

# THE SOUND OF MUSIC

by John Muri

**"There is a kind of musical lunacy in which things just happen but do not go together . . . rambling on but never saying anything . . ."**

It is interesting to study the various customs of musical programming and performance as applied by our concert-playing members. Some artists of prestige think that a sequence of pop tunes is sufficient, and they give programs that are half impromptu and half routine re-playings of their favorite medleys. Others believe in giving a prolonged display of technique, with fast and loud playing being their specialty; they have their followers. Others believe in mixing classics with popular material. Others believe in styling everything they do; they put their own marks upon a piece of music, sometimes very well and sometimes badly. This variety of approach helps to keep things interesting, as long as whatever is being done is well-done.

When he was an organist at the Chicago Theatre in 1925, Arthur Gutow was reported in a local newspaper as saying that his wish was to make "legitimate" music enjoyable to the listener who had not been educated in music. His 11 a.m. recitals in that theatre included operatic transcriptions and light classics. As a student of Arthur Dunham (who was organist at the Chicago Methodist Temple and teacher of Jess Crawford, Harold Turner, and yours truly among others) he learned to play the finest organ literature and to arrange orchestral music for the organ according to high musical standards. Al Carney, who was assistant organist at McVickers Theatre in the twenties, had other ideas. He believed in playing what the great masses of the people enjoyed, and he went on to

great local success on radio station WHT, playing little other than old and new popular tunes. He played only a few novelty numbers. He gave the musically-untrained general public what it wanted to hear (through telephone request programs every day for one hour at noon) and made enough money by 1929 to build a large Wurlitzer organ studio, using one of the consoles out of the Chicago Theatre. Albert Hay Malotte, who followed W. Remington Welch and Carney at McVickers, maintained a high musical standard and was able to sell it successfully because of his playing ability, coupled with a superior singing voice and a handsome appearance. His ability as a composer was a strong asset; he would often play his own compositions with such success that it was said that all the other top organists in Chicago were shaking in their shoes with fear and envy! His arrangement of "The Lord's Prayer" remains in the standard repertoire today.

Who was right? All of them were right. Each chose for himself the audience he wished to please. Today's theatre organ concert player makes the same kind of choice, and those of us who audition and review their programs are forced to ask ourselves: are there any standards that we can apply to all these players or must we judge each solely on the level on which he chooses to perform? I think there are standards that all of us who play for others must observe or suffer in lost prestige and acclaim. A few of them can be suggested in the form of questions.

1. With regard to technique, can the organist play the music he has chosen or has he taken on more than he can handle? Palm smears, incessant flappings of the swell-shades, and finger runs not clearly played are generally cover-ups for insufficient practice at the keyboard.

2. How is the rhythm? Is it even or erratic? If it varies, is it done for an intelligent purpose? Or is it too mechanical?

3. Are the dynamics meaningful, or are there sudden alternations of loud and soft without meaning, connection or emotional content?

4. Is the registration interesting, varied, and pleasing? Are stops used well together? Ordinarily one does not use the kinura in chord-handfuls as an accompaniment to a one-finger tibia solo, although I have heard it done. Too much use of bells, xylophone, and traps is an aggravation to the ears. The test is always: does the music sound good? If it is ugly, there has to be a reason for its being that way. Otherwise, the organist is floundering or can't hear what he is producing.

There is a kind of musical lunacy in which things just happen but do not go together — a succession of fast and slow, loud and soft, rambling on but never saying anything; all one gets is momentary kicks of sound. Such arrangements can be impressive on rare and inspired occasions, but people quickly tire of them. Every piece in a good program says something to the listener. If it's too long, he gets bored. If it's too complicated or *avant-garde* he gets confused. If it's too soft he goes to sleep. If it's too loud he squirms or walks out. Every player on every program, no matter how humble or insignificant (or, for that matter, how great and incomparable) he may conceive himself to be, needs to keep these points in mind if he wants to be invited for return engagements.

## BILLY NALLE AT LONGWOOD GARDENS

by Ray Brubacher

Longwood Gardens located in Kennett Square in the eastern part of Pennsylvania has become world renowned for its acres of beautifully landscaped gardens and the huge conservatories which house thousands of species of plants and flowers and are open to tourists throughout the year. The late Pierre S. duPont built the estate and added to the main conservatory a large ballroom. Behind one entire side of this room there was constructed an organ chamber sixty-three feet wide, twenty-three feet deep and forty feet high. Into this chamber went a mammoth instru-

ment built by the Aeolian Organ Company in 1929-30 consisting of 10,010 pipes including five 32 foot pedal ranks. The organ was rebuilt by the Moller company in 1957, but was not totally altered. A new console having four manuals and 250 couplers and stops replaced the old console. There are 364 percussion tones, 70 combination pistons, and a nine foot Weber concert grand piano in one chamber. Wind is supplied from a 60, a 10, and a 2 h.p. blower. Wind pressures vary from eight inches for the string organ, to 30 inches for the Tuba Mirabilis.

On Wednesday evening, April 30th, a concert was given on this instrument

to an audience of over six hundred who had assembled early in the evening because they knew that they were going to hear something very special, and not just another recital laden with the usual repertoire.

The artist for the evening was Billy Nalle, long a favorite of theatre organ fans for his presentations at the great theatre organs all over the United States. However, this evening it was Billy Nalle on a more formal note, a concert organist on a truly great concert organ.

The program was to be all-improvisational, something that not many

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