

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

by Gary Konas

While listening to your favorite theatre pipe organ album, have you ever wondered how it came into being, i.e., how it was produced? I wondered too, until I produced my own first album (*Gary Konas . . . On Broadway!*). I'd like to share my experiences and take you along the path I trod to explain the fascinating, though poorly understood, process of small-scale record production.

A dizzying number of procedures confront us, and we must divide our attention among half a dozen companies we'll be dealing with. To simplify matters, let's break down the entire process into its component parts: recording, editing and mixdown, graphic art, jacket production, mastering, disc production, and distribution. By taking an active part in most of these procedures, the artist maintains creative control, helps keep costs down, and receives an education as the project advances from concept to reality.

Recording deserves top priority; without a good master tape we're doomed from the start. Fortunately, to record a pipe organ we can get by with a portable four-channel deck and a quartet of good borrowed microphones. We could spend several pages just discussing our experiences during recording; suffice it to say that after a total of 25 hours of taping — spread out over five days — we have at least one usable "take" for each of the fourteen numbers that will make up the album.

From well over a hundred takes we

must choose the ones to be used in compiling the master tape. Again, this choice is relatively easy for an organ recording, especially since we've decided against splicing together portions of different takes to make a composite. We simply select the best take of each song. While the original recording has four channels (corresponding to left front, left rear, right front, and right rear microphone placements), the stereo record will have only two channels. We use the four-channel deck to play back the takes, and a two-channel deck to record the master tape. A mixer connected between the two decks makes the four-to-two transformation, or "mixdown." The mixer blends the two left channels, in whatever proportions we choose, onto one left channel of the new master tape; at the same time a new right channel is created in an analogous manner. Plastic leader tape is spliced in between songs on the master; this blank tape provides pauses that will become the bands we see on the record. As a three-second pause between songs is customary, and the tape moves at fifteen inches per second, we splice in 45-inch lengths of leader.

By the time we've finished the recording and mixdown, we should be making substantial progress on producing the jacket to stay on schedule. Once we've gathered the photos and written the jacket notes, we need a graphic artist to convert this material into a printable form. The graphic artist has five basic tasks. First, he makes halftone negatives from black

and white photos. Halftones are one-color photos made up of tiny dots, such as pictures that appear in magazines. Second, he makes color separations from color photos. In a four-color separation four halftones are made, one each in the three primary colors and black; when the four are superimposed during printing they give the desired color image. Next, he composes jacket notes and larger lettering in appropriate type faces, arranges them as they will appear on the jacket, and leaves "windows" for later insertion of halftone negatives. He then makes "line shots" of the front and back of the jacket. (The line shot is a 12 inch by 12 inch negative transparency that the jacket producer will use to make plates for offset printing.) Finally, he mounts photo negatives into the windows on the line shots.

These line shots go to the jacket producer, who asks two questions. First, how many liners should he print?; then, how many jackets should he fabricate? (i.e., how many of the liners do we want pasted onto cardboard jackets). Now, what good are unfabricated liners? Well, if someday we decide to re-release the record, we've saved money by already having the liners, making a more expensive second printing unnecessary. If we never re-release the record, spare liners become cheap wallpaper for the egotistical organist.

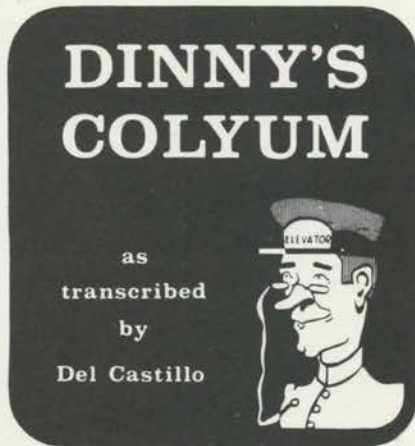
After placing our jacket order, we can concentrate on the disc. The two-channel tape we assembled during mixdown goes to a recording studio for mastering. In the studio, which contains a mind-boggling array of sophisticated equipment, the engineer puts our tape on a playback machine connected to a cutting lathe, which is the device that will actually make the master discs, or "lacquers." The term "cutting lathe" conveys an image of a monstrous, loud piece of heavy equipment. In fact, the lathe looks more like a turntable with an elaborate cartridge; it makes only a slight sucking noise as it rides over a lacquer blank, etching a grooved code of our music into the smooth black disc rotating at 33 1/3 rpm.

After getting the finished lacquers gently boxed, we carry them to yet another company, the one that will make the records. Our disc producer soaks the lacquers in a hardening bath for a few hours; he is then ready

to start making records. The first job is to create stampers — negative images of the lacquers that actually press vinyl blanks into records. In its most complex form, this process involves three steps: master to converted master, to mother, to stamper. Stampers wear out after about a thousand pressings; thus, to produce a large number of discs one makes several stampers from each mother, several mothers from each converted master, and so on, to get enough stampers from the original lacquers. For our relatively small order the producer makes only one or two pairs of stampers. However, he doesn't even want to make a thousand discs if we might refuse them because of poor quality. Therefore, he sends us a test pressing; he also includes a sample of the inner record labels for us to proofread and ap-

prove. After we send him our approval of disc and label, he is ready to carry out the final operations. Besides pressing the discs, our producer mounts the inner record labels, puts the records in dust sleeves, inserts them in jackets (delivered to him by the jacket producer), and poly-wraps the finished product. We arrive to load twenty cartons into our car, rather awed over all that has occurred in just six weeks.

At last we consider the question of how to distribute these records. I find most of my potential buyers through ads in THEATRE ORGAN and at my concerts. I have great hopes that I'll sell enough copies to encourage me to make a second one. The reason is simple: producing one's own record, though hard work, is a lot of fun. It's small-time show biz at its best. □



A couple of weeks ago I went to one of them Junior Simpany concerts like they have here in Los Angeles where they got so many kids wantin to be musicians. I dunno why, when you can be a plumber for 40 bucks an hour, but maybe now we got all that reaganomics unemployment like they say, why maybe they think they is as good a chancet playin music as fixin a leaky fosset, and you dont get so dirty neither. Well anyway they is fifty or sixty kids up there on the stage, most of them look like they was under 20, and they like to take your breath away they play so good. I got a real kick out of lissenin to em, and it says in the program that the most of them they got jobs in big simpany orchestras when they get older. And then it says that some of them get to be concert stars playin all by there selfs.

The feller who was the conductor

dint look much of any older but he certinly knew how to wave that stick around. Of course I dint get a good look at him until they got all through and he turns around to take a bow and he looked just about old enough to shave. Somehow it dont seem very polite the way a conductor always has his back to the audience, but I guess that is the only way to do it. Come to think of it they is only two kinds of performers that perform with there backs to the audience, that is conductors and organ players. Everybody else gets to show there faces when they play or sing or dance, even piano players get to sit sideways so you get to see what they look like. Of course nowadays its different when they is so many concerts on the TV and they have the cameras all around so they get close ups of the conductor and you get to see all the funny faces he makes. Singers is somethin else again, and everybody gets a good look at the way they screw there mouths around.

I seen a lot of performers on TV on account I like to lissen to music, and I come to the conclusion that all musicians when they play for the public why they cant help makin faces. I seen people playin the violin and the piano and the cello and all like that there and most all of them are screwin up there faces like they is in pain. So maybe it is a good thing that the organ players and the conductors dont have to turn around. For sure they would be screwin there

faces more than anybody because they have to untangle there feet as well as there hands and then they got all them stops to change and I guess you couldnt do all of that without your tongue helpin out.

But that aint all neither. On account the organ players dont get to look at the audience why they think they have to make up for it by bein entertainers between numbers. I seen a young feller give a organ concert awhile back and when he finish a number he got offen the bench and walked back and forth on a speshal platform talkin a mile a minute about all the concerts he give. And then on top of that he had two drummers who got in a lick on some of the numbers. Well, I dunno. I aint no critic to say he was rong, certinly the audience seemed to like it all right and he certinly played good and got a lot of applause. He switched off and played some of his peaces on the piano and he played them good too. So maybe I am just a old groutch to think I would rather have just a organ playing without all that extra stuff.

Organ players is all different just like everybody else. They is some who will just turn around and say For my next number I am goin to play a peace called Why Was I Born. Well I aint mean enough to say you was born to make people think you have fun playin the organ. We got some feature organ players who tell jokes good and play horse and get the audience to holler to them and clap and sing with the music which is what is called establishin a rapaport whatever that means. And then they is others who find interestin things to tell you about the numbers they is goin to play. And then the way they look, some of them dress up good, some of them look like they just come in from a picnic, and some of them dress very fancy with funny coats. And then like I say they is a few who just settle down and play and dont even smile and you lissen because they play good but you wish they would act like they was havin a good time.

So I guess it takes all kinds to make a world as they say, and they is room for everybody just so they turn out good music when they get on that there organ bench. And the only thing I really wish is that they dint think they had to dress up like the end man in a minstrel show. □