

CLOSING CHORD

For a period of three or four years in around this time, I was very honored to have been among the privileged few in attendance each Sunday morning as the Fox's magnificent 4/42 Moller got its weekly workout by the master of the instrument and house organist of many years, Bob Van Camp. I was even more privileged to get to know this wonderful man who put the organ through its paces each week and who enlightened his small, but enthusiastic, audience of technicians and house-cleaners with some of the finest music to have ever come from a "box of whistles."

Each week Bob would write down on a small index card a list of what he was going to play and, in some cases, a request or two. Bob would assemble the tunes together with gorgeous harmonies and lush registrations unequalled by any other organist. His playing was always precise, his phrasing impeccable, his melodies glorious and singing, and through all this his "famous left hand" would weave an accompaniment and counter melody that would inspire the greatest of musicians. At the conclusion of the songs listed by title, Bob would feature a composer such as Cole Porter, George Gershwin, or Irving Berlin and we would be entertained by a dozen or so of that composer's songs, all arranged into fantastic scores performed with that same precision, skill and musical correctness that would normally have resulted from mastering the orchestral score. This was Bob's true talent and art form, and the composers themselves would have been proud to hear their works played with such majesty and feeling.

Following these "workouts," we would usually have lunch together and Bob would share some of his personal views through relating his work experiences in memorable and amusing stories. He could have written a book about the events at WSB where he used to play the Hammond organ live on radio for commercial spots and other programs. Today's TV "bloopers" would not begin to compare with the days of live, "proper" radio. As Music Librarian/Music Director for WSB for many years, and as its senior announcer and early morning voice of *Merry-Go-Round*, he exposed Atlantans to the finest in recorded music.

Bob was very self-conscious about his own playing and was always striving to improve his performance. He was shy about playing before other organists and would relinquish the chance to play at

BOB VAN CAMP • A Tribute •

*The year was 1970
The time was Sunday morning
Any Sunday morning
Nearly every Sunday morning
The place was the fabulous Fox Theatre
in Atlanta
The instrument was the "Mighty Mo"
The artist was BOB VAN CAMP
Bob Van Camp passed away on
January 26, 1990.*



open console parties when other organists were in attendance. His favorite excuse was, "You must be tired of hearing me." He declined the invitation to play at the 1978 Atlanta Convention saying, "Let the younger organists get a chance to play a theatre organ in a real theatre, besides, you must be ..."

Bob was also a church musician and served several of the Christian Science Churches in the Atlanta area. He played a Christmas Concert every year for the Methodist Youth and was in constant demand as an accompanist for several notable vocalists in Atlanta. For many years he was the announcer for Rich's Thanksgiving night "Lighting of The Great Tree," and was emcee for the Atlanta Pops Orchestra Concert series. Bob devoted his life to music and was continually giving of his time and energy to that end.

Subsequent to his retirement from WSB, he became office manager for Allen Organs of Atlanta where he found more time and opportunity to play the organ than ever before in his lifetime. This was evidenced by the crowds that would come to the Saturday night Jam Sessions at Winn's Warehouse to get to hear Bob on the 4/16 Page where his arrangements of the familiar songs took on a different style, a new approach. There were exciting new registrations, more upbeat tempos, lush harmonies, more sentimental ballads than ever before. On several occasions, when asked to play a hymn, I heard Bob play "When Morning Gilds The Skies." And in closing this brief tribute to a lifetime of musical devotion, I quote from the opening lines of the second verse of this hymn:

*"When mirth for music longs,
this is my song of songs."*

The song has ended, but both the melody and the memory linger on.

— James Thrower

FLORENCE DeJONG

England's premier lady theatre organist, Florence DeJong, passed away on July 11. She is survived by her sister, Ena Baga, also a famous broadcasting organist. Miss DeJong was 95.

Miss DeJong was, for 13 years, resident organist in the New Gallery Kinema, Regent Street, London, where she played for many Command Performances. She was also the first woman organist to broadcast in England for the BBC at St. George's Hall, London, at Hilversum, Holland, and in South Africa.

Miss DeJong was at the BBC in Bristol during WWII, with her traveling organ, playing with Henry Hall in his guest night shows. She was also a "phantom" organist when Sandy McPherson was broadcasting from St. George's Hall, London. She was standing by ready to be "faded in" should a bomb fall on the Hall putting a quick end to the organ program. The bomb did eventually fall and the "phantom" came on the air.

Florence and her sister, Ena, made annual trips to South Africa for many years, giving concerts and broadcasts. They gave piano and organ recitals using their own Hammond organ.

Florence DeJong's most treasured testimonial came from a blind miner in Ynyshir, South Wales, who wrote the fol-

continued ...

THEATRE ORGAN

lowing poem upon hearing her play Handel's "Largo."

THE ORGANIST DIVINE

(Dedicated to Miss Florence DeJong)

Thou gentle soul, with magic touch,
Who gave thee such a blessing?
Your master mind ran through your being
While notes, our souls caressing.
As if from heaven, with mighty pow'r,
And we this hour in peril.
You cheered our hearts,
renewed our strength,
To fight and crush all evil.
May God abide with thee for e'er,
And guide thee on they travels,
That you may soothe our tired souls
With strains as from the Angels.

Gwylm Evans, Ynyshir

SIDNEY TORCH

One of England's most popular theatre organists, Sidney Torch, passed away on July 17. He was 82. After leaving the field of theatre organ, he created *Friday Night Is Music Night* in 1953, a program which is still running on the BBC.

Sidney Torch was born in East London in 1908 and served his apprenticeship as assistant organist to Archie Parkhurst, accompanying silent films at the Strat-

ford Broadway. In the 1930s, Torch became famous for his recordings of such jazzy pieces as "Hot Dog" and "Dance of The Blue Marionettes." Subsequent to his job as assistant to the great Quentin Maclean at the Regal, Marble Arch, he took over the giant Christie there from 1932 to 1934. He then moved to the Regal, Edmonton, where several of his recordings were very successful, including "Twelfth Street Rag" and "Orient Express," with distinctive piano work in the left hand.

In 1936 he worked for Union Cinemas, opening their new organs and recording at their flagship, the Regal, Kingston. In 1937 he opened the Wurlitzer at England's largest cinema, the Gaumont State, Kilburn.

During WWII Torch served in the RAF and, apart from a few recordings, left the theatre organ world for good. He became conductor of the RAF Concert Orchestra, and after the war devoted his time to composing, conducting and arranging.

Before joining the BBC radio, he led the Queen's Hall Light Orchestra for a time, and wrote incidental music for radio and television shows. Torch retired in 1972 and was appointed MBE in 1985. His wife, Elizabeth, preceded him in death last March.



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