

# The Social Bond

by John Muri

Anyone who concerns himself with music is involved in matters of the spirit. You can't eat music or build anything with it. It is an ephemeral human product, disappearing as soon as it is physically created. Only the memory, or tapes, records, and the printed page can hold it in a sort of suspension in time. Music is primarily for the mind, although it can stimulate or depress the human organism, physically and psychologically.

A serious weakness in our national spirit is the widespread dedication of popular music to the sensual and the hypnotic. Since the new music does not adapt well to the organ, ATOS has not been much affected by the movement and we stand apart as we play and hear varieties of music largely ignored by television, AM radio, and the movies. ATOS members are the only people in the United States that have the opportunity to hear an exceptionally wide variety of styles in a relatively inexpensive environment.

There are those who would ridicule our taste, but their limited views of the nature of music—pounding rhythm, little or no melody, monotonous or meaningless lyrics—display only the simplicity of primitivism, and we haven't much chance of convincing them that our preference for interesting rhythm, pleasant melody, and variety in registration is in keeping with aesthetic laws of beauty.

I submit that we have the better viewpoint. Most of us refuse to equate loudness with goodness, and we affirm

that our eclectic tastes are more than romanticizing and nostalgic drooling. Ours is a movement dedicated to the conservation of a valuable art-form. When theatre music was virtually silenced forty years ago the general public did not know that a significant social change had occurred, a change that carried in it the possible extinction of something that could be revived only with increasing difficulty with the passing of time. The *Saturday Evening Post*, the New York Paramount Theatre, and the Wurlitzer organ were not fossils that deserved to die; they were institutions that people concerned with humane values should have supported. When the *Post* died, one of its editors said that "a system that favors the loss of an irreplaceable part of our national past is fundamentally antipathetic to the requirements of civilized life."

There is no question in my mind that the motion picture producers and exhibitors were a large element in the destruction of the social bond in the United States. For many years their theatres were community meeting-places where people laughed and cried together, places to which people came to unconsciously re-affirm their sense of responsibility and community. This was especially true on holidays like Christmas and New Years, when theatres were filled and special shows were offered. The current sparse holiday attendance proves that the theatres are not offering much of a social service.

In the face of these losses what,

then, can we be thankful for in this holiday season? Well, first our thanks go to all the people in our chapters who get the organs into shape during long and many nights of dirty work; to the people who get out the advertising, make the arrangements, sell the tickets, and handle the money. Often they don't get very much of a "thank you"; they have to do everything on their own motivation. Their only satisfaction is that the affair went well; sometimes they have to put up with less than that. Soloists who get to bask in the spotlight and receive the applause and money might well give some Christmas thought to what has gone into making such appearances possible. The workers' contribution to our social bond is large.

Second, we need to be grateful that fresh young talent is joining our ranks of players as oldsters drop out. It is a blessing that no generation has ever had a monopoly on talent and genius. The new people coming into the theatre organ field will have a harder time getting recognized than the generation of the twenties, but really good players will find appreciative audiences. Some quite ordinary players with inflated reputations in the twenties would have to do a good deal of practicing and studying to meet today's competition. For the young newcomers we should wish steady nerves, endurance under the ardors of rigorous practice, and opportunity to make a good living at the organ. Their task and contribution are to cement the bond between the past and the future.

Third, we need to hold some kind thoughts for our friends who prefer and play electronic organs. Some of us feel toward them the way church organists looked at theatre organists years ago. Theatre people had a bad reputation with the church-AGO crowd, and we had frequent testimo-

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nies of their contempt for our use of the tremulant, the Vox, and the Tibia, and our use of transcriptions of every kind of music, vocal or instrumental. Maybe everybody needs to feel superior once in a while, but we ought not to be haughty with organists who are making a living providing wholesome entertainment in social rooms that we had no chance of performing in long ago. A fine player can make any instrument sound good. I have listened to dozens of dreadfully bad church organists; I have heard some exceptionally good electronic organists. We can afford to be gracious to the electronics people; basically they are on our side.

As one grows older, values change and worldly aims become less imperative. Meanings get more elusive. One questions the worthwhileness of keeping up repertory and technique, of engaging in the competition for excellence and acclaim. There is ample justification for physical and psychic slow-down in one's later years. A little melancholy nostalgia might even be good for the nerves, but for a musician to give way to apathy or defeat at the loss of vitality or youth is to insult one's life-forces. We have often been told of people who retire and quickly decline; so our fourth wish is that all living organists of seasoned experience have continuing health and desire to pursue musical excellence, with opportunities to demonstrate that excellence.

Getting back to the theatre entrepreneurs, our (fifth) New Year's wish for them is more brains, less greed, better taste, cleaner minds, better showmanship, less TV competition, safer streets, better transportation and parking, and better-behaved customers. Then they might have a chance to assume a respectable place in American society and help keep us together as a nation. □



*Manufacturers, distributors or individuals sponsoring or merchandising theatre pipe organ records are encouraged to send pressings to the Record Reviewer, Box 3564, Granada Hills, California 91344. Be sure to include purchasing information, if applicable, and if possible a black and white photo which need not be returned.*

*A slap on the wrist to our printer for deleted words and typos in the October column. On page 25, first column, line 10, the second sentence should start "While this is a quite different application." Same page, second column, line 19 should read "if the Post Horn were used less." That "less" makes a world of difference in meaning. Same column, line 34, the line should start "a tremendous clam" (which is a musician's term for a clinker, sour note or dissonance, and hardly represented by the printed "calm.")*

**HOMECOMING – DON BAKER RETURNS TO THE BROOKLYN PARAMOUNT.** No. CR 0113, stereo. Available at \$5.00 postpaid from Concert Recording, Box 531, Lynwood, Calif. 90262.

Much compressed air has passed through the regulators and chests since Don Baker's last previous pipe discs, "Sound Showcase" and "The Paramount Comes Down". After several years of concertizing for Conn (plus an occasional pipe date), the ex-N.Y. Paramount organist permitted the release of portions of a tape made during his concert at Long Island University gymnasium, which, as all aficionados know, is the former Brooklyn Paramount, complete with 4/26 Wurlitzer.

Don Baker is one organist who can make a large organ in live acoustics both swing and sing. His arrangements offer much variety in registration,



Don Baker is off the three-weeks-on-and-one-week-off concert circuit and is now the chief of the organ department at Music City, San Jose, Calif. Shown here in his main showroom, Don says, "I'm a happy man!" The instrument shown is a Conn 651. — (Stufoto)



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*Jason and the Old Prospector*