

"BEST" HOME ORGAN FESTIVAL SHOWS



GREETINGS!



THE BIG SCENE—A full house greets Lyn Larsen at the start of his concert, playing the Baldwin organ. This scene was repeated many times.



Judges — Millie Alexander (left) and Don Baker (right).



MR. PRESIDENT! LBJ-look-alike Earl Jacobson, Millie Alexander and Dewey Cagle get "Burpsi-Booma" refills during "on the house" cocktail party.



YOU MAY GO! Bud Iverson unconsciously uses a familiar school boy's sign language plea.

Editor's Note:

The following article is not concerning pipe organs but deals in the current trend of electronic home organ production as represented at the recent Home Organ Festival in California.

In reading this, members of ATOE will be quick to recognize that our dedication to the preservation of the theatre organ tradition has been influential in the design of the modern electronic instruments since most manufacturers feature "theatre" models and the voicing trend is to simulate theatre pipe organ tone.

Members of ATOE can take pride in the knowledge that our feelings toward the mighty theatre pipe organ is shared by thousands of owners of electronic facsimiles.

In my six years of attending the annual Home Organ Festival, held each September at Hoberg's resort in the pines of northern California, I have witnessed some amazing changes in the electronic organs shown. The instruments are the top models fabricated by the major manufacturers of electronic organs. The lineup of brands varies but slightly from year to year.

At my first Festival (1963), horseshoe consoles were in the minority. Of the eight models shown that year, only Allen, Conn and Thomas demonstrated a few instruments with horseshoe stop rails. Now, nearly all have this convenient and attractive feature. In 1968, Hammond was the only holdout to the strong influence exerted by the theatre pipe organ on the builders of plug-in organs. Rodgers, Allen, Conn, Thomas, Baldwin and Wurlitzer recreations of the

theatre instrument were much in evidence, plus the Hammond X77, a descendant of the ubiquitous "model B" but with space age overtones despite an increasing ability to produce certain theatre organ-type voices.

The Pacific Council for Organ Clubs, which sponsors the *Greatest Organ Show on Earth*, took an important step forward for the ninth annual Festival; an artists pool was initiated. Heretofore, organists have been brought in by the manufacturer to present concerts on the manufacturer's models only. This year, with only Conn, Thomas and Wurlitzer participating fully (i.e., providing instruments, artists, installation and maintenance crews, presenting commercials and maintaining a showroom), the idea which has been jelling for some years was put into effect; the Festival committee hired a stable of top organists to play both sponsored instruments and those rounded up from Bay Area dealers or manufacturers (in the case of Rodgers). These artists were heard on two, three and even four different instruments during the 1968 Festival. Among the pool artists were Gaylord Carter, Helen Dell and Lyn Larsen. The idea worked out so well that it will be continued and enlarged for the 1969 Festival, the tenth.

With the exception of Wurlitzer, the models shown were not necessarily the largest and most beefed-up types available. Conn used its new transistor 642 (successor to the "theatre" 640 tube organ) for all concerts and didn't even bring the larger and more completely unified model 645, or its transistorized successor. The largest Rodgers was the company's smallest 3-decker, the "Trio" (shades of the mighty 33E's, 34E's and 36E's of former years!). Baldwin did very well with its standard 2-deck theatre console, HT-2. Thomas showed both 2 and 3 manual models. There was only one Allen theatre model, the standard 2-manual job shown at previous Festivals.



ATOE's ALL! Gaylord Carter, Tiny James and Dewey Cagle during a lull in backstage activities.

OFF TOP ELECTRONIC ORGANS

by Stu Green

The only Hammond played in concert was an underpowered model X77, tonally perhaps the most interesting Hammond yet. The Wurlitzer model 4520 was easily the largest console shown at the Festival.

A few paragraphs back I mentioned the predominance of the horse-shoe console as a rough indicator of how completely the electronic organ industry has *gone theatre organ* for its entertainment models. Most have adopted the convenient accommodations of the theatre organ -- inclined, overhanging manuals, color-coded stop keys mounted on a curved stoprail, the voice terminology of the theatre pipe organ, the *unit orchestra* philosophy and the concave and radiating pedalboard, to name a few wisely adopted features. So far, so good.

However, somewhere along the line too many manufacturers were diverted from the path of rediscovering the practical assets of the theatre organ. They tried to *skip ahead* without completely exploring the many time-proven theatre organ features available (and long in the public domain) which could vastly improve their efforts. It would seem wiser for them to catch up with most of the refinements of theatre organ voicing and styling before trying to leap ahead with gimmicks intended to break down sales resistance. After attending the 1968 Festival it must be concluded that progress toward just catching up with the zenith of the theatre organ (as it was in say, 1928) has slowed to a trickle.

But it hasn't stopped. While very few new models were in evidence, subtle improvements on existing models provided the lushest sound yet to pour forth into the grooves of tall pines which surround Hoberg's. Tibias, the electronic kind, now have more "chirp", and "guttty" reeds are starting to develop, although much more work on them is in order. Several brands now have a Vox Humana stop, with Conn's still the most imitative. However, Thom-

as and Wurlitzer have the Vox available on the accompaniment manual where it can be used effectively as a mixing stop.

Nearly all organs shown demonstrated an improved balance among the families of tone which provide the ensemble sound of all organs. Therefore, an organ which once had too prominent Reeds (giving it a distinctive Kazoo ensemble sound) is no longer lacking the Tibia and String strength needed to blend with those reeds. This applies to several brands heard.

The one voice which seems to be lagging behind in development is the Diapason, although some of the manufacturers have church models which provide a much more realistic Diapason tone that is available on their theatre models. Of course, there are many, many kinds of Diapason. Yet, the three which one might expect to hear on a theatre model (Open, Diaphonic and Horn Diapasons) remain to be "approximated."

Wurlitzer, Baldwin and Thomas have followed Rodgers' lead in providing a Kinura sound. Most are reasonably realistic if a bit mild.

Strings are better than ever this year. Allen's still have an edge, possibly because they devote one whole set of tone generators to *celestial* an already good String. Their Trumpet (one of the best) is derived from the *Main* generators, along with the Strings, proving an effective Trumpet sound can be derived from a *Main* generator set. This model hasn't changed much in several years and we somehow get the idea that



Helen Dell's smile reflects the warmth which accompanied her acceptance.



PEEK-A-BOO! Bill McCoy discovers that the mirror works both ways.



WATCH THAT—"PHOTOG"! Lyn Larsen keeps a suspicious eye on the photo snapper as he whirls around to acknowledge applause.



COMEDIAN—Al Bollington played fast and accurately on the Wurlitzer plug-in while attired in his RAF flying boots and cotton gloves—among other things, of course.



A RARE SIGHT—Mildred Alexander (forward) at the Conn and Helen Dell at the Baldwin matching up styles during jam session.



Dewey Cagle having recovered from illness, resumes MC duties.



FLAT PEDAL BOARD — Our inquiring photographer checks the radiation and curvature of the Hammond X-77 pedal equipment. Other pedal equipment belongs to Miss Alexander.



SPACE PAGES—Kay Chenoweth (Festival Co-chairman) and Lorraine Marinell make pert creatures from out there during "Interstellar Costume Party."



LEE LEES (background) continues to play very earthly music as this unearthly creature stalks the auditorium during the costume party.



"SWINGING" CENTAURIAN CENTIPEDE — This beast was awarded the "most unusual" costume prize during the "Interstellar Costume Party."

Allen isn't terribly interested in competing in the theatre organ model areas.

Transistors have replaced tubes on nearly all models of electronic organ shown, and those builders who have not made a deal to incorporate the Leslie speaker as part of their instruments, were coming up with substitutes. So, Wurlitzer's *Spectratone* whirls an entire speaker to create a doppler effect, rather than just the horn portion a la Leslie's patent.

Speaking of horns, Wurlitzer has developed a loudspeaker with a brass exponential horn. Called simply "Brass Horn", it may be heard through either a trumpet or trombone bell, but not both together. The device is placed where the organist can reach it and with a little practice he can produce those "wah-wah" sounds a trumpeter obtains by hand-muting his instrument. A novelty for those organists who like to reminisce in the Clyde McCoy style, and can spare one hand away from the manuals.

Many of the gadget controls which in former years came as "optional" extras to be installed as pull-out drawers beneath the side jambs of consoles, had become standard equipment by 1968 Festival time. And they now appear atop the side jamb surface as rocker switches. Why they fail to be included among the stops on the stop rail remains to be explained, although it appears that not one of the current manufacturers of electronic organs is ready to admit that the next step will be a second stop rail - - either full or partial. Wurlitzer already has plenty of room for one on its model 4520 but most of the others, because of their efforts to keep their consoles "parlor size", must raise console tops a couple of inches to accommodate the second row. The manufacturer who "breaks the ice" and introduces the second stop rail will be performing a great service, because it will get rid of all of the oddly-placed controls which now pull attention down to the side jambs instead of keeping eyes up on the stop rail and music rack, where they belong. Most horse-

shoe models have used up just about all space on their single stop rails, so the start of a second one can't be too far away.

One of the theatre pipe organ's top pieces of ingenuity, unification, isn't being developed for electronic organ use as rapidly as it should be. Every last one features a well-unified Tibia, ranging from 16' to 1 3/5'. But engineers point to many unsolved problems when asked why something similar can't be applied to Trumpet, Clarinet, or Diapason for example, where 16-8-4 unifications could be expected. Nor can they say when we can have a Flute and Tibia at the same time. It would seem to be a matter of costs, and all must be highly competitive.

But now let's look at some of the artists who played at the 1968 Festival.

One of the most pleasant aspects of the 1968 Festival was the return of Don Baker, after an absence of one Festival, for Conn. Nowhere is the artistry of this giant of the entertainment console more appreciated than at the annual Hobergfest and welcoming spiels from many quarters were almost continuous. Also appearing for Conn was Bud Iverson, who created such a sensation with his arrangements and tasteful use of Conn registration last year. Gus Pearson and Al Bollington were on hand for Wurlitzer. Both employed a lively patter during their demonstration concerts and Gus produced a most entertaining pitch for the *Brass Horn*, the only real attachment heard at the Festival this year. Al Bollington performed his *act*, which includes a rendition of the fast part of Ponchielli's *La Gioconda* with hands encased in clumsy cotton gloves and wearing his RAF flying boots. He got through it with nary the hint of a sour note caused by the encumbrances. Al is a great crowd pleaser, a thorough showman.

Two remarkable newcomers to the Festival made points. No one who has been exposed to Gaylord Carter's brand of showmanship will be surprised to learn that he scored solidly

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Front row left, Charles W. Huelsman, veteran Albee projectionist purchased 22 tickets for young friends and family members, some shown here with featured artist, Gaylord Carter.

Warner, RKO regional manager, Joseph F. Alexander was all done up in his best bib and tucker; and it should be noted that he was seen to be wearing a pair of gold Wurlitzer console cuff links! ALBEE manager Lou Ruth and night manager Jim Chase had their hands full handling the ever-growing throngs.

Charles W. Huelsman, projectionist for many years at the ALBEE, had purchased a total of 22 tickets, and presented them to various young people in order for them to see the show; a wonderful gesture for which the Chapter is most appreciative.

By 7:00 P.M., the ALBEE lobby had become a very crowded place; some of those present had come from as far away as Washington, D.C., Lansing, Michigan, Detroit, Dayton, Ohio, etc. The visitor from Washington was a young man, all of ten years old, who was accompanied by his older brother. He insists that his parents permit him to go wherever a Harold Lloyd film is being shown. It seems that he had written to Mr. Lloyd, asking where he might see another of his films, and the reply came back -- "Cincinnati, Ohio on October 20th, at the RKO ALBEE." Among the familiar faces in the lobby were those of Dr. and Mrs. Walter C. Langsam. Dr. Langsam is President of the University of Cincinnati, and a great Gaylord Carter fan we are proud to say. Dr. Roberta Gary and her escort were seen heading for the balcony, to absorb the full effect of what they knew Gaylord was going to dish out during the course of the evening.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Schopp of Alliance, Ohio, returning home from a trip to Canada, came by way of Cincinnati to take in the show. The entire organ fraternity were shocked and distressed to learn of Bob's unexpected death the following week. Bob was a devotee of both classic and theatre organ. He headed the firm of A. R. Schopp's Sons, Inc. of Alliance, Ohio. Bob will be sadly missed and our deepest sympathies are extended to Betty and to the family.

By 8:00 P.M., just under 2,200 people had taken seats and fastened their belts in anticipation of the coming of "Flicker Fingers" Carter. The ALBEE booth was manned by Carl Engel and Morris Leeds. Backstage, Raymond Fabing, Sr. and John H. Hueberger were on lights and curtain, under the direction of Jim Day. At the stroke of eight, Chairman George Eaglin welcomed the audience on behalf of the Ohio Valley Chapter, then introduced WKRC's Bob Jones. After a few well-chosen words, Bob gave the cue that brought Gaylord up on the band car, playing the *Perfect Song* in a blaze of glory and applause. It was clear to be seen that Gaylord had the audience in the palm of his hand, after the first five minutes of *Carter repartee*. The bouncing ball sing-along was met with great enthusiasm, if not a bit off key here and there, and this was matched by gales of laughter during the course of the Keystone comedy shorts.

Following the intermission, the event we had all been waiting for

took place in the showing of Harold Lloyd's famous silent comedy, *SAFETY LAST*. The house roared with laughter, as Gaylord kept pace on the organ with the action on the screen. If the old timers attending, who remembered this grand era were laughing hard, it seemed that the many young people were all but rolling in the aisles! Ages ranged from six to eighty, however the college age turnout was amazing and delightful to see.

By 10:30 P.M., Gaylord had played the final selection for the evening and an obviously well-entertained audience reluctantly departed another Ohio Valley Chapter *Flicker Fingers* presentation. Harold Lloyd's antics had put a lasting smile on those many faces, and Gaylord's organ accompaniment a spring in their step. This was Gaylord's third appearance in Cincinnati for the Ohio Valley Chapter, and public demand already building, would indicate that our officers had best start thinking about his fourth return.

John J. Strader
Ohio Valley Chapter - ATOE

Home Organ Festival

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and threatened to return next year with a silent movie to cue. The other newcomer wasn't as well known but she, too, scored a personal triumph -- Helen Dell, whose arrangements and flawless performances on the Baldwin, Hammond and Conn (the latter during jam sessions) insure her return for many more Festivals. Besides, she's a living doll.

Bill McCoy appeared for Thomas and enjoyed an instrument which has undergone many unheralded changes -- all for the better. But Bill hasn't changed in the least; *old Gabby* has always turned out top-rate performances. Both Helen Dell and Gaylord Carter drew concert assignments on the Allen theatre organ, playing the same style instrument which has appeared at the Festival for several years without significant changes, long a good in-

More Home Organ

strument. But the Allen instrument probably suffered some from the absence of a sponsor on the spot to "push" it and therefore didn't hit with the same impact as when Tom Stevens' retail organization was in the picture.

Conversely, the Baldwin HT-2 theatre model couldn't have had better showcasing. It, too, was "un-sponsored" but two artists from the talent pool drew concert assignments on it, Lyn Larsen and Helen Dell. We are not certain whether the instrument has undergone extensive revisions or whether it was the artistry of these fine organists, but the Baldwin HT-2 was a sensation.

Hammond was represented by one lone model X77 without enough volume to satisfy the needs of Mildred Alexander, who turned to the Conn and Rodgers for some of her sessions. One of the most talked about happenings of the Festival was Miss Alexander's broadening of horizons to include the teaching of all makes of organ at her music schools, including a new headquarters studio in San Diego. The luxury of teaching just one type of instrument is fast disappearing; from now on, teachers must be able to cut the mustard on many makes and models of organ. The Alexander range will include pipes when she can locate one suitable for the "old southern" style mansion which houses her headquarters school.

One negative indication was the continuing trend toward including the easily conjured "gimmicks", which sales departments are said to demand to make instruments "competitive." Mute stops which control speaking stops are on the increase. These include such non-sounding effects as Attack, Reverb, Tremulant, Vibrato, "Emphasis" and an abomination called "*Repetition*" to which too many builders have succumbed. Other stops direct where another already functioning stop shall be heard (manual pedal, etc). Some silent stops are necessary, tremors for

example; there can be no argument there. But when there are more than twice as many nonspeaking stops on a stop rail as sound-producing ones, that's just too much dependence on clever circuitry and not enough on music making. I kid you not! Such an instrument was played at the Festival.

I won't go into the attractive social aspects of the Festival -- the many parties, the swimfest in Hoberg's giant pool, the "Trek to the Stars" costume ball, the nightly jam sessions -- for lack of space. But some contemplation as to why this year's show was the "best yet" (a rather universal impression among Festivalers polled on the final day) is in order. A successful Festival consists of many things, most of which are taken for granted by attendees -- such as the excellent food provided by the resort. Therefore, we must turn to what was different. First, the array of top artists, amplified by the Festival Talent Pool. Then, the staging was much improved, especially the subtle lighting effects which underscored the mood of every tune played during the concerts (credit here must go to former ATOE national president Tiny James, Les Fritze and Charlie Banks). And we shouldn't neglect the improved sound of many instruments. Also there were no speeches; MCing was brief and to the point. The shows moved at a fast pace.

Most of the gains were the result of careful planning. Lovely Kay Chenoweth was the same "sparker" she's always been. We rarely saw her when she wasn't perambulating to a hatching crisis or from a solved one. And Dewey Cagle was back this year, fully recovered from the heart attack which pulled him out of the 1967 Festival. Of all participants, these two rate the most credit for the nearly ten years of Home Organ Festivals (How Dewey Cagle finds time to act also as advertising manager for this magazine has long been a mystery!). Flo Lehtinen, the genial president of the Pacific Council for Organ Clubs, rates kudos, too.

Sooner State Is Here

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Ending the first portion of his show, he played *Pomp and Circumstance* the whole thing! This was an unusual but pleasant surprise. For the first and last part he turned off the tremors and gave the organ a big crunch sound. (The organ sounds bigger than ten ranks anyway). The organ was in good tune and held up well to this treatment; unlike many that sound terrible without heavy tremulants.

After the intermission, Lyn continued to captivate his audience with a mixture of show tunes and other standards, including *Lara's Theme from Dr. Zhivago*, which was played as a tribute to Jim Orcutt who played the song quite frequently before his untimely death.

For a change of pace Lyn performed the Tocatta from the Suite Gothique by Leon Boellmann. Again the Morton's big sound and excellent voicing added to the magnificence of the work. It was performed with mature ability and feeling.

Possibly the greatest highlight of the program was the medley from George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. Lyn played it to the hilt, in a style that Gershwin himself would have been proud of.

The Sooner State Chapter feels that our first venture has been a tremendous success and the people of Tulsa and Oklahoma are swiftly being converted to avid Theatre Organ Nuts, and that's what this organization is all about, isn't it? We're organ enthusiasts from the word "go!" The wheels are already in motion to plan for our next concert, so watch for more news from the Sooner State Chapter.

—Dennis Minear

The dates for the tenth Festival were announced during the 1968 session -- September 16 through 21, 1969.

—Stu Green, Hoberg's