

Home Organ Festival Weathers Move With Ease

by G. Bandini

Can a music festival for 11 years traditionally and emotionally linked to a highland forest resort be moved hundreds of miles to a seaside park without losing the qualities which accrued year after year to make it the West's number one electronic organ showcase, concentration of top artists and recreation week for organ enthusiasts?

The 12th Annual Home Organ Festival was held at the Asilomar Conference Grounds (a state park) at Pacific Grove, Calif. (near Monterey) between Sept. 26 and October 1, 1971. The show never before faced such obstacles. The loss of Hoberg's resort, the woodland site of previous Festivals, was thought by some to be a serious blow. Yet at Festival's end this year there was nothing but praise for the new seaside location. Its facilities proved to be superior to Hoberg's in many respects — better food, an acoustically superior concert hall and excellent lodgings.

But an event which transpired in San Francisco the day before the Festival opened posed a real setback; a truck loaded with the Rodgers organs (including a rare model 340) and Lowrey organs for display and concerts at the Festival was stolen. A stand-in Rodgers 33E was rushed in for the last two days of the Festival. Meanwhile Rodgers freed its talent (Richard Purvis, Tom Hazleton) to play on other brands. The loss to Rodgers in advertising and equipment



Organists Don Baker and Bud Iverson double as cocktail waiters during a Festival party.

was great, but the firm gained much in goodwill among Festivaleers.

Another disquieting note was that Allen Organs cancelled at the last minute.

Concerning instruments, there were a few innovations but in general the most apparent changes were in tonal refinements and a large increase in gimmickry — most of which provide grist for sales spiels rather than musical advantage.

Five days of concerts, workshops, jam sessions, displays, demonstrations and cocktail parties were presented by a star-studded cast of organists playing the major brands of electronic organ: John Seng (Yamaha), Peter Heaps (Saville), Byron ("Gorilla in the Garden") Melcher (Thomas), Bill Irwin (Yamaha), Tom Hazleton (Rodgers), Richard Purvis (Rodgers), Larry Vanucci (Baldwin), Frank Renaut (Lowrey), Hal Randal (Baldwin), Gus Pearson (Wurlitzer), Larry Embury (Conn), Hal Vincent (Baldwin) and Glenn Deringer (Wurlitzer). Due to the "great organ robbery," Rodgers released its artists to play on other brands. Thus Tom Hazleton's concert was played on the Conn 650. The replacement Rodgers 33E arrived in time for the concerts of Bill Thomson and Richard Purvis.

Daily workshop sessions were held in the morning with a choice of either Ray Frazier or Mildred Alexander. It was a difficult choice. A master class was presented by Dick Purvis. Al-

though Rex Koury was there for Allen, the Allen cancellation left him without an instrument so he was rescheduled to play the replacement Rodgers. Frank Renaut also played a replacement Lowrey.

The closing concert was played on Conn's large 3-manual model 650 by that Dean of Theatre Organists, Don Baker. Don's spectacular arrangements and flawless performance provided a fitting topper of the 1971 Festival.

Congratulations are in order to Festival chairman Tiny James and his able committee for a most successful "Festival transplant." The Festival is sponsored by the Pacific Council for Organ Clubs. □

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