

**HOME ORGAN  
FESTIVAL  
AT ASILOMAR**

# Bigger than Ever!

by Hal Steiner



Diminutive Ann Leaf makes the Rodgers 340 console look even larger. She is shown acknowledging applause following her concert. (Stufoto)

Byron Melcher denies that he's opening a chicken take-out store, but following his Thomas concert he sure resembled a certain Kentucky Fried Colonel. (Stufoto)



This year's September home Organ Festival, held at Asilomar state park, attracted the most customers ever — 2500, according to Festival chairman Tiny James. Now in its 18th year, the "HOF" is quite unlike any other organ confab in that it is held in a woodland setting where the deer and the raccoons play. The distractions of a city location are entirely absent. The idea of a forest site for an organ show has shown consistent appeal over the years, to both attendees and the manufacturers who supply organs and players.

This year the attractions were 39 manufacturer-supplied musicians playing several models of 13 brands of organ. There were opportunities to hear the organs in concert at Merrill Hall (and by closed circuit TV relay in the 400-seat chapel when 1000-seat Merrill Hall filled up) and in the more home-like atmosphere of the showrooms.

In recent accounts of the Festival we complained of very tired feet from all the traipsing between showrooms. The Festival planners were listening; this year there was mini-bus service between showrooms.

One of the continuing popular features is the daily "Attitude Adjustment Hour." Despite the psyched-out nomenclature it's a free champagne party, during which many of the organists volunteer to pour. This year they poured 11,880 glasses of bubbly, and there is no truth to the rumor that about half were poured into the writer's goblet.

Organ manufacturers participating this year were Allen, Eminent, Conn, Thomas, Gulbransen, Lowrey, Rodgers, Wurlitzer, Yamaha, Hammond, Farfisa and Kawai. There

was a trend toward including veteran keyboard artists, in contrast with former years' tendency to depend largely on newcomers, who often displayed lots of flash but not great depth. Thus, Ann Leaf (Rodgers), Gaylord Carter (Kawai), Byron Melcher (Thomas), Frank Renaut (Lowrey) and Weldon Flanagan (Gulbransen) were billed along with the Festival regulars and newcomers.

Because we are concerned mainly with the theatre organ features of electronic organ development, we'll concentrate on those aspects. Needless to say, the schism between theatre organ design and voicing and and the rock organ concept is wider than ever. Conn bridged the dilemma very neatly in their Martinique model by providing a switch which turns a mellow theatre organ ensemble into an old-fashioned Hammond B-3 sound. It may be sitting on the fence, but the idea is very practical in an effort to sell organs to those whose concepts never developed beyond the B-3. The Martinique has some improved theatrical voices, especially a Trumpet said to have been developed with the help of George Wright. The Allen company is making rapid strides, both tonally and mechanically, but has still to develop lush Tibia and Vox voices. Then — lookout! Rodgers is still the only firm to offer second touch (on order). Great improvements have been made in the Trio model and when Rodgers discovers the Lee Sundstrom improvements in the Tibia and Vox tonalities (as Lee has applied them to the Bob Power "Style 260" Rodgers) they'll be unbeatable. The Thomas is improving in the theatrical sense but much too



Dan Bellomy, following his concert on the Kawai organ. (Stufoto)



Dave Kelsey presented an exceptional concert on the Baldwin. Everything went well and his audience was most receptive. It was one of those rare "electric" moments too seldom experienced at concerts. (Nakahara Photo)

Jan Bordeleau exhibits much personal charm while introducing the new Eminent organ to showroom visitors. (Stufoto)



slowly. The tremos are better. Nearly all brands are determined to include a "piano" effect — before they have refined their organ voices to where they are convincing reproductions of their pipe forebears.

Most of the "jazz organ" models and some home models, are loaded with switches, dials, rocker keys and sliders on the side jambs or on the stoprail which call for an advanced instruction course to master (John La Duca, who played his concert on the new Eminent, is an expert in this area of complex switching arrangements). And the drawbar syndrome is still with us. One encouraging exception is Allen, which, despite the unchangeable aspects of computerized circuitry, has mastered the challenge of capture action for its combination buttons (the affected stopkeys go down when a button is pushed). In addition, all of its switching is done on the horseshoe stoprail, with no arrays of side jamb confusion. No doubt, Allen is a comer, thanks mainly to Dwight Beacham, whose efforts toward making the Allen easier to play and easier to listen to, are most appreciated by those who believe that theatre pipe values should be the goal before going off in other directions. Of course, Rodgers has had capture action for many years, and that firm is still among the leaders in the TO quality quest.

Too many brands seem to have opted for the gimmick route. Of course, these builders are not concerned with catching up with pipe technology and convenience; they are off on their own tangents, and they still may come up with something good. But the main thrust is in ear-catching devices which promote quick sales. One of these is the built-in synthesizer. It has promise, good and bad.

The over-use of mechanical rhythmic crutches during concerts was no credit to the performers. It must be a dilemma to a product specialist when he prepares a concert: should he play music or demonstrate the rhythmic gadgets, repeat choppers, tone distorters, self-playing capabilities for musical incompetents and automatic rhythm devices peculiar to his brand of instrument? It has to be a challenge.

The weather during Festival week was ideal; brisk but not chilling. The



Showroom scene. Wayne and Cheryl Seppala (left), Russ Butler and Ann Leaf (foreground) take in a Yamaha showroom demonstration concert. (Stufoto)



Weldon Flanagan, for 20 years a theatre organist in Dallas, made his initial appearance at the '77 Festival playing the Gulbransen Rialto II. (Stufoto)

Porter Heaps, veteran of the theatre organ's broadcasting days, checks out a new model in the Rodgers showroom. (Stufoto)





## BOOK REVIEW

**AMERICAN THEATRES OF TODAY** by R.W. Sexton and B.F. Betts. Text plus 280 pictures, 318 plans, drawings and renderings. 360 pages. Vestal Press, Box 97, Vestal, N.Y. 13850. \$35 (New York State residents must add 7% sales tax.)

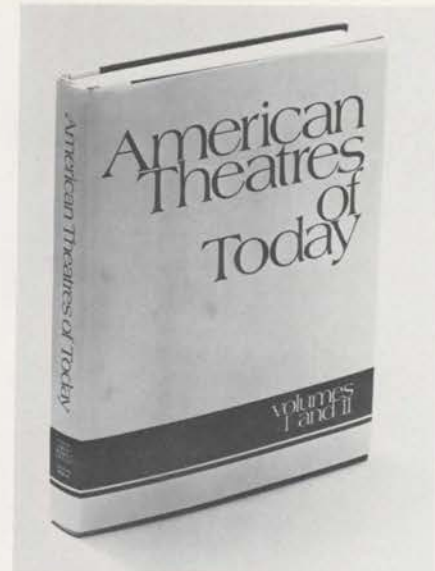
by Lloyd E. Klos

In 1927 and 1930, messrs Sexton and Betts, associate editors of *The American Architect* magazine, compiled two volumes on theatres — from the neighborhood houses to the motion picture palaces — which included construction details, plans and pictures of structures in existence and in the planning stage.

When Ben Hall was researching material for his *Best Remaining Seats* in the fifties, he was hard-put to find material already written on the subject of theatres. The two Sexton-Betts volumes were extremely difficult to locate; in 1958, one volume alone was selling at \$50 in antique bookstores! However, Ben was successful in acquiring copies of each work and upon his death, they were donated to the Theatre Historical Society. Vestal Press has combined them into a limited-edition reprint and it behooves the theatre buff to secure a copy, because in all probability, it will not be re-issued.

Beginning with the original foreword by the man whose name was synonymous with the motion picture place, "Roxy" himself, the book features pictures and plans of over 100 theatres in 46 cities and towns in 21 states.

Every facet of theatre construction is covered — from ground layout to final exterior and interior design. All the appurtenances within the building are touched: the stage, fly gallery, orchestra pit, organ chambers, projection room, screen, sight lines,



lighting, heating, ventilation and cooling. Psychology was extensively used when designing theatres as a vehicle to encourage increased patronage.

The text devoted to the organ asserts that "the pipe organ is now considered essential equipment for all motion picture theatres." Placement, size and height of pipe chambers, shutter openings, and chamber walls are discussed. "The organ equipment should be determined before the plans are too far advanced so that the space and arrangement essential for correct installation may be developed in conjunction with the organ builder." In 20 of the book's pictures, organ consoles are plainly visible.

Other chapters include "Tendencies in Present-day Theatre Design," "Planning a Theatre," "Decoration," "Electrical Installation," and "Acoustics." There is a two-page check list of items necessary for theatre operation.

Summing it up, this book is ideal for anyone who is seriously considering building a theatre (in these times?) or operating one. For those not so inclined, but who are devoted theatre buffs, *American Theatres of Today* should be a welcome addition to one's reference library. □

**DUES ARE DUE!**  
See Page 14



Rosemary Bailey entertains in the Hammond show-room. (Stufoto)

deer made many fleeting appearances but the raccoons hammed it up nightly with their floor shows designed to mooch goodies from the accommodating humans.

Were there any standouts? If audience acclaim is indicative the winner would be David Kelsey. Playing a Baldwin and piano spread-eagled, Dave's concert often sounded like the best moments of Ev Nourse and Frank Denke (Bay Area piano-organ favorites). His stylings and program caught the Festivaleers where they live.

Others who scored high in concert were Bob Birnstihl, Larry Vannucci, Dwight Beacham, Rosemary Bailey (wonderful on jazz), Carol Jones, Bud Iverson, Bruce Erikson, Dan Bellomy, Weldon Flanagan, Jonas Nordwall, Tom Hazleton, Joyce Clifford, Glenn Derringer and Bill Thomson (especially during his well-conceived workshops).

The HOF 1978 committee is already making plans for the next Festival, so get those applications in early. It's a pleasant experience — even for a pipe purist.

Always popular Larry Vannucci played his concert on an Allen model. Larry has been a frequent Festival concert artist since the Festival's Hoberg days. (Stufoto)

