

# Music Review

by Walter J. Beaupre, Ph.D.

Al Hermanns, **ORGAN SERIES, BOOK 4, Big 3 Music Corporation, New York, N.Y., \$3.95 (or available by mail from Hermann's Organ Studio, 1120 Union St., Reading, PA 19604).**

Al Hermanns solid integrity as the creator of many excellent "How to . . ." books for organists with a theatre-sound bias has been established in prior reviews. Obviously those advanced degrees in harmony, counterpoint, arranging and composition at Temple University have not been wasted. Hermanns has also capitalized on his many years experience as a teacher. But, as the saying goes, "you're only as good as your latest show." So let's take a look.

*Book 4* is a collection of eight organ transcriptions of pop tunes plus commentary and registration suggestions for draw bar or stop tab instruments. In a personal note

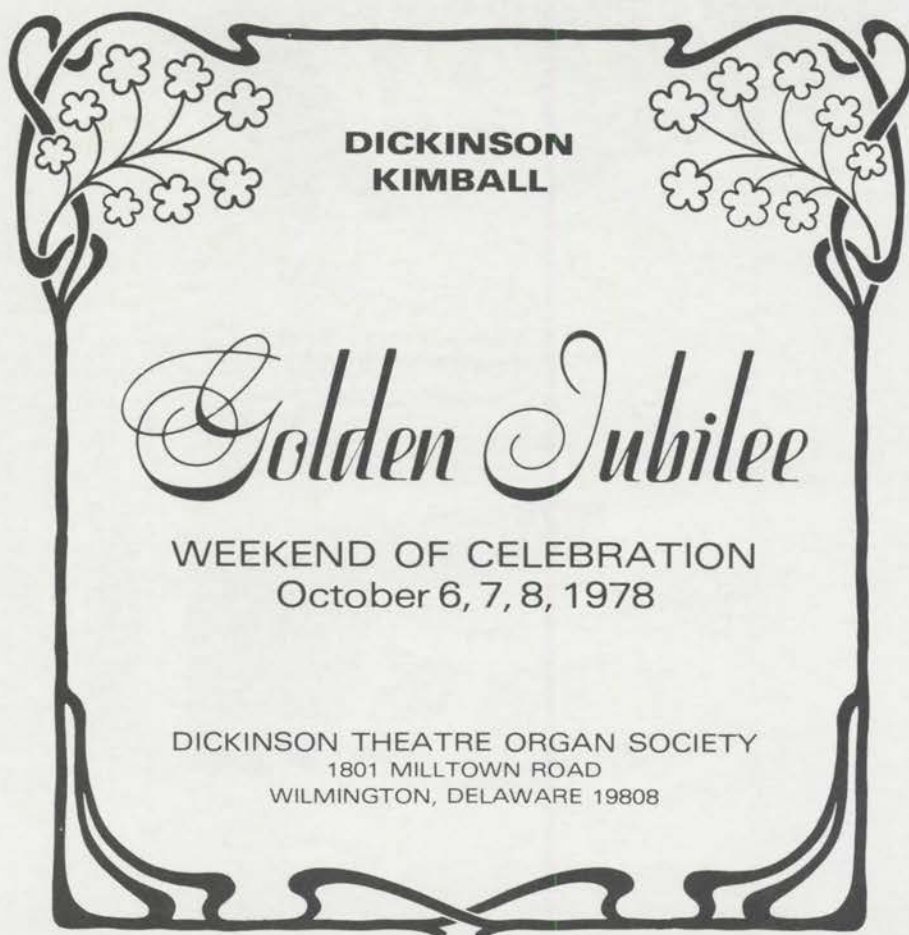
which arrived in the mail with this collection Al Hermanns reasoned, "The theatre organists of the '20's and '30's were always up to date with the latest songs, so there is no reason why today's organists should limit their repertoire to music of that period." I wondered, frankly, why he bothered to make such an obvious point. Many fine collections of arrangements for organ include both golden oldies and recent hits. It is also my observation that many not-so-fine collections feature a few good tunes (both old and new) plus plenty of junk music (also of varying vintage). The value of such collections is limited by the musical taste of the collector.

I must confess the first selection title "Weekend in New England" didn't fill me with wild anticipation. Never heard of it! Nor did scanning the lyrics printed between the bass clef and the pedal line ring any "top forty" bells. Oh well, it's in waltz

time and looks easy to play. Why not give it the once over? "Weekend in New England" turned out to be a lovely surprise: a haunting melody, tricky rhythmic variations in the song line (I'd been warned in Al's commentary) and harmonic patterns that were stunningly supportive even though they *looked* simple. Hermanns was right in his commentary about the importance of a sustained legato pedal passage at the end of the bridge. Then there was a simple and very right transposition from C to D flat for a final statement of the melody. I immediately flipped back to the beginning and played through "Weekend" a few more times just for the fun of hearing it. Granted, the suggested Tibia registration was too heavy for the accompaniment Diapason and string ensemble on my Marquee, so I made some modifications to bring out the counter melodies.

There were to be other delightful surprises in Al Hermanns' latest. At long last, someone has written a gorgeously simple and thoroughly satisfying arrangement of "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes." Nobody needs to be reminded that the killer in Jerome Kern's classic is usually the modulation from three flats to five sharps in the bridge. Hermanns takes the sting out of this modulation by keeping the left hand chords sustained and simple while the pedal takes on a beat to keep things moving. The right hand throughout the entire arrangement has the freedom of a single note melody line; the left hand counter melodies and arpeggio chords add just enough color and contrast to make things interesting without swamping the player in complexities. If there is a better organ transcription of "Smoke Get In Your Eyes" on the market for the home organist, I have yet to find it.

Three more standards are featured in *Book 4*: "Deep Purple," "Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White" and "Somewhere My Love." For those organists who cut their teeth on the lush Dave Coleman arrangement of "Deep Purple" (Robbins Music, 1952), this one is less Crawford and much easier to play. Hermanns keeps the transcription in the key of F and introduces variety with changes in rhythm. A lively waltz chorus with slight changes in



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the melody line works wonderfully well; the quarter chorus in beguine tempo serves as a nice transition to the finale which is an orgy of 9th chords in the left hand plus pedal. Again, Al's hints in the commentary prove helpful: the progression of 9th chords is written to be played easily, and the resulting sound is well worth the practice time involved.

"Cherry Pink" gets the tango treatment by Hermanns. It plays reasonably well, but suffers by comparison with the Ashley Miller rumba version in *Continental Favorites* (Chappell, 1962). Both arrangements are of equal difficulty. If Ashley gets the slight edge for sheer style and a snappy intro, Al Hermanns' "Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White" has that very important virtue of being readily available in music stores now. Either way, you can't lose.

It takes either courage or a superb arrangement to publish "Somewhere My Love" in a collection of organ solos at this late date. It's a pleasure to report that Hermanns wins on both counts. Without resorting to the verse of Lara's theme for variety, Al supplies a dramatic but simple intro and then lets the chorus sing away in G, B flat and C. Perhaps the greatest virtue of this arrangement is the Coda — and no irony is intended! Personally, I've never found the right way to end my own playing of this tune; it always seems to die without a final resolution. Al Hermanns knowhow has solved this problem with ease, charm, and class. Lara dies beautifully!

There are three additional new tunes in *Book 4*: "Tomorrow," "Gonna Fly Now" and "My Heart Belongs to Me." My current favorite is the hit song from the Broadway musical *Annie*, and Al Hermanns' "Tomorrow" is a joy to play. He wisely keeps the left hand spare and simple, letting changing registrations and repetition of the theme an octave higher add the necessary interest. Although I've heard the show version of the song many times, I never realized what a pretty tune "Tomorrow" is until I played this arrangement.

The theme from the movie *Rocky*, "Gonna Fly Now," is probably the most difficult selection in the collection to play well. The changing rhythmic patterns are a chore to

master, but if you like the tune it's worth the effort.

"My Heart Belongs to Me" is a recent low-down-blues-funk-rock tune that, for all I know, may have done well on the charts. The arrangement lends further variety to the collection. Steady beat guitar-type chords and the jazz horn solo line will require considerable skill and feeling. For my taste, it was the least effective tune in the book.

*Book 4* is quality printing throughout, but resign yourself to page turning at awkward moments. Regis-

tration suggestions, especially for the lower manual, varied little from Diapason 8' String 8'; you may want to modify the tab settings to suit your own ear and instrument.

The better pop organ teachers around the country should welcome this collection with open arms. Even those venturesome souls who create their own arrangements of pop tunes will find what Al Hermanns does mighty hard to beat. And for the home organist with modest playing skills, *Organ Series; Book 4* is just about the best buy on the market. □

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