

# CONCERT CIRCUIT

## Billy Nalle Wows 'Em in Motor City!

We have become accustomed to hearing "raves" reverberating from the walls of auditoriums after a Billy Nalle (like "Nawl") concert. In this respect, his Feb. 3rd bash for the Detroit Theatre Organ Club seems typical; the raves get better with time. Our first message came from organist Don Miller, a man who is renowned for "putting it on the line"—no holds barred. Don's letter arrived only a couple of days after the concert. Of Billy's performance at the DTOC's 4-34 Fisher-Orbits Wurlitzer in the Senate Theatre, Don wrote:

"Billy's greatness and artistry were in evidence throughout the concert. Two novelties, his 'Motor City Magic' and his treatment of 'Hello Dolly—or How Dolly Got Tangled with That New-Fangled Contraption' (in imitation of an old-time player piano), really 'wowed 'em!' There was lots more in Don's letter, but that will suffice to provide a sampling of the feelings of a veteran organist who himself "wowed" 1967 ATOE Conventioneers at the same console.

If the Nalle approach to what Billy dubs "the tremulated orgel" was well received by an ex-theatre organist of the top rank, how about the impression he made of those of the classic organ persuasion who might have been present?

A fine example would be Dr. Robert Noehren, head of the organ department at the University of Michigan, who is familiar with the Nalle interest in the classic, or concert organ (Billy is one of those few organists who shine in both classic and popular fields). We asked Dr. Noehren for a summary of his reactions, and received the following:

"The Detroit Theatre Organ Club and its friends provided a large and enthusiastic audience on the evening of February 3rd to welcome the celebrated New York organist, Bille Nalle. It was a memorable evening with the versatile Mr. Nalle bringing freshness and imagination to many old favorites, such as *Misty*, *Who*, *Moon River* and *My Favorite Things*. His fine sense of form, unique harmonic inventiveness and his irresistible rhythm make him stand out as one of the most versatile and gifted players in his field.



MOMENT OF TRIUMPH—Billy Nalle is congratulated by organist Don Miller at the close of his concert, while the audience continues the applause. Don, a spry 71, was down the aisle and at Billy's side seconds after the last note of the concert—although his seat was near the back of the house. —Lohnes photo

Billy Nalle's amusing arrangement of *Dolly* at the piano made this reviewer wish for more of his sensitive pianistic style.

The large and colorful organ, apparently in top form, the comfortable theatre beautifully maintained by the club, and two hours of delightful music so artistically presented marked an evening of rare enjoyment.

—Robert Noehren"

Those are the words of an organist who a few weeks later presented an outstanding classical concert at Vassar College, a concert heard by Billy Nalle. Billy was awed by Noehren's mastery of pipes; he was hearing the organist for the first time, and he stated later that he was glad Noehren had heard his (Nalle's) concert before he heard Noehren—or he might have had butterflies during his Senate theatre stint.

If Billy was a hit with both long and short-hair pros, he also scored heavily with the DTOCers, as indicated in this review by Editor Ben Levy of the Club's periodical, the DTOC Newsletter":

"Billy Nalle gave possibly the most polished program yet heard at the theatre. Here is a superb musician, an imaginative artist, an intellectual and a wonderful person. That he is a top ranking musician is evidenced not only by his performance but by the attendance of the illustrious organists who came distances to hear him play. His was not a rambunctious, rousing performance but keyed more to pastel shades and moving within limited dynamics. That he can play bombastic music is reported by those who heard him at an impromptu session at

the Detroit Fox Theatre the next morning. He is too young to have lived in the 'great' era of theatre organ but his playing of Crawford numbers like *I'll Follow My Secret Heart*, sounded most authentic. Even more so was his interpretation in the big dance orchestra style of *I'm Beginning To See the Light* and *Satin Doll*. In the latter, the Duke Ellington arrangement was so nearly perfect that one could almost see the Duke in his white tie and tails. Billy left the console to play a novelty at the piano, *Hello Dolly*, in piano roll style with slow-downs and speed-ups which required playing in many keys in rapid succession. He brought the house down! If there is any cause to be negative it might be that his playing was a bit too tightly controlled and this lost a certain amount of zest. Also, surprisingly, his interpretation of the lilting *On Wings of Song* just didn't get off the ground. Billy's composition and dedication to the DTOC of the musical montage, *Motor City Magic* and his tribute to those who have created this Club endeared him to us all. Billy Nalle, COME AGAIN!"

While in Detroit Billy was given the "red carpet" treatment and fully enjoyed being lionized by DTOCers, the highlight being a dinner party given in Billy's honor by music merchant Frank Lohnes at the famed Dearborn Inn. It left the modest southerner somewhat breathless. It was all he could talk about for days after returning to his Gotham workaday world, which he refers to as "Nineveh-by-the-Sea."

—Elmer Fubb, Nineveh