

Theatre Organ In A Festival of Arts

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"The 19th Century development of the organ has been topped by the cinema organ, a description of which will certainly not be expected in a book dealing with music."—Harvard Dictionary of Music.

The venerable Apel notwithstanding, Canton, Ohio AGO embarked recently upon a course of action which caused considerable discussion in the Chapter, much of which would have pleased the Harvard Dictionary's author.

Ever since the founding of the Canton Festival of Arts in 1958, a Fall event involving the Players Guild, Art Institute, Symphony, Ballet, Civic Opera, Garden Center, and like organizations, the AGO has had a part with its AGO Festival Choir, a select group which has performed difficult or unusual sacred works such as Zimmermann "Psalmkonzert," Poulenc "Gloria," Durufle "Requiem," Copland "In the Beginning," Milhaud "Two Cities"—indeed, having given the Ohio premiere of many of these.

In later years, noted concert organists have, under AGO sponsorship, appeared in the Arts Festival as a second contribution by the AGO to this cooperative event.

It was my task last year as Dean to line up the artist for the new season when Jack Vogelgesang would be Dean. Prof. Arthur Lindstrom of Mt. Union College and an Executive Committee member suggested the name of Billy Nalle, his Julliard roommate, as our artist. The newly formed Canton Chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society under Craig Jaynes' chairmanship volunteered assistance to the AGO in this venture.

But, it was argued, was not the Guild devoted to the advancement of church music? How could the presentation of a theatre organ concert under AGO sponsorship in a city-wide Arts Festival possibly advance church music?

Proponents of the theatre concert declared that for too long the same faithful people had given generous sums as patrons to hear music which drew little support from the public at large. Indeed, some of our AGO officers were conspicuous by their lack of support. Something was needed to shake up the disinterested and promote general support of a worthy cause.



It is a fact that interest in the pipe organ has been stimulated through electronic instruments. Persons who have bought small organs for their homes have wondered just what the pipe organ might have to offer. Just so has interest in cast bells when stimulated by electronic carillons. And so with the theatre organ, might it not just be that interest in the historic pipe organ be stimulated by its cinema counterpart?

A young lady pupil of mine who heard the Palace Organ on a weekend played by its restorer Steve Brown asked me how many *speakers* it had. These youngsters have never heard of a pipe organ in the theatre!

Apart from any musical question, the very fact of the golden age of the cinema should be a part of one's historical heritage, and this we Cantonians proposed with Billy Nalle and the Palace Theatre.

The choice of the artist was propitious, combining the talents of a player already noted for his Atlanta AGO concerts as well as numerous record and concert dates, and an excellent taste in programming with a flair for improvisation upon whatever instrument came to his fingers and feet.

It is just possible that the cause of church music may be advanced too. With the advent of jazz forms into worship and the perennial need for good improvisation upon the organ, classical organists can learn from a fine example.

With the Nalle Theatre Organ Concert on Tuesday, October 14th, and the AGO Festival Choir on November 2nd, our Canton AGO contribution to the Festival of Arts is complete for 1969.

BILLY NALLE ENTERTAINS ENTHUSIASTIC AGO/ATOE CROWD AT CANTON PALACE

by Craig Jaynes and Rufus Prentice

The city of Canton, Ohio—indeed, the entire northeast section of the state—was pleasurably entertained by the first theatre organ concert in many years as Billy Nalle, aptly titled "The Wizard of Organ" brought the Palace Theatre's 3/9 Kilgen out of the pit to the tune "Great Day."

And a great day it was for the sponsoring organizations, the Canton Chapters of both the AGO and the ATOS for their joint effort.

The calibre of "Miz Nalle's son's" playing and a near capacity crowd of over 1500 enthusiastic fans combined to make the evening a towering success. The concert undoubtedly did much to add to the credence of the theatre organ's artistic worth. Aside from the obvious progress that has been made and is yet to come with theatre organ in this country thru artistry such as was displayed here, the Canton Palace is a superbly maintained "Ebersson-atmospheric" theatre, with scattered stars and the warm glow of amber lanterns atop the garden walls. There has to be something extra special about one of "our" instruments being preserved in its original elegant surroundings. A repeat is being planned for next year.

From the initial notes to the end of the concert, Billy had the audience enthralled. The listener found himself surrounded in true stereo, inherent in theatre organ.

Probably of greatest interest to the sponsoring Canton chapters of AGO

Billy Nalle at the 3/9 Kilgen in the Palace Theatre in Canton, Ohio.

