

PORTRAIT OF CON MAFFIE

by Lloyd E. Klos

"One of the greatest ballad organists," is the accolade once conferred on Con Maffie by the one who was probably the greatest of them all, Jesse Crawford. The man had to be something special to receive such words of praise from the master.

Cornelius Michael Maffie was born in St. Louis on September 9, 1903. He came from a family with a very extensive musical background. His mother, Anne Sarli Maffie, was a harpist. An uncle, Antonio P. Sarli, played clarinet in the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, and later was in charge of music for Warner Bros. Louis Sarli was a violinist for the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra and later MGM Studios. Four other uncles were symphony artists. Cousin Joe Carione played for the St. Louis Symphony, and Al Sarli was a pianist.

With such a musical family, it is not surprising that Cornelius began lessons at five, and was a soloist with the St. Louis, Boston and Minneapolis symphonies when a teenager.

Upon moving to Chicago, he became a concert pianist at the Chicago Theatre, and began the study of organ under Arthur Dunham and Jesse Crawford. At this time, he dropped his given name, Cornelius, and adopted the professional, "Con."

His organ career began at small neighborhood theatres on Chicago's south side, and progressed into Indiana Harbor in 1927. From there, he moved to the Admiral, Roosevelt and Riviera theatres in Chicago. Then came travel on the Publix Circuit: Houston, Denver, Los Angeles and Omaha. He also served at the Paramount and Paradise theatres in New York City.

Con traveled the East Coast Loew's Circuit, including a stint as a singing

organist for several months at Loew's Rochester Theatre in 1937, playing a 5/24 Marr & Colton. According to Mrs. Maffie, "He was also doing radio work and making records. I have none of his recordings, but a few years ago, Con heard from a man in South Dakota who had a collection of his discs."

It was in 1938 that Con moved to California with his parents and son. His Hammond was sent by ship from New York to Los Angeles, via the Panama Canal. This electronic was his preference, and he played at all the radio studios. Among his shows were "The Life of Riley" with William Bendix, "Mayor of the Town" with Lionel Barrymore, "Passing Parade" with John Nesbitt, "Cresta Blanca" with Orson Welles, and "Michael Shayne, Private Detective" with Jeff

Chandler, to name a few.

Hall of Fame organist, John Muri, contributes his recollections of Mr. Maffie, who was a much-traveled organist as the foregoing attests.

"I met him in early 1927, when the manager of the Indiana Theatre in Indiana Harbor, introduced him. He was engaged to play solos and films in the evenings. I had played matinees there, beginning shortly after the theatre opened in 1925. Evenings, I played at the Hoosier Theatre in Whiting, Indiana, which was about four miles away. Maffie succeeded Ambrose Larsen at the Indiana.

"The two of us got along fairly well. Con was a good player and he made a very good appearance at the console. Both of us were about 20. Occasionally, we'd go out to dinner after I finished my session and before he began his. I remember how puzzled he was one evening when the waitress asked if he wanted a dessert of apple pie with rhubarb. Con couldn't understand why such a combination made sense. Anyway, we ate it and survived.

"One day, the Indiana's manager called me in and asked if I were interested in playing the evening sessions, rather than the matinees. He was very angry with Maffie who, as I learned later, was resigning to play the organ in Chicago's Admiral Theatre which was about to open. Con played his last shows at the Indiana on March 19, 1927. I took his shift the next day

Con at the console of the 4/23 Robert-Morton "Wonder Organ" in Loew's Paradise Theatre, New York. (Maffie collection)





Con goes over the score with noted actor, Lionel Barrymore, for a "Mayor of the Town" radio show. (Maffie collection)

and never saw him again. Following his departure, he played a long series of good jobs throughout the country.

"Incidentally, I played matinees during the few months that Ambrose Larsen (a big name in those days) drove out from Chicago to play the evening shows. Those were the days when we didn't call ourselves 'resident organists.' We didn't need to; we were on the job day in and day out, year in and year out. You almost had to live in the theatre. When I was evening soloist at the Indiana, I had an apartment in the theatre building. Many a time have I slept in theatre balconies on stormy nights!"

A musician who knew Con quite well is Eugene LePique. "Like Con, I, too, was born in St. Louis. The first time we met was when we were piano students of the great Ottmar A. Moll, who was a pupil of Theodore Leschetizky in Europe.

"I was a few years older than Con, and was playing professional piano in theatres while he was still a student at Soldan High School. He used to hang around St. Louis' Grand Central Theatre where I was pianist.

"A couple years later, he became an organ student of Charles Galloway, the dean of St. Louis organists, and who had been an outstanding student of Guilman in Paris. Con and I lost track of each other when I took off for New York City, and he went to Chicago for Balaban & Katz.

"Many years later, when I was es-

tablished in Hollywood as a radio pianist and organist, Connie showed up. His theatre organ days were over, and he got into the radio field. An aggressive guy, he got in with Art Linkletter and the job on the General Electric "House Party" show, whose theme he had written.

"He asked me to work with him and we formed a two-piano team with occasional use of a Hammond. Con did the writing, including accompaniments for vocalists. While doing this show, he worked diligently in real estate. His mother was already estab-

Con at home, seated at his Hammond. At this time, he was working several notable radio and TV shows.

(Maffie collection)



lished in that field and they built several apartments in North Hollywood.

"While returning to Los Angeles on the Santa Fe's 'Chief' from Chicago and a 12-week tour of the larger eastern cities, Con met Elaine (now his widow) on the train. She was enroute to her sister and brother-in-law in Santa Monica. Con and Elaine were married in January 1947 and had two sons. He had a son, Con, Jr., by his first wife, Eleanor, who was his high school sweetheart.

"After the Linkletter show terminated (for us), he eventually went to San Diego, where he built a large and quite elaborate house in the Torrey Pines area.

"For some peculiar reason, Con would never turn in his address for the Local 47 Directory, so he was always difficult to reach. I truly regret my inability to supply any more information than the foregoing, and I have no pictures of him."

In 1951, Con retired from music in order to better manage family investments which were gathered under "Cornelius Maffie Properties." After his mother's death, the family moved to Palm Springs, and Con began to play publicly again.

He became a church organist for Catholic and Religious Science services, was a teacher of organ, and had an evening radio program for DeBellis Music Store in San Bernardino. The broadcast was carried over the Palm Springs station, taped directly in his living room.

In 1969, the family moved again, this time to Phoenix, Arizona, for a three-year stay, and he played church services there. From Phoenix the Maffie family returned to California, this time to La Jolla, where he continued playing for a local church.

Mrs. Maffie says that for 15 years, they spent several months a year in Honolulu. "He gave concerts at the Thayer Music Co. for the Organ Club of Honolulu, and for the Religious Science Church. In 1974, while in charge of music at the church conference in Asilomar, California, he suffered his first heart attack. With his

health deteriorating, he was unable to continue his professional career. However, he was playing and taping the day before his final attack, which occurred on July 22, 1977 at La Jolla. Ours was a whirlwind romance which lasted over 30 years."

Con Maffie was survived by his wife, Elaine, two sons, Michael and James, and a son by a previous marriage, Cornelius, Jr.

(Editor's Note: We thank Mrs. Elaine Maffie, John Muri and Eugene LePique for the information they supplied. Without it, there would have been no feature.) □

on which your chord is built. There are exceptions, but that basic pattern is essential.) When attempting any new rhythm, always rehearse the left hand and pedal together until fluent before adding the melody.

Now let us begin our study of rhythms with the waltz — 3/4 time signature. The basic waltz rhythm requires you to play the root of the chord as the pedal on count 1 of each measure. Strike the chord crisply on counts 2 and 3. Repeat this pattern every measure, alternating pedals. By the time you perfect this simple waltz rhythm, you will most likely be bored with it. Here are some easy useful variations. In the examples, p = Pedal, c = Chord, --- indicates Hold and . = Staccato.

1	2	3	1	2	3
		C---			C
P			P	P	

1	2	3	1	2	3
		C---			C-----
P	P		P	P	

The following variations are a bit more challenging to fit against a melody:

1	&	2	&	3	&
C	C	C		C	
P					

(Viennese Waltz)

1	&	2	&	3	&
		C		C	
P					

(Spanish Waltz)

1	&	2	&	3	&
		C---		C	C
P				P	

(Easy Jazz Waltz)

1	&	2	&	3	&
		C		C	
P				P	

(Jazz Waltz)

1	&	2	&	3	&
		C		C---	
P				P	

As you can see, there are many variations of a simple waltz pattern at your disposal. There is no reason to think of waltzes only as beginner's material. Experiment with these ideas to enhance your favorite waltz. In the next issue, we will continue our study of rhythm with 4/4 and Latin variations. □

KEYBOARD TECHNIQUES



by Cheryl Seppala



RHYTHMS

We began our study of theatre organ styles with great emphasis on the importance of developing a smooth, legato technique. The styles of blocking, open harmony and chromatic glissandos rely heavily on your commitment to improving your technique through constant awareness and practice of good fingering and finger substitution.

It was recommended that you use these abilities on slow, melodic selections. But, let's be practical! Not every tune is meant to be played as a dreamy ballad. To be versatile in your interpretations you must learn to play a variety of rhythmic accompaniments. Although nearly all electronic organs now come complete with sophisticated rhythm units and automatic accompaniment patterns, we will assume your approach is the old-fashioned way — do it yourself!

Let's define a rhythmic organ accompaniment as any combination or alternation of pedals and chords

which count out to the given number of beats per measure. This may seem like over-simplification. But, how easy it is to fall into the rut of seeing the 3/4 time signature, saying to ourselves pedal-chord-chord, and proceeding to chop our way through the entire selection with that monotonous drone.

Before we analyze specific rhythms and variations, let's lay some ground rules on general rhythm technique. First of all, rhythms cannot be accomplished with legato chords and pedals. Now is your chance to loosen up that left hand and foot. Learn to tap your pedals and chords lightly and staccato. Realize that it will take practice to be able to play your left hand and pedal staccato and keep your right hand melody legato. Strive to find your pedals only by feel — you don't have time to look down. Memorize all your alternating pedals. (To find the alternate pedal to go with the root of any chord, use the fifth of that scale