



LETTERS

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 Unless it's stated clearly on the letter "not for publication," the editors feel free to reproduce it, in whole or part.

Address: P. O. Box 2329

Livonia, Michigan 48150

May 16, 1969

Mr. George Thompson
Editor - BOMBARDE
Dear Mr. Thompson:

Your April 1969 issue of the Bombarde, on page 20, - here a charming young lady, makes like she is bored to tears with holding keys and is making the chore more tolerable by reading. While this picture was perhaps posed for the article, the young lady's plight could not be truer expressed - for the art of key holding and the act of key holding is perhaps the world's greatest useless chore, wasteful of precious time.

There is nothing more trying than to find a "willing" key holder. Ah, yes, I know of many a dutiful organ technician's wife, his squirmy little girl or boy - indeed even janitors of churches often have found themselves glued to the organ bench, unable to get off. It is more like a man who grabs the lion's tail and has to go round and round with it, unable, indeed, fearful of letting go.

There it sits - the organ key holder, holding down one key and then the other, while the tuner in the hole, directs with a Next, Next, Next, etc., and when the tuner is making like the real thing, he does not innunciate all the letters in the word NEXT, but he saves wear and tear on whatever it is that he is trying to save wear and tear on, by giving out with a curt NEK . . . NEK . . . NEK.

There can be no argument - key holding is a waste of time - the grossest waste - there is no need for it, nobody likes to do it, nobody wants to pay much for having it done with - you see, it is an unnecessary bi-product of tuning which because of no other alternative, becomes necessary and that is hard to bear.

Many church organists USED to sit to hold keys - my very dear old friend, the Great Harry Hall of New Haven - died some years ago - used to tell me of one Harry Smith who was at one time curator - (now they call it curator of organs) at that time Smith was just an organ repair man at Yale University. To augment his meager earnings at Yale, Harry Smith used to take outside jobs and tuned a lot. In those days, maybe even now, organ builders provided a very useful facility for the convenience of the organ tuner. In the center of the chests and hung from a rafter in the ceiling, was a stout rope with a big knot on the end of it. The tuner grabbed this knot and thus supporting and swaying himself over the center pipes - the upper ends mostly, tuned to pipes with a wand in his other hand.

It so happened that Harry Smith was on one of these jobs one day, and Harry Smith was not much in love with upper ends any way. This day, the key holder was an old timer - an Ichabod Crane character doubling as organist of the church. Now, Harry knew that every time he yelled NEXT, IF the organist did not let go the note, it meant automatically that the organist was not satisfied with the running of that note - and Harry would do a little better until the old man let go the key. Things were apparently progressing pretty good, when on one of the upper end notes Harry yells NEXT and the note holds . . . NEXT! Harry yells - the note is still there and a few times more of Harry bellowing . . . no change the note holds . . . God Dam it . . . NEXT! and as Harry's stentorian voice resounds through the edifice, the high-pitched note stops.

Quietly, Harry ventures . . . next . . . no response from the console - he waits a little more and then lets go the knob, straightens up his now well kinked backbone and gets to where he can see the console . . . no Ichabod there . . . but as he looks a little beyond, there is Ichabod, with long frague coat and hat, with the crooked handle of a black umbrella over one arm . . . going out of the door.

Obviously the organist was a perfectionist and one who knew what he wanted but leaving Harry Smith hanging by the knob and walking out . . . well, these are some of the things that qualify man for some of the nomenclatures which we attach to them - like Ichabod - for who knows what his real name was.

Now, if Harry Smith had a gadget like the one in my 42 ranker at home, he would need no one at the console for tuning - as a matter of fact, my

gadget virtually fires every key holder all over the world and once for all time.

I had key holding troubles too during the many years I have had this organ growing from 16 to 25 to 35 to 42 ranks over the period of years. And it being a hobby more than anything else, I loved to tune it often. Wife was good for a while on that job - she is still an excellent wife - but as a key holder, she would rather not. My daughters grew up and one by one they came into their turn to hold - and if you have not seen the disgust on the little face of a little girl who would rather play, you have seen nothing. Finally it came . . . my last remaining daughter, now of asserting age, declared she was not going to do it any more. And little did I blame her for it - but the organ still had to be tuned!

Being of electrical bent, I took paper and pencil to draw up what I eventually called Adelle. Now of course this is a girl's name and I named it so for another incident which I shall not now relate. The eventual design called for a telephone stepping relay of 61 contact points, a little rectifier, a long three wire cord, a little hand held box with two switches on it. With this thing, you can set up whatever stops you want to tune - and as you press the switch one at a time, the NEXT, NEXT, NEXT, is obeyed without question and without grumbling and without girls reading books in between.

Thus, I have once and for all fired every likely candidate (?) for the holding of keys' in this organ - with 42 ranks, I would probably wear the knees off my pants begging for some one to hold keys - but I have been independent of this for a long time now - I can tune anytime without beholding to any one. Thus I have also eliminated the beholding in keyholding.

I thought perhaps you would get a boot out of this and maybe you can stir some interest for your readers to do something like it. I shall be pleased to supply details when asked.

Yours sincerely,

Garro W. Ray

Barton Drive, Orange, Conn.

The Organ Literature Foundation of 45 Norfolk Road, Braintree, Mass. have announced two addendas to their catalogue "E". Copies will be furnished free to ATOE Members upon receipt of a self addressed stamped envelope.