

# ENGLISH CONSOLE STARS

## No. 1: John Madin

... *Ralph Bartlett*

“A WAND’RING MINSTREL heralds John Madin, who is playing for us for the next half an hour, at the organ of the Granada, Tooting. He commences his programme with . . .” This is not an unusual announcement, as many English listeners know, for a theatre organ transmission on the B.B.C. But how many of you American organ enthusiasts know of John Madin, whom I imagine must be among the top ten console favourites in England?

John is a native of Chesterfield, famous for its twisted Church spire, and maybe even for its football team. His organ career started at the Parish Church, and a little later he was to be found at Newbold in Derbyshire. He became an organ pupil of the late G. D. Cunningham, who was famous for many years as the organist at Birmingham Town Hall, and gained a college diploma for solo organ playing at the Trinity College, London.

His first cinema appointment was the Gaumont-British at Sheffield, from where he moved to the new Gaumont Palace, Coventry, at which theatre he stayed five years, and gave his first broadcast in May, 1934. In 1936 he came South to London, and was for almost two years at the Gaumont Palace, Hammersmith, during which time he gave his first theatre organ broadcast on the old B.B.C. Compton organ, in 1937.

In the middle of 1938, John Madin joined Granada Theatres, and until he entered the R.A.F. was kept busy touring the circuit, and looking for new angles to present the organ. Returning to the company from the Services in 1945, he set out to present an organ show that was different. One idea was his very successful Chinese show under the guise of “Nidam Noj.” He appeared in oriental garb, complete with pigtail, and the music specially composed by “Noj” was much sought after by a well known oriental act.

Mention must also be made of two other ideas—“Madin Goes West” and “Madin Rides Again”—which were completely Western, and aroused great comment both at Head Office and among organ enthusiasts, and resulted in his being known, for a long time, as “Buck Madin”! Later John started presenting “Housewives Choice,” named after a B.B.C. daily record request programme, complete with a recorded introduction by Bryan Michie, one of the regular disc-jockeys, and it is a fact that at Mansfield over 500 requests were received in one week alone.

In other special shows he has appeared as a “Funfair Clown” (with balloons floating from the console) and even as his own Grandfather, plus whiskers and bent walking stick! Admittedly, this is not everyone’s idea of organ presentation, but if it is a means of attracting an indifferent audience to the organ, then it seems well worth while. Of recent times, John has been presenting a show called “Melody and Mime,” with melody by Doreen Lesley, and mime by a young fellow named Dennis Stuart. Mention should also be made of “Sandy” (no relation to Mr. Maeperson), who is purely John’s pet dog, and usually gives a pedal solo, plus a go at “singing” to the accompaniment of the organ and Clavioline. Needless to say, “Sandy” is a great favourite with the younger generation—so much so that during the Coronation celebrations he was invited to open a Children’s Tea Party! John also went along, but merely to lend moral support!

Coming to the Clavioline, John has been touring the circuit with this electronic keyboard for the past three or four years, finding that it gives added tonal quality and tone color to what are sometimes rather small organs; one must bear in mind that with the exception of Tooting and Walthamstow, which are 4-14 and 3-12 respectively, the Granada organs range from 5 to 10 ranks.

Every year at the Granada, Tooting, American variety and film stars appear in Sunday Celebrity concerts, and each time John has been at the Wurlitzer to help them along, whilst the orchestra has a breather. Stars who have appeared at this famous theatre include The Andrews Sisters, Frankie Laine, the late Carmen Miranda, Betty Hutton, Guy Mitchell, Martha Raye, Danny Kaye, and Johnny Ray. Danny Kaye was the only one taken for a ride on the console, whilst Johnny Ray had a “bash” at the manuals. With the introduction of Commercial Television to Britain, and the Granada group as an operator, it is possible that there may be occasion for organ spots by John Madin and the other players of the circuit. Meanwhile, he has already appeared on B.B.C. Television with an electronic organ.

A great believer in touring (hence his signature tune “A Wand’ring Minstrel”) John has visited several countries, including Finland, where a friend asked him to play “God Save the Queen” in the State National Church, and he was the first British theatre organist to broadcast from Helsinki, on a Hammond. He has made two trips on the “Queen Mary” as Hammond organist on the run to New York and back, when he tried to cover as many places as possible during the twenty-four hour turn round in New York, even managing to return with an accent slightly flavoured with American twang!

Last year saw John Madin become a hi-fi enthusiast possibly because of the B.B.C. commencing FM Transmissions, and partly, perhaps, so that he can listen with a critical ear to himself and his fellow organists on disc. One wonders whether he also plans to record his own broadcasts and play them back through his equipment, which I am given to understand is among the best in the country. During the latter part of 1955, John made his first LP record on the Tooting organ, for “Ventures in Sound,” and by the time these words appear in print it will doubtless have been released in the States.

But despite his ability as a theatre organist, John Madin’s first love is still the Church organ, and he enjoys giving recitals when the opportunity arises. One which gave him particular pleasure was at St. Stephen’s, Walbrook, a famous Wren Church. He is honorary organist for a school, and a willing deputy for any local Church in need of an organist.

Oh yes! Hobbies. Touring around with his Hillman car, squash in the winter, and swimming in the summer. But believe it or believe it not, he also likes Chinese Patience! An ambition? John often wishes that organists could be exchanged so that, say, English organists could interchange with their colleagues in Holland, France, Denmark, Canada, and the United States. He feels that in this way, not only would the popularity of the theatre organ be greatly helped, but also that it would help to create a more friendly atmosphere among the musicians, and even, perhaps, amongst the peoples of the world.