



HOME ORGAN FESTIVAL

"better than ever"

Story and Photos
by Stu Green

The Administration building where the nightly jam sessions were held, as seen through an adjacent woodland.

The 14th stanza of the Annual Home Organ Festival held at Asilomar, Calif. (Sept. 18-22) attracted well over 1000 attendees to the sandy knolls of the Pacific Grove Conference Grounds, a seaside state park, to hear fourteen brands of electronic music and music-related effect makers in the bright sun (and occasional overcast) of a Calif. autumn.

While there was very little shown which could be considered "new" in the electronic organ field, there were refinements apparent in the tonal resources of most models played in concert over those of the same or similar models heard previously. But the term "tonal refinements" refers to electronic tone generation; sorry to report that very little, if any, progress toward the emulation of pipe-generated voices was noted. The large manufacturers seem to have sidetracked research and development toward making their electronic sounds closer to those of the parent instrument in favor of: 1) sound distorters e.g. the "chopper" which turns the entire instrument into a re-iterating Marimba, 2) automatic rhythm, which serves well as a metronome. Both of these addenda appear to have become standard equipment on most models whether the customer wants them or not. The third diversion from the search for true pipe tone is the probably mislabeled "synthesizer" (isn't the electronic organ at its best a synthesis of a pipe organ?) ARP and the Concert Co. would seem to have the idea most acceptable to organ buffs; if the extra brass, reeds and non-organ "mod" sounds are desired, they may be purchased separately and played from a short manual mounted on the organ or on a stand at the organist's elbow. Thus, those not interested in producing pear-shaped "bloops" and "bleeps" are spared the additional cost of a synthesizer integrated into an organ console. For those who do like "Argh", "pfumpf", "urp" and other variable pitch effects in their music, there are models available with the machinery built in and operable from the console.

Speaking from the theatre organ viewpoint, the major brands sounded very much like they did last year. Conn has included a piano with its 3-deck 651, Lowrey has an amazing battery of aids in giving the "country sound" to music (or was it the skill of John Kemm?), Hammond's horseshoe



"Korla" del Castillo and "Sahib" Arlo Hults. Their comedy and music brightened the kickoff show.



Richard Purvis is congratulated by eastern visitor Shirley Hannum on his Festival-preem'd "Suite for Two Organs." Shirley's record album was a best seller at the Festival Music Shop.

Longtime Festival attendee Bob Zadel (Conn) indicates his devotion to mice and dogs while exploring the park grounds.



"Regent" is now in full production and being advertised as equivalent to 28 ranks of pipes (with 28 speaking stop keys and two manuals!), Yamaha has developed a very effective jazz organ and Thomas continues with its line of medium-priced but often theatrical spinets and console models. The Wurlitzer model demonstrated by lovely Fran Linhart is able to make like a coloratura soprano, either serious or in a comedy vein. The Rudolph brand has made one somewhat astounding revision by removing its Tibia from the rotary (Leslie-type) tremulant.

There were a couple of pleasant surprises. For the first time the Artisan organ was heard at the Festival. Made by a small company in southern California, the 3-manual horseshoe model shown was satisfyingly effective as played in concert by Tom Gnaster. The other pleasant discovery was the new Saville organ, as reconstituted by organist/tonal designer Tom Cottner. Last year we witnessed Porter Heaps playing "Ride of the Valkyries" practically as a Bourdon pedal solo on a small Saville moved in by a nearby dealer. This year the factory got involved, to the credit of Saville and all concerned with its promotion. Cottner's organ is both gutsy and sweet, although built along straight organ lines. However, Saville informs us that both the 2 and 3-manual horseshoe entertainment models are in the works.

Allen has come out with a 3-manual straight organ console which also has some theatre organ voices. Where Saville has been able to build an effective dual purpose instrument, Allen, which in years past has demonstrated a well-constituted straight organ and a fair to middling theatre model, would seem to have considerable R and D work before their "computer" model equals the firm's past product tonally. Before its major concert presentation, the Allen's bottom manual went dead. Organist Larry Vannucci played his concert on the two remaining manuals after some last minute registration revisions, with no audible evidence of the handicap.

One trend noted this year was the introduction of the instrument that does everything but play the melody. Designed obviously for the home putterer, the instrument provides a harmonic and rhythmic setting for any melody one-fingered on its manual. Of



Festival Chairman Tiny James doubled as MC for many events.



Tom Hazleton presented a suave and polished concert on the Conn model 651.

Tommy Stark concertized on an especially treated Gulbransen. He has a pipe organ home in San Diego.





Fourteen-year-old Debbie Lynn was both decorative and ear-pleasing during "jam sessions."



FRIENDS, ROMANS, COUNTRYMEN! Bound for the Costume Competition, these "Romans" stage a preview of their orgy which culminated in a light-generated burning of Rome, complete with Nero and fiddle.

Veteran radio organist Porter Heaps at the Saville organ.



course it could have been made entirely automatic by simply adding machinery to supply the melody, but that would have eliminated the customer who gets his kicks by observing what a fine organist he has become by playing a melody surrounded by canned orchestration. It gives the putterer the impression that he is contributing something to the music, a very necessary sales feature. It hasn't been on the market long enough to determine whether it will inspire greater learning effort or encourage prospective organists to cease all efforts beyond one finger soloing. It certainly will not be welcomed by teachers whose goal is to develop musical talent. But there's always the possibility the melody player will eventually "trade up" to a more legitimate instrument.

A coterie of more than 30 organists manned the showrooms and played concerts. Their ages and skills ranged from silent film veterans to junior contest winners, and they played music to satisfy every taste, or lack of it. Some of them were (with sponsor indicated): Axel Alexander (Hammond), Mildred Alexander (Hammond), Mike Brigida (A.R.P.), O'lyn Callahan (Yamaha), Lloyd del Castillo (staff), Donn Clayton (Concert Co.), Thomas Cottner (Saville), Frank Denke (pianist-staff), Sherry Emata (Yamaha), Rocco Ferrante (Yamaha), Tom Gnaster (Artisan), Tom Hazleton (Conn), Porter Heaps (Saville), Arlo Hults (staff), Jeff Humphrey (Gulbrandsen), Bill Irwin (Yamaha), Carol Jones (Conn), Bud Iverson (Conn), John Kemm (Lowrey), Byron Melcher (Thomas), Jonas Nordwall (Rodgers), Everett Nourse (staff), Gus Pearson (Wurlitzer), Richard Purvis (Rodgers), Paul Quarino (Wurlitzer), Tommy Stark (Gulbrandsen), Bill Thomson (Rodgers), Shay Torrent (Hammond), Larry Vannucci (Allen), Hal Vincent (Baldwin), Harry Wach (Thomas) and Wayne Wilkinson (Baldwin).

Styles of music heard included rock, jazz, night club, gin mill, classics, pop standards, ragtime, theatre intermission, silent movie, and two and three organ "jamming" during the nightly after-concert dance. In fact, some of the best fun music was heard during the late night jam sessions, mostly played by visiting professionals who were there as guests. These sessions included the talents of Tiny James, Shirley Hannum, Gordon Tucker, Claudia (Kennedy) Ashley,

THEATRE ORGAN



"Not ONE schmear glissando!" A triumphant Millie Alexander exults over the good show she gave to Festivaleers.



BACKSTAGE CONFERENCE. Organists O'lynn Callahan (Yamaha), Hal Vincent (Baldwin) talk it over with visitor John Seng between shows.

Veteran theatre organist Eloise Rowan, a protegee of Eddie Dunstetter, was an interested visitor at the Festival. She teaches in San Francisco.





Bill Thomson earned the plaudits of his audience, this time without the incentive of being scheduled near George Wright.



LOOK ALIKES, Concert Co. Prexy Bill Johnson (left) meets Saville's Tom Cottner. Their resemblance to one another caused many a case of mistaken identity during the Festival.

Larry Vannucci looks a little edgy following his concert because his bottom manual conked out just before showtime. The audience never knew, until told.



Debbie Lynn (14), and Dick Bailey. They were sometimes joined by other instrumentalists: Neil Graham (banjo), "Menlo Joe" Dimock (piano) and Stu Green (Tonette and Jawharp).

There were colorful extras such as a fashion show, a concert by Pacific Council for Organ Clubs' amateur members (P.C.O.C. is the Festival's sponsoring organization) and a costume competition, which used to be a more effective costume ball. If anyone got short shrift it was the P.C.O.C. member clubs' reps. The "Clubs on Parade" program was a technical disaster, with a stage full of organs tripping up the already nervous amateurs by some going sour in mid-selection, or not working at all.

Something different in the talent lineup was added this year by Festival Chairman Tiny James — variety acts performed by artists not connected with any organ manufacturer. The staff artists performed mostly musical specialties but there was one comedy sketch lampooning the TV medical shows done entirely in pantomime. Musical specialties were performed by teams of veteran artists. Richard Purvis and Bud Iverson premiered Purvis' *Suite for Two Organs*. One team, consisting of Franke Denke (piano) and Everett Nourse (organ), recreated many of the selections from their hit album, "Who?" Another team consisted of silent movie era organist/entertainers Arlo Hults and Lloyd del Castillo from southern California. Both are comedians as well as musicians. Their humorous patter, fine organ duets and solos added much pizzazz to the first night show, especially their "mangled march" duet. Such novelties break the pattern of continual concerts and the reception given by audiences indicates this entertainment area will be enlarged next year.

The 1973 Festival provided an opportunity for the professional organist to learn what technical and musical trends are surfacing. For the non-pro it was a grand week to soak up both music and the sylvan atmosphere of the park and the adjacent Pacific. For all it was a sojourn away from Watergate, "Impeach the President" moves, wars and the usual bad news. It was also a good place to shop for and sell organs; nearly all 1973 exhibitors signed up for the 1974 Festival in order to hang onto their showrooms, which are in short supply.



Jonas Nordwall appeared for the Rodgers Organ Company.

Last year our closing remarks suggested perhaps golf carts to help over-the-hill reporters get around campus to all events and showrooms, as continual "climbing the dunes" can become tiring. The suggestion was considered and this year there was a mini-bus available to ferry the corpulent, lame and lazy to events. It's a small matter but it's indicative of the sensitivity of the Festival Committee to suggestions made by Festivaleers. They aim to please, and their aim is improving. □

Canadian Artist Tapes Odeon Farewell

by Ronald L. Payne

On September 9 and 23, the organ of Toronto's Odeon Carlton Theatre spoke in its true glory for the last time, until its new home is found. The organist was 19 year old Colin Cousins, of Hamilton, Ontario. His style is very reminiscent of true theatre organ playing. When Colin sits at the console of one of the mighty instruments, he commands immediate attention from all those present, as borne out by testimonies of theatre organ greats Harold Jolles and Don Baker.

The tapes made at the theatre are of excellent quality, thanks to the efforts of Dave Granger of Mississauga, and the organ sounds totally unlike the 3/19 Hillgreen Lane, that it is. The organ was babied into playable condition, and the ciphers silenced by organ-expert John Holywell of Unionville. Colin's sincerest thanks go out to these two men.

The organ itself has a future that is very much in doubt. It may go to Kingston, Ont., or out to British Columbia. Hopefully, though, it will be playing again soon, as it marked the end of organs in theatres in Ontario. □