



THOUGHTS AT CHRISTMAS

by John Muri

In last February's issue of *THEATRE ORGAN*, Dinny the Elevator Man complained about the way we have juggled holidays so as to make them meaningless parts of long weekends. We don't celebrate much of anything any more except Christmas and the Fourth of July. I suppose nobody has dared to tamper with them. The creation of our artificial Monday holidays (for the extension of weekend hangovers) has reduced both respect for and observance of most of our special occasions.

Christmas and New Year are the holidays most dedicated to the celebration of expectations and renewals. For the aged, there are days when one reviews the past, assesses one's losses, revises expectations, and enjoys the season for its own sake. For the young, they are more or less happy, conspicuous mileposts on a long adventure, the purposes and goals of which are yet obscure.

There is joy in the prospect of a busy future; but however joyous it may be, in later years it can never contain the life of youth, of growth, of prospects, of grand hopes. With the passing of time, ambitions lose intensity; achievements seem less significant. How fortunate it is to enjoy triumphs in days when one is filled with energy! Holidays bring all such memories to us, and if we are sentimentally inclined, we may be tempted to give some thought to the effects of change, of mortality and immortality.

The word *immortal* is, in general, used carelessly. One mail-order classical record firm uses the word incessantly in its advertising of great (and not so great) composers. The repeti-

tion is irritating for its obsequiousness, particularly when one considers mortality and the history of music. Where are the "immortals" of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries? Musical content and style change through time, and old favorites disappear.

Periodicals dealing with ideas and ideals frequently complain about the lowering of standards. One critic maintains that people are not only attacking excellence; they are even attacking mere competence. We find increasing concern (rightly or wrongly) about the culture of young people and particularly their deficiencies in language, mathematics, and history. The flower children of the Sixties are now ten years older, and many are said to be living in a pitiful, alienated, drug-ridden, rootless, hopeless existence. In time they may have to be written off in a reluctant hope that the next generation will repudiate their progenitors' lifestyle.

How do we learn to respect the virtues: honor, industriousness, justice, decency, mercy, reason, beauty, and taste? How do we build character? Over forty years ago, students of education were preaching that one could not hope to develop good character in children by simply telling them to be good; one had to provide and be an inspiring example. Teachers would try to let classic stories and histories speak for themselves and let the academic disciplines breed habit-

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

its of civilized thought and action. If our holidays are to be effective, they must regularly bring to mind those things we consider to be virtues. How important, then, must be the work of our conscientious music teachers, who quietly encourage and exhort our children to love and to play good music!

As we grow older, our attitudes change during the Christmas holidays. Our thoughts turn to the past, since most of us oldsters have more of a past than we have of anything else. We think about the life-choices we have made. Would we have done things differently? There is usually no satisfactory answer, not even for the luckiest of us. Have we made the most of the talent we have? Are we as good as we can be? As organists, have we done the best of which we are capable?

We must also give a little time to wish success and happiness for the young newcomers to the theatre organ field. Unfortunately, the theatre industry offers almost nothing to them in the way of careers, and pizza organ jobs are not plentiful; so we wish for them (in the paraphrased words of an anonymous writer): enough success to keep one happy, enough failure to develop humility, enough trials to develop strength, and enough hope to keep one working.

At our house on Christmas Eve we shall remember and toast those who have been parts of our lives, particularly those whom we see only occasionally. Caught in the tyrannies of time and distance, spread over a vast continent (not to mention our overseas friends) good friends whom we love are infrequently met, but they are frequently thought about. Those of us who concertize go into a community for a few days, meet charming, generous people and quickly depart. Rarely can we feel that we have repaid their generous hospitality. Life is made up of happy meetings, but it is also made up of bitter-sweet partings.

There are also those whom we shall never see again on earth. Are we morbid in remembering them at our holiday tables? Charles Dickens long ago said that we should banish no one from remembrance at Christmas, not even those who live in the halls of the Dead.

This Christmas, our little house-

hold will celebrate, if only in memory, the organists whose work has delighted and taught us so much and whose persons remain to us only in dreams. With love and affection, we summon the spirits of Henry B. Murtagh who wrote and published organ arrangements for all of us; of Dick Liebert, whose lovely compositions "Come Dance with Me" and "Under Christmas Mistletoe" make the world lovelier; Arthur Gutow, who taught us to register tastefully and to play for movies beautifully; Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Crawford, who brought popular solo work to its highest point; Albert Hay Malotte, a fine all-around theatre organist and composer of "The Lord's Prayer." We shall salute Don Miller, Con Maffie, Jack Ward, Preston Sellers, Ambrose Larsen, Eddie Dunstedter, Dessa Byrd, Fred Feibel, and Pearl White. There will be others. Rummaging through our scrapbooks and record collections, we shall see and hear these fine players again. To their ghosts we shall say "Welcome!" There will be room for them in our hearts, even if they cannot come to our hearths in this happy, solemn time. □

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON THE TECHNICAL SIDE

by Lance Johnson

Q. Can you or your readers suggest a technique for repainting the brass Wurlitzer Nameplates, and do you know how the Wurlitzer factory did it? It seems very impractical (and imperfect) to use a brush, yet other methods I have tried fail because it is hard to remove the excess paint from the surface of the plate.

A. From Bob Arndt, at Arndt Organ Supply, comes this informa-

tion: Take the old paint out of the engraving completely. Using colored lacquers, brush in the letters and do not smear over the engraving any more than necessary. After the lacquer is completely dry, take a sheet of no. 499 wet or dry sandpaper and attach it to a rubber sanding block (the type sold in hardware and paint stores) and sand the surface of the plate. Finish off with no. 600 and spray with clear lacquer to prevent tarnishing.

Q. I have a Wurlitzer Model B theatre organ (four ranks on one chest) to which I am adding four ranks of Wurlitzer pipes on single Marr & Colton unit and off-note chests. The lowest twelve pipes of each rank will be winded from two separate regulators without tremulant. On the regulators to have the tremulant, the wind goes through a larger conductor to a manifold box and from there branches out in smaller conductors to the various single unit and off-note chests. I would like to use the electronic tremulants with the valve dump boxes on

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