

HELEN DELL WARMS DAMP AUDIENCE AT "TUBES, INC."

It was raining on February 24th. In fact it had been raining, on and off, all over southern California for three days prior to the date set for Helen Dell's initial concert on pipes. Even without



DAINTY MISS—Helen and friend at 'Tubes Inc.' The 2-9 Wurlt served her well.

the rain, the location was a hard-to-find warehouse, miles southeast of Los Angeles. To complete the difficult conditions under which Miss Dell performed, the weather turned cold late in the afternoon and the

rain perked up. An hour before concert time it was coming down in blinding sheets and it continued that way half way through the concert.

With all those negative factors, did anyone show up for the petite lady's debut? They sure did, over 250 strong. Some were attired in "sou'westers" and oilskins. Some came equipped with rubber boots (they were the dry ones), but they came. The concert was held in the "Tubes Inc" warehouse, located inconveniently in the badly-lighted industrial area of beautiful downtown Commerce, Calif., mainly because the building houses Chuck Baker's 2-9 Wurlitzer (yes, 2-9; we checked). Inside the building it was a few degrees colder than outside, so when foot-stomping accompanied applause, it was for a dual purpose. Irving Cosgrove was seen lurching around the seating area cursing himself for failing to apply for the hot water bottle concession.

In the tooth-chattering atmosphere, organist Lyn Larsen stepped to the microphone and gave Helen a warm introduction, welcoming her to the Malar label for which they both record. Helen appeared immediately, stepped to the immaculate white and gold horse-shoe through a blast of applause and opened with a fast "I Know That You Know."

After the handclapping died down she greeted the enthusiasts who had so valiantly braved the elements. She was wearing a knee-length white sleeveless dress with a gold belt and golden "Cinderella" slippers with glass heels. She spoke in a confident, lowpitched (almost husky) voice and it was soon evident that she was quite at ease doing her own MCing. After a voxy version of "I'll Remember April," with solos on the excellent Clarinet on the Baker organ, she greeted her parents who had come from Arizona to take in daughter's debut.

Among the tunes which highlighted the first half of the program were a simple but pleasant "Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans?", an emotional "Dancing in the Dark", "I'm Through With Love" (as done in her album) and a timely "Button Up Your Overcoat", which was a comment on the TV commercial that spoofs musical films of the '30s. Helen programmed her concert carefully, avoiding overripe cliché tunes and including some novelties. One was "Les Myrtles" which, she explained, she had heard Harry Mills play on the Welte which once graced the Barker Bros. department store in LA. Another was a swing-band arrangement of "Shiny Stockings" a minor masterwork in jazz which had toes tapping. It smacked of "Artistry in Rhythm" in its pattern and drive, ending on a dirty, lowdown chord.

Then, Helen asked musically, "How Are Things in Glocca Morra?" "Hopefully, warmer than here" stagewhispered Bill Exner. She closed the section with that fine old depressionistic morale builder from a long ago Dick Powell movie, "Marching Along Together."

During intermission we looked at the organ in closeup. The pipework is installed in two ample-size, floor-level chambers in a corner of the warehouse. The console is located on a dolly about 25 feet from the chambers. Drapes have been hung in the corner of the warehouse to provide a proper setting for the console and, perhaps, to take the edge off any excessive reverb in the huge, high-roofed building.

The organ has a bright sound, with considerable treble emphasis on reeds and strings. The Tibia is adjusted for Stopped Flute quality. The ensemble sound is excellent and even at full organ the sound was never overpowering due to the immense interior of the steel tube warehouse. The corner occupied by the organ and about 300 folding chairs doesn't make a dent on the over-all capacity.

After intermission, Miss Dell played a medley from "Oliver", a '20s group ("Lilac Time" and "Baby Face"), "The Song is You", Anderson's "Jazz Pizzicato" and the tune most closely associated with her, "One Morning in May". Her encore was "Step to the Rear" and those who did, following a whopping round of applause, found themselves out in the reality of a cold, damp night. Somehow, the musical enchantment had caused listeners to forget that getting there wasn't half the fun.

— Peg Nielsen

Au Revoir to the Boyd Kimball

For once, thankfully, a final concert did not mean the end of a Theatre Organ, or a theatre, or both! The Boyd Theatre at 19th and Chestnut Sts., became for a brief period the only operating theatre in downtown Philadelphia, Pa. with a playable instrument. This neatly groomed theatre boasts a 3-19 Kimball first heard on Christmas Day in 1928 and which had become as silent as the "silents" it once accompanied. Used for intermissions from 1931 until 1939, it had remained silent for 30 years. With its dark and dusty pipes hidden behind red velvet curtains radiating from the edge of the cinerama screen, and its gray-blue handsome console lurking like some archaeological specimen beneath a covered orchestra pit on an inoperative lift, the presence of this instrument was known only to the theatre management and a handful of enthusiasts until recent weeks.

Then, along came Robert E. Dilworth, an energetic and imaginative teacher and organ enthusiast on the faculty of John Dickinson High School in Wilmington, Delaware. Bob Dilworth had become aware that RKO-Stanley Warner Co. was willing to donate Theatre Organs to qualified non-profit or tax-supported institutions. Having secured the cooperation of faculty and students at his high school to install a Theatre Organ at the school, Mr. Dilworth arranged through agent Walter Froelich to obtain the Boyd Kimball to be removed to nearby Wilmington by student volunteers. A preliminary examination of the instrument revealed that while a considerable amount of restoration work was necessary involving extensive re-leathering and repairing about 100 squashed pipes, the organ was immediately playable to some extent. Mr. Dilworth saw an opportunity here to arrange for a final concert on this instrument in its original setting for the sake of nostalgia as well as the practical idea of raising funds to defray the costs of relocation. Enlisting the help of organ expert Brantley Duddy of the Austin Organ Co. plus volunteer workers from the Delaware Valley Chapter (TOSDV, Inc.) and John Dickinson High School student and faculty volunteers, serious restoration work commenced at the beginning of 1969.

Finally, while restoration efforts were in progress, TV and Concert Organist Larry Ferrari, who has become an irreplaceable pipe organ enthusiast, tried out the Boyd Kimball. Arrangements were made for a midnight concert featuring Larry Ferrari tentatively scheduled for Saturday, February 22.

To the everlasting credit of everyone connected with the project, the organ was sufficiently restored by the morning of the concert — even the lift, which defied all kinds of electrical teasing, finally became co-operative, but only after Don Stott and Dick Croft spent the entire night nursing this erratic elevator back to reasonable health.

There is one thing all “final” concerts have in common — problems. In this case the weather and the late hour were not on our side. Nevertheless, nearly 500 of the faithful were at the Boyd at midnight. After a brief greeting by Mr. Dilworth, the console rose to the spotlight with Larry Ferrari at a gleaming console opening with “This Could be the Start of Something Big.” For those of us who had heard the first feeble pipe-like sounds from this Kimball a few weeks ago, the effect was electrifying. Even though the combination action was not operating and other malfunctions were evident, the magnificence of this instrument — in perfect tune — spoke through the temporarily tied-back curtains with full authority. Here was the “big sound” — crowned with a very powerful trumpet stop.

At the finish of his opening number, Larry paid a brief tribute to Bob Dilworth’s group and the ATOE and then launched into the uninterrupted first portion of his concert — music of Broadway and the Movies. Our artist illustrated the operative percussions with appropriate use of glock and chimes. The straight organ passages exhibited the beauty and power of the Kimball which Mr. Duddy had tuned so perfectly. Mr. Ferrari continued with a varied program moving rapidly from song to song in an uninterrupted string of harmony with considerable use of the full organ effect.

The second half of the Larry Ferrari concert involved a considerable range in repertoire making full use of the Kimball Tibias. In addition to all the various rhythms presented, even a polka was included. In accordance with his telecast tradition, Larry concluded with sacred music consisting of hymns. Since the time allotted to us by the theatre was depleted, Mr. Dilworth announced that we would have to close the program, and our organist concluded with the traditional “Auld Lang Syne.” In this case it was not “goodbye”

to the mighty Kimball sound but only a brief farewell until we meet again in a new location and with the organ in even better condition than this crash program in restoration.

Our thanks go to the friendly and cooperative Boyd Theatre staff under the management of Mr. Ray Meyer, to the tireless workers who made this evening possible, to the leadership of Robert E. Dilworth, and finally to Larry Ferrari for providing over two hours of pipe organ entertainment.

—Grant Whitcomb

DTOC’s Good Fortune: Don Miller

Two good friends, Billy Nalle and Don Miller, were reunited when Billy visited the Detroit Theater Organ Club to present his January program. The extent of their friendship was amply revealed when, during Billy’s playing of “The Happiest Orchestration” the mighty “orchestration” began to run down! Just when it seemed that the music was about to grind to a dispirited halt, the resourceful Don came to the rescue by dashing onto the stage and winding the instrument back up again, restoring all its jangling vitality in time for a brilliant climax. The gag was enhanced by highly audible sound effects created by a gigantic ratchet (dubbed “Ratchet Mirabilis, not to be confused with the English Post Ratchet” by its creator, Dave Brewer) temporarily affixed to the console’s posterior.

Not to be outdone by his friend, Don Miller himself appeared in concert before the DTOC the following month. Appearances by Don Miller, one of the authentic masters of the console in the days of the silent screen, are infrequent since his retirement, and each one is a memorable event. ATOE members who attended the 1967 National Convention in Detroit will recall Don’s brilliance that stifling July afternoon as he opened the convention with a performance that to many was the high point of the entire convention.

On this occasion, however, Don announced that the program would be informal “Just as if you were guests in my home and I played the organ for you.” True to his word, the evening was relaxed, light, and varied. However, it was the familiar Don Miller playing, with his bright and surprisingly modern-style arrangements and harmonies, and his brilliant, varied and effective registration.

His opener was a brisk “You,” followed by a suite from Gershwin’s “American in Paris” music that deserves to be heard more often. (One of the things that will be sorely missed when those organists whose memory spans the golden era of popular music are no longer with us is their ability to dig into their memories — and music collections — and come up with gems. Not that the music is necessarily obscure or forgotten; but to some of the younger artists, perhaps, it is not as viable in their experience and as easy to come by as are some other tunes. Hence much deserving music is neglected, and other music is over-played.)

The remainder of the first half of his program included a sensitive “People”; a selection of three ballet excerpts noteworthy for their orchestral registration; a slow, sentimental blues featuring Tibias; “Brazilian Sleighbells”; the old chestnut “Mighty Lak’ a Rose” played sentimentally on Dulciana and Unda Maris; and as a windup “Slaughter on Tenth Avenue.”

After intermission, Don announced (with a fanfare of brass) his co-star, Maureen Lyon, a very talented and charming young lady well known for her intermission performances at the Redford Theatre and elsewhere. She gave Don a further breather and the audience a glimpse of the coming generation of organists with assured performances of “Everything is Coming Up Roses”, “It’s Wonderful” and “Granada.”



— Photo by Phil Gorden

Don, Maureen and John

Don then returned and a surprise brought out a young sailor friend of his, John Tyner, who sang “Moon River” and “My Favorite Things”, with Don accompanying at the console.

The evening concluded with an excellent “Misty” and a spectacular and climactic “Battle Hymn of the Republic” in honor of Washington’s birthday, featuring a shattering entrance of the Post Horn which almost blew the audience out of the theater. —Ben Levy