



Candi Carley — (Max Herr Photo)

How Does She Do It?

by Stu Green

Those of us who have heard blind organists closely duplicate the skills of sighted colleagues often wonder how they manage to master the intricacies of playing such a complex instrument. So we decided to find out, by asking a young lady who has no recollection of sight — although she was not born blind.

After numerous interviews and observations we came to the conclusion that an organist such as Candi Carley, who is sightless, must be strong in several areas: (1) she must have a very receptive ear for music (so-called "relative pitch" may help), (2) a retentive memory for music,

and (3) a generous degree of will power and discipline. Her musical ear helps the brain absorb music, where the retentive memory stores it, and the will to succeed keeps her at the tedious task of cramming endless pages of music into her head — always ready for instantaneous "playback." This is quite in contrast with the sighted organist who is also a good music reader. Even though he memorizes his music, he has had the advantage of reading it initially from the printed page, as the composer wrote it, even though he may eventually re-arrange it to suit his needs and abilities.

Conversely, the blind organist has only the musical sensitivity of the ear and memory to depend on — so they had better be accurate.

Candi Carley was born prematurely. She weighed in at 2½ pounds, and her chance of survival wasn't too good. She was placed in an incubator. Back in the '50s, medical technology hadn't yet determined how much oxygen to administer to a "preemy" in an incubator. An overdose blinded her. But Candi was equipped with a strong will to live even as a baby. She would survive, and that was that.

By the time she was two, it was



Gordon Kibbee

(Stufoto)

noticed that she was attracted to the radio when it was playing music. Then came a 78 rpm record player. That was even better because tunes which caught her fancy could be repeated. She was only a little past her third birthday when she learned how to operate the record player. Then it was music for most of her waking hours. She discovered something new at the age of six — a piano. Here was an instrument which would play the tunes she knew. All she had to do was touch the right keys. Music she had stored in her head thus found an outlet through her fingers, first just melody lines. Within a year she had added harmony, rhythm — and embellishments.

Candi had several piano teachers, then she discovered the electronic organ. Her emphasis changed immediately. Here was a whole orchestra to play with. It was a short step to pipes, and that was even better. In her southern California home she still has her old Hammond, although she does most of her practicing on a

Richard Purvis

(Stufoto)



more orchestral Rodgers. Candi lives with her mother and an older brother.

There have been those who encouraged her, friends and teachers. The earliest and probably most fondly remembered is the late Paul Beaver. Paul noted Candi's extraordinary musicality when she was only seven, and he never seemed to tire of watching the kid with the pixie haircut plink out tunes. It was Paul who insisted she supplement her natural abilities with some formal training. Her early training was on piano, partly financed by a scholarship she was awarded. Her current teachers are classical organist Richard Purvis and theatre organist Gordon Kibbee, who specializes in arranging.

Candi has been active in the concert field for several years. She first came to the writer's attention when she played cameos during Los Angeles area organ crawls, jam sessions and informal gatherings. Our curiosity resulted in questions. How did she manage to play such a complex instrument? How could she even manage registration? Slowly the story began to unfold.

When Candi is confronted with an instrument new to her, she goes around the stoprail, listening to each voice in its various octaves, noting pitch and making a mental note as to its tonal characteristics and its location on the stoprail so she can find it quickly. If a sighted person is there to read the names and pitch indications, so much the better. But knowing the actual name of the voice is of secondary importance at this point. Next she tries mixing voices to learn what's good for ensembles. And she also notes solo possibilities. So, by the time she is ready to play she has a reasonably complete picture of the instrument's facilities fixed in her mind. Toe studs and combination pistons are explored in the same manner. Of course, the organ with a convenient number of settable pistons is a big help. Even on a non-capture piston system, Candi doesn't forget what voices have been set. Tape overlays in Braille on stopkeys help, too. Candi is a skilled Braille reader.

Learning music is no chore. For pop tunes, Candi usually has them firmly set in her mind after hearing them once or twice. Then it's only a



Candi "white canes" it. She is remarkably adept at getting around on her own.

matter of trying what she has learned on the keyboards. Her fingers seek the right keys automatically. More complex music requires more application but the procedure is the same. Incidentally, she can play readily in any key; transposition was always easy for her.

As for repertoire, she collects tapes and records as well as sheet music. A friend, Deke Warner, provided over 50 reel-to-reel tapes containing a vast collection of pop tunes. These added immensely to an already large collection. Tune titles are catalogued so the tape or sheet music may be located easily. A couple of playbacks and the tune is hers. She

Paul Beaver.

(Stufoto)



usually prepares her own arrangements, and they are constantly changing. If the music is in printed form, a family member, usually her mother, Virginia, reads the melody line to Candi. She commits it to memory. Often, while being driven to work, she hears something she likes on the car radio. She usually has it "stored" by the end of the drive. Her abilities are not limited to music. She graduated from high school as an honor student, and later completed two years of college.

Learning classical music takes a little more time and concentration. This is done during her lessons with Richard Purvis. He plays the selection then Candi, applying that remarkable ear, takes it as far as she can. Then the teacher makes any necessary corrections and plays a couple of more pages for Candi to absorb. Of course, progress is in pro-



Mike Ohman.

portion to the difficulty of the music. Some she picks up quickly, just like her pops. And some requires a great deal of concentration and repetition. Between listening to passages and having her teacher read consecutive notes aloud, she manages to master intricate organ classics. All lessons are recorded on cassettes for later study.

The lady indulges in no self-pity because of her blindness. Hers is a strictly upbeat outlook. But she does have compassion for people less fortunate than she. For example, for four years she went to the Metropolitan State Hospital monthly to play for the patients. More recently she has been making monthly trips to

the Long Beach Veterans' Hospital to play for patients in the spinal injury ward. On one occasion an almost helpless patient, noting her blindness, said, "Candi — hang in there." Candi was touched. Later she remarked, "Can you believe it! He can't move anything but his head — and he told *me* to hang in!"

Candi was first exposed to the public on a continuing basis when organist/organ technician Mike Ohman bought the Pipe 'n Pizza in Reseda, Calif. Mike wanted to upgrade the music so he rented an electronic organ while he tore out the somewhat hastily installed 2/10 Wurlitzer which had been the main attraction since the pizzeria opened in 1969. The organ, which once sounded forth in a Beverly Hills cinema, needed a lot of work. While he was at it, Mike rebuilt the chambers farther apart to get better separation. He revoiced the many notes which neglect had soured, and he added a newly fabricated Posthorn. He also put the shutters up high, — near the 16-foot ceiling. Then he renamed the establishment "The Great American Wind Machine" and dubbed the



Candi during a jam session at the Los Angeles Elks Bldg. 4/61 Robert Morton organ.

(Bob Hill Photo)

GEORGE WRIGHT



In Concert

WHAT THE CRITICS SAY.

" . . . A master arranger for the instrument. His original and daring registration gives the organ rhythmic vitality and zip in performance. . . He makes it swing."

The New York Times

"On stage to play a Bach chorale or a Gershwin song, he seems to be re-creating the music. He apparently does nothing that no other organist does, yet he accomplishes results that none of them seem to come near accomplishing."

Hollywood Citizen-News

"His program had humor and was always musical. He has brought theatre 'pops' organ back to a nation which had forgotten it."

Theatre Organ

"Sponsored by the San Jose Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, he gave a display of musicianship that must be heard, live, to fully appreciate. He had them in the palm of his hand."

Tabs and Drawbars

For concert information and availability contact:
J. NELSON MANAGEMENT
900 Andersen Drive, San Rafael, California 94901
(415) 457-0255

organ "Windy."

Long before this work was underway, Mike was determined to provide an improvement in the quality of playing. When Candi Carley auditioned, Mike knew he had found an artist who could meet his exacting requirements. He also hired Tony Wilson, a young man of great musical talent. Candi and Tony divide the evenings between them. It's a nearly 90 mile round-trip to her home in Norwalk, Calif., but Candi loves the work.

With so much public exposure, Candi has been enlarging her repertoire in order to meet the many requests of the pizza chompers. She adds several new tunes each week and her memory shows no signs of saturation. She is popular with the patrons, thanks to an outgoing personality. Many who observe her handling the console for the first time are surprised when told she is blind. "How does she do it all?" they ask. We hope these notes will supply some of the answers.

Footnote: Candi Carley's first recording, played on "Windy," was being processed for release as we went to press. □



Candi caresses "Windy."

(Max Herr Photo)

'The Great American Wind Machine' has changed radically through the efforts of owner Mike Ohman. There's more visibility and the swell shutters were shortened and installed near the room's ceiling. In this Chuck Zimmerman photo, the pizza eaters are ATOSers, there for a business meeting.



BOOK REVIEW

by Francis Hibbard

JEWEL OF JOLIET — An 80-page, largely pictorial, history of the Rialto Theatre, Joliet, Illinois. Produced by the Will County Cultural Arts Association, 1300 West Acres Road, Joliet, Illinois 60435.

This handsome document was produced by the Will County Cultural Arts Association for the purpose of acquainting the public with the historical importance of the Rialto facility available to them and to raise funds for saving the complex. Considerable research has gone into the production of this book. It features several photos of earlier Joliet theatre enterprises. It also contains a number of pictures depicting the construction phases of the Rialto Theatre.

The Rialto Theatre was a product of the famous theatre architects, Rapp & Rapp. Many of the pictures in the book taken at the completion of the Rialto clearly shows the lavish setting Rapp & Rapp felt necessary for the presentation of motion pictures and stage productions.

A 4/21 Grande Barton organ figured prominently in the opening. The organ is still in the theatre and is currently used in many of the money raising programs being conducted. The Joliet Chapter of ATOS is charged with the refurbishing of the instrument.

The book being reviewed here is an excellent history of a deluxe theatre and presents a good statement of how it was in the golden days of the late 1920's. It can be especially recommended for theatre buffs and would be an addition to any theatre organ enthusiast's library.

The book is available from the address given at the beginning of the review. The price is \$8.50 plus \$1.00 for postage and handling.

A \$10.00 donation to the association will bring the book to you plus a nicely-rendered pencil sketch reproduction depicting in montage the