



Letters to the Editors

Letters concerning all aspects of the theatre organ hobby are welcome. Unless clearly marked "not for publication" letters may be published in whole or in part.

Address:
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Opinions expressed in this column are those of the correspondents, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors or the policies of ATOS or THEATRE ORGAN magazine.

Dear Mr. Gilbert:

My cup runneth over — what a marvelous convention in Detroit, and what a wonderful group of "green vest" workers. Everyone was helpful and kind.

The tape concerts arrived in record time. The chocolate logo on the cake at the banquet was unique, the centerpiece with treble clef in the center for the meeting was adorable.

The boat trip, museum, Meadow Brook, instruments and theatres, but especially the music will always be a cherished memory. My music room "sings" with the sounds of the convention.

Thanks, Motor City.

Jane Billings
Los Angeles

Dear Sir:

Some time ago I wrote a letter to the editor which was published in THEATRE ORGAN, in which I explained why concert organists must request that there be no taping of their concerts. Apparently, judging by the letters in the March/April '82 issue, some members did not note the information I gave.

I feel that a letter, such as that written by Mr. Lyman Nellis, is a very unfair criticism of those concert artists who say "No tape recording." If the concert artist is a member of the Musicians' Union, he MUST say "No tape recording," or he will be violating union rules and will be subject to a stiff fine.

Personally, I don't feel that the typical hand-held portable tape recorder can hurt the concert artist's record sale, at least not to a great ex-

tent, as the sound quality of those recorders is so poor compared to professionally recorded music. BUT, the artist still has to say "No."

Please, stop blaming the artists and stop thinking they are trying to be "upstage" in their attitude. They are simply complying with union rules. Blame the union, not the artist.

Yours sincerely,
Harry J. Jenkins
San Diego

Gentlemen:

I was born in Switzerland in 1917, and have lived in Munich for a long time. In 1938 I got my first theatre organ disk with Sidney Torch at the console, and then was always going in search of more of these disks. Unfortunately, it was very hard then to get all the disks I wanted. My scanty stock of organ disks was demolished during the last war. Now, for four years I am happy to own 70 U.S. organ disks. For two years I have been a member of your ATOS, and I must tell you your journal, THEATRE ORGAN, is a magnificent magazine. I always read it from the first page to the last.

With the disk "Great Pipes" from the Marietta Wurlitzer I became acquainted with the producer of this disk, Bob Wilkinson in Laureldale, Pennsylvania. Our correspondence and exchange of organ tapes has evolved into a unique friendship. On June 11 of this year I accepted his invitation and visited Bob for three weeks. Bob arranged the fulfillment of my dreams to see and hear some of these fantastic organs in person. The summit of all was the incredible per-

mission to play these instruments myself.

So I must say thanks to Bob Wilkinson; to Harry Linn and Robert Dilworth of the Dickinson Theatre Organ Society in Wilmington; Mr. R. Hartenstine of Sunnybrook Ballroom in Pottstown, Pennsylvania; Mr. Jim Breneman of the Colonial Theatre in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania; and Mr. Bob Ney — Pianos and Organs in Reading, Pennsylvania. I was allowed to play all these organs and have had the feeling of living in a dream.

I have at home in Munich a Farfisa electronic organ, and all the time I am working to make this instrument like a theatre organ. I know it is impossible to get the mighty sound of a pipe organ and the exact voices of a theatre organ with an electronic, but I hope to get the wanted voices nearly the voices of pipes.

I congratulate you and your country to own so many of these fabulous theatre organs. Here in Germany you cannot find one such theatre organ. The concert organ of the broadcasting station "Norddeutscher Rundfunk," made by Welte, is more a church organ than a theatre organ.

Sincerely,
Werner Scheppach
West Germany

Dear Mr. Gilbert:

I have had an intense enthusiasm for the theatre organ for many, many years. The November/December '81 issue of THEATRE ORGAN has stirred me to offer some remarks and reminiscences. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have heard many fine organs and organists before the arrival of motion pictures with sound. Those were the days when good theatre organ music in attractive surroundings was not too far from anyone who lived in or near an urban area. Whether the location be New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, etc., one could leave a theatre with its beautiful organ and find another, and another, and another a short distance away. Or one could take a train or trolley into the suburbs where some "movie palace" with its "grande organ" would entertain the local patrons. The theatre in my town had a Mighty Wurlitzer with four ranks and a smashing toy counter.

In my early days my favorite was the New York City Paramount Theatre. Only one dollar was needed for

transportation to New York, the ticket to the theatre and two or three chocolate bars to enable me to enjoy eight to ten hours of organ music (translate, sheer delight). The picture — what picture? I couldn't identify by name who was accompanying the picture, but the difference in playing style was recognizable when another organist would take over his or her shift. The change was always done with the console out of sight, presumably at its lowest level to coordinate with the access door from under the stage. Often this was done with the retiring organist holding a chord and the relief organist holding the same chord briefly while getting set to play. Often too, the organist would play with no lights on the console, basing the music upon a combination of memory and improvisation.

My fondness for theatre organ resulted in my meeting many interesting individuals, some of whom were organists. Occasionally these associations ripened into valued friendships which continue to this day. After my wife and I moved into New York City in 1941, Dolph Goebel and his wife, Mary, became our friends. You can readily understand how pleased we are to see the reference to Dolph. The article by Lloyd E. Klos is excellent. Here is a complete report, abundantly supported by interesting photographs, documenting the musical life of Dolph. Individuals like Dolph represented an important segment of the history of theatre organ. For those who lived during that era, such articles should evoke memories. For those who have come upon the scene later, they should provide fascinating history. I look forward to similar articles to learn about organists whom I did not have the opportunity to meet.

Dolph Goebel was a rare individual, an unusual combination of engineer and musician. One might not expect a person who could construct a Goebeltone Speaker, ham radio and other electrical equipment, to possess the great feeling from which would flow delicate, melodic music. His style of playing suggested that he was master of the instrument and that he expected it to respond to his wishes. He always granted my request to play his Hammond or mine, and often would depart from the traditional melodic line to engage in rollicking improvisation. He was fun to be with.

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Despite our long association, I was unable to get any of his recordings, except one well-worn, scratchy disc which is played by starting the needle near the center and having it work its way toward the rim. I regret that records in even moderate quantities were not available to preserve the artistry of men like Goebel, Feibel, Parmentier and their peers. Even Crawford with his fame is remembered on only a few records. Presumably the lack of interest by the general public and deficiencies in recording technique at that time offered little or no incentive to the artist and the record companies to make records. Perhaps because the real thing could be experienced in the theatre just down the street.

An era is gone. In its stead we have the organs of today being played by organists, some of whom have remarkable talent. Back then there were no chapters of dedicated theatre organ enthusiasts where an individual could join with others and share a common interest. In 1927, '28, '29 and even as late as 1932 when the Radio City Music Hall opened, we did not realize that the theatre organ

was losing its specific purpose, and many fine instruments were losing their homes and sometimes their existence. For this reason it gives me a good feeling to be reminded by the articles and photographs in the ATOS Journal that some of these magnificent instruments are being preserved, to participate vicariously in the activities of the various chapters via their reports, and to realize that we have available to us a fine magazine which makes all this possible.

Sincerely,
Stanley Warzala
Wayne, NJ

Dear Sir:

From time to time I read of celebrities in many walks of life who have been silent movie pianists or organists when very young. I was once told that Virgil Fox's father owned a movie house and he played there as a teenager. It was said that Elsa Maxwell played silent movies in her youth. I will now haunt the libraries to see if I can find any more on it.

"This is the luxury of music. It touches every key of memory and stirs all the hidden springs of sorrow and joy. I love it for what it makes me forget and for what it makes me remember.

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Sincerely,
Esther S. Higgins
Collingswood, NJ



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Dear Editor:

Mr. Charles F. Harrison (Letters, Nov./Dec. '81) had some good points about recording at concerts, but he missed some points on which I would like to comment:

1. True, there will be background noise; also true you cannot beat a first-class professional recording. However, most of us are trying to get a complete recording of a memorable event, so that later, in the quiet of our home, we can relive it as it was. During a convention you hear so much in a short time that you find your impressions much more accurate when you can listen to it all again at home without pressure.

2. Most portable recorders, unless you are fidgeting with more elaborate equipment, are very simple to handle and need very little adjustment. True again, some are most unwise in using the wrong type of cassette. As most concerts last about 90 minutes with an intermission half way, a 90 minute cassette is the best choice. It is foolish to try to continue in the second half with a bit of tape left on side 1; it should be turned over and ready to start. It is in the interest of the amateur recorder, as he would not lose a nice part of the music, or bother those around him with noise. Above all, one can use a pen flashlight to see, using it discreetly, and unwrap all cassettes ready for use. If it is necessary to flip a tape or do something a bit noisy, do it during applause when no one will hear you.

3. As for records, some rare ones were available (once the artist died) only because someone had made an amateur recording, and thus they became precious.

Real theatre organ fans will always buy the best records. At each convention I attended I bought over \$100 worth of records. Records are collector's items because they are permanent, have pictures of the artist and console, jacket notes, etc. However, they can also be over-rehearsed and lack the spontaneity heard at concerts, mistakes or not. They can even be disappointing and not necessarily the best of an artist, as a record is only a limited sampling of his regular playing.

4. Finally, I would compare records and amateur recording to post cards and personal pictures you get during a trip. You can rarely take pic-

tures as good as the best post cards, but your own pictures are what you really saw and lived during that trip.

You may buy an excellent record done some years ago, but your own recording is what you just heard, often realizing the artist you just heard is even more versatile and lively than expected and may be even greatly improved. We will often be so pleased that we will watch eagerly for new records from the artists we enjoyed most.

5. Finally, I doubt any of us would bother to carry all the paraphernalia and record if a good copy could be made available at a reasonable price, including some profit for the artists involved.

Mario Kent L'Espérance
Province de Québec □



SHORTCUTS TO CHORDS

There are several ways of dealing with an unfamiliar chord:

1. Skip it.
2. Substitute something that harmonizes reasonably well.
3. Take time to find the scale, and go from there.
4. Use a few shortcuts to find the chord in a hurry.

The first two alternatives are cop-outs; the third, though theoretically sound, takes too long when you need a chord *now*. That leaves us with using shortcuts.

Before using these shortcuts, you'll need two definitions: A *half step* moves from one key to the very next with no key in between (F to F#, A to Ab, B to C, F to E, for example). A *whole step* moves from one key to another with one key in between (F to G, D to C, Bb to Ab, Eb to F, for example). Now you're ready. To find any:

Major Chord

Root (the name of the chord) plus 4

half steps higher, plus 3 half steps higher (1 + 4 + 3).

Minor Chord

Root plus 3 half steps plus 4 half steps (1 + 3 + 4).

Augmented Chord

Root plus 4 half steps plus 4 more half steps (1 + 4 + 4). There are only four augmented chords because both intervals are the same (major thirds). They are: F A C#; F# A# D; G B D#; and G# C E. Change the pedal, and you change the chord. For example, F A C# can be F+, A+, or C+, depending on which pedal you play.

Diminished Chord

A true diminished chord consists of three keys — Root plus 3 plus 3 (1 + 3 + 3), but most musicians who play popular music add the sixth scale tone for body. So the chord now is 1 + 3 + 3 + 3. Again, because all the intervals are equal (minor thirds), there are only three diminished chords: F Ab B D; F# A C E; and G Bb Db E. All diminished chords are possible from these three, depending on the pedal tone.

Dominant Seventh Chords

Add one whole step below the root.

Major Seventh Chords

Add one half step below the root.

Ninth Chords

Two steps here. 1. Add one whole step below the root. 2. Raise the root one whole step and play the root in the pedal. (Example: A C chord in playing position is G C E. To make a C9, add the Bb, and play D instead of C. You now have G Bb D E. Be sure to play the C in the pedal.)

Major Ninth Chords

Same procedure as above, except add one half step below the root (instead of a whole step).

Whenever finding new chords, always remember to invert them to playing position. In other words, put the bottom note on top (or top on the bottom) until your chord fits between the two Fs around middle C. This will ensure smooth playing.

For additional drill and explanations on this chordal approach, see *Bradley's Chord Course for Organ* (Books 1 and 2) by Richard Bradley and *Organ-izing Popular Music* (Book 1) by Al Hermanns. □