



VIVACIOUS is the word for Mildred Alexander as she reflects some of the fire she puts into her music—even while between tunes at the Hammond X-66. Mildred hasn't missed a Festival in many years, coming on her own when it wasn't "official business."



THE QUIET MAN—It was Johnny Duffy's first concert at the Festival. His chiffon-smooth stylings, subtle registration on the "Rialto" and his Irish charm added up to a welcome addition to the Festival family.



FROM THE EAST—Rodgers brought Dick Smith across the continent to play its model 33-E for Festivalers. The clock is to help Dick keep on schedule; he gets so engrossed in the music he loses track of time.

8th ANNUAL HOME ORGAN FINDS MOST PLUG-INS ON

Builders Have Discovered Theatre Pipe Organs, Bombarde Survey Shows

For the many readers who have asked for more information about the current crop of electronic organs, we offer this evaluation arrived at during the Home Organ Festival, a 5-day series of concerts and demonstrations played by top artists on the latest and best models that electronic builders could muster. Most but not all of the official Festival artists are pictured in the photo coverage.

The Home Organ Festival was bigger than ever this year. Held at the well-wooded Hoberg resort in Northern California as always, the combination of a vacationtime atmosphere, Indian Summer weather and the irresistible pull of almost a week of star-studded organ music attracted 1,500 "festivalers"—the most ever. Staged by the Pacific Council for Organ Clubs (a union of Bay Area plug-in dealers' clubs), the show featured the finest instruments made by Allen, Hammond, Thomas, Baldwin, Conn, Gulbransen and Rodgers—the top plug-in builders. Kimball had signed to come, but canceled at the last moment.

There was much that was encouraging to the pipe organ enthusiast who looks on with interest, and often amusement, as the electronic instrument builders "discover" and then integrate into their products the very practical characteristics of the theatre organ developed by Robert Hope-Jones and his associates

around the turn of the century. All except Hammond have adopted the horse-shoe console for top entertainment models. Many now offer the overhanging upper manual, slightly inclined to accommodate two-manual, one-hand playing. The theatre organ "stop key" has largely replaced the rocker tablet as a means of switching voices except on the smaller spinets. And the color-voice coding is becoming more and more like that on theatre pipe organ stop keys. In the pedal department the Hope-Jones style concave, radiating pedalboard (long accepted by the AGO) is now almost universal but with many minor variations. The usual number of pedals is 25 but some builders (Conn and Rodgers) offer a standard 32 on their larger models.

Perhaps most interesting to the pipe organ enthusiast are the developments since last year in "ranks" and "voicing." It is well established that most entertainment organs emphasize "Flute" sound above all else (one maker depends on it alone) but have, in recent years, developed varying qualities of "String." If "Reed" voices were available, they were usually synthesized from combinations of "Flute" and "String." Thus the generation of real "Reed" voices lagged.

There are exceptions. Allen, which has always generated its "Strings," "Flutes," and "Reeds" separately, has had a bright "Trumpet" and proper "Oboe" for many years. But, true to its church-style antecedents, the Allen theatre model offers



"AVIATOR"—Rill Thomson didn't land his plane on Hoberg's golf course to get to work, as he has been known to do in years past, but came by "gasoline safari" instead. But at least his music was as exciting as ever. He played the Baldwin HT-2R.



WHAT—AGAIN? Bud Iverson looks aghast at his audience during a request period when the played-to-death tunes were shouted loudest. It was Bud's first stint at the Festival. He played for Conn and also conducted a workshop session.

FESTIVAL RIGHT TRACK

these voices "straight-organ style"—at 8' only.

But this year Rodgers demonstrated considerable progress in the "Reed" voices. The "Tubas," "Trumpets" and "Posthorns" were much better defined than previously. Rodgers has had a good "Kinura" for several years.

One area where most builders lag in "catching up" with the wind-blown ancestor, is in the division of voices. Nearly all are equipped with only one swell pedal to control volume, thus giving the effect of a "single chamber" organ. The shining exception is Rodgers. Its 33E model boasts not only separate channels ("chambers") controlled by two swell pedals but also a very welcome Crescendo pedal. Conn has developed a method of separating the "Tibia" from the control of the single swell pedal, thus placing that voice in an "unenclosed" category. It's a help, but no substitute for the second swell pedal.

Another exception to the "lagging Reed" situation is Baldwin. The Baldwin sharp "Reeds" have had plenty of pizzazz for several years.

In the "Tibia" department, Gulbransen's "Rialto" still has the edge. It's still the sweetest, most cloying, and (to use a dangerous comparison) the most "pipe-like" stemming from electrons. But Rodgers' "Tibia" is better than ever and there was a notable improvement in the Baldwin "Tibia," an area in the latter where improvement was needed.



"Strings" were keener than ever at this year's Festival, but mellower and more "String-like" (as opposed to the whining "electronic" sound of yore). On the "Rialto" it seemed that only the development of a better speaker was needed to strengthen the Gulbransen "Strings"; they now have it. The Gulbransen "Piano" sound was among the best, according to those who are impressed by percussions.

The instrument conceded to have made the most progress tonally was Thomas. The Sepulveda [Calif.] firm is now able to present an instrument which can compete tonally with the others. Gone is the emphasis on the raspy "Reeds"; replaced by a new balance of all voices—a pleasing mellowness.

Hammond was the maverick, with its three-year-old X-66 reaching out in new directions rather than "discovering" the tried and true—especially in console styling. The X-66 has an extended high-frequency range (which helps a lot) and oodles of pattern-repeating gimmickry; but, as heard at the Festival, it wasn't too different tonally from that firm's model "H-100," a more "traditional" Hammond. But its futuristic console is something to behold, with chromium-plated columns which give some credence to one description heard: "... a barber chair wired for sound." We understand that the X-66 has finally gone into production and sells for around \$9,000.



BUSYBODY—Shortly after his debut as a Festival artist for Rogers, Lyn Larsen played a pipe concert for the Los Angeles Chapter, then set off on a concert tour Eastward. He's currently doing a 2-month stint as staff organist at TOSA's Dendy Theatre Wurlitzer in Melbourne.



SELF-CONSCIOUS—Ever since some scribe pointed out how Larry Vannucci used his list of tunes as a normally mutilated pop, the Bay Area organist has hung onto it with both hands. Ever-popular Larry played for Gulbransen.



VETERAN FESTIVAL ORGANIST Tom Hazleton has been Allen's sole console artist for many years. He's pictured here during his concert on the theatre model, just as he finished a tune.



OL' GABBY—Bill McCoy chuckles when a heckler reminds him that his boss (Thomas Organ Co.) now also makes rock 'n roll guitars. Bill acquired the name "Gabby" back when he used to play entire concerts without saying a word.



NORCALSHAP'S CHOICE—Tiny James is as much at home at a lighting effects console as an organ console. He's pictured at the 1967 Home Organ Festival, where he "played" ever-changing light patterns on the performing artists from a switchboard.

HOME ORGAN FESTIVAL

(Continued)

Conn's "Vox Humana" remains the most realistic of all attempts to recreate that typically theatrical voice, and the Elkhart firm's "Tibia" has been improved.

The only outfit that takes much interest in such extras as sound effects is Baldwin. Added to the goodies on its HT-2R (theatre, horseshoe), is an excellent "Fire Siren." It already has a "Door Bell" (real) and a blatant "Auto Horn."



FESTIVAL FOUNDER—Dewey Cagle, who is this magazine's advertising manager, is one of the pioneers of the Festival. He and Kay Chenoweth started it 8 years ago. He is shown here with his wife Lorraine at the "Pleasameetcha" cocktail party. He was later taken ill and had to leave the Festival.

Also noted was a tendency among all firms to build in, as standard equipment, the "optionals" of former years which could previously be had for an extra charge, mainly "traps" (Wood Block, Cymbal, Drums, Tom-Toms, Claves). These are usually accompanied by the means to make the "clackers" repeat adjustable rhythmic patterns.

Transistors continue to replace vacuum tubes as tone generators and amplifiers. A number of "all-transistor" models were shown. Tonewise, they didn't seem to differ from "tube" models. Yet, this same new freedom which came with transistors plays a part in the plethora of "gimmicks and gadgetry" which now affects nearly all builders. There is now an over-abundance of "bells," "zithers," "banjos," "marimbas" and "xylophones"—all equipped with any degree of desired "re-iteration"—plus a lot of sounds best described as "non-organ" sounds. These are explained as "sales aids" and they seem to be effective, although the customer must feel let down when he gets the instrument home and finds out he can't make a "banjo" twang like the demonstrator did. Most of these gimmicks require a special technique which must be mastered.

The only exception most pipe organ

enthusiasts take to the maze of "effect switches" (other than the confusion they cause), is that they are premature. Most of the gimmickry was introduced before the builder had done a satisfactory job of recreating the four families of pipe organ tone—Flute, String, Reed and Diapason. This writer has yet to hear a proper "Diapason" sound (any type) from an entertainment model electronic. Thomas has it, but only on laboratory prototypes.

Our critique at this point must be tempered by the fact that large-scale theatre pipe organ research and development ceased in the late '20's, and it is not our intention to limit our interest



CONCERT CROWD: A portion of the 700 Festivalers who crowded into the auditorium for the Conn show. That's Don Kingston playing. Hoberg's resort is a 3-hour drive from Northern California population centers, which makes visitors part of a willing captive audience. There are few distractions to divert attention from the subject—organs.

only to what the "Golden Age" produced. It is quite conceivable that, had "talkies" not put an end to silent films, the pipe builders might have come up with many of the things we now call "gimmicks." For example, Hope-Jones' chief voicer (at Elmira), James H. Nuttall, was experimenting with tremulants that started *after* the note sounded, in the '30's. Thomas has it. It's called "Vibra-Magic" and it enhances especially solo voices greatly.

The plea of the pipe enthusiast with an interest in electronic organs might be summed up: "These tricks with transistors are probably great—but, please, let's catch up with Hope-Jones in the voicing and unification department first, Mr. electronic organ builder."

Not all of the models demonstrated differed from those shown at previous

festivals. While the Hammond X-66 is considered new so far as the public is concerned, it's a three-year-old model to the festivaleer. Allen has had a good model theatre organ on tap for several years and this year's model hadn't changed visibly nor audibly, but something new had been added in the optional attachment which replaces the music rack. This auxiliary unit, which can be used with any make of instrument, is called the "Explorer." It's an additional short manual which provides extra voices and percussions. It would seem to be most useful with organs which are limited to "Flute" or "Flute and String" tone generators. It has a real bitey "Posthorn" and a good "Piano" among many other sounds and effects.

The Conn organ, always a winner, has changed only in the delicacy of its voicing.

But whether there were new developments or not, the consensus was that, as a whole, the organs on exhibition never sounded better than they did at this year's Home Organ Festival.



CAUGHT! John "Flash" Gallagher, ace news-hawk for the Festival's daily "POOP Sheet," gets some information—firsthand. His subject is Kay Chenoweth, co-chairman of the Festival.

It was five days well spent among the autumn pines of Northern California and the conclusion reached after hearing the finest models of the leading builders in concert was that the electronic organ has come a long way. It could also be stated that it has just about as far again to go.

The pipe aficionado would agree that the pattern set by the "mighty Wurlitzer" of the '20's leads electronic builders in the right direction. In fact, many at the Festival asked about Wurlitzer. But, for the first time in several years, the firm which should be the leader in updating and upgrading the wonders it inherited from its own Robert Hope-Jones, was not represented at the Festival.

—Hal Steiner

PHOTOS: Ralph Ehat and Elmer Fubb