

# THE CARE AND FEEDING of ORGAN Soloists

by John Muri

Some of the conditions under which traveling organists have to play are incredible. How can a management that wants its soloist to do a good job throw obstacles in his way or fail to provide even the necessities? I have soloed in theatres where I have had to change clothes in the projection booth and wash and shave in the public men's toilet. I have slept on lobby furniture and on floors. So this month we shall offer suggestions for the benefit of committees inexperienced at sponsoring concerts.

Make sure all arrangements of arrival and departure are understood, together with the details of the performance and the fee. If you have programs frequently, send the artist copies of recent programs so that he may avoid duplicating pieces that others have recently played for you. Be sure to meet him at the airport or station and see that he gets to wherever he is going to stay. It is proper to make reservations for the player at hotels, etc., but ask him if he wants you to do the advance work, for he may prefer to do it himself.

If the artist is agreeable, he might be asked to appear on local TV or radio stations on the morning or the afternoon of the program, and he might play a couple of tunes on a studio electronic, furnished either by the station or a local organ dealer. It's good publicity and it sells tickets. However, don't keep the organist running around all day. Be sure he is free after 4 p.m. to get ready for an 8 p.m. show. If he wants to rest during the afternoon, see that he is left alone. Some organists get the butterflies — that is, pre-concert nervousness or tension — that destroy appetite. One might intrude to see if he would take a light snack before the show, but it should not be pressed upon him. Don't schedule any dinners before a concert.

When you take your soloist to the theatre for practice, don't inflict your local star who wants to demonstrate

the organ upon him unless there are some unusually wild gimmicks on the console layout. A short demonstration of this kind may be necessary, but then let the visitor take over. Especially don't confuse him with suggestions like "Play some loud things" and "Play soft", etc. If you shoot a number of these exhortations at him, he may get worried, and the music he plays will reflect it. Above all, don't ask him to do "Happy Birthday" during the show. It may please the celebrants, but it's a bore to everybody else. Leave him alone for as long a practice period as he specifies, but make a schedule of practice time with him, after which you can set up piston-changing and tuning schedules.

He should be provided with a dressing room, backstage if possible, with hot water and the following items: a few comfortable chairs, a long mirror, good lighting, several clothes-hangers, a clock, a water pitcher (with an ice-bucket and tongs optional), drinking glasses, paper napkins, soft drinks (Coke, 7-Up, Pepsi, etc.), orange juice for those who require it, drinking-straws, sugar, a box of matches, a knife, spoons, a box of band-aids, anacin or aspirin, and some hard candy. A sign should be posted in the room: "All guests must leave this area five minutes before program time."

No one should be allowed to sit or play at the organ during the hour preceding the program for any reason other than the most urgent repairs. No tuning or regulating should be done on organs before a concert while any of the audience are within hearing distance. There should be no pre-program music, particularly recorded tapes. They can destroy the whole aura or anticipatory atmosphere of a musical event. The theatre should be kept in silence until the opening announcement or the player's first notes.

Artists should not be approached by anyone during the hour before the program in the "green room" or anywhere else, either for social or for

business reasons. The player has a whole evening's entertainment resting on his shoulders. Business and socializing can come later. Every intrusion upon a player's solitude is likely to detract substantially from the quality of his performance. I suppose there are a number who don't need or want to be left alone. Let those people make the decision; don't make it yourself. Make it clear to them that they are free to choose company or privacy.

Let your soloist know when he is to be introduced, and don't delay beginning for more than a few minutes — certainly no more than ten — without making some kind of emergency announcement to the audience.

Don't let people go backstage at intermission. The soloist is only half through, and the critical part is yet to come. You might offer to bring him some hot coffee or a cold drink — but no booze.

After the concert, allow no one to sit or play at the organ until the soloist has left the building. I did a concert recently where a youngster started playing while I was still talking with people at the orchestra-railing and the house still unemptied. He ruined the effect of my big emotional finish.

With all the work and the tension over, the player may be happy — in fact, anxious — to get something to eat. Playing a concert uses up a lot of energy, and the artist can get quite hungry as he relaxes. Some groups offer parties supplied with enough table-goodies to make up for the earlier fasting. There may be an occasional boozier or socialite who has to be watched and corralled (particularly to insure concert-time sobriety) and you'll have to follow him around and tactfully keep him out of harm's way.

When he leaves town, make sure he gets to the airport or other point of departure on schedule. By this time, the program chairman is usually ready to throw up his hands and say, "Thank God, it's over!", but if he has taken care of the organist's needs, if he has been handy even when leaving the artist alone, if he has not planned events without the artist's consent, if he hasn't worn out the player with excessive socializing, if he hasn't twisted the artist's arm to do all kinds of extras, he will have done everything he can to provide a good show with a happy ending. □