

THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH

by John Muri

*"The old order changeth, yielding place to new
and God fulfills Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."*

According to the poet Tennyson, King Arthur spoke those words when he was dying. To state the matter bluntly, one may say that nothing lasts forever, and that one ought to be glad that it doesn't. Still more bluntly, one may say that progress in this world is made by fires and funerals, realizing, of course, that only a small part of truth can be told in any wisecrack. Surely, King Arthur was referring only to the beneficial effects of change. Change without improvement effects stagnation in art as it does in anything else, while the pursuit of change for its own sake is a futility.

Current changes are the results of economic and other forces at work, centered in what is called the mass media. The popular music scene came about by our leaving a whole generation of young people without theatres to attend and good music to hear. Now they flock by thousands to assemblages where untrained and untalented performers temporarily satisfy their desire for a living emotional experience. Artificially manufactured fashions keep recurring, seemingly original and triumphant, and then dying of their excesses.

Nobody needs to argue that tastes have changed. It was apparent in the fifties that there was a serious shortage of hit tunes. The trend became noticeable in the forties. The sixties dated the beginning of the great music subsidies and building projects like Lincoln Center. In 1966, the president of the National Arts Councils of America observed that "everybody wants to build a cultural center . . . (but) if you put people into a beautiful hall and don't give them quality, in two years you'll have an empty monument." Things looked pretty good in the sixties. One statistician reported that in 1963 more people went to concerts than to baseball games. In 1966, orchestras were subsidized to the tune of eighty million dollars.

Change was in the wind, though. Popular music became ethnic and country-Western, mixed with rock. AM radio people were the foremost promoters of the new pop stuff, with FM following reluctantly. Of course, films and television (imitative institutions that they are) had to follow suit. The classical people started wondering, too. By 1969 they were worrying whether or not all solo performers would be deserted by the public.

Do we organ-addicts have to concern ourselves with the problems created by all-encompassing change? Probably. Some would say that we are trying to hold back the clock (1) by trying to keep alive an instrument that can be much more efficiently built with electronic technology, (2) by trying to perpetuate a library of music that is presumably dated in style and complexity, and (3) by trying to hold on to old buildings and entertainment procedures that seemingly will never attract a large public.

Wood and leather rots. Insulation and music paper crumbles. Paint scales off and ivory yellows. Water leaks in. There are forces that insidiously nullify our efforts at preservation. Is there a lesson in this for the historically minded?

We are creatures of time. Using it to good advantage, we try to study the past as a guide to the present and the future. We act a little more intelligently in the present if we avoid the mistakes of the past. Anyone who does less takes unnecessary risks. One pauses, then, to hear some enthusiast say that the works of the composers of the nineteenth century are passé and that their compositions (if played at all) must be

Mr. Muri's opinions expressed herein are his own and do not necessarily reflect the policies of ATOS or THEATRE ORGAN Magazine.

played in the light of the new musical idioms of the last quarter of the twentieth century.

History does not support such a view. Every revolution in music has failed. It failed in the fifteenth century, it failed in the time of Beethoven, and it failed in the early years of this century, when wild romanticism in music was rejected. There is plenty of evidence that most of the successful innovators of our time worked in harmony with traditional methods and purposes. There have always been fashions in music, and time after time their excesses have been rejected and the musical world has returned to a steady progress that has continued for 2500 years.

Will there be a place for theatre organists in the years to come? Will temporal change bring back large audiences to theatre organs? Silent films will probably never return, at least in this generation. Producers will make silent films only on rare occasions when silence becomes a part of the action. A whole art-form could be built on genius-inspired silent film, but there appears to be no market for it. Even if such a thing were to happen, the films would have to fit a modern pattern that is non-narrative. Movie-critic Pauline Kael believes that general audiences have lost the narrative sense. Their years of TV watching have conditioned them to enjoy shock and action, even when those elements have no logical basis. Kael sees structural disintegration in the movies and finds it "rather scary to see what's happening." A second part of the pattern embraces the non-rational, when anything goes and critical standards are pitched out the window. You are supposed to accept everything in a "new" film, preferably in a kind of narcotic lassitude. If this kind of film-making continues, Kael says, cinema is going to become "so lacking in audience appeal that in a few years the foundations will be desperately and hopelessly trying to bring it back to life." If this is an accurate assessment of the situation, what hope do organists have for film accompaniment work? Clearly, it would have to be a kind of non-music or aleatory music, something that was never a part of the theatre organ age.

Change and loss are in the nature of things. Woody Allen is reported

in *Esquire* as being upset about "the constant struggle against annihilation and death" which is "absolutely stupefying in its terror and renders one's accomplishments meaningless." He can't seem to take the world on a day by day basis. Dorothy Parker, another cynic, said that no man ever came to a happy ending. People who worry about such stuff are too egocentric. Does it really matter much if all of our "immortal" words or sounds are destined to vanish? It is better to live the way Walter Pater recommended in 1876: burn each moment of every day with a hard gem-like flame of experience. Since everything is born, grows, declines, and dies, we must live to maintain the ecstasies of the moments given to us.

Music offers no exception. A great piece of music will last a number of years, become too familiar, and then die in neglect. Something new will pre-empt the time and interest of concert-goers. Changing life-styles, like television and other electronic wonders, eliminate whole institutions. See what happened to the coal industry when oil and electricity became cheap. Look at it, now that prices have risen. In the long run, music will take its course as it always has. In the short run, we shall do well to tolerate and adapt to the popular fancies of the moment, living, as Pater recommended, with a "hard, gem-like flame." □



ME AND MY WURLITZER. John Ledwon playing his 3/26 studio organ. Alpha No. 7703 (stereo). \$6.50 postpaid from Alpha Records, Box 115, Newbury Park, Calif. 91320.

John Ledwon started playing a plug-in at 11 years of age, encouraged and propelled by parents who had hopes he would seek a career as a concert organist. To rivet his interest they purchased a 3/11 "assembled" Wurlitzer and installed it in their San Fernando Valley (Calif.) home. They were partially successful; John developed a healthy respect and preference for pipes but a concert career didn't appeal to him. He wanted to teach music. So his college

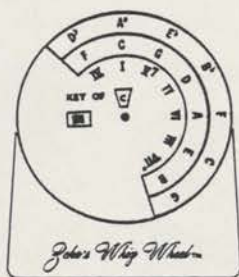
courses were in public school music. For the past decade he has taught music at Newbury Park High School (Calif.), not far from his Agoura hill-top studio home. He has recently come into national prominence as chairman of the Los Angeles chapter or ATOS.

From a biographical sketch by veteran theatre organist Del Castillo, we quote: "John is definitely a comer . . . To those who have followed him through the years, his musical development has been outstanding, whether playing, teaching or producing musical comedies at Newbury Park (high school)." Meanwhile the 3/11 has grown to a 3/26, augmented with carefully chosen ranks to combine, in the 22,000 cubic feet of studio listening area, to form one of the most complete and attractive recording organs in southern California. This is John's first recording with it as a 3/26, although he has several previous releases.

The program adds up to a variety show, presenting many types of music but always with the theatre organ aficionado in mind.

Whether John is presenting the heavily tripleted semi-rock of "Sh-Boom" or the romantic schmaltz of Romberg's "Deep in My Heart," he displays an understanding of the intent of the writer and the feel of the time the selection reached peak popularity. This latter quality is particularly evident during the E.T. Paul march, "Napoleon's Last Charge," a worthy relic from the early days of this century. Of course march time is limited as a means of expression (example: the French regiments never get out of step during the battle nor during the retreat from Waterloo in the E.T. Paul version). Still, John crams a lot of dramatics into the selection by variations in his arrangement which never appeared in the sheet music. In an entirely different aura, John pictures an incompetent but romantic knight, Don Quixote, pursuing his dimwitted Dulcinea in the title selection from *Man of La Mancha*.

But John Ledwon's forte is his treatment of groupings of 1920's tunes and later, 1940's titles. Rather than give them cursory treatment in order to list the titles, John provides each one a loving pat on the fanny which puts each tune into its most effective musical and historic perspec-



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