

DONALD WILLING  
ORGAN PLAYING  
AND DESIGN:  
A PLEA  
FOR EXUBERANCE



WITH FOREWORD BY DANIEL LEMIEUX

# Bringing Back Willing

## **Foreword to the 2019 Republication**

Organ Playing and Design: A Plea for Exuberance is a sincere and refreshingly light-hearted call to action; one we don't hear often enough in our little world of big pipe organs. Willing's call is to be true artists and innovators working with the organ as a vital and relevant medium; forward thinking and representative of our world, our humanity, and our time.

Times have changed since his 1976 publication, but the underlying spirit of his writing is brave and wise. If the people of the pipe organ were an indigenous culture, he would be the shaman.

I am a 'grand-student' of Donald Willing. My private lesson organ teacher during my formative high school years studied with him at New England Conservatory, and was influenced down to his core. In turn, my teacher influenced me in the same profound way. His name was Mort.

Here's one story he used to tell me:

Mort had to play a recital on a "crappy organ" and was being a defeatist about it. Willing responded with the following:

"But Mort, you are so musical that you could make music on a turnip!"

Mort would use this idea on me to great affect—fifteen-year-old boy that I was. I have lived my artistic life by this elegant, simple, silly, little, positive

affirmation. For me these words are rich with ethos and contain deep metaphysical implications. If you believe that you are so musical that you can make music on a turnip, then you will be that musical. Ah—the power of belief.

Yet Willing writes this book.....his playful plea for exuberance, with a healthy dose of critique. He doesn't want us making turnip music on turnip organs!

In light of the 'performance practice' brain trust that ensued after his death, Willing's personal musical approach to phrasing or 'touch' in chapter three may seem dated (a slur across the bar line?!?, God forbid!), but the spirit of his ideas is exhilarating. You may find yourself gleaning a trick or two. But, the more important overarching notion is to do something special—anything! Embed every line with motion and emotion (with life and personality) via how you touch the keys. Give to it your humanity, so that something emotional and moving is being said and heard.

Willing was alive and writing pre-age-of-information, where every generation was rejecting the work/aesthetics/notions of the previous generation. What's interesting about Willing is that he began his career rejecting the 'tubby' decadent post romantic organs of the 1930s and ended it rejecting the neo-Baroque revival and its growing bend towards antiquarianism. Personally, I have been moved by historically informed instruments and performances, NOT necessarily because they were 'informed', but rather, because they were simply great. Loads of ethnic or period character can be an exciting thing, but so can other styles of interpretation (i.e. original personal

styles, modern styles, cross-over styles, etc.). Willing is right to say that a great many performances and organs have been diminished by pedantic and uninspired historically “authentic” performance practice. How much do we really gain by having everyone play the ‘museum’ version, and how much do we lose by focusing on those types of gains? It is far more important to be musical than to be historically correct, just like it is far more important to be good than it is to be right, and that’s true in both music and in life.

This little book, written towards the end of his life, is his gift to sensitive and listening organists and organ builders. Because of Willing, Mort, and a few other great mentors, the artistic pursuit of pipe organ exuberance is now my life’s work as well.

I studied organ performance at the Eastman school in the late 90s, but for the majority of the last 20+ years, my focus has been on the organ building side of things. Sharing this book with the world is the result of a revitalization of my passion for the pipe organ. This came about through my discovery of the new world of ‘virtual’ pipe organs and its welcoming community of enthusiastic practitioners. For me there is a direct correlation between my early engagement with the visionary influence of Willing via Mort, and my recent work in forwarding the future of our art in an age that is dominated by recorded music mediums and digital platform-based dissemination.

My own artistic focus has turned towards making virtual pipe organs a reality for ‘live’ use in churches, places of learning, and other professional settings. The start of our work as pipe organ people lies in the preservation of our great original acoustic pipe



organs (and many good things are being done on this front), but it doesn't end there. Replicable dissemination is the key to influence. Most people know the Mona Lisa, not by having the privilege of visiting the Louvre, but rather because they have engaged with it in some form of print replica. Since the dawn of decent record players and speakers, hearing recordings of various pipe organs from around the world has been possible, and has grown and influenced the art. For example I fell completely in love with Cavaillé-Coll organs as a teenager, based on recordings, not visits to France. Now with the technology of our age, it is possible to actually play high definition sample sets of many great pipe organs from around the world, which can be delivered at a level of high artistic integrity and with the supple, flawed realism of the real deal.

Virtual pipe organ building is the practice of carefully recording an existing pipe organ, pipe-by-pipe, then curating that organ sample set into another space. This technology represents a turning point; a merging of the best of traditional pipe organ building with the best of our digital information age. Having spent 25 years of my life focused on the virtues, vices and endless permutations of 'acoustic' pipe organs, I thought I knew quite a bit. But virtual organs have opened up a whole new depth of experience for me. I now get to work with great pipe organs throughout history and geography on a daily basis, and the artistry of these world-class instruments shines through even in their 'virtual' replicas. In short, the raw artistic material I now have dominion over is massive and often breathtakingly beautiful when expressed correctly in a new live space.

With traditional church attendance shrinking, it is simply not a reality that most churches can afford or will be able to continue to afford a pipe organ. Obviously, this is eroding the mainstream practice of our art. I'm on the front lines of this reality. I'm in the trenches tuning, repairing, restoring, building, rebuilding, and sending invoices. I'm happy when a church both values and can afford traditional acoustic pipe organ work, but by my estimate it's less than 25%. We need more focus on the other 75%, because that's where the most progress can be made and where it's most needed. Their pipe organs often fall short of excellence, or most already have the older style generic digital organs built by corporations and sold by 'motivated' sales people. We have to find solutions for these churches that are both full of beauty (to inspire), attainable, and of and for our time. If organists of all skill levels are able to engage with really exciting instruments, the art form will self-sustain. Willing knew this, but like all who prophesied, the reality of the future never treads uncreatively in the prophet's imaginary path.

What Willing did not get right was to advocate some form of relegation of the history of the pipe organ, in favor of some present or future-day greatness. To quote Bob Marley: "In this great future you can't forget your past." The organ's rich history is what keeps us coming back for more! He underestimated the power and pull of the tradition itself, and all its wonderful trappings. He also didn't anticipate that replication would get so good, or how technology could deliver an entire history of pipe organ replicas in one console. Price of admission?.....the pipes.

As artists working into this great future, doing art in our age is all about replication, dissemination,

interpretation, curation, and juxtaposition. You can go to any art museum and stroll through the contemporary wing to understand this. In our digital/information age all those limitations of the past (i.e. “this organ doesn’t play that piece well”) are gone. Organists and organ builders who embrace this reality will be the artists that keep our traditions alive and evolving with our culture. This is the underlying spirit of Willing’s book.

I’m pushing hard for a new reality and better alternatives. I don’t accept the generic and reductionist organ imitations of the past. Personally, I’ve never felt very musical playing them. But I do accept exquisite replication of Cavaillé-Coll, Aeolian-Skinner, Silbermann, Rosales, etc., etc. I feel musical playing them— it’s that simple. But we still do need acoustic pipe organ crusaders to encourage the wealthy and well-endowed organizations to keep carrying the torch for the original art form. There is a symbiotic relationship here. There’s the original Mona Lisa, and then there’s thousands of replications of her, seeping their way into the human collective consciousness. Both are needed and valuable, and both forms add value to each other for a high impact manifestation of influence.

Good things capable of forwarding the pipe organ tradition for our age and beyond are coming to fruition. The information and tools needed to engage with the pipe organ’s great past are so readily accessible today. The Organ Historical Society and the American Guild of Organists are doing wonderful work and high-caliber research. Around the world sample sets of world-class pipe organs are being made by dedicated artisan sound engineers. Imagine if the Notre Dame organ was actually destroyed but

at least a quality sample set of it existed (It doesn't yet, but should!). Many organists have put their performances on YouTube and contrabombarde.com, the virtual pipe organ movements own clearing house! There's a lot out there already, ripe for the taking.

Perhaps not many realize this, but we are at a point where we don't even need proprietary "organ" products in our industry. That's not how the traditional acoustic pipe organ industry has operated for at least 50 years now. Access is readily available to the building block technologies capable of excellent pipe organ replication (i.e. software, computers, touchscreens, amps, speakers, and MIDI organ consoles). What we need to do is change the zeitgeist. What we need is a revolution; a new organic way forward.

Making the organ exciting and vital again will require multiple approaches including preservation of our great acoustic instruments (destination pipe organs), egalitarian dissemination of the 'virtual' versions of these great pipe organs, and an innovative eye-catching public relations/education campaign.

There have been some wonderful strides forward in both the playing and building of organs. In some regards it's never been better. But on the flip side, concerts are poorly attended, use of the organ in church is diminishing, and generally speaking, we have not done a great job being competitive for the attention of the general public. It's a difficult task these days, but very necessary if the organ is to survive and thrive. Many of Willing's ideas are still worth serious consideration.

The pipe organ could be an artistic medium that touches many, many more people and in much more significant ways. But there are problems to solve. Let's work together to make the pipe organ a fun, relatable, and deeply moving artistic vehicle for everyone.

On a personal note, I'm grateful that my life is focused on 'Good Things' (Willing's own closing valediction); I'm grateful for Willing's spirit, writings, and influence, which is where it all started for me. I'm also truly grateful to all my client friends who support my work and my vision, which allows me to make a life and a living in the pipe organ arts. Willing's book was not widely disseminated in 1976 when it was published. I am happy to be able to take the time and the funds to promote it as part of an overarching mission to keep the pipe organ tradition alive and well for generations to come.

If you received a free promotional copy of this book, please consider a donation to **pipeorgansrock.org**, a non-profit we started with a mandate to raise pipe organ awareness in grade schools via engaging classroom resources and educational/entertaining pipe organ focused video content. It's still in the embryonic stages, but we have big plans for it.

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**ORGAN-PLAYING AND DESIGN:**

**A PLEA**

**FOR EXUBERANCE**

**DONALD WILLING**



## PREFACE

This little volume of essays into organ design and playing is certainly not intended to be a complete school or coverall in any direction, but rather, expressed thoughts to quicken the awareness of organists—of people who play the organ—and builders who make the instruments on which organists must play.

We seem to have reached a plateau in the general state of the organ and organ-playing on which nothing much is happening except boredom: organ specifications are all much according to formula and practically all the same, and playing is likewise in general according to formula and the same, together yielding ho-hum audiences (when, indeed, there are any!) and a total lack of enthusiasm everywhere.

The time of awakening has come. Music is too vital a force to yield to formula; *all* art is. The fault is not with the potential or expression of music in the true sense; the fault is with us, who have donned blinders—or ear muffs—or who have allowed “education” to apply them to us—and who have thereby pretty well killed off the audiences for our instrument, and, therefore, our instrument.

This is not a book on education, but those of us who teach would do well to remember that, along with the teaching of techniques, our main duty is to excite students to their *full* potential as creative souls, to awaken them as communicating musicians and exciting people.

Exciting instruments (for more than a few



moments!) should follow. But there is nothing to limit the unfolding of a really creative builder except his own self-applied limitations—feelings of lack of imagination, lack of self-esteem, lack of a sense of prosperity, perhaps. But these things merely reflect the short sight. There's a larger view, and more fun, in stepping forward and freeing oneself to be creative, with conviction..

*Donald Willing*

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## ON PLAYING THE ORGAN

First of all there is the spirit of playing the instrument. It is very easy, especially for the layman who knows nothing of the multitudinous charms and ideosyncracies of playing the organ, to tell the difference between those who play *on* the organ and those who *play* the organ. And if we listen to the organ musically rather than with preconceptions of how things should be played (according to the way we were taught to play them) we would be able to tell the difference also.

The organ is, of course, an intriguing instrument. It is also something of a beast, to be beaten into submission. We should always remember that the organ exists for one purpose only—to make music. It is not an object to be worshipped, to bow down to in awe, to become a “nut” over. Granted that it certainly has its fascinations, it remains an agent for the conveyance of musical ideas. If for any reason it fails to easily and readily convey those ideas, it is all the less a musical instrument. By the same token, if the player fails to make the organ do his bidding, he is all the less a musical player.

And, I repeat, the organ is something of a brute: it is by far the loudest of instruments, it is overwhelmingly the biggest of instruments, in physical size (ah! if only an oboe were polyphonic!), it is the most inflexible of musical instruments, and it is the most obvious of musical instruments. All of which means that if we don't play *it*, it will certainly play *us*!

And so we must be able to musically, phy-

sically, and mentally project our ideas in so strong a way that the organ becomes docile, musical, flexible—in short, a musical instrument. Which by nature it actually is not. The piano yields itself to even the gentle player with some grace, even in the playing of, for instance, a simple folksong. Whereas if the gentle player tries his luck even on a simple four-part hymn on the organ, his mastery of the organ—or the lack of it—will be all too apparent. Which is certainly not to say that you can play another instrument with less mastery than that required in playing the organ—it's just that any difficiency or lack of control shows.

So—from the first note you play until the last—really *play* the organ; make it do your bidding even if you play triple adagio. It will love it and so will you. And nothing less will really please anyone for any length of time.

## TO PEDAL — AH, THERE'S THE RUB!

There are many systems of pedalling floating around these days, and I suppose there always have been and always will be. There are also some rather spectacular *nonsystems*. Some tie their knees together and try to operate that way; others keep knees always over keys being played; some sit way back on the bench and lean forward; others sit forward and lean back; some use the entire leg in striking the key; others keep knees as steady as possible and give ankles much to do.

Actually, you can make *any* system work if you really want to.

Yet, related very much to pedalling, since it entails using *legs*, fairly heavy gear, is the very important and often overlooked problem of *balance*. And balance—good or bad—concerns much that you do in playing the organ. A sudden shift of weight can cause wrong notes to be played, a complete change of touch, unexplainable musically, or the missing of a piston or stop. It can cause a sense of walking on egg-shells, of uneasiness.

It is *very* important to have good balance when playing the organ. It is also important to look good when you pedal, to look at ease—as if what you are doing is effortless.

And this is *not* difficult to do!

Whatever your system, there must be no real *weight* on the pedals. The second you have weight on the pedals you lose all control of touch—and you *must* be free to leave any key as quickly as you want to on the spur of the second,

to play anything from soupy legato to staccatissimo according to what that note in the phrase demands musically. So, get weight off the pedals and keep yourself free to be musical. A good way to achieve balance is to simply practice *any* pedal solo very, very slowly with a staccato touch—without holding on to bench, keycheeks, anything; fold your arms over your chest and you won't have to worry about them.

My own system of pedalling is quite simple and can be completely mastered in a couple of months' intensive practicing. The few rules are these:

1. Always sit over middle D; manual and pedal keys are always lined up wherever you have a 32-note pedalboard.
2. When playing Pedal naturals keep the right foot always *forward* so that the toe is at the base of the sharps. Keep the *left* foot back (always!) so that the left toe is at the instep of the right foot. With very rare exception, the right foot always crosses over the left foot.
3. When playing sharps with either foot, use *only* the front two inches of the key. This simple rule makes for better balance and more effortless pedalling than swinging the leg weight forward to cover the entire key with the foot; it also prevents striking pedal pistons and swell pedals by accident (don't laugh; I've seen it happen!)
4. Use only ankle motion, keeping knees completely steady.
5. Keep the knee over the key you are playing,

except at the outer reaches of the pedal-board. Be free and easy and natural.

6. As a postscript I would like to take issue with the late—or early—Sir John Stainer and his theory of feeling around the sharps before playing a note. Nothing is more disastrous to good pedalling! This builds up amazing insecurities in pedalling—and, besides, you then must make two motions for every note you play—and we don't often have that kind of time! Can you imagine playing Sowerby—or even Bach—with that kind of limitation? All in the name of "not looking at the pedals." Can you imagine teaching piano that way—"fumble around the black keys before playing a note, and, whatever you do, don't look at the keyboard . . .?"

Nonsense! Keep a careful watch over your pedalling, particularly at first, watching your foot position, ankle-motion, and spacing—then, after a few weeks, you won't have to, resting secure in the knowledge that ankle-motion, foot position, and spacing are all A-OK. Then you can forget pedalling and move on to making music—and that is what it's all about.

Perhaps I should add the note that I have still found no organ "method" that works as well as and as quickly as W. T. Best's "Art of Organ-Playing"—and it was first published in 1870! Originally published by Novello, it is now (all the original exercises) published by Southern Music Company, San Antonio, Texas, in an edition that I made for them, using American fingering, etc. (12345 rather than the English +1234).





## TOUCH, THE MAGIC INGREDIENT

It is my opinion that the magic key that opens the door to vital organ-playing is touch. A good control of touch on the part of an organist is, to my mind, more important even than good tone. Without a good control of touch, music-making bores and palls even on the finest-toned instruments; with it, an inferior instrument can sound exciting indeed.

Touch is the light, the shadow, the shading, of the musical line. Touch is also the musical line's sense of movement. Touch is the singing quality of the line. Touch is the line's rhythmic drive—or rest.

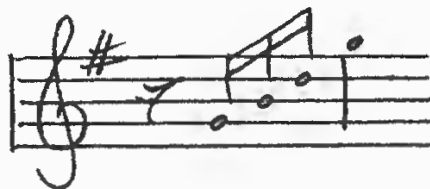
Now, having said all these things, some perhaps completely new to some readers, to some, unthinkable, let's see how they work.

Some method books, and many teachers, preach that the basic touch on the organ is a legato one, since the organ is a church (somber?) instrument. Occasionally they permit a staccato touch for a particular passage (where called for). Nonsense! The sooner we get on to considering the organ a *musical* instrument, pure and simple, and not a church instrument, or a funeral home instrument, or any other kind of *place* instrument, the better off we *all* will be!

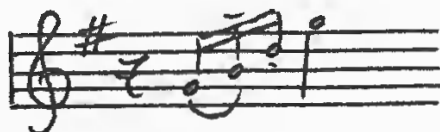
No, there are *not* only two kinds of organ touch! There is every conceivable kind of touch between, and including, very short staccato and overlapping legato. And actually, no two notes should be played with the same touch, if there is

to be real vitality in the playing. Every note and every group of notes—must, except in very special cases where a static condition of non-movement is sought, *move* in a direction, since music is a moving thing that exists, or seems to exist, in *time*. Movement through time is generally inherent in music. That being true, we should make sure that we, as performers, are aware of that fact. All too often we aren't.

Now, in this simple arpeggio,



we can play the notes all alike (or try to) and do not much with them; in this case we have indeed, and merely, played an arpeggio. But if we do something like this:

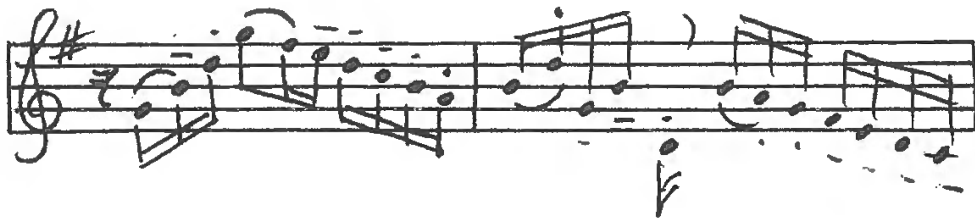


with each note growing *shorter* in duration, and with spaces between the notes growing longer, we shall have added an element of *motion* to these four notes, and will have put that high G on something of a pedestal! A great deal more excitement and movement will have been generated by the changing touch.

Now, having built a "pedestal" under the G, what do we do with it, since it must move on

with all that energy behind it?

Try this:



A word of warning: don't dole out the note values like so much spaghetti; do it in a very simple, natural way, with the weight of your hand, as you move through the passage. Begin the low G with much weight (quite a bit more than is necessary to get the key down), then, as you move up through the arpeggio, *release* the weight so that by the D you have just enough weight to make the key work. Presto! It is very easy to do, it sounds natural, it sounds *vital*! Now, as you quickly reach the pinnacle, the high G, quickly apply weight to this important accented note, gradually releasing weight again as you "fall" through the descending scale passage following, to the end of the phrase. There is all the difference in the world, musically, between this *graduated touch* approach to playing and the "black or white" system, completely *unfree*, of playing either legato *or* staccato.

Weights and balances are always mixed up with motion, and this applies to *playing* tracker action as well as to building it. Or playing any action as well.

Now, this little three page piece (in Peters), the G major Prelude of Bach, is jammed full of touch possibilities and lessons---but then, so is every piece that we play. This particular piece,

along with the fugue that follows, is filled with passages consisting of repeated notes. *Never* should those repeated notes all be played the same; the result is then *no* motion, where Bach obviously intended a great deal of motion). Rather, try this:

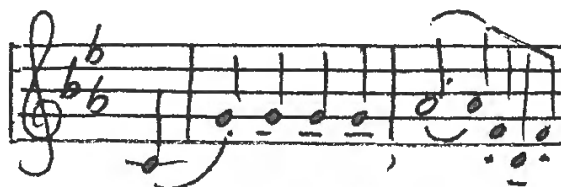


with each eighth getting a bit heavier than the preceding one, until the note moves to E, then connect the D to E, *immediately* releasing weight so that the first E is very short, and the process begins all over again. Motion, rhythmic vitality, *and* accent—though accent by illusion—are created.

A word about linear accent on the organ: the organ is not, by nature, an accenting instrument; striking one note *harder* than another does absolutely nothing to create an accent (though this works on the piano). A pipe speaks or it doesn't speak—it doesn't speak, then get louder: it would then go sharp, if, indeed, it were possible to execute mechanically. Nor is it louder at the beginning of its speech than later on because of striking the key harder. It just isn't the nature of the organ—this magnificent instrument without, however, built-in accenting possibilities.

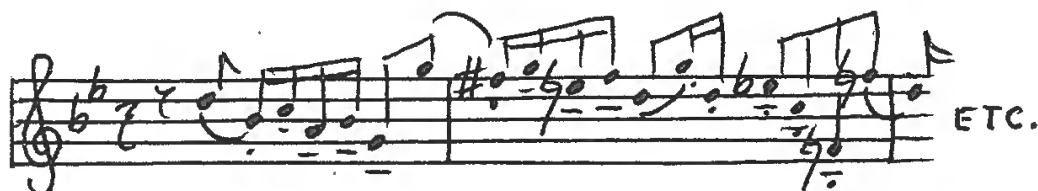
There are, nevertheless, *several* possible ways to achieve accent—or the *illusion* of accent. One important way is to *point* to the accented note by holding the upbeat (or unaccented note) *into* the accented note, leaving *it* short and clipped.

What you have done is to call attention *to*, or point to, the accented note:



Another way of accenting—or getting the illusion of accent—is illustrated in the same example: the repeated G's, growing longer with each repeated note, build tension toward the accented A-flat following. This can be further strengthened by hesitating a bit before striking the A-flat.

The big G-minor fugue can be treated in the "pointing to" way of accenting also:



and is, in my opinion, much more natural to the sustained-tone instrument than is the percussion-instrument way:



Usually, when the percussion (piano) touch is applied to this subject on the organ, the result is, oftentimes, that the first note of the theme isn't even heard, particularly in the Pedal, because the pipes just don't speak that quickly (except perhaps some upper pitches). Another by-product of the piano touch is that the sixteenths become then too heavy and sound smeared.

A good singing line is rarely heard on the organ because most organists don't *really* play a good legato, all things considered. And all things must be considered, even the acoustical setting. Legato must be actually an *overlapping* of notes in a dead acoustical environment; nothing less sounds legato. In a live room, the notes should not get *too* close together —although, to *my* listening ear, organists usually err on the side of being too non-legato rather than the reverse. Always *listen*; that's the key to everything!

Also, listen carefully to the space between a note and its repetition: give it enough air! It seems to me that organists are too afraid of silence, resulting in a monotonous unchanging touch, with nothing really connected, nothing really broken.

In this example:



play it:



with a good break between the E-flats and a good healthy legato on the quarter notes.

Hymns should be played as you would have a chorus sing them, with perhaps a few bows in the direction of the limitations of the organ:

1. On occasion you would like a chorus to accent, while singing legato, the notes of a hymn; to approximate this on the organ, break the notes of the alto line (as much as acoustics permit) while playing all other voices legato. Don't break the total chords—this does not produce accents but merely detached chords. In detaching the alto line, break *all* notes, whether they move or are repeated.

2. Repeated notes (by the dozen?) in the Pedal (bass) can make things pretty choppy and a bit humerous if you have a 16' reed going; the best solution I have found is to tie *all* repeated notes *until* the one that moves to another note:



This gives more vitality to the line than tying everything, and notifies those singing bass that they'd better get ready to move!

And again, where you have repeated notes in the *soprano* part, remember to do things with touch. Don't allow yourself to get into a machine-like routine, ever, in playing music!

A warning: a hand-staccato is *always* a dangerous thing, since it does indeed produce a machine-gun touch. A machine could actually do it better. When you've got the weight of a hand and at least part of an arm moving up and down,

things can't be very subtle! Keep your fingers close in for good control and let your *fingers* do the playing, except in large chords.

So—listen! And *require* that your fingers produce the touch, contrast, and control that your ears demand of the music you hear. Others *will* be listening↓



## UPON PERFORMING

Music, to be valid, must be heard. Which implies also that at each performance it must be recreated—or else a machine could do it better. It must be played and sifted through the magical strainer of the performer's spiritual, musical, and human understanding.

We are accustomed to criticizing music as being good or bad (rarely in the middle). When, actually, there is probably no "bad" music. In looking over His creation, God saw that it was *all* good—even the smelly marshes and manure piles, no doubt, and I am sure He sees it that way today; it is we who do the limiting.

How many times have we heard a fine performer make a piece of art from a piece of music that we have dismissed as being "junky!" Sir John's "God so loved the world" being one. And even "The seven last words" of DuBois. And many much "worse." No, I have reached the conclusion that the fault is most often with the performer. His re-creating has too often been only regurgitating. If you listen enough, and if you are questing enough spiritually, you can make a miniature masterpiece of any simple ditty you have perhaps considered "cheap." Think of this a bit. But you must put your complete self into it, and you should in everything you do. You're wasting your time if you do less. Perhaps I should add that you need not be "serious" in putting yourself into things; joy and humor are certainly more vital than solemnity (and there's a

thought for churches).

Now. Whether you are playing a recital or playing the prelude of a church service, *you* are the authority at that moment, *you* are the one asking to be listened to. See that you have something to say to those listening. And say it convincingly. 'Don't pussyfoot.

When you enter stage or chancel or organ loft, whether seen or unseen, enter as if you know what you are about. If you bow, be gracious about it; your bow is a thank you to the people who have come to hear you; perhaps they have paid money to be there. You owe them your thanks—for coming, for applauding (if they do)—no matter how brilliantly you have played. They could have stayed at home, you know—or gone for a ride in the country. So, be gracious. And be cheerful about it, as if you were greeting a good friend (you should make them all friends with your playing).

And *do* play from memory. At least ninety-five per cent of the players I have had any contact with play better from memory. Music in front of you is a crutch and a terrible distraction; you already have enough to occupy you, what with playing on several manuals and pedalboard, pushing and pulling stops and combination pistons and pedals, not to mention the important business of listening to what you are playing. And how often have I seen players using music lose their places and do rather ungraceful improvising until places were again found! Forget using music. Never give it a second thought. Fear of playing from memory usually comes from two sources:

either the player feels that he doesn't know the music well enough—in which case he shouldn't be exposing his lack of preparation in public (he may not admit to this), or the problem is a spiritual one—he has not enough faith in himself or his Inner Strength (call it God if you will). If it is lack of practice, the remedy is simple: more practice, until the player gets bored turning pages and simply stops turning them! If the problem is spiritual, a shoring up of faith in himself by whatever means is in order—a deeper approach to his professed religion, a change of religion to one that works (for him), a course in self-confidence, perhaps. You need both faith in yourself *and* adequate preparation in order to perform. A helpful device in memorizing is to gradually, in your practice, add “starting places,” so that you always have a place to go if you get into trouble. The more numerous the starting places, the less likely you will ever have to use them!

We too often don't realize that we must have a comfortable “safety margin” in playing in public. This usually applies even to playing in lessons. Quality of performance usually drops about 20 to 30 per cent when playing for others—except in those rare cases of completely uninhibited self-confidence already present. Which means that you must have prepared yourself so well that, even allowing for a 25 per cent drop in efficiency, your playing is what you want it to be and says what you want it to say. Most students are actually inadequately prepared for their lessons and are disappointed that it didn't go as well as it did “upstairs in the practice room just

a few minutes ago.” If you would be a performer, build up your safety margins!

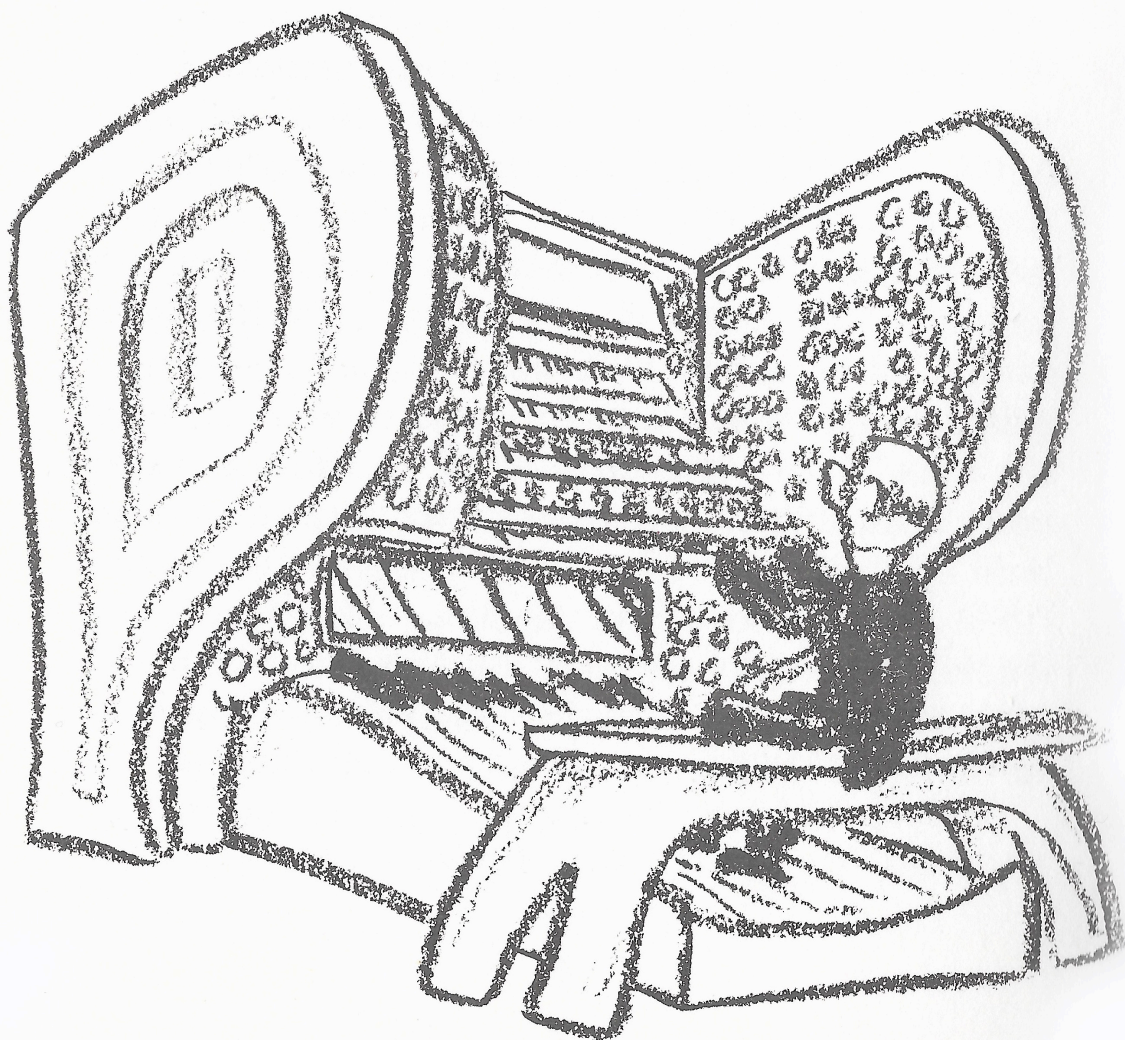
I could preach a whole sermon about choosing a program, but I won’t. Scattered all through these pages are already enough hints that what we play, and the manner in which we play it, must communicate. So choose music that communicates *today*. Stultifying masses written centuries ago have little to offer today’s audiences, nor have primitive excursions into contrapuntal writing involving extinct chorales. Go to programs and listen, with others in the audience, with your ears—not your prejudices. And, if you profess to not understand what I am talking about, be aware of audience reaction to literature being played. Most audiences are pretty honest. If they are touched, they let you know; if they are untouched, they let you know—with yawns, going to sleep, polite applause (one *should* applaud at recitals, shouldn’t one?). Perform music that excites an audience in a way that lets them know that *you* are excited, and we shall always have a good audience.

Build an atmosphere with your programs—or, even, individual pieces. The frame of mind with which you play frames, to a large extent, the work you play. Before playing a note, get yourself *into* the work; feel the mood you want to paint, make it an experience for all who are really listening. The first rule, of course, is to forget yourself; that audience is not nearly as interested in you as you *think* they are! They have come to hear *music* made; *make* it, and love every note you play—even the wrong ones! If by some

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chance you play a wrong note, or several, bless them and let them go; there's not one thing you can do to correct them, so forget them. Don't let them fester all the rest of the way through the piece. I repeat: love and enjoy every note you play, even the wrong ones!

Afterwards, no matter how you've played, remember that you've apparently, all things considered, done what you were ready, at that particular time, to do. Don't let criticism bother you, nor praise. And, hardest of all, don't apologize. It is past; it is done. Outside of remembering a few things that you think should be watched over next time, forget it. Your statement of that moment has been made; already it is a part of the past, never to be repeated. Learn from it and move on. If you want opinions for your own future use, ask singers, violinists, pianists, clarinetists, etc. for it. Particularly choral conductors. But not organists—they will have their own pet ideas of how you should have done everything, and have probably listened only with their prejudices. I think this is only being realistic. Be careful over asking advice in any case, but particularly about things artistic; find someone with the broad view: a great person's opinion is worth more than that of a narrow performer, no matter how brilliant. So, play on! Make yourself the finest person you can be, and play with your whole self. When technical matters demand solution, you will find a way to solve them in order to say what you must say in your music.





## UPON PRACTICING

Most people don't learn how to practice until they get their first jobs. Then they learn quickly—they have all too little time and too much to do, so every minute counts!

We shouldn't wait so long. Particularly since the basic repertoire we learn in school must serve us, for several years to come, as the roast beef of our musical fare. While in school students should learn everything possible, build up an imposing repertoire, and play as many recitals—and in as many others—as schedules permit.

Learn things well. If you memorize a piece and play it in recital from memory, years later it will take you a very short time to get it back into playing condition. It is much more difficult to regain a composition that you have just barely learned and haven't memorized. It really is very good insurance to learn everything very, very well; it's like money in the bank.

Don't be discouraged at the outset about *any* piece you're about to learn. Remember that you can play any piece written—if you play it slowly enough! At first that may be at a pace of ten notes a minute; no matter! that is *still* ten notes a minute, and all you have to do is to jack up the speed gradually until you have it up to an acceptable tempo! Always remember that; there's nothing you cannot play if you take it slowly enough!

Learn things in little bits. Don't attempt to eat the entire loaf at once! A bite at a time,

chewed thoroughly, works fine in practicing also. Take one line, or one phrase, or, if the work isn't very difficult, one page, at a time—and don't move beyond that section *until* it is easily playable *at tempo*! This will save you hours and hours of time in learning any work. Every piece—perhaps I should say, almost every piece—gives away most of its secrets in the first page or two—its textural patterns, its types of sequences if there are any, the general pattern of pedaling, etc., etc. And once you've learned the first page, the second will fall down in less than half the time it took to learn the first page; the third will go even faster, etc. Nothing—I repeat, nothing is as slow as to creep through the entire work and then try to jack up the entire thing gradually. It will indeed take a month of Sundays, and even more Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays!

Don't worry about registration at first. Practice by the hour on a little Gedeckt stop (they *always* sound pretty good, don't they? Even on wrong notes!) and nothing more. It will be much less tiring than trying to wrestle with registration, loud sounds and mixtures, while trying to learn notes. Don't worry—you will no doubt soon get the sense of what the work wants to do, sound wise. But get the piece musically before fooling around with console-playing, then let *that* unfold naturally also.

Practice at different tempos. Keep it flexible. Don't let yourself get into the routine of "running through it a few times!" The minute you find yourself "running through it" quit! Leave! Go get something to drink, or go talk to



someone or take a walk. But, better still, change stops, or tempo, or touch in general, or organs if you're in a school, or bench height, or something—but *make* yourself *listen*! Every note you play should be aware, should be listened to. Don't tune out for one second—or you'll find yourself tuning out for ever-increasing periods of time. Keep yourself aware, alive, listening, always. You are in a vocation, a way of life, that *demand*s listening—by *you* first, then your audience. If *you* don't listen, no one will—for very long!

Practice all tempos when you're practicing from memory also. Have a *tempo* safety-margin, also; don't ever give the impression that you're playing a work at the top of your limit, tempo-wise. Practicing a piece at half-tempo, or very slowly, from memory does much to strengthen self-confidence: when you play very slowly from memory you have to know very well indeed where every note goes. Another good thing to do is to practice with distractions around—somebody sweeping up the floor, changing bulbs or such, or having small children playing around you. Everything won't necessarily be perfect when you play in recital—what about that elderly gentleman folding his program noisily during your trio-sonata adagio? Or latecomers walking all the way down front to seat themselves? Or Aunt Susie leaving early, in the middle of a piece, to go home and take the roast out of the oven?

Organ shoes are more important than you think! Just changing into your organ shoes will change also your mood, your attitude. They should be of thin, flexible leather (or similar ma-

terial), and fit your feet like gloves (remember, you won't have to do lots of walking in them), and they should *not* have overhanging soles. The narrower the better. And I insist on leather soles (thin also) and rubber heels (leather heels slide around too much and clank unmercifully on the wooden keys). And they should have shoelaces. No loafers, nothing that slides up and down on your heel. Soft leather soles—no clunk; soft rubber heels—no clunk!

I cannot stress enough how important it is to practice *slowly*. My first teacher, a Dutchman, was fond of saying that the better you can play a thing slowly, the faster you can play it. And I have found that that little statement is all too true! Yet you must also practice in tempo to find out what fingering and pedalling really works; this is one reason that you *must* get that first section of a piece in tempo as soon as possible. In the long run, however, the bulk of your practicing should be—*slow*. Slow staccato practice of a troublesome spot soon gets the kinks out of it; slow staccato practice of a pedal solo gets *it* smooth *and* helps perfect your balance.

Slow does it!

## UPON RULE BOOKS

Organists are the only musicians I know of who perform according to rule books! They think they must go “by the book” in tempos they use, in registration, in style (accepting anybody’s style but their own)—even using rules, called by the general term “performance practices” for touch, fingerings clumsy and illogical, rhythms completely changed, based partly on research and partly on conjecture, and so on.

If pianists played Chopin as pianists closer to his day played his works, or Liszt as Liszt played Liszt, they would be laughed off the stage! How many violinists have you seen using a curved bow when playing Bach? Certainly pianists usually use “wrong” ornamentation in Bach (they’re even using the wrong instrument, according to the rule books). And wind players don’t bother much with playing according to the old customs—nor do they copy the old mouthpieces.

Somebody has certainly put the fear of something-or-other into organists in general, so that they are fearful of doing anything that is not correct, that is not “done.”

There probably is a whole book of material on this one subject. Could it be that organists in general have been mashed flat by the “proper” dictates of the church? Have they felt demoralized for too long by low salaries, by feeling they must always do and play “in good taste,” by knuckling under to music, organ, and worship committees who actually know nothing, or little, about music and the arts, and who care less? What a fertile field for the psychologists!

After many, many years of service in churches, it is my sincere opinion that even churches and committees respect a person—even the church musician—who has his say, who has no fear of them, who has his standards, whatever they be, and who stands by them. And, I have found, he always comes out better than one who bows down and prostates himself before those less knowledgeable but more demanding. The world—and this includes churches—respects the man who respects himself. And it will always be thus.

Read the rule books as much as you like. Listen to all the recordings you want to hear. But pay not too much attention to them; they represent the opinions of others and usually little else. Of course they would like for you to bow down and follow them: their business depends upon your doing just that. But what an unrewarding thing it is to copy others, to follow the dictates of others! As Emerson said some years ago, this always admits inferiority.

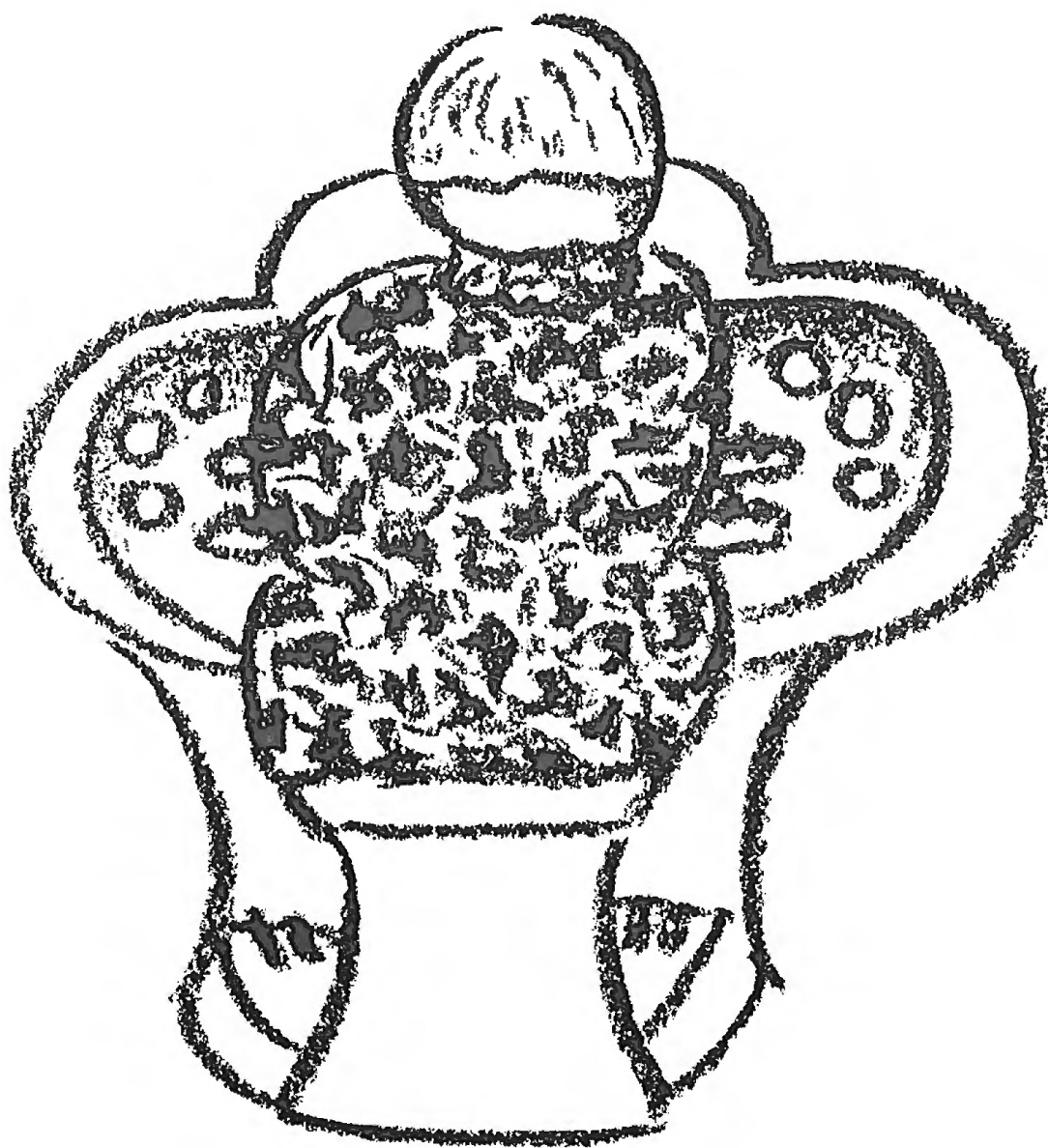
As for the “authenticity” bit, this is also for power or job. There *is* no authenticity for you except your own!

Until by some kind of electronic means the actual playing of Franck, Bach, and all the others can be brought back from the ether waves for us to hear once again, we shall never know exactly the kinds of touches Bach—or even composers closer to our day—used, the subtleties of nuance, even the exact registrations; words, no matter how authoritatively written, cannot describe in exact terms these subtle things of music-making. And this is probably intended and for the best, no matter what the historians say. We *must* be our own selves, we must make our own contributions.

If you still worry about not being “authentic” enough in your playing, consider for a moment how impossible it *is* to be authentic in playing music from an earlier day: stops don’t sound the same no matter how identical their names, acoustical environments are quite different, even the audiences have different ears and listen for different things, so hear things differently. Religious beliefs have changed and have a bearing on the impression made today by the music of Frescobaldi, Couperin, et al. Forget “authenticity!” You can’t be authentic, no matter how hard you try to be. It will only make you boring.

It is my deep feeling that, if music still communicates, it has its own built-in message for those willing to listen, for those willing to dig into the music. It will whisper its secrets. And the amazing thing is that, if the music is vital, its message varies according to the age. It isn’t static. All inspired music is current.

Don’t copy. Listen! And be your own man—or woman!



## A POINT OF LITERATURE

There are articles published from time to time in the organ journals, and even one book, proclaiming the theory that an organ cannot be built on which can be played more than one small segment of the total organ literature. This one thesis, in effect, condemns the organ to the museum, and effectively bans its use as a general instrument of the concert hall.

How many pianists condemn their instrument as being unfit to play both Rachmaninoff and Bach, or Brahms and Scarlatti? How many violinists think they cannot play both Mendelssohn and Bach on their instrument? They don't even bother to use the old curved bows! And, indeed, why should they?

It seems to me that the one criterion of a really successful organ is *not* that it have at least five cornets (for early French stuff, you know!), or the Werk Prinzip (the French never *did* bother with that one, did they?) or open-toe voicing, or the inevitable 8' Krummhorn or the Positiv, or the unmusical (by any definition other than organists') 16' Posaune, heavy as lead in the Pedal; the one really valid criterion is that the organ, like any other musical instrument, simply be beautiful to listen to for long periods of time. Most of us realize that most organs are *not* beautiful to listen to for extended periods; they are (1) too loud, (2) too screeching, or (3) too hooty (wide-scated), (4) too inflexible, and/or (5) simply boring, tonally. Sensitive organists work hard to hide this fact by playing excitingly, using every facility they have of touch, expressive playing, exciting literature, and, sometimes, just extreme

speed. The fact remains.

Yet one curious group of organists do nothing to make the organ into a musical instrument. They connect *no* notes, make no attempt to sing a line, use the ugliest sounds possible (being guided by rule-books and not by ears), distort rhythms in confused and meaningless fashion (obviously bored), and chatter among themselves about the latest in wrinkled rhythms.

Let us think about this sad situation for a moment. What could bring on such boredom, such despair, unless it be caused by what has become to them a tired, tired instrument *and* a tired, tired literature? And this impasse, dead-end, brought on by limitation—narrowing down their instrument to a period-piece style!

Where is creativity? Where is the expansive *spirit* of life? Where is the fresh air? Academia and musicology, taken in an uncreative sense, have killed it dead in these people. A tragedy, for them.

Luckily, they will not kill the *organ* in spirit, though it may be already practically extinct in that particular form. The organ, I feel, will come out of this compost smelling like a rose, and I believe it will bloom like one.

And it will not be confined to playing music of a particular period, but will be the agent for performing *all* living music beautifully. Probably the music of questionable interest to audiences of today will fall away, as indeed it should, having encrusted the organ like barnacles for much too long.

Most important of all, it should bring on lots of bright, joyful, expressive, *new* music written by people who are alive *today*. New forms should naturally develop, new ways of using rhythms and



harmony heretofore foreign to the realm of the organ. More and more people will want to *improvise*, and this is where creativity begins.

I hear a polite murmur of disagreement: But, sir, the organ is the instrument of the church; it must always be grey and bland and colorless and inoffensive, so that it will blend with the church.

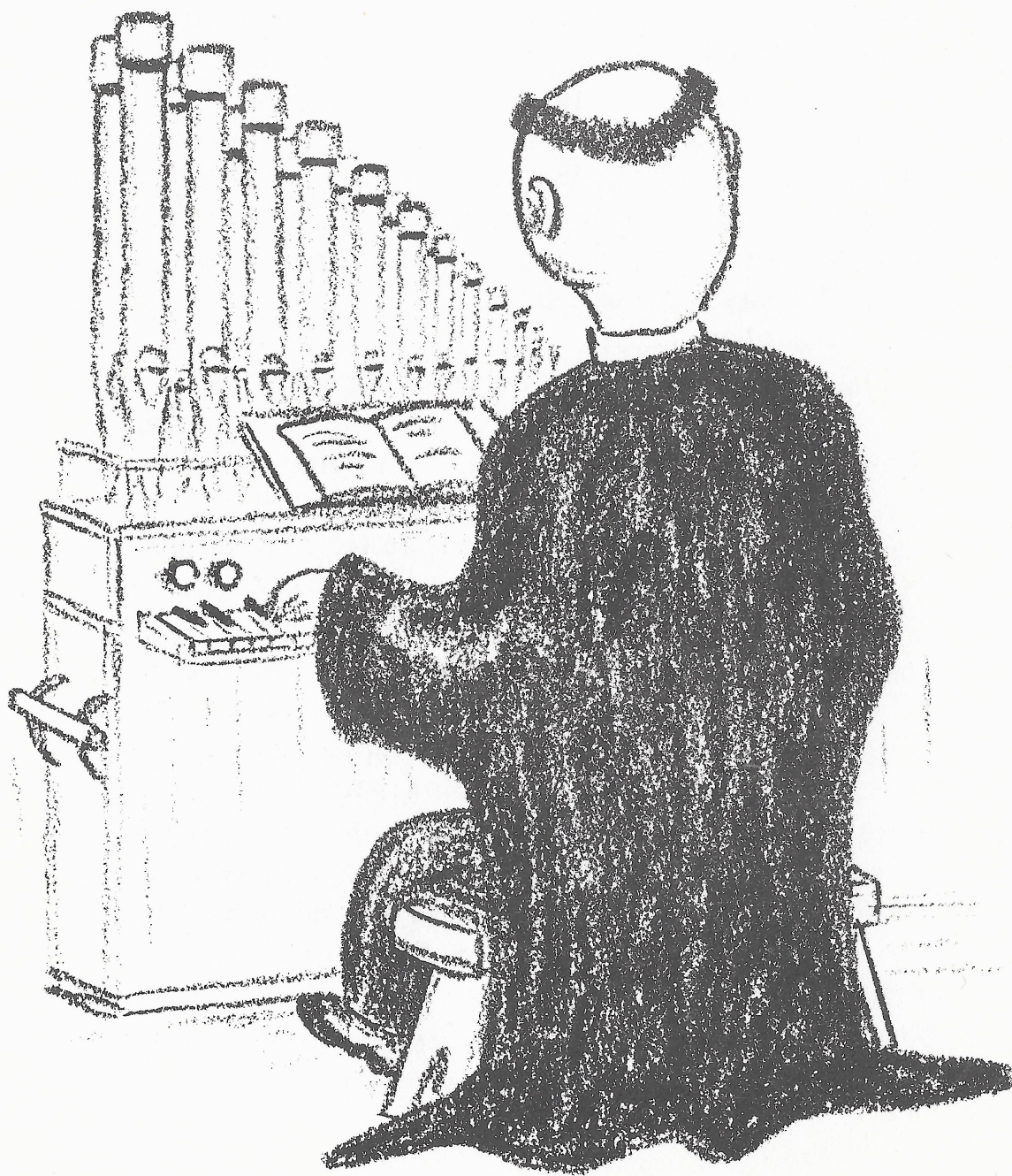
Let the dead bury their dead!

The organ, in all its possibilities and now in its probabilities, is quite capable of exhibiting all the colors of life, of vitality unimaginable. Bring it out into the sunshine of joy. And let the church do likewise: let it open its windows and doors to life, also. We will all be better off when it will. Let it teach principles of love and joy, and let the organ sing of today where it will.

We haven't even *begun* yet!

We need:

- (1) Organ-builders with *new* concepts, who can and will build organs that are so beautiful, so singing, so sensitive, and so tantalizing, that they can play *any* kind of music expressively.
- (2) Composers who will think of the organ as a musical instrument, on the level with the piano (though I am convinced it will be better!).
- (3) Organists who have imagination, freedom of soul, color, and sensitive musicality, to take this new twentieth-century instrument and *run* with it! No more moss, barnacles, tattletale grey—but all the colors and vibrancy of life.



## WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE

Most organists play only for organists. We don't realize that organists are not necessarily musical, or even that *most* organists are not really interested in the latest *cliche*, the latest "in" fads, be they wrinkled rhythms, excavation excursions, or skinny sesquialteras.

Most people, including most organists, *are* listening for the singing line, the musical phrase, evidence that the performer is listening to what he is doing and that he is interested in and committed to communicating his feelings and understanding to the listeners. When these simple things are missing, audiences steal away, or don't come. Emotions may be out-of-date, but we've still got them, and most of us demand some touching of the deeper emotions by *any* performer or artist. When these deeper feelings are touched, and an inner feeling of beauty is aroused, we will go to great lengths, in time and money, to attend a performance.

Whether we admit it or not, these deep feelings of beauty and emotional response demand attention and nurturing, or a large dimension of living is missing, and, deep within, we are all too aware of it. So when we find ourselves repeatedly rebuffed by dull recitals, we simply stop going out of our way (or across the street) to attend them.

Don't blame the organ! True, most organs are dull and uninteresting, but an excited and exciting player can make any organ interesting. And must, if he is to have an audience. Some organs may be so clumsy or difficult for music-

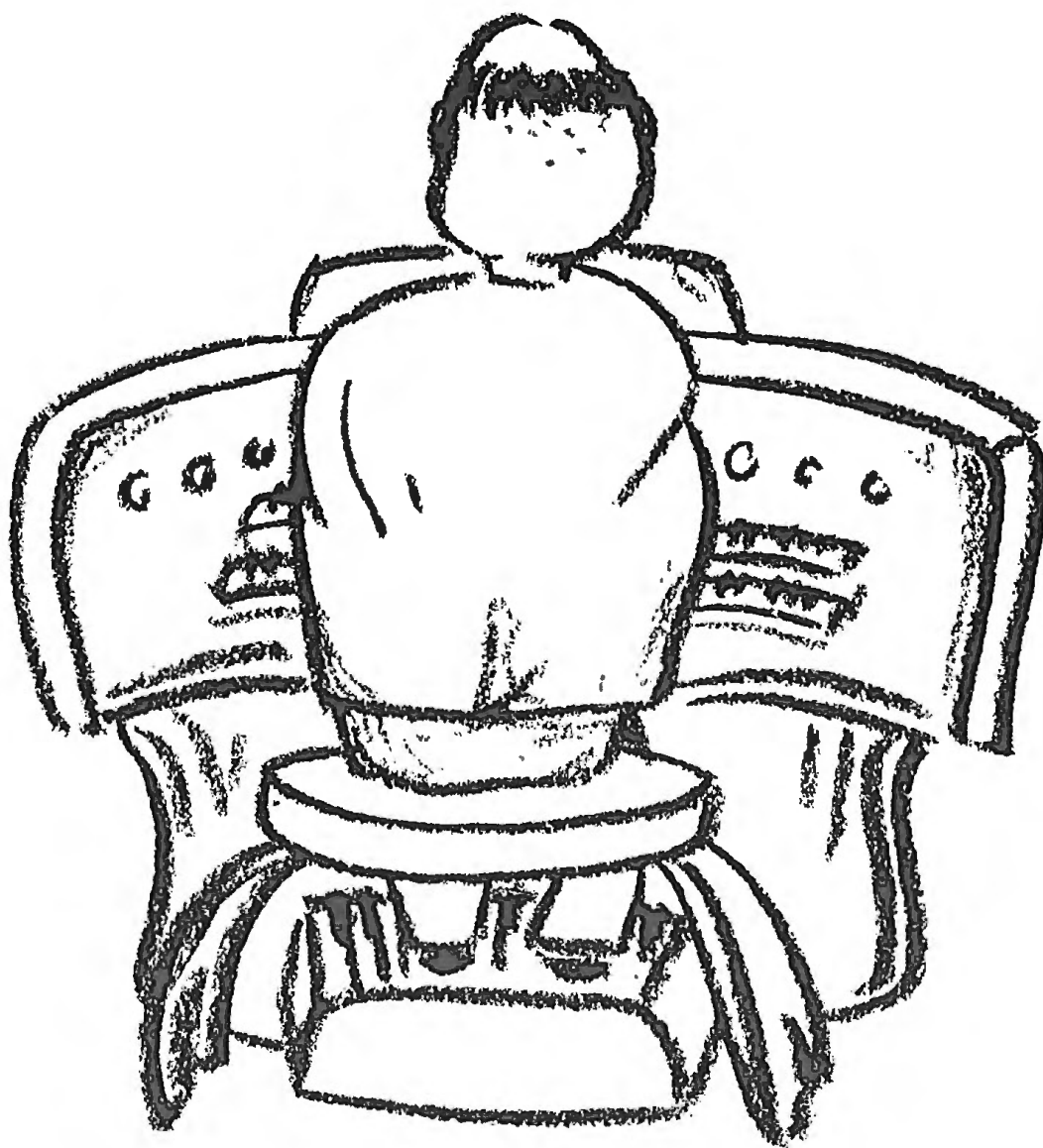
making that you, as performer, decide it's not worth the trouble. But if you take it on, give it your all; nothing else is worthwhile.

Give an audience something to remember, something to take home. Illusion is a great thing in any experience or performance, so use all of your reachable imagination to create an atmosphere in which your music can bloom, in which your audience can dream a bit (not go to sleep!). Turn on their fancies: dim the lights, light fancy candles around and create soft shadows. One well-known architect told me that he thought it necessary when designing churches to always provide very dim lighting, or no lighting, of the church ceiling, in order to create a mystical atmosphere. If possible, use colors to change the feeling of the room. I can think of no atmosphere as cold for music-making as the average church, with all lights blaring away, underscoring poor architecture, dirty corners, and giving a deathly pallor to the faces of those present in their Sunday suits. One of my students recently gave an all-improvisation recital with many candles around, including one on each side of the console, and all lights off—this in a 1923 auditorium not noted for its enchanted atmosphere.

The result was fairyland, in the music as well as in the visual surroundings.

Make sure that your technique is but a springboard for expressing deep convictions of beauty in the music you make, combined with a sincere desire to communicate with these wonderful people who have given their evening, and sometimes their money, to hear you. We *all* want value received; give each person present something to

remember, almost anything to remember, except  
a wasted, boring evening.





## CREATIVITY AND ORGAN DESIGN

Think with me for a few moments about what the organ can be.

We begin with the only keyboard musical instrument with sustained tone, and with tone of infinite variety—all within the performance range of one player!

In addition to this singular and noteworthy capability, what other characteristics can the organ have? Let me suggest a few:

Key-action must always be, coupled or uncoupled, light and easily controlled in subtle attacks and releases, trills and ornaments, and runs with graduated touch. It is my opinion that it should be mechanical (tracker) with a skillfully worked out system of weights and balances, or done electronically with the same touch possibilities. Keyboards should certainly be of five-octave range so that *all* organ literature can be played, with key materials that feel good and last long, and the keys should be of piano-key length with their feeling of elegance and quality.

Tone should be warm and colorful, with overtones the natural result of the pipe itself, eventually. I think we have perhaps leaned too heavily on mutations and mixtures for color and brilliance. Mixtures are simply the residue of the *blokwerk* of centuries ago, when you played either full organ or nothing; the mixture is the top end of the old *Blokwerk*, the only part that remains. I suggest that the use of different materials may yield astonishing tonal results; a few years ago two of my students made pipes of pa-

per (plain old purple and green construction paper) that produced tone that was more colorful, with richer harmonics, than tone produced by pipes in a contemporary European organ standing nearby! Plastic or plasticized paper pipes, I maintain, will be richer tonally and more interesting than pipes made of metal or wood (though very thin wood pipes develop a tonal sheen that is enticing).

Windchests can probably easily be made of plastic, of uniform number of stops, thereby cutting costs remarkably once forms are made, and making the organ considerably more portable than present-day organs.

The entire organ can be a beautiful exercise in unity—an instrument, with console, tone-producing components, action, and case, one entity, with everything working together, mechanically, tonally, and visually, to make a beautiful musical instrument.

Flexibility of dynamics is certainly a requirement in the making of music. The nature of pipe speech is that they speak or not; they don't by nature get louder or softer by varying wind-pressure without the attending condition of going sharp or flat, if indeed they can gracefully do either! We have in the past (and still do, to some extent) placed divisions in boxes with controllable venetian blinds on one or two sides which can be opened or closed by a pedal; while this has little integrity, it does furnish the instrument with a degree of dynamic flexibility. This means of tonal flexibility should probably be explored further to include shutters (and casework, for that matter) made of plastics and other lightweight ma-



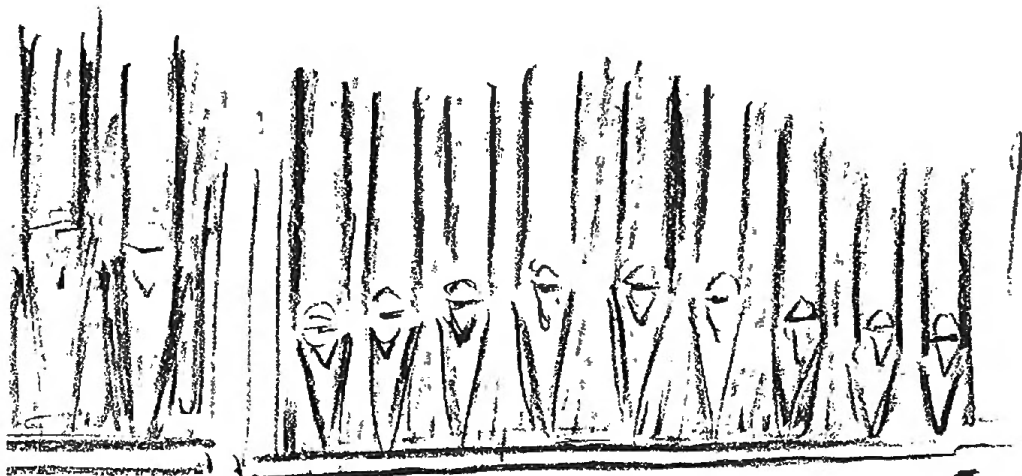
terials with a purely mechanical action working them, shutters on several sides (even on the back, sending the sound against a more remote reflecting wall for depth of sound) and top, with each set of shutters controlled by a different pedal.

But mainly, I believe that we should approach organ-building (and perhaps even organ-playing) as one of my friends approached his work as superb candle-designer and manufacturer—as if it had never been done before! Tradition, if taken too seriously, can be the death of us! Certainly it has buried many a fine idea.

So, let us make a joyful noise on joyful instruments! Throw open the doors, let in the fresh air, the sunshine, the gorgeous blues and greens (mixed) of nature, the sounds of joyous birds and crickets, of jibbering squirrels and delighted children.

This world, and certainly the world of the established churches, has taken remarkably strong and joyful ideas and imprisoned them in grey stone and heavy atmospheres. The organ has bowed low and done likewise. Yet the delightful Compenius organ of 1612 with all pipes of wood was built for dancing!

Let us put on, and keep on, our thinking and imagination caps. The organ can indeed “soar above,” as Widor liked to think, with joyous tones of multitudinous colors and shades, expressively played by delighted, exuberant organists revelling in light-fingered freedom. Let’s do it!



## TONE, THE MAIN REASON

We should not have to be reminded that the real reason for the existence of any musical instrument is to create *tone*. It exists to make music by way of tone. Now, tone can be anything from a hoot to a thin shriek. It can vary from the scarcely audible to the unbearably loud. And all of these possibilities are at the disposal of the builder of organs. How the organ-builder handles his job of laying out the pipe-scales, how he places the organ in the room, how he interprets the specification, how he looks at organ-building in general and in particular, has a great deal to do with how an organist enjoys playing it, how an audience fares in listening to it, and how long the church or college elects to keep it. To some extent, the continuation of the organ as an instrument is dependent on how the organ-builder interprets his role.

During the past few decades we have thrown overboard everything that was not considered "essential." Architecture did the same thing. All embellishments, decoration, fanciful things were unceremoniously discarded. Gropius and the Bauhaus were the chief instigators in architecture; in organ design it was done in the name of the Organ Reform, actually started by Albert Schweizer—though he kept pointing to the Cavaille—Coll organ in the Church of St. Sulpice, certainly not an Organ Reform organ, as the ideal instrument.

Whatever, we followed our leaders—and I was out there pointing, myself, though chiefly in the direction of a sensitive tracker action (and I still

stand on that platform)—to the extent that we've turned our instrument into a formula: all specifications look alike, many organs sound alike, most organs are boring tonally because all has been sacrificed to tonal ensemble and the individual stops are not exciting to listen to. Worse, we have taken to imitating older organs, primitive voicing methods, primitive console design, primitive ways of tuning (so that you cannot even play the B-minor Bach on them!), primitive limits to keyboard range, and so on. It is fairly easy to see where all this is leading—extinction. And I suppose that's why I'm so worked up: I think the organ has all the potential of becoming *the* instrument—the most exciting, the most popular, and, probably, the most demanding. At present it is pricing itself out of the market—in price, in popularity, in demand, in musical sensitivity. Something must be done.

First, the organ must have tone that can be listened to for a long time without getting boring: it must be beautiful. I realize that such a term as “beautiful” is old-fashioned and quite subjective; no matter. Create tone that everyone is entranced by and you will know what I mean.

There must be great variety of tone. The days of the “waterbucket” principals, built only to furnish the trunk of the ensemble tree, are gone. There is no reason why the Principal stop cannot be exciting in itself; indeed, it must be—it is too important to be simply utilitarian. In these days of soaring costs each stop must pull its own weight, as solo stop or ensemble stop. Flutes should all be different one from the other

(otherwise a unit stop would do just about as well). And by different, I mean *noticeably* different. Gemshorns, colorful Gemshorns, are useful at all pitches. A Quintadena or two I cannot live without, provided they are well done. Their pungency is needed. Narrow principals called Salicionals can also contribute much to the color of the organ. And don't forget celestes, an important tonal resource (do you know that on a large Allen electronic you can make a celeste of *any* stop?)

And then there's chiff! The consonant of the organ. It is indeed extremely important to have quick speech from a pipe—from *every* pipe. But I wonder about *overdone* chiff, and about *uneven* chiff. Just recently I listened to an organ recital played on an organ that had a very chiffy flute—but *only* on three notes in the tenor register; the rest of the stop was unchiffy. What a stop to make music on! The tracker action was too stiff to permit control over those pipe characters, and so they did their damage to the musicality of every line that ventured into their kingdom. A few nicks wouldn't have damaged the organ; they would have made it a much more musical instrument. Formulas again!

And then there are the reeds. The reeds that don't blend with anything, but that give—or *can* give—great excitement to music-making on the organ. First of all, they should speak properly. One enterprising builder guarantees his reeds (*he* builds them) to speak as quickly as the flues—and they do. But, to my knowledge, this company's reeds are the only ones to do so. Reeds, I think, should not add weight—but most full-

length reeds *do* add weight, making the organ more bottom heavy, more earthbound. I think they should add brilliance without weight, and without loudness; they should not consume the ensemble, but contribute brilliance to it. So many full-length Posaunes add so much weight to the Pedal that the entire organ seems to dig a hole and crawl into it. The Posaune is the organ's wild onion root. Which is fine if you don't want the organ to soar. Regals, short-resonator reeds, contribute much to the organ's color and are the organ's funny bone.

Tonally, the organ should not give its secrets away too soon or too easily. Wide, bubbly scales do this easily. There should be a great variety of scales in any organ, and there is reason to think that deep cases in dead rooms do much to add depth to the sound, along with warmth and blend. A too immediate sound is tiresome and soon palls. Much research should be done along these lines, and it *must* be done.

Beautiful tone, variety of tone, quick speech (but not too noisy), all contribute mightily to making a musical instrument.

## ACTION

The best action, and the only action that fits into the scheme of sensitive music-making, is the action that you don't notice at all. It should at all times be light and responsive in attack, and the keys should very quickly return when released, so that the release of the note can be controlled easily. Slow-returning keys can make performance into a stiff-sounding exercise. Likewise stiff, hard action.

The musical potential of even the most beautiful tone cannot be unlocked without a light, sensitive action. Some years ago when my first electric-action house organ arrived with the then-new "tracker touch," I was furious and told the builder that undoubtedly it would make bad players sound better—or, at least, more rhythmic—than before, but that it would keep a good player from doing anything subtle with touch. His reply: "But it will last forever!" So? Whither music?

Now that tracker action is a *fait accompli* and with us increasingly, it has become the magic key to acceptance by the "in" group of organists. Nonsense! Tracker action *per se* is meaningless, and can easily be a real hindrance to music-making. When I advocated tracker action at the 1952 A. G. O. National Convention, it was in an address entitled "A Sensitive Touch" and certainly was not a blanket endorsement of tracker action! A light, sensitive tracker action (my present house organ has 2¼-ounce tracker

action) has almost unbelievable and far-reaching musical potentialities, and is certainly, without doubt, the most sensitive way of playing music on an organ, while, by contrast, a hard, clumsy, slow-returning tracker action can offer more real resistance to music-making than the ugliest tone!

Perhaps I should mention that recently I have heard some organists voice their preference for a hard action, saying that a light action makes them afraid of playing wrong notes, particularly if they haven't practiced enough. Certainly a light action demands more, musically and from the control standpoint, than a heavier action. But was ever a fine instrument built for incompetents?

Perhaps you are assuming that I am writing about manual action only. Not so. Everything that I have said applies exactly to Pedal action as well. Recently I listened to a demonstration of a new tracker action instrument after having played it myself; in a Bach prelude the player played a Pedal key that needed a second "kick:" I heard the note played with a clack (good acoustics!), manual playing continued while the second clack (harder) brought the recalcitrant note, much needed, to life! Only a second or so late, it's true, but late enough to destroy the rhythmic flow. On the same instrument a fairly high level of body weight had to be maintained to keep all pedal notes sounding. I wonder what would have happened in a *rapid* passage!

In playing the organ one should never be conscious of "climbing from note to note" mechanically, of going from pot-hole to pot-hole, or having to work hard. Particularly on the organ, a



wind instrument, one should have the feeling of merely freeing the tone to speak. Organ-builders need to do research, obviously, in the field of weights and balances, of friction and its removal. With enough research and today's materials every action should be a good one!

The importance of action is downgraded by some builders, and, strangely, by some organists, who don't seem to be bothered by any action, no matter how clumsy; the organ, *per se*, is more interesting to them than music! This may be one reason for so many dull organ recitals.

Yet imagine the ecstasy of performing music whose tones are so sensitively released that any subtlety of touch and release is possible—to play a musical instrument which unlocks music easily without the undue effort of climbing from key to key.

This is not some dream, some unreasonable goal; it is a very necessary part of *any* musical instrument. Certainly with research and interest it is entirely possible.



## CONSOLES ARE FOR PEOPLE

Consoles are not *the* organ, as some people think, but they are much more important than most organ builders think! A well-planned and beautiful console, using fine materials that look fine and *feel* fine, can inspire a player to give an outstanding account of himself. A poorly designed console, with stops out of reach, toy-piano keys and/or overhanging keys that include banged knuckles as standard equipment, Pedal pistons or combination pedals on the wrong side or out of reach, and no foot rest, can easily cause a good player to turn in an uninspired, awkward performance. With good reason: he has been uncomfortable all evening!

As I have said all too many times before, the human body moves in curves. In fact, I know of nothing in nature that is not in or of curves. I know of no square tree, or square mountain, no square bush, no square man. And certainly, the organ console, to be played by man, should keep in mind that his body moves in curves. Arms, hands, fingers, combine enough joints (plus possible moving of the upper body) to easily encompass a five-octave keyboard. Legs and feet, being anchored to the fixed (on the bench) part of the body, and being not as flexible as arms and fingers, need to be accommodated in their curving movements. And so a concave, radiating pedalboard is an absolute necessity to sensitive playing. Oh sure, we can make do on a flat, parallel-keyed pedalboard—as we have had to do in Europe on

the old organs. But it's no pleasure, and makes clumsy, awkward work of playing the organ. As a student, my first organ job had me playing an old tracker with flat, straight pedalboard; I made do, but I never enjoyed it because it seemed so unnatural, and it always seemed to get in the way of making music. Slow things weren't too bad, fast things were. And we can't go through life playing adagios.

Manual keys, as I have already said, should in my opinion be long and elegant, adult size, with no overhang (we aren't building many six-manual organs today, so we don't have to squeeze dimensions so), and certainly of five octave range. Why this preoccupation of always trying to cut the range of keyboards on the part of builders—it's like cutting the size of candy bars to make a little more money!

Stop controls should be within *easy* reach of the player, preferably in front of the player in order to create as little distraction as possible. In any case, their position should always keep in mind the curving reach of the arm. When playing some of the new two-manual trackers with stops on the sides out of reach, I keep remembering how easy it is to play the Wanamaker organ in Philadelphia, how *easy* it is to reach all the stops in that rather large instrument! Where is our progress in this respect? We would do well to remember, also, the easy convenience of the old theater-organ consoles. Certainly we can design a more elegant stop-control, of perhaps better material. But the theater-organ console designer remembered that the human being moves in curves!

Combination action? Of course. Noiseless and quick. And particularly in organs of over twenty stops, or where there must be flexible playing and accompanying—and that should be in *most* installations. My own taste dictates placing combination pistons (square, so they won't keep turning upside down and confusing us!) either above the top keyboard or under the bottom keyboard, with keyboards as close together as possible, like the old Chickering harpsichords, for easy changing of manuals. But more important is to have Pedal pistons galore, with generals *always* located on the right side of swell pedals. You can almost always get a *right* foot free, seldom a left foot. How many times I have had to cross over to get a general toe-stud while holding a middle D or E pedalpoint! It simply doesn't make sense to place them on the left side.

Two builders of pipe organs and at least one builder of electronics use stop/coupler and/or combination pistons that light up when in use. Not as garish as it sounds, it gives the player immediate knowledge of what is on at the moment. And, since little or no movement of control is necessary, it is much quieter. A good idea, so long as we don't get into red, white, and blue!

It seems silly to have to suggest that benches be adjustable, since it seems that no two sets of legs are exactly the same length, but do let's have adjustable benches, and do away with the adjacent lumberyard! As teacher, I am a little weary of stumbling over two-by-fours on my way to mark a phrasing or pedalling.

And let's design a contemporary console, a

console of today! Away with Gothic arches, crosses and the rest—what have these things to do with the organ? Let us have consoles *with* style, not *in* a style. Consoles express, to many people, the organ. Console design is a complete give-away concerning the feelings of the builder toward his instrument. In the design of its fanciest electronic, Yamaha has come up with a console design that we should all study: it is simple, stunning, efficient, and very much of today. Some day somebody is going to drag the organ into the twentieth century. It would be nice if we could all go together.

## A WORD ABOUT ELECTRONICS

There was a time, not too long ago, when no really “serious” organists would entertain the notion of playing an electronic “device.” I certainly was among the forefront!

Yet, I am beginning to have second thoughts, as are a handfull of other “serious” organists. New developments in producing and reproducing tone are steadily making great advances through constant research. I have, frankly, been astonished by some of the results of this research. Would that pipe organ builders would spend even one per cent of the money, time, and energy that electronics manufacturing concerns are spending on research! But I have seen practically no interest shown in experimenting with new concepts and/or materials, except in console design on the part of two builders. A welcome note.

But—back to electronics:

The first keyboard electronic that I know of was the Ondes Martinot, invented in 1923, and, though monophonic, it remains, in my opinion, the most musically expressive of all electronics, and has gathered around itself the most notable literature of any electronic—including one of Messiaen’s most important and lengthy works.

Electronics are capable of any kind of tone. Where they most fail to satisfy is in the realm of imitation, an area in which no true musical instrument needs to be involved. Commercial interests have their way, however, and seem to be more interested in short-term gain than in long-term

possibilities. What could have been a sparkling addition to our list of respected musical instruments has so far been something less.

Pipe organs, if their basic integrity is to remain inviolate, are terrace instruments, and remain inflexible dynamically except when stops are added or subtracted. The swellbox is a rather crude attempt to circumvent the natural limitation; it remains a necessity for the playing of "romantic" music.

Electronics have no such limitations. Indeed, dynamic flexibility is one of their strong points, and, given good tone, music of great sensitivity can be created on them. Key action can be as light as desired, of course, and in some cases can even control dynamics and vibrato.

The chief limitation of electronics is simply that they have attempted to achieve the limitations of the pipe organ—a rather foolish yet practical aspiration (where sales are concerned).

Given advances made during the last few years, it is easy to visualize the emergence of a new musical instrument, capable of any nuance of tone and dynamics, easily portable, along with its complete acceptance by the musical community, composers as well as performers. It is ironic that at this time, when electronic research is bringing forth ever more capabilities and potentialities in electronic musical instruments, pipe organ builders are building instruments that are ever more limited and inflexible. Perhaps we need both—but it is likely that one will end up in a museum.



## POSTSCRIPT

The past, as far as today is concerned, is full of dust, decay, gloom. It has had its glorious moments, which we have enjoyed to the full until they are worn out. Even favorite garments and comfortable shoes eventually wear out and grow threadbare. No criticism is meant of their original worth. But today is of today. It needs today's creative living in order to be vital, alive. Leave the past. Don't look back, don't try to reclaim the past; it is a futile gesture, pathetic. Move out into the bright blue skies of today and the future. Free yourself to be, to the brim full, yourself. You have nothing to lose, everything to gain. Leave the gravediggers to their forlorn pickings and move out. We all need your creative contributions, your individualistic color, your particular vitality.