

FIFTEENTH ANNUAL HOME ORGAN FESTIVAL

DOES IT AGAIN

by Hal Steiner

Each year it seems like the same old story — "Home Organ Festival Huge Success." We must make that report again. Seventeen makers of electronic organs, publications and accessories displayed their wares and artists this year to the greatest Festival attendance so far — more than 1500.

The 5-day session (Sept. 9-15) of organ music presented in a woodland setting was again held at Asilomar Park near Monterey, Calif., a rustic area with buildings designed mainly to accommodate religious conferences. The Festival is in danger of outgrowing the accommodations, considering the attendance growth rate in recent years. A study is now underway toward overcoming the threat of overcrowding, one solution being two performances of each concert in the park's one auditorium, Merrill Hall, which seats about 1100 comfortably.

The exhibitor/participants for 1975 were Allen, Baldwin, Conn, Farfisa, Hammond, Gulbransen, Lowrey, Rodgers, Thomas, Wurplitzer and Yamaha, plus *Organist Magazine*, *Hansen Publications*, *Concert Company*, *Hal Leonard Publications*, *Doric Records*, plus several other related industries.

The large list of organists included Debbie Lynn (16), Hal Randall, Del Castillo, Arlo Hulst, Bob Dove, Richard Purvis, Bud Iverson, Fran Linhart, Dave Kelsey, O'Lyn Callahan, Bob Ralston, Frank Renaut, Tommy Stark, Johnny Kemm, Byron Melcher, Glenn Derriinger, Jonas Nordwall, Bill Thom-



The long chow line moved fast, and the food was tops.

Merrill Hall at full capacity. All Festival concerts are held here.





Richard Purvis (left) stops to chat with admirers Doris Henderson (PCOC Pres.), longtime Festival stalwart Della Hedburg and — well, George Thompson, our esteemed editor, seems more interested in Festival Registrar Jan James, who worries about "where to put 'em all."



Free champagne parties are a daily 5:00 p.m. Festival event. Bill Johnson (Concert Co.) and Conn dealer Reta Rogers serve as volunteer refill dispensers.

Still sporting his lei, Hawaii returnee Dave Kelsey smiles for the 'birdie' after his well-received concert for Baldwin.



son, Larry Embury, Ralph Wolfe, Bob Walls, Dennis Hinman, Eddie Vodicka, Gus Pearson, Larry Vannucci, Don Lee Ellis and Tom Hazleton. All were exhibitor employees.

In examining the list of artists, one notes a paucity of the "blockbuster" names heard in previous years. Perhaps a handful of those listed rate the "big time" label, and they, for the most part, provided the most highly applauded music. We don't downgrade the newcomers; Debbie Lynn was a delight, but there was also that guy who whammed out a whole "concert" without changing his registration noticeably. There was also a seeming slackening of playing standards in some cases, with notably younger organists reverting to the "cocktail lounge" style of the '40s when anything went. One veteran and usually excellent concert artist tried to play his concert in the teen mode — much to the despair of his students present. But the professional and imaginative playing of such stalwarts as Richard Purvis, Del Castillo, Arlo Hults, Byron Melcher, Bud Iverson, Larry Vannucci, Tom Hazleton, Jonas Nordwall, Frank Renaut, Bob Dove, Dave Kelsey and others more than atoned for the sins of the few. So did the stand-up-comedy antics of a last minute shoo-in — Danny Brown.

With few exceptions, there seems to be little progress on the part of builders toward getting nearer pipe tonal values. Rodgers displayed a very good church organ from the tonal viewpoint, although it is controlled by a medieval drawknob console. Another exception is Allen, which frankly had quite a way to go to catch up in the TO area. We're glad to report they are getting there with a new two-stoprail theatre model, despite computer circuitry (which would seem to discourage tonal scaling). This model manages to provide tonal qualities never before heard on that brand of instrument. Rodgers has come out with an \$8,000 2-manual "home model" which should be of special interest to the professional who plays club dates. Most of the rest remain very much as they have been for the past several years; pleasant sounding instruments with emphasis on sales-promoting gimmicks and a continuing love affair with the synthe-

THEATRE ORGAN



We couldn't run photos of all the fine artists who played during Festival week, so we selected a handsome one to represent the unpictured majority. Besides, Byron Melcher (Thomas) has a fine little Robert Morton in his home.



Del Castillo and Arlo Hults closed their Concert Co. show with an Al Jolson medley, with Stu Green belting out a raucous vocal of "Mammy" in grotesque period blackface.

We were trying to get a shot of Johnny Kemm (Lowrey) seen over some shoulders, but events in the foreground were distracting. Reta Rogers is amused by organ dealer John Nelson who dresses as his own billboard. Sorry, Johnny!





Bob Ralston brought along a fine vocalist, Mimi Boyer (right). Here Bob with 'bunny' Betty Pofert (left) who changed the stage billing signs between concerts.



Tiny James (right) introduces a glowering King Kong, still carrying a rumped Fay Wray, during the Costume Parade. Inside the monkey suit is a perspiring Stu Green.

Billed as the 'Worthless-Slow Duo,' Jonas Nordwall and Tom Hazleton sat in for the Worth-Crow Duo (Rodgers) who couldn't appear due to illness. Their encore was a triumphant 'Hallelujah Chorus' which somehow ran afoul of 'Yes, We Have No Bananas.'



sizer.

Yet, there is one very encouraging trend. Those who despair at the ever-increasing proliferation of gimmick switches in console side jams, and even across the front board under the bottom manual, may take heart in the trend set by two brand new models. Both the Rodgers "Topper" and the new Allen theatre organ have eliminated this slopover by placing all switches and voice controls on the stoprail directly in front of the player where they belong. Allen had to go to a double stoprail in order to evacuate the side jamb area, something knowing designers have encouraged "majors" to do for several years.

Weather for the Festival days was gray but dry, cool, crisp and definitely autumn, although the 1975 Festival dates (Sept. 9-15) were the earliest yet. As always, the meals supplied by the Park kitchens were tops, three times each day.

Part of the fun of any Home Organ Festival is the unscheduled events which take place in the showrooms, often through the wee hours. For example, where else could an organ buff enjoy the informal music of artists of the caliber of, say, Ann Leaf, John Seng or Del Castillo — for free!? Such happenings were transpiring in all of the showrooms at any given hour.

In addition to the concerts and showroom events, there were the usual diversions — swimming (ocean or pool), and Lorraine Cagle's well-presented "Clubs on Parade" (brief concerts by chosen reps of the clubs which make up the Pacific Council for Organ Clubs, the Festival's sponsor). Then there was the costume Parade, which plays to the "ham" in all of us — a chance to dress up as something weird and entertain the other Festivaleers. This year the variety was especially rich, with witches, ballerinas, be-wigged Mozartian court musicians, a team of perambulating Jello boxes, a walking golf ball, a gorilla and clowns galore.

Chairman Tiny James was well pleased with attendance and the general enthusiasm shown. He held a November dinner and post mortem for his crew of volunteers who staged the Festival, and plans were laid to make the '76 Festival even bigger and better. □



BOOK REVIEW

THE CHICAGO THEATRE, a commemorative brochure. Theatre Historical Society Production Review by Francis Hibbard.

The Chicago Theatre opened in 1921 as one of the earliest motion picture palaces and was the flagship house of the rapidly expanding Balaban & Katz Circuit.

The Chicago is unique in that in 1975 it is still a flagship. The Plitt Theatre Corp., present owners of the Chicago, have maintained the house as one of the few remaining deluxe theatres in the U.S.

This 24 page Theatre Historical Society Brochure presents the Chicago's history pictorially with an excellent selection of some thirty photos, four representative B & K institutional-type advertisements, and a reproduction of a program for one of the famous Chicago Theatre Sunday Noonday Concerts.

An interesting story on the 4/29 Wurlitzer is also presented with high quality photos to match.

Among the pictures in the brochure are six photos of stage settings used for specific programs. Of special interest is the use of an organ console onstage as part of the set.

The photos showing publicity displays or "fronts" are memory jogging examples of nostalgia which eloquently tell how it was in the "Golden Era" of the super picture/

moving?

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