



Reginald Dixon

time he was broadcasting on the BBC up to eight half-hour programs a week (what a wealth of material he must have covered) and he remains the world's most prolific recording organist.

He was born in Sheffield, Yorkshire, in 1904 and took piano lessons quite early in life. He taught himself to play the organ at Birley Carr Methodist Church in his home town, but his first job was as a pianist for the silent movies in an industrial town in England's midlands. While appearing at Preston he met Vera, his future wife, and popped the question to her while sitting in the balcony of the Tower Ballroom, long before he had any thoughts of playing there.

While at the Preston theatre he heard that the Tower company was looking for an organist to play for dancing, and even though he had no experience in this kind of playing, he applied. To his surprise he was appointed and commenced his duties in 1930. By 1932 he was already recording and broadcasting with some regularity, and by 1934 it was decided to replace the 2/10 Wurlitzer with an instrument more suited to Reg's ability and fame, so the 3/13 Wurlitzer was installed, which became world famous as Dixon captured the hearts of the English with his infectious rhythm playing.

His white suit, two-tone shoes and pencil-slim moustache were copied by countless young men of the day. In a much publicized newspaper poll he supplanted Gracie Fields as England's most popular entertainer. At the peak of his popularity in 1939 he volunteered for the RAF and was ab-

sent from Blackpool until 1945, during which time "Squadron Leader Dixon and his melody sextet" entertained the troops from "somewhere in England" until he put his foot down and insisted on active service.

In 1945 he returned to Blackpool, nervously wondering if his public would still want him. He need not have worried. His popularity was as great as before, so much so that Queen Elizabeth awarded him the M.B.E. He continued broadcasting, recording and playing for dancing until his retirement from the Tower in 1970. His final performance was broadcast in its entirety on the BBC and at its conclusion he received a 20-minute standing ovation, with many people openly weeping. It was described in the press as "the end of an era."

Dixon continued playing, however, and toured England giving concerts wherever there were pipe organs, or

touring his own electronic organ. The BBC installed a 3/13 Wurlitzer (formerly in the Empress Ballroom, Blackpool, whose nucleus was the original Tower 2/10) in the Playhouse Theatre, Manchester, so that he could continue to broadcast regularly. His final concert performance took place in the City Hall of his home town in 1978 and he then returned to his bungalow on the outskirts of Blackpool.

He will be fondly remembered, not only for his music and recordings, but also for the profound effect he had on the lives of quite a few young musicians, many of whom became professional organists solely as a result of his example and inspiration. He always had time to reply to fan letters or spend time with his fans, and continued to correspond with the writer and offer encouragement right up to this year. He leaves a void which can never be filled.

DON THOMPSON □

KEYBOARD TECHNIQUES



by Cheryl Seppala



COUNTER MELODY

After you have become acquainted with the vast variety of rhythm patterns available to complement your favorite melodies, you may wish to add a left-hand counter-melody to further enhance your arrangement.

Let us simply define a left-hand counter-melody as holding down any note of a chord while playing a rhythmic accompaniment around it. A counter-melody improves the sound of a rhythmic accompaniment by eliminating the choppy, monotonous effect, while adding pretty harmony.

The first step in learning to play a

counter-melody is to develop the ability to sustain one finger while tapping the other fingers around it. We will call this finger independence. As a preparatory independence exercise, play a four-note chord with the left hand in this manner: Press the lowest note of the chord down firmly, then tap the remaining keys in the chord lightly and staccato. If you are performing this correctly, the counter-melody note predominates the others. Repeat this procedure using the top note of the chord as the counter-melody. Finally, try this exercise using one

of the middle notes of the chord as the counter-melody. Sustaining a middle note while tapping around it is a very difficult technique, but can certainly be mastered with some careful practice.

Once your fingers have developed the ability to sustain any note as a counter-melody, you then must learn to select which note will sound the best to use. Many times there will be more than one good choice — trust your ear to decide what is most pleasing. The following ideas will help you get started in selecting a pretty counter-melody.

1. Select a note out of the chord that sounds best against the melody. Often it sounds good to select a counter-melody note the distance of a third or a sixth away from the melody.
2. Do not duplicate the melody as the counter-melody. This does not create harmony.
3. Try to form a direction or line to the counter-melody by keeping it moving in the same direction for

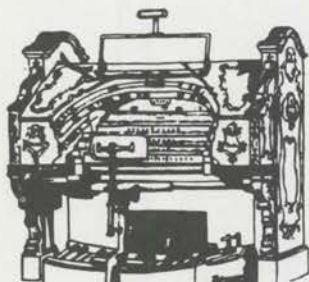
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4. Try to use the "distinctive" note in a chord as the counter-melody. For example, if the chords are F to F minor to C, select A (the third of the F chord) to Ab (the "distinctive" note that moved, in this case the minor) to G (the fifth of the C chord, and the note that completes the simple chromatic pattern of A-Ab-G).

A beautiful counter-melody can make an otherwise amateurish, boring, choppy piece into a flowing, interesting and well-studied arrangement. It is one more technique you can develop to make your playing more professional. There are many reference books and theatre organ arrangements available for more in-depth study of this subject. It is a skill well worth the effort to develop. □



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