

The Subject is ROSES

by John Muri

When one considers the material poverty endured by musicians like Mozart, who was buried in a potter's field, and writers like James Joyce, who changed the course of writing in the English language while almost blind and destitute, one is angered at the extent to which freeloading in the arts remains a part of our world. Several fine theatre organists have lived — and died — in virtual poverty. In these, as in many other cases, mercenaries hovered around, ready to snap up the products of their talent.

Today, the theatre organist is confronted by numbers of people who want to record his concert. Many people think nothing of bringing in tape recorders and taking down whole evenings of programs without a thought of what it means to the player. I know of a case where a fellow made recordings of program after program and then traded copies to other collectors. I understand there is an outfit in Canada that has attempted to set up as a clearing house for tape recordings, mostly of the free bootleg variety. Usually the organist is asked for and grants permission to record, even though he realizes that a single tape can be duplicated hundreds of times and that a given tape-recording by a non-professional will in a few years be duplicated from one end of the country to the other. With his tapes making the rounds, what chance does he have of selling a record including some of his favorite pieces, done to the best of his ability, particularly if the tunes have already been taped, albeit with a background of audience coughing and slamming doors?

There is a limit to the amount of time one can give to listening to recordings. The more tapes of a performer we have in our collections, the less time we will have to listen to any one of them and the less motivation there will be to purchase another by the same player. Several problems of our time are being caused by the spiritual and temporal effects of surfeit, of having too much of a good thing.

I think a player has a right to

remuneration for a recording that is to be played repeatedly, if for no other reason than the savings the listener makes in his entertainment budget. Time spent in listening to tapes reduces the auditor's need for going out to get a similar aesthetic experience in the performance of another organist. Surely, an hour and a half of decent recorded music ought to be worth something. We don't expect our lawyers and doctors to work gratis. It is only in the arts that we have the phenomenon of a public that wants the product and is willing — yes, eager — to take it for nothing. That tape recordings are important historically and legally has been brought forcefully to our minds in the recent Washington investigations. Apparently, tapes are not to be made or disposed of lightly. We need to work out an ethical policy for tape recording, so that the organist will have some kind of reward, if only a token — a rose, so to speak — for his work.

I am probably inconsistent when I beam as I find a cheap print of some old movie I thought had been lost forever. Many old films are gone because their producers and owners did not want their creations exploited; so they destroyed their films when they no longer had use for them. I am told that some fine current films are being destroyed, but chances are that outsiders are running off duplicates of any film they can get their hands on. In one respect we can be thankful to the fellows who made it possible for us

A note of thanks to the many friends who sent cards, flowers, and telephoned during my recent hospitalization (It was the best medication I had).

I'm happy to say that I am now home and improving each day. The doctor informs me that with a little care, I should be as good as ever.

W. Tony James

today to see many of the earliest primitive films. As entertainment, they are often questionable, but as history they are invaluable, even though a lot of property rights have been trampled. Perhaps organ tapes will serve the same purpose.

In the matter of giving out rewards or roses, the world is often opportunistic. Universities give honorary degrees to wealthy contributors, politicians, or TV comedians for favors performed or expected. Sometimes they do it to placate noisy or powerful segments of their communities. Some groups honor celebrities to get publicity for themselves. When a choice must be made, second-rate people with power of some kind usually nose out first-raters. Our own Society has done a considerable amount of honoring in its Hall of Fame, etc. It looks to me now as if we have included every distinguished name known on a national scale, and we are scouting for names known on regional levels.

I like the idea of giving roses to people while they are alive to enjoy them, but I am leery about permanent enshrinements of people still living. Years ago I worked in a school system that named a building after a retired administrator. I thought the idea was wrong at the time, and I often wondered if the revelation of any scandal about the man would occur to make the school board and the community look silly. Recently it happened in California, when a prominent governmental official, who had made his high school's Hall of Fame, was being considered for unseating because of his involvement in a national scandal. I now believe that even though we should pass out honorary roses to the living, we can afford to establish permanent memorials only posthumously. It can prove too embarrassing the other way. A dead organist with a good name will probably stay that way; you can't be sure about the other kind.

As in everything else of mass appeal, we Americans are given to fastening upon a favorite and acting as if he were the greatest of all time. At this writing, the piano world is gaga over Clementi and Scriabin, even though both have been around for a long time. The fault is probably that of the critics, who like to dose up their columns with excitement. It is quite likely that the current musical heroes and heroines are those who have been

lucky enough to be picked up by critics. Look how Vivaldi was puffed up a few years ago and then dropped. You can't help suspecting the short-lived enthusiasms of idolators like these.

I wonder if historians feel the same way I do about getting accurate reports so that falsities or plain lies do not go down as historical fact. How careful we on the Hall of Fame committee have to be to get the organists' names correct! How often do I find important people's names misspelled in places that might be used later for historical reference!

One of our problems comes from vagueness — and sometimes nonsense — in reviews of theatre organ concerts. What can you say about such items as the following: "The organ behaved well, and X extracted the most from it." It sounds like a report in a medical journal. Then there's this one: "X's fine program displayed his artistry and virtuosity to its finest degree." It must have been a remarkable performance, if true, but then why are we denied the details of such an awe-inspiring event? Finally, "His counterpoint, dash and verve along with romantic tenderness put him in top place to communicate very well with distinct charm." That one baffles me. It can mean all kinds of things, some of which aren't very nice. Why do we have to say "his artistry" so much instead of "his playing"? It smacks of bootlicking as it tries to praise.

Oh well, the sentiment behind the old quotation, "Give me my roses while I'm alive, not after I'm dead" is understandable, but it's a little presumptive. Give bouquets if you must, but give real flowers, not artificial ones, and be careful about those memorial wreaths. □

Organ Festival Announced

Los Angeles, California: Locations and plans have been set for the 1974 Yamaha National Electone Organ Festival according to an announcement by the Keyboard Division of Yamaha International Corporation. 1974 marks the fourth year of participation by the United States in this unique international musical event.

"Although international in scope, with the Grand Festival scheduled for Japan, the purpose of the festival here is to recognize and provide performance opportunities for the many organists throughout the country" said Bob Dove, Yamaha executive.

"Organists, both amateur and professional, have an opportunity to participate in a local, regional and a national festival and in so doing they can win various prizes including an expense paid trip to Houston, Texas for the national festival finals. There they can also win scholarships, cash prizes, and an all-expense paid trip to the International Festival in Japan. The National Festival in Houston will take place on Saturday night, June 15th, staged as a part of Yamaha's participation in the National Association of Music Merchants Convention and Trade Show. Musician-composer and television personality Steve Allen will repeat in his role as Master of Ceremonies at the U.S. National finals.

It will be judged by a prestigious group of nationally recognized musicians and critics. Former judges have included: Conductor-composers Elmer Bernstein, Percy Faith, John Green, Quincy Jones and Fred Waring; organists Lenny Dee, Clare Fischer, Jimmy Smith and Shirley Scott; recording

stars Sarah Vaughan, and David Clayton-Thomas as well as other noted musicians.

The regional festivals will take place on weekends in April and May at Asilomar Conference Center, Monterey, California; Fred Waring's Shawnee Inn, Shawnee, Pennsylvania; Pete Fountain's Buena Vista Hotel, Biloxi, Mississippi and the Playboy Club Hotel, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

Organists can enter the festival in any of four categories: Junior, for those under 15 years of age; Intermediate, for those amateurs 16 to 25; and Senior Professional/Amateur for those over 16 and a special Hobbyist Division for amateurs over 25.

This is the fourth year the United States has participated. The U.S. representatives have taken the top prize at the International Festival each year. Three years ago the winner was Les Strand of Silver Spring, Maryland, next Rocco Ferrante, Jr. a teenager from Newark, New Jersey, and this past year Bobby Lyle from St. Paul, Minnesota.

Yamaha is a major manufacturer of organs, pianos and other musical instruments, and the festival is being coordinated locally by participating Yamaha Organ dealers. Those interested should contact the local dealer or write Yamaha International Corporation, P.O. Box 6600, Buena Park, California, Attention Festival Coordinator. □

LEE ERWIN TO RECORD FOR MAJOR LABEL

Angel Records has signed Lee Erwin to do a series of albums on the Richard Kline Wurlitzer in Frederick, Maryland. Special recording equipment will be sent from the West Coast and the taping will be done in quadrophonic sound under the supervision of Mr. Carson Taylor.

The first release will be the Classic Ragtime Music of Scott Joplin, a composer from whom a large segment of twentieth-century American music derived its shape and spirit.

Scott Joplin, Lee Erwin, and the Richard Kline Wurlitzer might be exactly the right combination to put a theatre organ record on the best seller list early in 1974! □

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