

TAKING TO THE HILLS . . .

In Search of "New" Pipe Organs

by Arthur M. Cox, Jr.

It was a long day, but a rewarding one. The event had consumed some fourteen hours. Aboard the home-ward-bound bus could be heard the subdued tones of pipe organ music as recordists reviewed their many tapings of the day.

And what a selection of instruments and artists they had at their disposal!

For one thing, they had heard the largest pipe organ in a religious edifice in the world. They also covered a former network radio studio organ once heard from coast to coast, plus a largely "undiscovered" church/

concert/theatre organ that is still used for silent film shows!

The event: The "New Horizons" tour conducted on a crisp November Saturday by New York Chapter. Never before had the chapter conducted an event by chartered buses and — as near as can be determined — never before had any chapter visited these three remarkable instruments.

From midtown Manhattan with a second passenger pickup in northern New Jersey, the two gleaming deluxe cruisers with nearly 90 organ enthusiasts aboard, headed off into spec-

tacular mountain scenery enroute to West Point and to Cornwall-On-Hudson, New York.

Right "on the advertised" they arrived at the Washington Gate of the United States Military Academy where escorts boarded to direct the buses to the inspiring, cathedral-like Cadet Chapel, which sits on the edge of a high hill overlooking much of the Academy campus — and the Hudson River, replete with sailboats, just beyond. The view alone was worth the trip!

Inside the long and massive sanctuary they found an organ console of



World's number one church organ — with virtually a "super-horseshoe" console, the West Point Cadet Chapel instrument under the hands of Organist and Choirmaster Dr. John A. Davis, Jr. (U.S. Army Photo)



"New Horizons" tourists examine the rather unorthodox console of the NYMA theatre/concert Moller Opus 4925. The instrument evidences having been equipped originally with a player mechanism. (Craig White Photo)

complexity outranking the cockpit of any jumbo jet! Stop tabs *ten* levels deep literally surround the organist.

At the appointed hour, the master of the great instrument, Dr. John A. Davis, Jr., chapel organist and choir-master, came forth and demonstrated the instrument's vast tonal resources by playing music first from the baroque era then through the romantic era to modern times. There seemed to be chambers everywhere in the building — and there pretty nearly would have to be with a total of 18,200 pipes! While most of them, incidentally, were made by Moller, the instrument has an extensive, hand-picked selection of ranks by outstanding organ builders in Belgium, France, England, Holland and Germany.

At the conclusion of Dr. Davis' informal, light-hearted but highly informative program, he invited everyone to cluster around the console for questions, pictures, more demonstrations of the myriad of voices at his command, etc. He showed the amazed group how he has to make the organ "march" in processions by gradually shifting

the chambers he uses, initially those at the rear of the chapel, then forward with the marching choir until they reach the front of the chapel. If he didn't do this, he explained, the building is so long that either he or the choir would be out of step at the end of the music because of the time lag!

After vigorous applause for Dr. Davis, the group returned to their buses for a short hop to the Post Chapel, used by followers of the Protestant faith who reside permanently on the Academy grounds.

Inside the colonial style, red brick structure, chapter members and their guests found the one-time National Broadcasting Company studio organ of 1934. A veteran of countless nationwide radio programs, the Aeolian-Skinner instrument still has its theatre voices although a new Moller console of traditional style has replaced the one used at NBC.

Post Chapel Organist Pat Maimone, who has a concert background not only in organ but piano, harpsichord and tympani, presented a short program which covered a wide range of serious music and which not only showed the capabilities of the instrument but her outstanding skill as a concert musician. After acknowledging much applause, she confessed feeling that she couldn't do justice to the organ's theatrical elements and she called upon Louis Hurvitz, a member of the staff of the United States Military Academy Band, to do so. Picking an ever-popular romantic ballad from Broadway, he brought forth sounds known to millions of radio listeners of another era.

Again, a grouping around the console, questions, pictures and organ



Brigadier General F.J. Roberts, Superintendent of NYMA, welcomes everyone to the theatre-style organ concerts. (Craig White Photo)



Undivided attention is given Dr. Davis by New York chapter members as he explains intricacies of the huge instrument. (Craig White Photo)

talk prevailed until the tour directors reluctantly announced pending departure of the buses.

Leaving West Point, the coaches headed northward to traverse one of the most breathtaking mountain highways anywhere east of the Rockies. The road literally clings to a ledge high over the river offering a panoramic view of the lower Hudson River Valley akin to that usually offered only to helicopter passengers.

Upon arrival at the bucolic community of Cornwall-On-Hudson, the

Theatre concert artists Lou Hurvitz (left) and Lee Erwin oblige photographers at the NYMA Moller console. (Craig White Photo)



At the former NBC radio studio organ, 1934 Aeolian-Skinner theatre instrument (but now with a Moller, church-style console), West Point Post Chapel Organist Pat Maimone (seated) and bandsman-organist Lou Hurvitz. (Craig White Photo)



buses pulled up in front of the fortress-like structure of New York Military Academy, a private, preparatory school. In the Davis Memorial Chapel, which serves as both chapel and auditorium for the school, the group came upon an unusual semi-horseshoe console. NYMA's 4/30 Moller (Opus 4925) was built in 1927 to serve not only as the school's chapel organ but to accompany silent films as well. The instrument's more than 2,000 pipes are housed in four chambers, three of them located, theatre style, behind large grills on either side of the stage plus an echo chamber. The building has a balcony and a fully-equipped projection booth. When theatrical lighting is turned on and the stage is set for showing films, you wouldn't know you were in a chapel — unless you looked at the stained glass windows on either side!

The artist for the late-afternoon concert was Specialist Seven Louis B. Hurvitz of the West Point Military Band, a former student of the renowned Ashley Miller. In a fast-moving program that left no doubt in anyone's mind that Moller Opus 4925 was a theatre instrument, Lou Hurvitz contrasted the previous programs with one devoted largely to popular music, ballads and rhythm numbers. He pulled a great surprise to everyone (including those who planned the tour) when, in the midst of his musical tribute to Walt Disney, a band-playing "Mickey Mouse Club" fully costumed and over a dozen musicians strong, suddenly marched in playing with Lou the famed club theme then vanishing as

mysteriously as they appeared. Organist Lou acted almost as if the musicians were a figment of the audience's imagination. We suspect they may have been friends from the West Point Band but for the audience, the only clue was a cryptic "Special Thanks To:" credit in the printed program followed by a group of names.

After an encore and many bows, Lou's program was reluctantly ended with a call to the buses and a buffet dinner at the nearby Storm King Arms Hotel.

Then back to NYMA once again for what has become a semi-annual experience for residents throughout this part of the Hudson River Valley — an evening concert, sing-along and feature silent film presentation with Lee Erwin at the console.

This time Lee picked a Harry Langdon comedy *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp* which features a very early Joan Crawford. The film climaxes with an incredible cyclone sequence (which somehow resolves the plot but which clearly must have strained the creative ingenuity of the producer's props and special effects staff). There were times when Lee had the audience feeling that the storm was right in the auditorium with them but, as might be expected, everything came to a peaceful, happy ending.

And so did the New York Chapter's tour. With many tapes and pictures to refresh memories of the day, the group rode drowsily but contentedly homeward to New Jersey, New York and many points even more distant. □

SCHOENSTEIN FIRM UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

A complete change in ownership and management along with plans for expanded operations has been announced by the venerable San Francisco organ building firm, Felix F. Schoenstein & Sons. With the retirement of Erwin A. Schoenstein, the last of the founder's sons still active in the business, the name was changed to Schoenstein & Co. on January 3, 1977. Lawrence L. Schoenstein, grandson of the founder and a fourth generation organbuilder, who returned to the firm following twenty years with the Aeolian-Skinner Company, will be in charge of all tonal and technical matters. Jack M. Bethards, a San Francisco businessman and management consultant, who has operated a pipe organ restoration and maintenance firm for the past fifteen years along with other business and musical interests, will take charge of financial and overall management of the Schoenstein firm. A nationwide search is underway to build a top-rate staff of technicians and builders so that the firm's factory can be fully utilized in all phases of organ work including building of new organs and restoration of fine old instruments. Tuning contract work will be continued. In preparing to take over the firm, Lawrence Schoenstein and Jack Bethards indicated that their aim is to provide "the highest quality workmanship backed up with professional management." More specific announcements about the firm's future will be made in connection with its 100th anniversary in August 1977. □

Erwin Schoenstein (left), Jack Bethards (center) and Lawrence Schoenstein (right) discuss plans for the future of the San Francisco organ building firm. The Studio organ in the Schoenstein factory which was used for broadcasts over San Francisco radio stations for many years is in the background.

(Cathie Centorbe Photo)



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