



Letters to the Editor concerning all aspects of the theatre organ hobby are encouraged. Send them to the editor concerned, Box 2329, Livonia, Michigan 48150. Unless it's stated clearly on the letter "not for publication", the editors feel free to reproduce it, in whole or part.

READER REVIEWS JESSE'S REVIEWER

Dear Mr. Editor,

The 1923 review of Jesse Crawford's performance at the Chicago Theatre (October 1968 TO-B) by D. Kenneth Widener was obviously an organist well-grounded in the classic organ traditions (note his reverence for Guilman, Dupre, etc.) who found the brashness of the new-fangled theatrical application of his instrument a little hard to reconcile with tradition as he knew it. While he professes admiration for the many of the approaches in the Crawford bag of tricks he takes Jesse to task for over use of the Kinura. In 1923 the Kinura was something of a radical innovation among organ voices and the old school wasn't ready to accept this departure from time-honored concepts in organ voices. The same applies to what Widener claims is too much 16' content in combinations. It is probable that the straight organ Widener used as a point of reference had 16' stops only in the pedal division, with mainly 8' manual stops plus a sprinkling of 4' stops. The low hum of the 16' voices was new, different—and, to him, muddy. Of course, the 16' rumble can be overdone, but it's unlikely that a musician of Crawford's impeccable taste would err very far in that direction. Then there's the complaint that Jesse improvised the music for his comedies instead of using standard or printed music. Crawford picked up this art (and it is an art) while observing the all-time master of comedy accompaniments, Oliver Wallace. Wallace's forte was improvising during comedies. He did it because the fast pace of the slapstick left little room for whole tunes, and customers didn't like hearing the current pops cut up for 8 bar-cues or interrupted by effects. So Wallace was able to follow the comedy by improvising around a throw-away theme; no one minded if he punctuated it with a fire gong or dog bark now and then. Apparently Mr. Widener hadn't yet been faced with such problems or hadn't thought them through. However, the most forceful evidence of widener's lack of appreciation for things then new is his condemnation of that assault on musical taste—the glissando (or roll)—one of the developments for which Crawford is remembered, with affection, after 45 years. Widener just couldn't see that the world of organs was changing—and leaving him behind.

Henry Beardsley
Danville, Illinois

OUR OCTOBER COVER GIRL RESPONDS

Dear Stu:

When my picture stared at me from the cover of THEATRE ORGAN-BOMBARDE (October 1968), it was the surprise of my life—totally unexpected. I knew that if I waited long enough and kept faith, I'd make it, one day—a real cover girl. When a gal gets so close to 80 that it isn't funny, its most gratifying to be thus remembered and honored. Thank you for putting Edie Steele in the lime-light once more.

Edith Steele,
San Diego, California

(This editor looks forward to reaching 80 soon if he can count on becoming as young as Edith Steele. Her home is a melange of musical instruments — Novachord, piano (2) and organ—which she plays constantly with the same skill and beauty which made her a console favorite at the San Diego Fox in the early '30's.)

PIED PIPER IN REVERSE

Dear Stu:

Recently I had the pleasure (for the third time) of playing the world's largest pipe organ in Convention Hall, Atlantic City. What a thrill! Yes, I turned on all ten 32' stops plus the full-length 64' Diaphone. I'll bet every rat left the neighborhood before I was through with that Processional March!

Stevens Irwin
St. Petersburg, Florida

(Steve Irwin is a lexicographer who specializes in describing organ tonalities. A retired educator, he flits from console to console, listening to what the instrument has to offer and then dreaming up phrases to describe the sound for the next revision of his *Dictionary of Pipe Organ Stops*.)

Dear Editor:

I have just received the latest (for me) magazine, which is the August edition, and I must protest strongly at the two pages devoted to one Martha Lake. Whereas this female was originally a joke and quite a good one at the time—it has now reached the stage where myself, and one or two friends, are heartily sick of the creature and when good organ space is devoted to such trivialities then it is time to find another magazine.

My congratulations on the colour, but who was responsible for the front photo of George Wright being printed in reverse? This sort of thing is sheer carelessness which ruins an otherwise (apart from Martha Lake) good effort, and cannot be excused.

Just to let you know that we in England are not behind the wall when it comes to organ presentation I enclose two programmes which I have had the pleasure of organizing with my colleagues, Keith Phillipson, the Northern Representative of the Theatre Organ Club, and Rank Theatres Limited. These have been quite successful and we continue on January

26th with Reginald Dixon. More plans are afoot but cannot be revealed at this stage. Organist Jeff Barker will well remember this organ as he played here for sometime before leaving for the States.

You will notice that we have had very good co-operation from the Manchester agents of Hammond, and I am quite convinced that the electronic organ will prove the saviour of the pipe organs that are left.

Remember — more colour, organ gen, more relics from the past, more news — and less Martha Lake.

Yours sincerely,
John Potter
England

FROTH OVER NEAR BEER

Mr. Editor:

Come now—who are you kidding? I read with interest and doubt in the October (1968) *Nuggets* column about organist Lloyd del Castillo writing a prohibition tune called *Near Beer*. I have always considered Mr. del Castillo among the top concert organists. My estimate of his musical prowess is backed up by his recent Concert Recording release on the Los Angeles Wiltern and Elks Temple instruments. Now you say that he is a composer of what has got to be musical trivia—*Near Beer*. Tell me it isn't so.

Antonio Provansano
Barstow, California

(As evidence that *Nuggets* columnist Lloyd Klos wasn't pulling any *Gambi*, we offer this box ad from the March 1920 issue of *Metronome*. In addition, read the words of the composer (below). The fact that he has a fine sense of humor in no way detracts from his musical prowess.)

Near-Beer

(How Dry I Am)

March By L. G. del Castillo

Band and Orchestra Leaders all over the country are writing us in effect: "The best PROHIBITION number published." "It's a RIOT." "Playing it nightly." "A novelty march? We'll say so!"

BAND 36c Net ORCHESTRA 45c Net

Mr. Editor: You'd be surprised at the more disreputable sides of my career. When confronted with the ad, plucked from a long extinct issue of *Metronome*, I must plead guilty. The *Near Beer* march featured melodic contrapuntal themes over and under that fine old madrigal, *How Dry I Am*. Its composition was inspired by the arrival of 3.2 percent beer, legalized sometime after the advent of Prohibition in 1919. You'd have thought then, from the degree of public jubilation, that near beer was blue ribbon champagne. Anyway, it put the tune in vogue. What's it like—besides *How Dry I Am*? Well, the break-up strain is a cacophony of Chopin's *Funeral March*, *What the Hell Do We Care?* and *We Won't Get Home Until Morning*. And that's all you'd want to know about *Near Beer*.

Lloyd G. del Castillo
Hollywood, California