

★ Concert Circuit ★

D. Beacham Debut Concert At Wiltern

LOS ANGELES, May 12. — Anyone who has heard Dwight Beacham play, even on an electronic, is conscious of the young man's great potential. He has a way of arousing musical excitement; there's magic beckoning in the sounds he produces. But that knowledge is shared only by those who have heard him—and this was his first public concert, anywhere.

About 250 hardy souls braved the sunny May Sunday morning of Southern California to laze in the comfortable chairs of the Wiltern Theatre for a concert sponsored by the Los Angeles Chapter of ATOE. Between chops on a huge stogie (unlighted, of course), Program Chairman Neal Kissel looked happy; considering that it was the first concert of an unknown artist, he was satisfied with the turnout.

At the appointed hour, the big organ sound poured down from the chambers and Mr. Beacham brought the console up to its zenith, playing a fast oldie entitled *High Society*, a real kicker. When the applause subsided he welcomed the audience to "my very first concert," then went into his second tune, *Hands Across the Table*.

Dwight's concert consisted of nineteen selections, most of them classed as "nostalgia" as well as standards. The range was wide, with Sousa's seldom-heard *The Thunderer* at one extreme and an un-earthly "skeleton dance" called *Ghost-Safari* (written by a friend) at the other. He avoided the commonplace and too-often-heard standards. Even his "Crawford" was in the "less familiar" category, e.g., *Rainbow on the River*, *Little Girl Blue* and *Siboney*, all played with registration and phrasing very reminiscent of the late maestro.

His rhythm tunes developed a solid beat, but emphasis was always on the subtle, never the slam-bang. These included *Honey Bun*, *The Girlfriend* and the welcome return of an almost forgotten Bix Beiderbeck jazz classic called simply *San*.

One of Beacham's strong points was his mastery of registration on a console on which it isn't easy—if only for the sheer size of the double (in some places triple) stoprail horseshoe. His changes

of registration, much of it done manually, provided continually changing orchestral colors to enhance the music. Who does he sound like—so far as style goes? He has a style of his own. Of course, he can "do a Crawford" and some of his arrangements showed a leaning toward the distinctive registration of the late Buddy Cole—for example, the fat, untremulated Diapason tone clusters with searing Serpent punctuation heard during *They Say It's Wonderful* and *He's My Guy*, both tunes also being graced with the rhythmic tricks and between-phrase "doodads" which mark the Cole charisma. But that's conscious imitation; for the most part he was pure Beacham.



DWIGHT BEACHAM at his home pipe organ. He created musical excitement—from Sousa to a 'skeleton dance.'

In the MC'ing department, Dwight at first had a little trouble with the "butterflies" which always flutter around bright lights. But as soon as he learned that his audience "out there" was with him, he even tried a little humor; his delivery was funnier than the material. His comic tune titles, however, earned him some laughs, chiefly *Get Off the Stove*, *Grandma*, *You're Too Old to Ride the Range!* and *They Called Her "Hinges" Because She Was Something to a-Door*. He blamed the humor effort on his wife's urging.

Even in the novelty department, Dwight's choice of tunes was unusual. Instead of the usual *Nola* or *Dizzy Fingers* he performed a bright little finger buster by organist Emil Velasco (remember?—the New York Roxy), entitled *Krazy Kat*.

The humor occasionally expressed in Dwight's music was probably more effective than his Joe Miller material. For example, during a Hollywood-style rendition of *On a Little Street in Singapore*, an argument started in the accompani-

ment between the Chinese Gong and the Triangle, plus a few chirps from the Bird effect. It was a draw. But he really hit the Spike Jones trail during *Once In Love With Amy*, whom he described as "a rambunctious type of girl." To make certain no one missed the point he sprinkled "Amy" with an assortment of thuds, bumps, auto honks, sirens—and, again—the bird! As always, that style of musical mayhem indicated a wide appeal. Dwight did it with a sly charm which had it sailing somewhat above the "pure corn" classification.

But his way with ballads more than atoned for any liberties he may have taken with someone's favorite tunes. In deference to the place he earns his bread (the Wurlitzer plug-in exhibit at Disneyland), Dwight played a soaring arrangement of *Some Day My Prints Will Come* ("the Kodak song") which featured a sexy, full-throated Tibia/Vox melody combination, and a particularly lovely *Speak Low* which soloed the seldom-soloed Kimball Clarinet rank. The Beacham closing was a low-keyed one, a reading of the dramatic ballad, *The Thrill Is Gone*. It was a beautifully scored heart-wrencher with a slow fade applied to everything—volume, spotlight and tempo—during the final bars. The last notes trailed off on dying Vox and Strings as the big white console and its talented player sank back into the pit.

Outside, Programmer Neal Kissel finally lighted the big stogie and gulped a lungful. After listening to the comments of the departing concert-goers he knew he had featured a "comer"—one the organ-oriented public would be hearing from again—and soon.

—Peg Nielsen, Hollywood

Dwight Beacham is an unassuming young man whose easy charm tends to obscure his deadly serious love affair with the theatre organ. Rescued from the purely classical bag by a college teacher of classical organ who turned out to be something of a renegade (he admitted to having once played theatre organ professionally in Fresno), Dwight had been preparing for his concert of May 12th since he was fourteen years of age. At that age he was first exposed to theatre organ, the 11-rank style-235 Wurlitzer in the Pasadena Crown theatre, then being played by organist-theatre manager Billy Wright. Wright gave the lad a chance to explore the possibilities of theatre organ tonalities, and after that no other instrument would do. Dwight was no dilettante even at fourteen; he already had seven years of piano and organ studies behind him, some with veteran theatre organist Lloyd del Castillo.