

# 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 the 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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got a bit too far behind schedule on our crawl.

We took a 'drive-by' with a quick 'look-see' at John Beck's home where we saw a newly poured concrete floor and some pre-fab vaulted ceiling arches. This should be quite an impressive installation when completed.



Chambers at Dale Flannery's home — note glass shutters.

Mr. and Mrs. Dale Flannery in Garland were our third hosts. Dale showed us his truly delightful 3-15 Wicks theatre organ with a horseshoe console from a St. Louis Baptist Church. Traps and other percussions came from a Cadiz, Ohio theatre. The shutters are made of heavy glass and the toy counter and percussions are positioned up front and shown to excellent advantage with colored lights playing on them. What to watch — the percussion goodies chattering away or the organist. The installation was completed in just three months to be ready for our visit. We were both impressed and delighted.

Stop number four was at the home of Rodney Yarbrough in Celina, a home that is so musical it 'sings' a welcome as you approach the front porch. Rodney, technical advisor for the North Texas Chapter, had his mother put a player roll on the beautiful little 2-4 Robert Morton that was given to him by his friends in the chapter in 1967. Then the Sooner State Chapter bunch put two of their professionals to work entertaining, Ray Elmore at the organ and Joe Crutchfield at the player grand piano. As they tired, others helped to keep the little Morton going including Phil Judkins, Charlene Roberts, Dennis Minear and Joanna Weaver. Several members

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of the North Texas Chapter had joined us during the evening. It was nearly midnight when we said good bye to a remarkable young man and fine technician, Rodney Yarbrough.

The end of a perfect day and a good night's sleep to prepare for the next day — well almost a perfect day. It seems that on this particular week-end, our hotel was besieged with countless numbers of young people attending the Young Democrats Convention. I do hope in passing, that the friends of Charlie and Delores FINALLY found them. The last time they went down the hall yelling their names at top volume level was about 4:30 a.m. Now I know the real meaning of the generation gap. I'm too damned old for this all night foolishness!

Up the next morning bright and early — well early anyway, we had a hasty side of beef for a "light" breakfast before we met our genial host, Jerry Bacon, assistant manager of the Capri Theatre in downtown Dallas. Jerry has done a fine job of repairing and maintaining this beautiful Wurlitzer 235. A jam session with members from both chapters was followed by Jerry pulling out all the stops and giving out with a thunderous and rousing march to wind up the session. We made a fast pass at the hotel, checked out, boarded the bus and headed for our luncheon where we were the guests of the North Texas Chapter. Like I said, this Texas hospitality is something else.

Our final installation of the week-end was the home of Mark and Nola Kenning in Richardson. We had a brief tour of their self-designed, and for a large part, self-constructed spanish style home which houses the giant 4-17 Robert Morton formerly installed in the Ritz Theatre in Tulsa. Mark is a professional musician and teacher and I'd venture to say, one of the best musicians in this part of the country. We sincerely hope that you both enjoy possession of the instrument through the years as much as we enjoyed hearing you play it.

It was late afternoon when we boarded our homeward bound bus, reluctant to leave but most grateful to all the fine and generous people in the North Texas Chapter. In large glowing letters may we say, A BIG HEARTY THANKS TO YOU, OUR NEIGHBORING NORTH TEXAS CHAPTER. We're looking forward to returning your hospitality.

A suggestion to all chapters who have not been on an organ crawl. Call your neighboring chapter, pick yourselves a week-end and go find out what wonderful people you have in your near-by chapters.

— Photos and Story by Joe Crutchfield

The North Texas Chapter was delighted to host the Sooner State Chapter. During their all too brief stay, they listened to and viewed five Dallas area residence organ installations (Dallas area because our membership spreads over five counties). We were sorry that the time limit of their trip prevented the Sooner State Chapter from hearing, among others, the Wurlitzer Publix #1 in the Palace Theatre.

One of the biggest surprises was the impressive amount of talent per capita displayed by the Oklahoma folks. It was truly astonishing to see and hear the way in which any one of them could walk up to a strange organ and produce beautiful and often unusual registrations with exceptional competence. Although they are a relatively young chapter, they are coming on strong.

Such a marvelous, cram-packed day and a half. The Sooner State Chapter will be welcomed back to Dallas at any time.

— John Beck

## BILLY NALLE

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organists dare attempt to any degree because improvisation is a separate art form in music, and must be studied. It is not the routine variations on chords we hear church organists playing on Sundays, but rather something which takes years of practice and experience to do well. It is an understatement to say that Billy Nalle does this well. In short, he is a genius while being at the same time a sensitive human being whose interest is to make any audience an integral part of his program, to make them feel that they belong in his music.

This reviewer not only notes the feeling for the music that Billy Nalle imparts, but also an exquisite taste in registration that permits just so much at any one time to do the job in the most successful manner. Only twice did we hear the full organ and just then for brief moments because the power of more than one-hundred and sixty ranks can be overwhelming in the confines of the ballroom. Judging by the enthusiasm of the audience, we can surmise that Billy will be back at Longwood and we hope that day will be very soon.

For information of tourists wishing to hear the Longwood organ, it is played by its resident organist Clarence Snyder every Sunday afternoon from 3 to 5 p.m. Admission is free of charge for all concerts.