

Hi-Jinx Wind-up

This is the concluding episode of the coverage of the Northern California Chapter's August 6 - 8 Regional "Hi-Jinx" Convention, continued from the Fall issue of BOMBARDE.

One of the pleasant aspects of the Northern California Chapter's makeup is the fine relations maintained with the organization which represents the cocktail lounge and restaurant beat, the Professional Organists Breakfast Club, Bay Area. In fact, the two groups are somewhat interlaced because a number of the Breakfast Clubbers play on pipes for a living rather than the more usual sets of tone generators. Some are ATOE members.

An example of the cooperative spirit was the Sunday afternoon event entitled "Jam Session, San Francisco Style" held in the Mural Room of the St. Francis Hotel, the Hi-Jinx GHQ. It was the same large ballroom which, on the previous evening, was the scene of the banquet, concert and performance by waiters which, according to the BOMBARDE, might have been produced by Mack Sennett. This time there were no waiters in sight; no food would be served -- or flung. On entering, the eye was greeted by a row of electronic consoles, side by side, in the middle of the dance floor, their speaker equipment lined up against the far wall.

With the exception of alone Hammond, all consoles were horseshoe theatre types, a Rodgers, a Baldwin and a Conn. The hostess was vivacious June Melendy, a gal whose performance on pipes or transistors would be hard to top.

There were all types of organist presented at the consoles, ranging from the professional excellence of a June Melendy (who was too busy mistressing the ceremonies to play) to the somewhat curious spectacle of a player getting fairly good sounds by apparently doing no more than running palms and soles across manuals and pedals. There were far too many artists on tap to attempt to list more than a few of them: Don Kingston, Bill McCoy, Tiny James, Bill Taylor (13), Loretta Lee, Claudia Kennedy, Everett Nourse and Ashley Miller -- plus many more. Each played two or three tunes, enjoyed the resulting applause and melted back into the audience area. This went on for nearly three hours and the music was still sounding forth when Dewey Cagle reminded us that it was time to adjourn to Grace Cathedral for a special concert for ATOErs played by Classicist Richard Purvis.



Console Aeolion Skinner Grace Cathedral, San Francisco



Richard Purvis greets ATOE guests.



A group of avid listeners hang on the words of Grace Cathedral organist Richard Purvis. Photo by Allen Friensehner

So, with a warm feeling in our pipe-happy heart for the pros who make a living playing organ, we left the St. Francis and made for the big church on the hill. It's a huge and imposing structure of stone, stained glass, buttresses and all the massive majesty required to state its function as "a mighty fortress." As special guests the ATOers were permitted to sit in the seats ordinarily occupied by the choir. As we passed between the two rows of facing choir seats, someone in the front row stage-whispered, "Hello, y'ol goat!"

We turned -- somewhat surprised -- and blurted "George -- where have you been?" It was the only Hi-Jinx event at which George Wright was seen. His "salt 'n pepper" hair added a mark of distinction under the fluorescent lighting as he greeted the BB editor.

The 4-manual console of the more than 100-rank organ is in a raised position across from the Great Choir area (a long extension of the Nave behind the altar) of this Episcopal edifice. The right side of the console is practically against the left side of the Choir area. Two facades of decorative pipework about 20 feet above the console on either side of the Choir area mark the chamber openings. On the music rack we noted a sign in large letters proclaiming "WURLITZERS FOREVER!" which had evidently been placed there by some wag. We later learned that the wag was none other than Mr. Purvis.

At the appointed time Mr. Richard Purvis strode briskly to the console, picked up a hand microphone and greeted the Hi-Jinxers in a warm style which put them at ease; this was definitely not going to be a stiffly formal affair. Mr. Purvis mentioned that he didn't usually require a PA system for his weekly concerts but that this was something special for him. It must be remembered that several hundred parishoners and the general public were sitting out in the Nave of the church, Mr. Purvis' regular audience. It must have sounded strange to them to hear the voice of their favorite Sunday afternoon artist talking informally to a special group up front and describing the tune he was about to play as "a gasser."

Then came the enchantment. The big instrument has a majesty and fullness, a brightness and shimmer, which couldn't help but stir the short hairs on the neck of the most dedicated theatre organ fan. There was much variety in the program which ranged from a Bach Fugue to some of the organists' originals. We heard Purcell's "Tune in D", "Psalm 19" by Marcello and Purvis' own arrangement of "Greensleeves." Of special interest to TO enthusiasts was Krag-Elert's "Soul of the Lake," a low-keyed descriptive work which pictures an enchanted lake. "Seen" through a mist, the lake's ripples, swirls, pastel colors and life were sheer music magic in Pur-

vis' able hands.

Mr. Purvis warned that the second half of the program would consist entirely of his own compositions and that anyone who couldn't take it could hit the road before he started. The only response was a sea of smiles from the choir seats and the organist offered his "Four Dubious Conceits" which he describes as "a chuckle for the King of Instruments." Failing completely to live up to its title the quartet demonstrated the degree of charm a huge instrument can turn on in the hands of a skilled master. Lighter voices cavorted gaily even chatted and chuckled some -- the bigness and grandeur of the instrument for the moment forgotten in softly fluted tunes (some with Trems on full!) designed to beguile, and beguile they did. But not for long. The big "feature selection" was Purvis' "Fanfare." One might picture in his mind a nearly endless line of mediaeval Trumpeters standing on a great wall, blasting out contrasting fanfares for a festive occasion, maestoso flourishes passing down the line of horns with a new call bursting forth while the previous ones are still echoing; sharp brass, alto brass and baritone brass fighting for attention against a deep pedal of Roman Tubas. A magnificent display of big organ tone color, as theatrical as a Max Steiner adventure film score, played to the hilt in thunderous tone clusters by its composer. The final mighty note echoed up and down the nave of the huge church for several seconds before the transfixed listeners could gather wits enough to applaud--yes, in church, too. The transcendent moments of the past hour could find expression in no other way. But Purvis had warned it would be "a gasser".

The applause got the desired encore from Mr. Purvis then little knots of organ fans started toward the great doors, still in the grip of the past hour's magic. Near one door stood Tom Hazleton, listening for comments. A solid Purvis rooter, Tom seemed to like what he overheard. We couldn't help thinking of the instrument's tonal designer, G. Donald Harrison, and how right his conception of concert organ tone had been, especially when one considers the current inroads made against tonal beauty by the regressive "back to the Hydraulus" school of baroquery.

It was still a bright summer afternoon outside the church. Many gathered on the stone steps to discuss the concert; noted were Bill Brown huddled with George Wright. They were discussing something which looms huge in both their lives, the former Chicago Paradise theatre 5-21 Wurlitzer which George rode to prominence via records when it was installed in the Vaughn Los Angeles residence -- and which Bill is currently building a home around in Phoenix.

After walking several blocks, a look

back revealed the sidewalk outside the church filled with those who had emerged from the church and were trying to get their feet back on the ground. There is little doubt that many a theatre organ purist came away from Grace Church with a new respect for the "straight," or concert organ. As for Mr. Purvis, he's always been on "our side" -- even to "moonlighting" light music played on a radio studio organ years back. George Wright refers to Mr. Purvis as "a swingin' cat." He certainly made the 100-ranker purr!

Making our way toward Route 101 to pitch for a hitch back to "Angeltown" we alternated toward exercising our "hiking thumb" and recapping the events of the fast-paced weekend. -- All the experiences and adventures were recapped in a kaleidoscope of sound and sight memories, as we stood at the roadside, bundle over our shoulder, thumb extended in the direction of Los Angeles traffic flow -- Hey, lady ---- how far South ya driving?

-Stu Green, Hollywood



BAY AREA (AND PHOENIX) ORGAN VIP'S WING TO LOS ANGELES FOR MILLIE ALEXANDER WILTERN PIPE CONCERT

Northerners Give an Ear To Southern Talent

Hollywood - The concert staged by the Los Angeles Chapter of ATOE starring Mildred Alexander at the Wiltern Theatre 37-rank Kimball organ provided the impetus for an invasion by Northern Californians prominent in sponsorship of organ concerts in the Bay Area. Ostensibly here to take in the October 24 Sunday morning organ session played by the former belle of the Radio City Music Hall console, the group, which included such prospective hiring talent as Kay Chenoweth and Dewey Cagle (Home Organ Festival); Tiny and Ida James, Fred and Jan Clapp, John and



Laurel Ruby and Ruth Carson admire the highly decorated console of Jim Gaines' "Echoing Antiqu Shop" Wurlitzer during the marathon organ hop.