

The closer was a spirited "Slaughter on 10th Avenue," Richard Rodgers' symphonic flirtation with '30s gangsters in semi-ballet style. Then George announced his innovation. In celebration of his 4th year of concerts at "San Gabe," he would offer a re-creation of the type of organ-poetry broadcast he used to do over radio KFRC, San Francisco, playing the station's 18-rank hybrid organ, with romantic readings by Howard Culver — after a brief intermission.

George told us beforehand that he had no idea how many in his full house concert audience would return for the experiment — perhaps 10, 20 or 30 people.

When George returned to the stage with Howard Culver, he faced a practically full house. Culver sat at a small table, equipped with a lamp and microphone. The stage and booth lighting, which had been outstanding in helping to establish moods throughout the evening, illuminated Culver only while he was speaking.

"The Imaginary Broadcasting Company brings you The Hour Before Tomorrow, featuring George Wright at the organ" intoned the voice in mellifluous tones. George soloed such nocturnal selections as "Down By the River," "Midnight Bells," "In the Still of the Night," "Over the Rainbow" and "When Day Is Done."

Culver's words were voiced in romantic tones — "words to smooch by." He included the words to a couple of the tunes — "Night and Day" and "When You Wish Upon a Star" but was most effective during such poems as "The Instrument" by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Yet his most interesting reading was from *Through the Looking-Glass* during which he used those same romantic innuendos to underline the nonsense of the Jabberwock. 'Twas brillig. Even frabjous!

The audience sat there spellbound in complete silence, except for a few chuckles during the *Looking Glass* passages. The half hour wedding of voice and organ was over all too soon as Culver "signed off" while George underscored with "Goodnight Sweetheart." Suddenly the hypnotic spell was over and the audience made its way to the parking lot but with vivid memories of a George Wright concert which more than "hit the spot." □

At Boston Church

UNUSUAL PLAYER ORGAN

by Dr. John Landon

It was an eerie experience — a cold March night, sitting in almost total darkness amidst the faded gothic grandeur of Boston's Church of the Covenant and hearing the 4/60 Welte-Tripp pipe organ playing by itself. Unseen ghostly fingers from virtuoso organists, now dead, brought forth from the organ sounds that are all but forgotten today by the listening public. The performances were stunning, every nuance of expression, the changes of registration, the opening and closing of the swell shutters, it was as if the dead had been brought back to life.

The Welte Company was but one of the many firms engaged in the manufacture of automatic roll-playing pipe organs. Although many were remarkably good at reproducing the artists' work, the Welte received the most prestigious endorsement of the world's most highly-esteemed musicians. The Welte Reproducing Organ Player was first exhibited at the Turin Exposition in 1910. It was widely-acclaimed and led to the assembling of a roster of talent unequalled by any other company. This impressive list of organists included Bonnet, Gigout, Dupre, Henry Goss-Custard, Lynwood Farnum, Edwin A. Lemare, T. Tertius Noble, Max Reger, Clarence Eddy and Samuel Baldwin. The artists journeyed to Freiburg, Germany, or New York to make organ rolls. Eddy and Baldwin left an additional mark upon history, having helped in the founding of the American Guild of Organists.

Welte eventually assembled a library of more than 1,000 rolls, some of which played up to 15 numbers.

Selections were geared to the tastes of residence organ owners and included orchestral transcriptions, operatic selections, salon music and standard classical organ works. Artists of impeccable credentials were attracted to the Welte Company because its reproduction of their work offered them life-like immortality.

The chief limitation of the reproducing pipe organ was that at \$10-15,000 only the wealthy and near-wealthy could afford them. With the passing of time many of these instruments have gone into oblivion, unappreciated for art's sake or for the remarkable technology which they represent. A few have been rescued by private enthusiasts. In the case of the Welte in Boston's Church of the Covenant, two dedicated organ craftsmen have spent untold man-hours in an ultimate labor of love, connecting a Welte reproducing player to the Church's 1929 Welte-Tripp organ, an organ which remains virtually the same as it was when it was dedicated 51 years ago. This organ was the last completed by the Welte Company before it sank into bankruptcy.

Ken Clark, an expert on player mechanisms, located the Welte reproducing player in 1970. He began looking for a church in which he might install the player, once restored, where sufficient tonal resources could be found to fit the builder's intentions and adequately reproduce the rolls of the masters. He located Boston's Church of the Covenant through Nelson Barden, restorer and rebuilders of pipe organs, who had done considerable work on this instrument over the

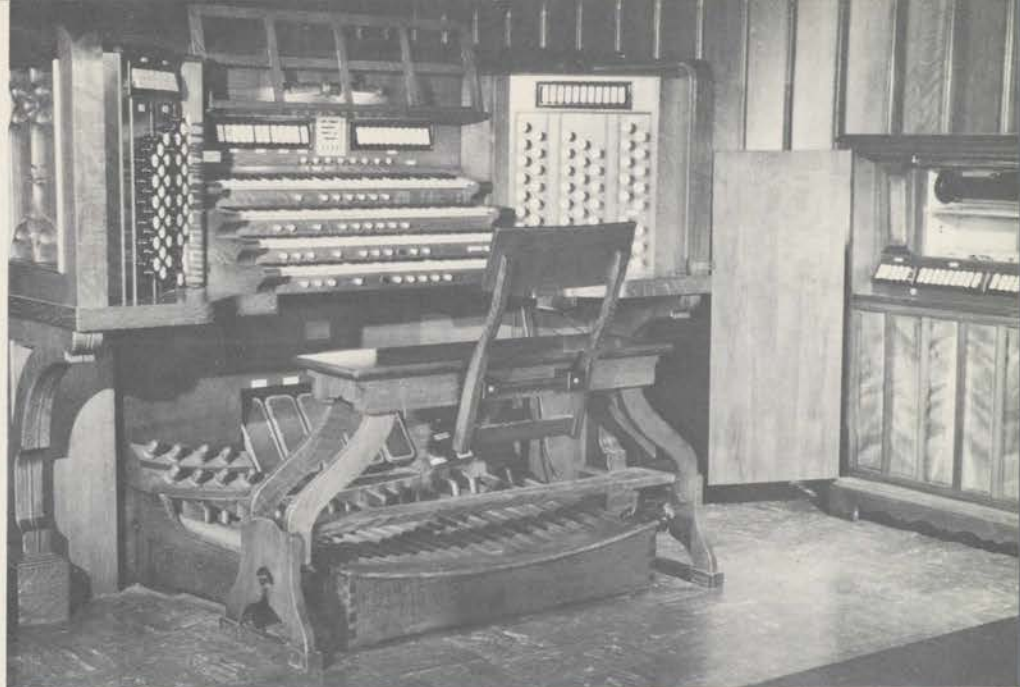
years. With approval of church officials the player mechanism was installed and dedicated in 1973. The remarkable recital of organ rolls moved the *Christian Science Monitor* to report that the performance was, "a dazzling virtuosic account, an astounding demonstration of what player rolls could encompass."*

While it is true that the style of performance of these rolls is not the one currently in vogue, they are well worthy of a hearing. Very expressive and even flamboyant, they reflect the personalities of the artists themselves and the prevailing musical tastes of the time in which they were made. But Kenneth Clark and Nelson Barden have rendered an inestimable service to present and future generations by preserving an organ and reproducing player in surroundings where it can be heard and appreciated as intended. The ample, soaring height of the Church of the Covenant provides a properly spacious and reverberant setting in which to hear these virtuoso performances.

Using the highest standards of stereo sound recording they have issued two stereo cassettes which provide a tantalizing sample of their library of rolls. Few of these great organists made phonograph records and the performances of those who did were severely limited by the phonograph recording and reproducing machinery available decades ago. But via these cassettes you can hear organ performances from 50 or 60 years ago reproduced in the highest of high fidelity and realism.

These cassettes are not of theatre organ music, but no lover of pipe organs, theatre or otherwise, can afford to be without them. You haven't lived until you've heard H. Goss Custard's rendition of "The Storm," or Edwin H. Lemare playing Saint-Saens' "Dance Macabre." If public response is sufficient Clark and Barden hope to issue more cassettes and perhaps higher quality records. After a lifetime of collecting phonograph records of the past (my own collection now exceeds 10,000 discs) I can truthfully say that there is nothing in my collection that remotely rivals these cassettes. □

*Nelson Barden, "Notes for the Program of the American Guild of Organists, Boston, Mass. 1976."



Console of the 4/60 Welte-Tripp pipe organ installed in Boston's Church of the Covenant in 1929. It was the company's last installation. The Welte player mechanism (right) was installed in 1973.

The Welte Reproducing Organ Player offered artists life-like immortality. Unfortunately, it was beyond the means of all but the wealthy.

