

CORN, HUMOR, A TOPFLIGHT MUSICAL PERFORMANCE MARK DEL CASTILLO CONCERT FOR L.A. CHAPTER

by Elmer Fubb, Hollywood

Anyone who has laughed over the outrageous definitions in organist Lloyd del Castillo's "Alphabetical Primer of Organ Stops" would anticipate that any concert played by the veteran theatre organist would be different. Billing himself as "the world's oldest living theatre organist," Lloyd brought up the LA Wiltern theatre 4-37 Kimball console to the accompaniment of a snore-wracked "Oh How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning." When the spotlight hit him, the "snooze" theme was amplified by his attire — an old-fashioned nightshirt and cap. While acknowledging his applause he shed the outward attire, stripping down to a snappy gray business suit. He complained that the nightie and cap made him look too much like a member of the Ku Klux Klan, and handed the garments to a stunning doll who materialized from backstage. (she turned out to be his granddaughter!) Her exit music was a Kimball'd wolf whistle. That was the intro to Del's 1969 concert for the LA chapter of ATOE, played on March 30th, starting at 9:30 A.M., which may help explain Del's exanimate spirit.



DEL AT THE KIMBALL — A pixie from the 'Golden Era'.

Del went into "Lazy" slumped over the manuals, and "Lazy" degenerated into a rumble of "snores" played on the lower register of one of the Kimball's Voxes. But Del "came to" in time to take a bow for his musical "sloom session". Continuing the "Matutinal, Diurnal and Doggone Sleepy" theme which headed the group, he hauled off and played a generous portion of von Suppe's "Morning, Noon and Night in Vienna," "Night and Day" and a "sun-

rise" medley. The last, "When Day is Done," was dedicated to the memory of President Eisenhower, and it was a beauty.

The next group on the printed program was headed, "Exotic, Lush and Just Plain Sexy." For this group Del had selected a Hollywood-style oriental caper worthy of "the turban" — "Japanese Sunset," a hangover from silent movie epics starring "Sojin", Anna May Wong and Sessue Hayakawa. Next, a wild, fast, loud and rhythmic "Swamp Fire," replete with rowdy Serpentine eruptions. Then Del did a beautiful job on tunes borrowed from Borodin under the title, "Kismet selections." The closer in the group was a violent "Bacchanale" from that long-ago version of "Hair" known as "Samson and Delilah." It made "Swamp Fire" seem like a lullabye.

Throughout the program, Del was fighting the clock; he had scheduled too many tunes and the house had to be cleared early. That also limited his humor, but didn't cap it entirely.

The opener for the post-intermission session was a bright "Washington Post" during which the lobby lingerers marched to their seats. The program ballyhooed this group as "Rhythmic, Exuberant and Uptight." The latter never materialized but the first two adjectives were well-justified by "Fascinatin' Rhythm" and Kern's "Waltz in Swingtime." Del played his own "Cuckoo Clock" which turned out to be charmingly-assembled "tick-tock" music with the inevitable loosening of spring tension followed by "winding" (the wood block). Del closed the section with a fine reading of Lecuona's moody "Malaguena."

The notes on the program (which had an unmistakable Del Castillo aura) claimed that the organist's theatre music beginnings date back to "The Birth of a Nation" — the D. W. Griffith version we hasten to add, not the George Washington super epic. He's not that ancient, despite his billing.

Little did his listeners know that "Peter Gink" would be a burlesque of Edvard Grieg's immortal "Peer Gynt" suite — but it was. Each of the beloved

themes — "Morning", "Ase's Death", "Anitra's Dance" and "Hall of the Mountain King" — were put through the ringer in fast, rhythmic stanzas, liberally interspersed with syncopated riffs. The slight whirring sound heard as the applause died down might have been echoes of Grieg spinning in his sarcophagus, with the shade of Spike Jones turning the crank.

But if Del's halo was somewhat tarnished after that skilled slice of musical mayhem, he made it all good with what followed, a charming bit of froth by Rudolph Friml, "Chansonette" (later integrated into "Donkey Serenade") and then a round of gorgeous Gershwin, including a generous hunk of "Rhapsody in Blue", and all of "Somebody Loves Me", "Strike Up the Band" and "Of Thee I Sing."

The final title was something of a colossal production. Called "Scrambled Overture," it consisted of recognizable themes from such orchestral or operatic potboilers as "Poet and Peasant," "Aida", "Faust", "Light Cavalry" and "William Tell," all expertly assembled with appropriate harmonic imbrication, into an overture to end all overtures, and it is characteristic of the man that he played his overture as the last item on his program — without even bothering to retitile it "finale."

Del won his battle with the clock but there was no time for an encore. So he obliged by turning up in the lobby to greet all his well-wishers and autograph records.



DEL AND EDDIE — The veteran organists 'talk it over' in the lobby after the concert.

In the lobby, as Lloyd exchanged small talk with scores of fans, a quiet, heavyset man with horn-rimmed glasses edged up to him and told him "Young man, I predict a great future for you as an organist — if you practice daily, live a clean life, save your money, lay off booze" Lloyd was looking the other way but that last word caught his ear and he turned to his "adviser" — and did a double-take. ". . . . Eddie Dunstedter!" Eddie had come in quietly to hear his old colleague's concert, a signal honor because Eddie is not known for attendance at concerts.

But the most descriptive evaluation of the concert came from a tall man dressed in a deep blue uniform with brass buttons. Peering over flattened



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steel-rimmed spectacles, Del's No. 1 booster, former elevator jockey Dinny Timmins, stated in a flat New England drawl, "Thet Del Casteelio is shure a funny comeediun - and he plays thet big music box purty good, too. Yup, it's almost as good as listnen' to Laurens Welk."

When Lloyd del Castillo comes to town for a concert, armed with his oversize repertoire and nightshirt, get set for an evening of fun and entertainment interspersed with expertly performed music in many styles. He's living proof that console veterans still have something of value to say to all of us.

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CHICAGO: CIRCA 1926

The following item on Chicago organist, Henri A. Keates, was found in the November 1926 issue of *Jacobs Orchestral Magazine* by Lloyd E. Klos:

In the constellation of organ stars, none shine with more brilliance than Henri A. Keates, the nationally famous concert organist who has recently come to Chicago from the Pacific Coast.

Mr. Keates, who played for six years for Jensen and Von Herberg at the Liberty Theatre in Portland, Oregon (one of the three houses which made architectural, musical and other artistic history in the business), originally came to McVickers last fall. The opening of the magnificent Oriental in the Masonic Building, inevitably carried both him and Paul Ash, his orchestral partner, into the new, exotic palace, where both are enjoying unparalleled success.

Out west, Mr. Keates did practically nothing but concert organ work and the writer recalls, with pleasure, many of his concerts which did much to elevate the standard of music in the theatres. It is certainly axiomatic that the musical taste and standard of the movie audiences are in inverse proportion to the size of the cities, and good music, no matter how well rendered, as solo or concert numbers except the Sunday morning recitals held at the Chicago Theatre, which cater exclusively to the intelligentsia, usually fail to satisfy audiences.

This would have proven an unsolvable dilemma to most organists. To Mr. Keates, with his versatility, it was easy. He tried the community idea which, while not original, lent itself happily to his magnetic personality. Coupled with the personality angle, Keates studied out special slide arrangements which added just that peculiar flavor of individualism which put them over and which resulted in the plagiarism and imitation of this style of com-

munity presentation by a great many of his contemporaries.

As he says without exaggeration, "The stage of experiment or innovation is past; it is now an institution of the Oriental and one which the public demands." Mr. Hutter, of the famous Chicago Choral Society, tersely remarked of his work, "The Chicago Choral Society has quite a time to get its 100 members to sing in rhythm and these are musicians, or presumably so, but Keates gets the whole audience singing, many of whom have apparently no music in them at all."

His wife, who is his secretary, showed numerous letters from organists throughout the country requesting the privilege of using his special slide versions and novelties; also quite a little of the usual fan mail to which all big name people fall heir. And, right now, while we talk about Mrs. Keates; she seems the impresario, he the artist, and a wonderful team they make. "She writes most of the lyrics for my slides," he proudly and affectionately told me. "She's the biggest reason for my success."

Last week, Mr. Keates took three encores on a certain act he was using and practically stopped the show with the ovation he received. He is very enthusiastic about the success not from a selfish delight, or satisfaction that he has pleased his audiences, but because he feels he can use this success to elevate their taste. "I'm working to get them so that they will finally sing opera. Last Christmas, during the holidays, I had them singing such sacred songs as "Holy Night," "Come All Ye Faithful," and so forth, and they enjoyed it. And there is a ring of sincerity in his voice which the ethical artist likes to hear when he glowingly paints a future for this great branch of musical endeavor.

Mr. Harry Edward Freund, head of the Music Research Bureau of Chicago, one of the most powerful musical influences towards better music in Chicago, recently wrote him concerning the work, which shows the appreciation of the musically big men of the town: "My Dear Mr. Keates: I take much pleasure in heartily congratulating you on the great success of your Community Sings at the Oriental Theatre.

"If I may be permitted to make a suggestion, it is that you are afforded a splendid opportunity to raise the level of the class of music which is now placed on the screen. With every good wish for the progress of fine work you are doing. Sincerely yours, Music Research Bureau (signed) Harry Edmund Freund."

So much cognizance of the importance of this comment was taken that the biggest newspapers published it and I felt that Melody readers would like authentic proof as to the interest of the intellectual musical world in this artist.

Keates looks the part of the musician. He has quite bushy, wavy hair, reminding one much of Percy Grainger. There is little of the so-called artistic affection about him. He is simply Keates and easily accessible to everyone. In fact, too much so, I sometimes think. During the half hour interview I had with him, a total stranger called and asked for a photograph, which was given, then, mind you, had to be autographed; a salesman trying to sell an ad in some vaudeville periodical, a whistler who wanted to work in an act; a man who dropped into make the usual weather observations and take up time; a woman admirer who gushingly had to tell "Dear Mr. Keates" how "very wonderful" he was, and so forth. But the biggest pest was met with a hearty smile, the stranger got his photo autographed, the whistler got a job, and so forth. Such is Henri A. Keates.