

"Am I Blue" when in walked a beautiful young woman whom the manager introduced as Mademoiselle Somebody, associate organist at the great Gaumont-Palace Theatre. She spoke no English, but conveyed to me that she liked my "American" style of playing, and would I please continue? No, I wouldn't, not with a pro around, and I persuaded her to take my place, where she gave us a delightful concert. She had come in to complain to the manager that the Gaumont organ was always on the blink in one way or another, that she refused to play it anymore, and that she wanted a Hammond installed behind the curtain.

This gave me a bright idea, and, since it was morning, I went straight from there to the stage door of the Gaumont and inquired for the organist, who came in shortly, invited me into the basement where we entered an elevator which proved to be the rising console of the mammoth 4/14 Christie pipe organ, and together we rose majestically into the 6000-seat empty auditorium. He was the very personable, friendly Tommy Dessèrre, who was to preside at this organ for a total of 30 years until 1960 when the 1500 pipes were auctioned off. But I have never learned who made the winning bid, how much it was in francs or dollars, and where it was re-installed. But, despite Mademoiselle's complaint about it, somebody got a honey. Its tones were beautiful, and it made even me sound good!

First Tommy played, and then courteously allowed me to run off "Make Believe" and other of the six or seven hundred old popular pieces I knew. All this reminded me of an account I had once read of the black American pianist-organist, Fats Waller, who, down on his luck in his youth, bummed his way to Paris and looked up the internationally famous Marcel Duprè, organist at the Church of Saint-Sulpice, who, as Tommy had done with me, invited Fats to join him on the organ bench where, as Fats later related it, "Fust he play de God-box, den I play de God-box." Racial differences quite apart, Waller and Duprè became instant friends with a curious common bond.

This recollection gave me another brilliant idea. One Sunday morning my wife and I made our way to the

Church of Saint-Sulpice to hear the great Duprè and were directed up a long stairway to the organ loft, already full of Marcel's friends and admirers waiting to hear him play. The console was located right outside the pipe chambers, which meant that this instrument must originally have been an old tracker-action type, close enough to the pipes to be operated by mechanical levers before the invention of electrical switches. Somebody in the years since had electrified and renovated it but had left the console right there next to the louvres and pipes. Just then Marcel Duprè himself stepped in, recognizable from photos we'd seen, and after nodding to his friends, seemed fascinated by my wife's hand-sewn coat and cute little French hat. Ordinarily not the forward type, she nevertheless took immediate advantage of this opportunity to introduce us, to tell Marcel that we were leaving for America in a few days and that we couldn't go without hearing him play, that we had unfortunately missed his concert tours in the United States, but had heard his records and considered him the world's greatest organist. Well, that, and the coat, did it! Ignoring me, Marcel invited her, as he had with Fats Waller, and as Tommy had with me, to join him on the organ bench, where, because of the cold, he played the service in his beret, overcoat, and mittens with the fingers cut out.

Duprè could do what many musicians can't do — all the time he played, never missing a note, he carried on a conversation with my wife beside him, discussed his love for his children and grandchildren and how much he enjoyed them as a family man. Then came the big closing Bach number, the only piece for which Marcel didn't read the notes, and for which he whipped off his fingerless mittens and opened up that organ with everything it had. So close to the pipes, and in such a small room, we were stunned, deafened, but it was the most terrific Bach we'd ever heard! We've never forgotten it, and have always counted this occasion one of the great experiences and privileges of our lives.

In two days we sailed for home and have never revisited Paris, but we have our memories, if you'll pardon me, to keep us WARM! □

DINNY'S COLYUM

as
transcribed
by
Del Castillo



Us riters we don't always know just what we are gettin into, like for instince I got to gabbin on about how many holydays we got in this country, strichin from end to end so to speak I counted up 36 witch dont leave much time to get a weeks work done especially sence the gov. has changed all the holydays to week ends irregardless of which day of the week they is really on so as to give all the workers a extry day off. Like for instince Washintons Birthday comes on Wednesday and Memorial Day comes on Tuesday but they move the both of them up to Monday witch seems pretty silly to me but then I dont have to work five days a week so I guess maybe I would feel different if I did.

Of course all the holydays I men-shuned aint reely official or they is only in certain parts of the USA like for instince Patriarts Day in Noo England Gen. Robert E. Lee in the South and Johnson Day in Texas and Huey Longs Day In Looisiana. But now the latest I read about and this is pretty confusin is Sun Day witch will be on Wednesday the 3 of March. You would of thought the least they could do if they want a holiday about the Sun would be to put it on Sunday but I guess that would be too easy.

So anyways accordin to our mayor here in LA who is Mayor Bradley and is one of the Bored of Directors of Sun Day this is to lead the USA into the Solar Era. So now you know why we got another holyday and what it is for. Here in LA they already got a So. Cal. Solar Energy Assoc. and like they say, they know that here in LA it wont rain on May 3, so they are goin to have a lot of events only they don't know what they are yet. Well, that figures. Politishans are like that.

Up in San Francisco they are goin to have a Solar Festival and a Magick Show. Of course the big noise will be in Washinton where they will be a Solar Fair and a Public Concert and a Conference of Experts at Geo. Washinton University. Like Mayor Bradleys says, in 1970 they had Earth Day, so now we get to have Sun Day. I spose pretty soon we will get to have Moon day and it will be on any old day except Monday.

Some of the things they are planin to do are pretty cute. Like for instince they will have a sunrise celebrashun on Cadillac Mountin in Maine which is the spot where the sun hits the United States first. Then they will have a tour of the Solar Homes, a whole dozen of them, that has been bilt in Martinsburg, W. Va. Then they will be a Sunrise Concert at the United Nashun Bildin in Noo York. The big idea is to get people to usin Solar Power and givin it a fair shake like if somebody puts up a solar house they will be a law that nobody can put up a higher house next to him that will keep the sun out. And like they will have laws that will keep the bilders from chargin too much, and then some more laws that will give a cut on the taxes, and I spose it must be a pretty good thing because they is a lot of important men that is runnin it.

I pick up a lot of informashun out of the paper, like for instince did you know that they is more organs sold than any other insterment except pianos and geetars? That's a fact. I guess. If you can beleave everythin you read in the papers. Like it says that in 1950 they was one organ sold to 17 pianos, but in 1960 they was only one and seven-tenth pianos to one organ. That piano must of been a dilly. But probily it was better than in 1975 when they was only one eleventh of one piano sold more than one organ. All I know is that if they was only goin to sell a part of a piano the best part to leave out is those last half a dozen notes at the top which sound like hittin a tin plate. □

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In Retrospect...

A REFLECTION

on the

WESTERN RESERVE REGIONAL

by Betty Heffer

As Lowell Ayars reminded us, a great measure of the success of our theatre organ conventions consists of the joys inherent in sharing the music with friends old and new.

And so it was in Cleveland, Ohio last November as the Western Reserve Chapter welcomed fellow ATOS members to its Super '77 Regional Convention during the Thanksgiving Day weekend.

The meeting and greeting, the conversation cum coffee, the touring together in inclement weather — all helped establish the leitmotif.

A recitative proclaiming that Dennis James "must be a juggler to manage all those stop tabs and keyboards

and pedals simultaneously" was provided by a local resident who had won two tickets of admission from a radio station. With a background of classical piano, she was enthralled with Heidi's contribution to the Saturday evening program at Gray's Armory. With her first exposure to a Wurlitzer accompaniment of a Laurel and Hardy comedy, she was enchanted. Another convert to theatre organ, folks!

Now for a scherzo or two. We, the audience at Keith Chapman's concert in the Cleveland Convention Center, were seated on the stage. And when Keith requested the aid of two itinerant page turners capable

Registration desk, (left to right) Phyllis Merhan, Elaine Hawks and registrants.

(Packard Photo)

