

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