

COFFEE BEANS AND ORGAN MUSIC...

An interesting and enlightening exposition of why the theatre organ has an appeal that makes it need only to be heard to be loved.

Betty Donath

ONCE WHEN I WAS IN an English composition class at the university I was asked to write a theme which would describe the fragrance of coffee. I was stumped. I wasn't a coffee drinker, but the fragrance of coffee had always intrigued me. I considered it utterly tantalizing and wanted to say so. But "intriguing" and "tantalizing" are only two words and the assignment called for over a hundred words. I went to my advisor who had offered to help me whenever I got stuck on something. He was a psychologist and his approach was definitely clinical. He got out an encyclopedia, and a dictionary, and helped me gather some pertinent data. Between us we concocted the most scientific article on coffee and the coffee bean that has probably ever hit the university English department. And I got an "F" on the composition. After all, a learned discussion on the coffee bean can't possibly describe the fragrance of coffee, which, for most people, has the power to conjure up memories and hopes and dreams of both the past and the future in a single waft from a steaming cup.

So when I was asked to write a few hundred words on how organ music affects me — a lay person — I felt the same frustrated feeling. How can I possibly put into words — to say nothing of a few hundred words — how wonderful I feel when I listen to the organ. I can say "stimulated," and "relaxed," and "inspired," and perhaps find a few other adjectives that might express some of my reactions to organ music, but I find words totally inadequate.

Organ music does something to me and for me. If I were of the teen-age group, I would say it "sends me." It makes me think BIG — gives me a perspective. It carries me into far horizons and distant places. It curls my toes!

I have never known organ music to depress me; it always gives me a lift. But I must admit that I do have preferences in the type of music I want to listen to. I like to have my toes curled, so I like mighty billows and deep-toned chords and soul-stirring themes and earth-shaking crescendos and arpeggios.

But on the other hand, I also like the quiet graciousness which is so expressible on an organ console, the fairy-like tones that can be produced, and the foot-tapping rhythms of the popular songs that make me want to dance. (I guess I like organ music, period!)

I don't know how it's possible, but I can feel both relaxed and stimulated, inspired ethereally and able to plan mundanely, when I listen to organ music. Curled up in a comfortable chair with my shoes off and little or no light, I am relaxed as a kitten, and it is then that I feel ready to look at my immediate problems with an objective eye and to do something about them. Somehow, they don't seem nearly as big as they did as I listen to the grand music rolling from the console. And after my problems are resolved — at least for the time being — I am ready to do some planning. Perhaps the plans will be long-

range, about my work or my home, or they may be short-range, such as the week's menus or what I should wear the next day.

How is it possible, too, to hear every note (and I'm quite sure that I do) and yet not hear themes as such, or rhythm patterns, or chord progressions (although I am conscious of them all in an unconscious way!), or all of the things that I have been taught to listen to, and for, in my music appreciation courses.

I don't know the answers to any of the above — I just know that that's the way organ music affects me.

When I listen to the organ I hear things that I never hear through any other medium; I feel things that I never feel through any other medium. Perhaps that is because the organ combines some of the best and most interesting features of these other media — the voice, the piano, the violin, the brass, the woodwinds — and that after listening to the organ any single voice or instrument seems too THIN. From the deep, deep tones of the instrument to the high delicate tones, the organ has that quality or production that makes my heart soar. The music it produces has many facets — it can be exotic, exquisite, shattering, delicate, light-hearted, soul-searching, dignified, lackadaisical, energetic, heavenly, earthy — a music of contrasts, an instrument of contrasts.

I think the latter is why I like organ music so much — and why it has such an effect on me — I like contrasts and the organ meets this multi-purpose need of my personality. (I wonder if I have done any better on my composition about the organ than I did in my composition about coffee!)

NOTICE TO A.T.O.E. MEMBERS

There will be a meeting of A.T.O.E. for the purpose of electing officers, and for such other business as properly may come before it, on Saturday night, September 27th, 1958, at 8:00 p.m. This meeting will be held at Joe Chadbourne's barn, west of Fairfield, California.

Richard S. Simonton
President

For those who do not already know the way, Joe Chadbourne's ranch is reached by traveling highway 40 to the road, known as Russell Road, crossing the highway about one mile south of the traffic light at the Fairfield crossroad, about 13 miles north of Vallejo. Follow Russell Road to its end, four-tenths of a mile to the GI packing shed, turn left on that corner and proceed north one-half mile. Chadbourne's is the fourth house on the left after passing the packing shed and will be identified the night of the meeting.