception for Billy was held later in the evening at the nearby Treadway Inn, and many in the crowd went over there to meet him personally. In fact, so many gathered there that the room temperature was soon like a steam cabinet. Tall ice-cubed libations soon helped cool that situation, while the various groups awaited their turns to greet Billy. An occasional flashbulb popped. Cheese and crackers were consumed in great quantities. A convivial time was enjoyed by all.