

MORE ABOUT CARE AND FEEDING

by John Muri

A re-reading of my February 1973 article on the "Care and Feeding of Organ Soloists" reveals the need for a piece that takes into consideration the mutual responsibilities of soloists, promoters, and audiences.

Let's consider the soloists first. Some of them should be more careful about getting advertising material to the publicity committees well in advance. Concert promoters need a generous supply of photographs (glossy black-and-white) and biographical data. The material should be sent as soon as the engagement is confirmed. After the concert, the photos should be returned to the organist. Performers also need to report early on the job and spend adequate rehearsal time at the console. Then they will not have to apologize for their lack of knowledge of the instrument, as did one fellow who appeared for his show in an eastern city one-half hour before concert time. He was half-way through his program before he found the tablets for the top manual. Incidentally, programming is sometimes a disappointment to listeners. There are at least three organists on the concert circuit who have been playing the same pieces at every concert. They need to get busy and develop some new stuff or their phones will stop ringing.

Organists who offer community sings should play in keys that lie well for voices. Pop-tune manuscripts are not always written for voice, but for ease of playing. Tenor and soprano voices range from middle C to the E a tenth higher. Middle voices range about a fifth lower. Bass voices range too low for general melody lines, so one has to compromise with them. The best results can be achieved if the tune is kept moving in the octave above middle C.

It seems impossible to get across to some fellows that they have a reputation for playing too loud. Recently I heard of one who turned the snare-drums on with sforzando for forty seconds at the close of a ren-

dition of *The Lord's Prayer*. When one of these earbusters comes to town, you can reduce the decibels by simply disconnecting the noisiest parts of the organ. If you think it will help, take out the post horn, the drums, or the xylophone for a night. There's not much to be done about the organist who plays too long other than to shut off the lights if the audience has left and the fellow is still playing. Believe me, it really happened a couple of years ago in the Chicago area. At private affairs, you might put a timer on the organ motor-switch, although that can look a little too cheap. One host ended an over-long session by putting a cherry-bomb in a long piece of wind-line and setting it off behind the console.

Concerning feeding, organists like to eat — but who doesn't? Top-job organists didn't have to eat at the console; they had plenty of off-duty time to stuff themselves, but the grind organists (the great majority) played long hours, and quite a number of them helped pass the time by serving themselves candy, fruit, etc. with one hand while playing with the other. It was no secret; lots of people knew about it. The picture on page 23 will give you an idea. Drinking is a more serious matter; it has always been a problem. As a youngster I was appalled to see people with fine musical talent ruin themselves with liquor or drugs. I still am. One soloist admitted to me that he had played badly because he couldn't get the manuals to stand still long enough for him to grab

News Flash . . .

"A THEATRICAL FIRST"

On January 28, 1975, the mighty 4/56 Radio City Music Hall Wurlitzer made its silent film "Debut" with Lee Erwin at the console and his own score for the noted 1926 feature film "Metropolis."

hold of them!

Now we come to the promoters. A few more points on handling visiting organists are in order. (1) Be careful about asking for changes or additions to the program unless you are absolutely sure that the change will not hurt the effects that the organist is working to get. Since most performers are willing to cooperate, even to some detriment to their performance, it devolves upon you to make sure that what you are asking him to do will not cheapen or hurt his performance. (2) Don't talk him to death before the show; you won't need to entertain him then. He will have a lot of program on his mind. It's a rare organist who can do well without preparation and a certain degree of pre-concert tension and concentration. Afterward, he may be quite fatigued, but not necessarily so. He may be ready and willing to step out. Be on the lookout for fatigue symptoms and treat him as you would like to be treated yourself. (3) Conduct advance sales of tickets. It's too risky to depend solely on door-sales. There might be a storm on concert-night. This may seem a needless suggestion, but it is prompted by the failure of one theatre manager who refused to take mail orders. (4) Turn the marquee lights on early, so that people driving past the theatre on their way home from work can know that a show will be going on. It's good advertising. (5) Don't tune the organ while the audience is entering the theatre. There should be no organ sounds until the program begins. (6) Always have someone assigned to pull ciphers and make other adjustments during the program. That person should remain close to the chambers and should never leave the auditorium while the program is in progress. (7) Have an intermission. This is very important. The organ might have developed some trouble that cannot be detected by listeners, and opportunity may be needed for the organist to communicate. Such a simple precaution may prevent the ruination of a complete show. (8) If recordings are to be made, the artist should promptly be sent a copy of the tape. In several instances, recordings have been made by groups that have failed to give copies to the performers. This is ungracious, if not thoughtless.

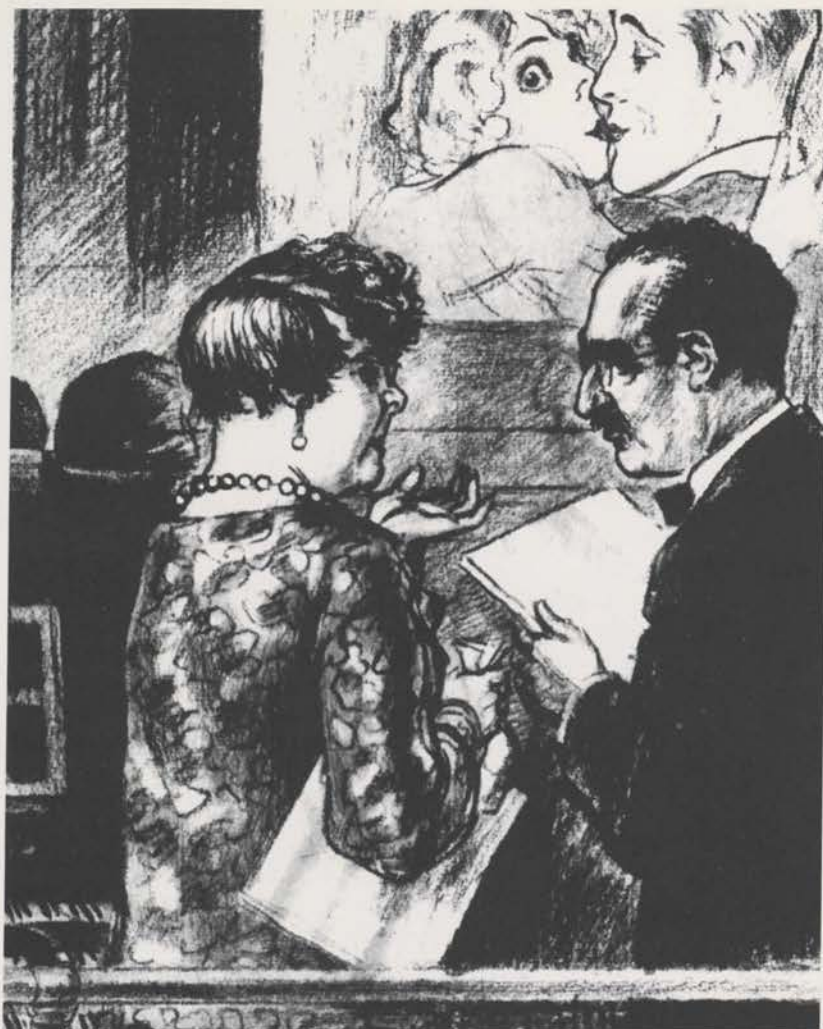
As for audiences, a few theatres have problems with people who come before opening time and ask per-

VOX POPS



Conducted by Stu Green

Readers are encouraged to submit interesting sidelights on the organ hobby (exclusive of chapter news items) material they believe will be of general interest about local organ activities and installations and the people who work at the hobby. We know "there's VOX POPS in them there chapters" and it only requires an 8 cent postcard to get it to VOX POPS Editor, Box 3564, Granada Hills, California 91344. If the contributor can afford a 10 cent stamp, why not include a black and white photo which need not be returned.



Mrs. McMangle, organist, has been at the Gem for five years now. She and the manager are in a hurried conference over the score. The music for "Her Parisian Sin" is not on hand, so the score for "Her Eleventh Tooth" will have to serve, although, as Mrs. McMangle says, "you won't know the difference on this organ, anyway." Mrs. McMangle is a perfect lady, as you can see by the refined way she is eating plums, not spitting the pits all over the orchestra, as a common employee might do, but keeping them in her hand until she has a chance to toss them under the organ into a corner of the stage box.

Courtesy: Chicago Tribune — New York News Syndicate, Inc. (Circa 1920).

mission to inspect the organ. Much as they like to oblige, most managers find it difficult to get the house ready for opening while escorting visitors through the organ. A problem exists in theatres that have consoles that cannot be concealed or removed from public inspection. Some organ fans gather around the console before the show or during intermission to poke at keys and work stop-tablets. One theatre owner in Pennsylvania has to station an attendant at the console to keep people from handling the instrument. Of course, managers are happy to have fans come to their shows and enjoy themselves, but it is risky business to permit all comers to manipulate the console and enter the organ chambers. We ought not put managers to the

necessity of hiring extra help to keep their investments secure.

Some kind words should be said for ATOS audiences in general. Their behavior has been outstandingly good when compared with that of the average audience. Broadway audiences have been reported as usually cold and torpid. Classical concert audiences are as often obnoxious as not. At the Philadelphia Symphony, Stokowski often had to scold his audiences. He pleaded with them to stop their milling about and to cease their "disagreeable and disgusting noises." Contrasted with most symphony or rock audiences, ATOS audiences are sophisticated and well-behaved. It's a remarkable and highly commendable phenomenon. □

Your VOX POPPER wishes to thank the three readers who noticed that this column was missing from the December '74 issue. We have dreamed up all sorts of logical sounding alibis but decided finally to tell the truth; we missed the December deadline, not by just a couple of days, but by better than a couple of weeks. There's a very good excuse but who needs another hard luck story with the economy in the shape it's in? Armed with a better pair of eyeglasses, we'll try to miss deadlines with more margin to spare in the future. And to you three who noticed the column wasn't where it should be — Thanks, again!



The new *Earthquake* movie is proving quite a sensation with its low frequency rumble called "Sensurround," an in-theatre sensation designed to rattle upper plates and atrophy ear drums. To make the earthquake sequences realistic, the "Sensurround" equipment consists of batteries of well-baffled "woofers" speakers dispensed around the theatre. Into these are piped a 40-hertz electronic signal