

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/ATOS 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 "Eberson-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.



and ATOS were the Nalle arrangements of "All the Things You Are" ala Bach and "Love and Marriage" in the Mozart idiom. "Turn About Is Fair Play" was his comment about the way Martin Luther and the other early churchmen had taken popular songs and turned them into great religious classics. He then played his transcription of the well-known hymn, "Now Thank We All Our God" turning it into "The Grateful Rock."

Musically speaking, his counterpoint was truly amazing. Repeatedly, just as one thought he knew where the voice was leading, the Nalle technique would go into an entirely different area. Equally outstanding was his ability to improvise and not the sterile type of musicality often heard at organ recitals. This concert was alive—musically, tonally and in an ever imaginable way. The Nalle charm was also much in evidence in his descriptive commentary between selections.

Stylistically, Nalle is a master of "jazz cantus firmus". His program proved that no matter what style music is played, the uniting of so-called classic and jazz idioms can turn an evening into an artistic musical experience.

The management of the theatre and its owner also deserve a word of commendation for their interest in maintaining an organ such as this in the Canton area. The organ is a tremendous asset and, hopefully, should be used soon again by Billy Nalle and others in the field of theatre organ. □

Lee Erwin Plays Ten Shows At Alexandria

One evening during the Chicago convention last summer Woody Wise and Lee Erwin discussed the idea of doing a silent screen presentation on the Grande Barton in the Virginia Theatre. They decided that there was a potential audience for a show that could easily run for seven days.

The following review appeared in the *Alexandria Gazette* on October 31:
VALENTINO ENTRANCES LOCAL MOVIE FANS IN SILENT MOVIE
 by Ted Creech

The Virginia Theatre has a hit show. Would you believe thunderous applause at the end of a movie? Would you believe a program of silent films and organ music in this day and age? Well, that's what is happening at the Virginia Theatre right now.



President and First Lady, on tour of duty(?), pay surprise visit to Lee Erwin's Silent Screen show in Alexandria, Virginia.

The show opened Wednesday night for a one-week engagement and judging by the enthusiasm of the audience, they really liked it. The Film? A great classic from the silent era "The Eagle," starring Rudolph Valentino. The musical accompaniment is a brand new score composed especially for this film by organist-composer Lee Erwin. He plays his own score on the Virginia's giant Barton theatre pipe organ while the story of love, jealousy and revenge during the reign of Catherine the Great of

Russia unfolds on the silver screen, and in utter clarity and brilliance; the print is a good one.

The generation gap seems to close as the entire audience falls under the spell of Valentino's magic, and Lee Erwin's superb musicianship. The music enhances the movie, and vice-versa. If you think mixed media and stereophonic sound are something new, go to the Virginia Theatre this week and see the original sound-light show. You won't believe the picture was made 40 years ago. Those who have never seen "Mr. Sideburns" himself, Rudolph Valentino, in a full length movie, now have their chance.

Those who saw him years ago can measure their memories against the well-preserved celluloid reality. The key word among the buzzing audience as it filed out of the theatre was 'fun.'

This reviewer, with ears ever-alert to audience reaction, heard one lady say: "It's something different, it's fun! I want my husband to see it and I want my children to see it."

There's a two-reel comedy and a sing-along before the feature. All in all, it's a pleasant evening and a real treat. Don't miss it. □

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