

Thoughts About The 1989 Young Organist Competition

It seems as if our committee's decisions to elect Russell Holmes, John Cook, and Barry Baker have met general approval. I have received no complaint, although I didn't expect any. The winners played well, were always courteous and gentlemanly, and brought credit to their sponsors, teachers, families and friends. I am especially happy with the winners because they exemplified musical characteristics that I like: restraint in registration and dynamics. I like the pedal work of all three, for they were sparing in their use of those muddy old sixteen-foot bourdons, and not one of them was hooked in addition to snarling posthorns that make more noise than music. We had evidence at the Convention that they were competent to play everything to which they professed in their tapes; there could have been no tape-doctoring or double-recording. I had a talk with Russell Holmes about his training and was pleased to find him able to indicate some knowledge of harmony as we talked about triad-inversions, seventh and ninth chords.

Something should be said about music-contest judging. As musicians, we have lasting opinions about composers, compositions, and styles. At such times our prejudices, along with our dislikes of performers and personalities, are showing. For hundreds and perhaps thousands of years musicians have been envious of each other. The famous German critic of the latter half of the nineteenth century, Eduard Hanslick, often thought that the music of Richard Wagner was tasteless and long-winded. In 1881 he reviewed the first performance of Tchaikowski's Violin Concerto, of which he said in effect, "Normally we smell through out noses, but here is music that stinks in our ears." Happily, nothing stank in my ears at the Convention, although the rock-and-rollers are trying hard enough. The Chinese, perceptively have their word for "rock-and-roll": **yao** pronounced **yow**.

Concerning our demands upon the contestants' musicianship, we need to be careful not to make

too rigorous requirements. I think "Embraceable You" was a little too demanding. In his book, **American Popular Song**, Alec Wilder discusses George Gershwin's skill in the use of bass notes, his avoidance of musical cliches, and his ever-moving harmony. This latter characteristic explains why several of our candidates found it necessary to use too slow a tempo for a popular tune that is basically happy and affectionate in spirit. The first measure starts after a quarter-rest, and then imitates it in the second, to be followed by an unexpected phrase in the third. Another unexpected novelty is the eighth-note e-flat in the final cadence (the piece is written in G).

There are two ways to help our young students avoid pitfalls: (1) use popular material in the form A-A-B-A. It is simple and repetitive. Students who can't handle this need ear-training. (2) Have the students sing the songs they are proposing to play. This will insure that they catch the mood and style of any piece before they get carried away into the briar-patches of excessive imitation and mannerism.

Now some words to our young organists. Long ago Sophocles said that the most enviable of our endeavors should be to "grow wise in old age," but music history has usually found that the wisdom of old age is seldom as rewarding as the genius of youth. Youth in music is fine melody; it's like a flower garden full of roses. Young people, please keep the weeds of boredom, incompetence, and evil from choking out the roses. Then may your musical world stay full of roses.

A last word of praise should be given Tony O'Brien who had the courage and the good musicianship to include in his program a composition by German composer Sigfrid Karg-Elert, whose works are not often played or appreciated. Tony's performance had class.

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NUGGETS *(continued from page 43)*

may be in fit condition to meet their obligations on the lot early the next day. Picture stars who have held their high places are, for the most part, surprisingly orderly persons."

July 29, 1942 (RD) . . .

DOLPH GOEBEL, musical director and organist of WWRL in Woodside, New York, since June 1941, has been named by the U.S. Treasury Dept. to make personal appearances Sundays at Forest Park, Long Island, in behalf of the sale of War Bonds and Stamps. Goebel will be featured at the Hammond, supplying the music for community sings and rallies.

GOLD DUST: 7/38 ERIC THINMAN and REGINALD FOORT over GSG and GSI, England; LEW WHITE, CBS; ARTHUR CHANDLER, Jr., WLW, Cincinnati; Chicago's HAROLD TURNER on MBS playing piano; Canada's ROLAND TODD over MBS; MILTON CHARLES & The Four Notes, CBS . . . 10/38 CHARLES PAUL, CBS; GEORGE LUNDQUIST, WJTN, Jamestown, NY; MARY FOUNTAIN, WHP, Harrisburg, PA; DICK LEIBERT, WJZ, NY; JESSE CRAWFORD, NBC; ROSA RIO on "Between the Bookends" with Ted Malone, NBC; TRUMAN TAYLOR, SWYR, Syracuse; FRANK RENOUT, WORK, York, PA; TOM GRIERSON, WHAM, Rochester; HARRY SPRINGER, WESG, Elmira, NY; JOHNNY HEREFORD, CBS; GUNTHER DECKER, WBNF, Binghamton; ROBERT SMITH, WKBW, Buffalo; MATHILDA & IRENE HARDING on "Twenty Fingers of Melody," CBS; FRED FEIBEL, CBS.

That does it for this time. So long, sourdoughs!

Jason & The Old Prospector

JESSE THE GREAT!

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boys, tenor sax Eddie Miller and pianist Bob Zurke, appeared in solos. Miller played SENTIMENTAL OVER YOU beautifully, and Zurke added variations to BODY AND SOUL in a masterful rendition. Both were splendid . . . Jesse Crawford left me stone cold . . . It is sad but true that he 'Ain't what he used to be!' . . . His execution especially has slipped; too, he has failed to keep up with the trend of modern organ music . . . Maybe I'm wrong, but I like his performance on the house organ much better than his pieces on the Hammond Electric Organ . . . Finis. Hal C. Rees.

Yes, Jesse was a great legend, but he was a mortal, too. Which one among us had not fallen flat on his face at least at one concert. But this is a side of the Poet of the Organ that you never hear about.



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