

# SHIRLEY GOES WEST

by Peg Nielsen

*The future of the theatre organ hobby depends largely on the emergence of young artists ready to take up the torch, but they need encouragement. This is the story of one talented youngster on her first safari far from home, and the efforts of those with whom she came in contact to make her feel welcome and at ease. Included are photos from her picture album, visual records of people, times, places and instruments she wants to remember.*

Photos: Bob Hill, Stu Green

Malar's Bob Carson found Shirley to be a cooperative artist. She adapted quickly to an unfamiliar instrument.



Shirley found the Wiltern Kimball much to her liking.

**I**t was raining on the January night when the big United jet nosed into its berth at Los Angeles International Airport. For one passenger it was her first venture so far from her Philadelphia home area; Shirley Hannum had travelled as far as Detroit, Rochester and Buffalo to attend ATOS conventions or play east coast concerts during her young career as a professional organist, but now she was arriving in Los Angeles to play a concert and make a record. It had all happened suddenly, and at a time when the youthful organist had been having more than a little concern about her future as a concert artist. No, not doubts as to her ability as a musician; she had been reassured years before by one of her teachers, Leonard MacClain, that she had that certain spark which would one day bring her

into national focus. Yet the concert offers had been sparse in recent years. Shirley wondered.

Then a series of transcontinental phone calls changed everything. Malar Records' talent scout, Helen Dell, had heard Shirley's cameo spot at the 2/8 Wurlitzer in the Tivoli Theatre in Frederick, Md., during the 1972 ATOS convention. Helen was impressed and made a note in her book.

As Shirley traversed the accordion-pleated passage from plane to terra firma her eyes scanned the waiting crowd, and fell on a familiar face; Helen Dell's. Helen and her husband, Malar Records president, Bob Carson, drove Shirley to the famous studio which is also their home. There was the 3/26 console that has been recorded by Johnny Duffy, Lyn Larsen, Helen Dell, George Wright, "Guy Melindy", "Jocelyn McNeil", Tom Hazleton, Bud Taylor, Gaylord Carter and many others in the "Who's Who" of organdom. For the next week it would be exclusively Shirley's.

Lansdowne, Pennsylvania (home base) seemed far away and remote in time as Shirley fingered the same stopkeys and combination buttons her illustrious predecessors had once fondled. Pushing a button under the great manual brought a smile of recognition to her lips. "That's a Lyn

Larsen combination," she exclaimed to no one in particular. Then with a pang of anxiety she wondered how her church choir would fare without her on Sunday.

The Carsons had invited Shirley to be their house guest during the recording session, so she would be in close proximity to them and to the organ for the next week. It was an advantageous arrangement because Shirley was never far from the instrument she would soon record.

Shirley had four days to become familiar with the organ before the recording session. She had one night off while Les and Olive Pepiot tuned the instrument. She was driven through the continuing rain to the Pipe & Pizza to hear Carl Simone (subbing for Bob Garretson) play the 2/10 Wurlitzer. Carl gave Shirley a whack at the organ and the ears of pizza chompers quickly noted there was a distinct difference in style. It was a sparse audience, due to the rain, but they warmed up to the music of the gal sporting the shag bob and the comfortable slacks.

Next day it was back to work on arrangements and registration — and much practice. There wouldn't be much more recreation before the taping, other than leisurely meals in Hollywood restaurants with the Car-

sons and a look at the stars' footprints in cement at the Chinese Theatre. Thus went the Hollywood visit, from Monday to Thursday.

On Thursday, engineer Dick Stoney moved in his recording equipment, and the hard work started. Helen and Dick were delighted to learn that Shirley could get the desired results on tape in two or three "takes" at most, so the work time went quickly. Some selections went faster than others. The one piece Shirley concentrated on above all others was the "Liebestod" (Love-death) of Richard Wagner's ill-starred lovers, Tristan and Isolde. With her trademark tune, "I Enjoy Being a Girl," the recording session closed on Friday evening, with all taping accomplished in only two days.

Her next project would be her concert at the Wiltern for the LA Chapter of ATOS. But there was a weekend for sightseeing before she could get her hands on the monolithic Kimball 4/37 which scares so many organists. Her hosts and new friends drove her around Hollywood and Los Angeles for a looksee of "Tinseltown" in soggy conditions. On Friday night it was a visit to Coffman and Field's Old Town Music Hall in nearby El Segundo for a listen to the 4/24 Wurlitzer with Bill Coffman at the console. Next day it was the Elks' Club 4/61 Morton,

"I Enjoy Being a Girl" Shirley completes her Malar record taping session on the Carson 3/26 Wurlitzer with a triumphant grin.



An opportunity to hear Lloyd del Castillo in concert was a highlight. "Del" obviously warmed up to the situation.





The San Sylmar 3/25 Wurlitzer was a special thrill on a rainy afternoon. That's a huge orchestration ahead of the console, not part of the Wurlitzer.

then the 3/16 Wurlitzer in San Gabriel's Civic Auditorium. On Sunday she attended the monthly meeting of the LA pro organists Breakfast Club as a guest.

Next day, she moved from the Carson home in Hollywood to the

Westwood home of "Deke" and Dottie Warner, where she would be a house guest while preparing for her concert. Bright and early Monday morning she was delivered to the Wiltern by Deke where the LA chapter's Liaison Chairman, Chick Landers, took charge. In a

moment they were in the dimly lighted interior of the Wiltern and the console was raised to "up" position by maintenance chief Leonard Worne. Soon Shirley was lost in the intricacies of the Kimball, a brand she knows well, having played one as a theatre staffer for seven years back in Lansdowne, not to mention the large Kimball in the Dickinson High School in Wilmington, Delaware, where she has played concerts. She would spend the next five mornings at the Wiltern, preparing her concert. Her afternoons and evenings were free and she accepted a number of invitations from locals. A dinner date with ORGANIST magazine publisher Bill Worrall got her around to several of the southland locations which feature organ music, and also an assignment as eastern regional reporter for Bill's mag. Rain was still a problem which discouraged projected visits to the movie studios, but Shirley decided to accept recording engineer Dick Stoney's invitation to visit Disneyland, rain or shine. She got rain by the bucketful as they sailed with the Pirates of the Caribbean, marvelled at the animated tweeting of the Tiki Room birds, plunged to the ocean floor in a submarine, chilled to the wraiths and apparitions which threatened them in the Haunted House (with George Wright's eerie recorded organ music flooding the Phantom Ballroom) and shuddered at the roars of a giant Tyrannosaurus and a spike-tailed Stegosaur, stopping to do battle while fleeing before the sizzling lava of an erupting volcano. It was an afternoon, the youthful organist would not

She was pleased to find this schedule in the Wiltern lobby during a practice break.

She was intrigued by the realistic imitative voices of the Bob Power "style 260" Rodgers.



soon forget, despite the soggy skies.

On another rain-drenched afternoon Stu Green and Peg Nielsen arranged with Gordon Belt to let Shirley have a go on the 3/25 Wurlitzer in J. B. Nethercutt's antique auto and musical instrument museum — San Sylmar. "J. B." happened to walk through while Shirley was playing and sat down to listen. But not for long; other matters beckoned. Later, after Shirley had departed, he asked Gordon to get her address, so he could forward a "thanks-for-the-concert" note.

Next a fast snack and the trio set out for Bob Power's home up the coast in Camarillo. The rain was now a down-pour, slashing across Route 101 in sheets. But expert handling of Peg's trained Maverick got them there in a little over an hour and Bob and Alice Power welcomed them into the home with the world's most elaborate electronic theatre organ. The big Rodgers warmed up to Shirley's crisp musical attack immediately; the girl and the electronic marvel got on famously. The Powers had just purchased a Steinway grand and Shirley played it in a few piano-organ duets with Stu Green, who, as usual, offered earplugs. She politely declined — but later regretted it. At least the rain stopped in time for the trip back to LA.

The rest of the week was devoted to polishing the concert material. Bill Exner and Bob Hill joined the group who ironed out any balking on the part of the Kimball.

Then came the big day — ground zero — concert time. The day dawned bright and sunny. The organ had been



Shirley's host, Deke Warner (right), adjusts a suspicious Stu Green's "Brownie" at the Elks' Club. Shirley was most cooperative with fotogs, preferred to be shot minus her glasses.

honed to a fine edge by the Worne crew and a good-size audience applauded as Shirley brought the console up with "Another Openin' Another Show." The program was varied — "West Side Story" selections, a jazzy '20s "Millie," a treatment of "Don't Blame Me" in the style of her teacher, Leonard MacClain; some Gershwin tunes and a striking fantasy improvisation which eventually revealed its identity — the "Mickey Mouse Club theme". However, the one selection from the classics, Shirley's organ transcription of Wagner's "Liebestod,"

drew the most extended applause in a program which rated plenty of hand clapping. Among the enthusiasts was one friend from Lansdowne, an organist formerly supervised by Shirley when he was an assistant performer on the Lansdowne Theatre Kimball. Charles Kolbik, on pass from his west coast army unit, had special pride in Shirley's performance — she was reflecting glory on the home town.

Too soon it was over. After she had held court in the Wiltern lobby, and had bid goodbye to the last well-wisher, Shirley was spirited off to a

News-hen Peg Nielsen interviews Shirley in her dressing room just before her Wiltern concert. 'Butterflies' were minimal.

Shirley found the behemoth Morton at the LA Elks' Temple a pleasant challenge during a chapter jam session.



# MUSIC REVIEW



by Zoltan Sembrich

"Alles Was Du Bist", a trio in the style of J.S. Bach built around Jerome Kern's "All the Things You Are" by Billy Nalle, edited by Fred Tulan, \$1.65 at music retailers. Published by World Library Publications, Inc., 2145 Central Parkway, Cincinnati, Ohio, 45214.



Billy Nalle. His point was 'pop polyphony.' (Atlanta Fox Moller console)

Billy Nalle has scored some "firsts" in his career, one being the first soap opera score using jazz improvisations. Another was the first theatre organ concert scheduled as part of an American Guild of Organists' convention a few years ago in Atlanta. Billy introduced "Alles" to the orthodox organ pro's on the Atlanta Fox Moller and received such an ovation he had to repeat it. ATOS convention goers heard it played by Dr. Fred Tulan on the monster in St. John the Divine Cathedral during the New York session. Now it's available to all who dare attempt a Bach-style trio, a style of music which requires complete independence of hands and feet because the organist is dealing with three independent tunes. So, if one can

simultaneously pat his head, rub his tummy (circular motion) and make a horizontal trace with one foot while making a vertical trace with the other, there's a chance he's ready for polyphony.

Registration suggested is very simple: right hand a clear flute, left hand a pristine reed, pedal a gems-horn at 8' only, same stops throughout. Also supplied is suggested registration for a Hammond X66, with an alternative "switched-on-Bach" Harpsichord combination to get an even more baroque sound.

A right hand theme which Bach might have written fills the first eleven measures, a tune designed to wrap itself around "All The Things You Are" which starts with the twelfth measure in the left hand against a variation of the RH theme, all of this played against a pedal bass that moves chiefly in diatonic steps, mostly in quarter notes which call for getting into it with both feet. The three key changes of the Kern tune are accommodated simply by changing key signatures rather than face up to a mess of accidentals. It starts in E flat, changes to G, then to D, and back to E flat. It looks deceptively simple on paper, and it may be easy for an organist trained in the performance of music which flows horizontally. For the organist whose skills are strongest in playing a melody line against chord clusters and occasional counter melodies ("vertical" music), it will take some doing. But there are rewards beyond the mere performance of a pseudo-Bach novelty, as good as it is. Organists who normally play "pop" organ, or theatre style, will find this interesting exercise can strengthen their ability to perform counter melodies and to make one hand less dependent on the pattern being played by the other one.

Performance suggestions are somewhat tongue-in-cheek but to the point. For example the editor admonishes us with "don't laugh!" when he suggests an X66 Harpsichord effect consisting of Celesta and Banjo stops. And the suggested tempo is "easy does it." One can't help but wonder why there is so much emphasis in the notes to help X66 performers and so little to aid players of other brands of electronic or pipe organs.

But deficiencies in the "how to" notes in no way affect the value of the music itself, which is well worth the effort required to master it. □



Joe Koons gives Shirley the guided tour of his variegated "cycle shop" pipe chambers. She played for the multitudes who always attend Joe's Saturday night soirees.

nearby restaurant for a farewell luncheon. Then, after a jam session stint at the Elk's Club Robert Morton, the adventure was over.

Shirley would have loved to have remained in California longer, but back in Lansdowne there was an issue of the Delaware Valley Chapter's newsletter, *THE LIFT*, coming due, her church choir (which had sent her a congratulatory telegram) to rehearse, and a raft of teaching and sales commitments awaiting her. Shirley reflected on her two-week adventure in the west, and a resolution evolved. Some day she would return to what she described as "a dream bubble" for a more leisurely look-see. And if it still beckoned with such allure, she just might stay, "despite all the rain."

The weather was bright, clear and sunny in Los Angeles as the big jet roared skyward and headed east. □

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EARLY  
BIRD**

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Convention  
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TODAY**