

To paraphrase the famous advertising slogan of the PHILADELPHIA BULLETIN — “In Philadelphia, nearly everybody knows Larry Ferrari.” It is quite a distinction in this day and age for an organist’s name to have become a household word in one of America’s largest cities. The reasons are that the Ferrari engaging personality and wide-ranging keyboard talents have been exposed to TV, radio, and concert audiences throughout the Delaware Valley area for over twenty-one years. With no less than three TV shows on Philadelphia’s channel 6, plus numerous other functions involving the media, this popular talent is hard to miss.

Although many of his fans are under the impression that the Ferrari career began in Philadelphia — not so. Contrary to the popular belief that Larry is another of the many South Philadelphian musical talents of Italian background (remember Mario Lanza), Boston is where it all started. After some basic piano training at parochial school, Larry first became fascinated with the pipe organ while functioning as altar boy at St. Mary’s. This particular church had two organs, and Larry’s first multi-keyboard experience was on an old tracker in the smaller downstairs sanctuary. As his natural talents developed, Larry worked out an arrangement with the regular organist on the big 3/60 in the main church. He acted as substitute organist in exchange for free lessons, since the regular organist was engaged in defense work and sometimes did not make it to the church on time.

Larry continued with his church job throughout the ’teen years, but he was of course fascinated by the popular music of the day and was anxious to develop his abilities along these lines as well. At fourteen Larry began studying with Doris Tirell, who had been a theatre organist in the Boston area and had become at that time staff organist at WEEI (CBS) Boston — a position which had previously been held by Lloyd Del Castillo. In addition to study, practice, and performance, Larry was — and still is — a good listener. He particularly admired a trio heard regularly on the Jack Birch Show which featured a fellow named Wright on organ — George, of course.

By the age of sixteen the rapidly developing Ferrari talent was being heard regularly at the Paragon Park



IN  
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FERRARI

by Grant Whitcomb

rink, Nantasket Beach. At eighteen, upon graduation from High School, Larry began a two-year engagement at Cains — a popular Seafood Restaurant and Lounge just outside Boston. However, world events at this time began to have a direct influence upon the Ferrari future which ultimately resulted in Boston’s loss and Philadelphia’s gain.

As the Korean conflict developed, there was some familiar fingering by Uncle Sam. Larry was advised by a friend to get to Fort Dix, New Jersey (not far from Philadelphia), since the friend told him “. . . there are organs all over the place!” This would not only make basic training more bearable, but ultimately served to bring Larry’s talents to the attention of Special Services. He was one of five performers chosen to represent the U.S. Army on a show entitled “Fort Dix Presents” aired over Philadelphia’s WFIL (since changed to WPVI — channel 6). Jack Steck, who was at that time program manager for this station, recognized the potential in terms of both personality and musical talent. What started out as a four-week show continued for eighteen months and evolved into the “Larry Ferrari Show” — now in its twenty-first year!

Larry is now musical director for Channel 6. In addition to his own weekly Sunday show, he also appears on “Captain Noah” and the popular “Dialing for Dollars”. These shows are morning affairs requiring Larry to arise before 6:00 A.M. in order to be on deck at air time. Even with this full TV schedule, Larry still finds time to concertize not only throughout the Delaware Valley, but to all points of the compass for neighboring ATOS Chapters and other organ clubs — both pipe and electronic.

Over the past two decades the Ferrari touch has been seen and heard at such a variety of events and functions that they can only be highlighted. Larry was appearing at the Philadelphia Musical Festival while he was still in uniform. Throughout these years he has appeared at sports events, horse shows, fashion shows, auto shows, and business promotions ranging from supermarkets to Real Estate Development. He has played countless concerts at churches, high schools and theatres — with special emphasis on the Tower (Upper Darby, Pa.), Lansdowne, Senate (Detroit) and at numerous theatres and private

installations in the east ranging from Toronto (Casa Loma) to Florida (Kirk of Dunedin).

Except for a brief two-week appearance with Lawrence Welk on the west coast in 1957, Larry has not been exposed to a western audience except through his numerous recordings — thirteen in number with one currently in production. Three of these were theatre organ recordings with the first one on the 3/8 Kimball at the Lansdowne Theatre (Lansdowne, Pa.) and two wonderful albums recorded on the famed Fisher Wurlitzer in Detroit's DTOC Senate Theater. Westerners who have not had the opportunity to hear Larry Ferrari live can rest assured that this void will be well filled at the 1976 ATOS Convention in the Philadelphia area.

The Larry Ferrari story would be seriously incomplete if it dealt merely with his musical accomplishments, because in addition to the entertainment and enjoyment he has provided to thousands, he is also an extremely active Theatre Organ Enthusiast and one of the most cooperative and energetic talents around. Larry can only be described as "Mr. Nice-Guy". As an active and past Honorary Member of the Delaware Valley Chapter (TOSDV, Inc) of ATOS Larry has performed countless times for the benefit of this — his local chapter, and has cooperated frequently in performing for neighboring ATOS Chapters. To highlight just one event, the famous John Dickinson High School

Larry and the late Ed Sullivan at the Philadelphia Music Festival (1954), an annual charity benefit sponsored by THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER.



Larry with his mother, Mrs. Colomba Ferrari, during a Conn trip to Hawaii in 1974.

3/28 Kimball was not always the magnificent installation it is these days. Only a few short years ago it was a neglected 3/14 housed in the former Boyd Theatre, Philadelphia. Although the instrument was in sad condition, it was arranged that Larry would play a final concert at the theatre to assist in raising funds to start the restoration, removal and reinstallation of this instrument generously donated to the high school by the Stanley Warner Co. Although a crew worked feverishly to get this instrument in playable condition, it was barely passable by concert time.

In spite of the obvious handicap involved, nearly 500 people showed up on a snowy December evening at midnight to see and hear Larry perform the final Boyd concert. This was the beginning of a most successful project, and Larry's contribution to this cause was rewarded in part when he played the first concert on the reinstalled instrument a little over a year later to an SRO audience at the John Dickinson High School in Delaware.

In order to please the vastly differing audiences for whom he plays the Ferrari approach to the organ console is of necessity quite broad. It is a far cry from playing for "Captain Noah" compared with the requirements of an ATOS audience, for instance. Larry is able to bridge the gap between a general TV audience and a more sophisticated group by sticking to a repertoire of standard, permanent musical value. He believes in playing the type of music that most of the

people want to hear, with novelties and innovative material kept at a minimum. To be a commercial and artistic success at the same time as a musician is a bit like being an acceptable politician to both liberal and conservative elements. It is not an easy task, but the middle of the road is the obvious answer in both cases.

Whether at the console of the Conn 650 provided by the Delaware Valley dealers who sponsor his show, or on the bench at the Tower Wurlitzer or the Civic Auditorium Möller, we will continue to look forward to Larry Ferrari concerts. Those of us in the Delaware Valley who have come to know and admire him both as a person and a musician wish him several more decades of success. □

Larry with Lawrence Welk in 1957.

