

On the last Saturday in June, 1987, hundreds of organists and organ lovers came to one of the largest buildings in Minneapolis to hear the largest organ in the midwest. It was the long-awaited "Play the Organ Day," a 14-hour marathon fund-raiser to benefit the preservation and restoration fund for the 123 rank Kimball organ, built in 1928 - dubbed the "Voice of Minneapolis" at the time of its dedication by Lynnwood Farnam and Eddie Dunstedter. The City of Minneapolis has started construction of a new Convention Center which will replace the present Minneapolis Auditorium, which consists of an exhibition hall and the auditorium/arena which seats 8000. The organ will be heard for the last time in late October when the Minnesota Orchestra with guest organist Hector Olivera will put this unique instrument through its paces. The City of Minneapolis has funded the removal and storage of the organ, but the remaining \$750,000 must be raised through private channels to ensure that the organ will be installed in the new building in 1991.

AGO -
American
Organist

Minneapolis Star and Tribune columnist Barbara Flanagan, a long-time supporter of the organ (she was writing about it when Virgil Fox played it in 1949), suggested a "Play the Organ Day" many months ago. The Kimball Pipe Organ Steering Committee took her suggestion to heart to stage the marathon. The event opened with an 8:30 a.m. wake-up concert on the theater organ console by Karl Eilers. At 9, Minnesota Public Radio presented a live broadcast, hosted by Michael Barone, with guests Karl Eilers, Edward Berryman, Merrill N. Davis III, and Flanagan. The marathon proper began at 10. The basic schedule included an invited guest organist playing for 10 minutes every half-hour, followed by individuals who payed \$5 for 5 minutes at either the theater or concert consoles. A festive atmosphere was created with the use of cabaret seating at round tables, balloons, clowns, food, a video tape showing the inside of the organ chambers, and sale of "Voice of Minneapolis" T-shirts and recordings of the organ.

Other events during the day included dancing and singing with organist Mike Grandchamp, a finale concert played by E. Lyle Hagert and Merrill N. Davis III, and the professional assistance of several local radio personalities who served as MC's to announce each individual's performance. A volunteer committee enlisted the help of a huge complement of volunteers, without whom the event could not have taken place. Over 100 people had the opportunity to play the great organ, many of whom commented that this was an experience they would never forget. The last person left at 11 p.m.

There were two associated events that led up to "Play the Organ Day." The evening before the marathon, the Steering Committee hosted organist Tom Hazelton, who performed at both consoles and delivered verbal program notes to the large audience (even large audiences such as those at national AGO conventions look small in this huge room). The organ again did one of the things it does best: it sells itself to all who come to hear it.

In early June, a number of brave volunteers participated in the second event leading up to the marathon. The

Mpls. St. Paul Magazine and local media sponsored a "Summer Pleasures Hot-Cha Parade." Included in this parade to promote local summer events were a 20' loon (state bird), a precision lawn-mower team, the Kenwood Croissant and Perrier Bottle Band, and a stalwart marching group of organ lovers. All were wearing their "Voice of Minneapolis" T-shirts (black shirts with a picture in black and white of the 5-manual console) with white shorts and carrying old organ pipes. At various intervals along the parade route the "organ major" stopped the pipe band and shouted "Pipes Up!" The group then played the theme of the little Bach g-minor fugue, to the delight of the crowd gathered along the parade route. Who cares that the theme was not in g-minor, that it was out of tune, that it had a few extra notes, and a few members of the "band" occasionally missed their cues? A good time was had by all.

On July 3, 1927, the Minneapolis Journal quoted A. E. Benson, recently appointed chairman of the organ selection committee, as follows:

"When the Municipal Auditorium Organ Committee was appointed, it was felt that a large number of Minneapolis citizens would like to participate in this move. We felt that \$30,000 could be raised by contributions of \$1 and under. This goal has been reached, due largely to the splendid support of the newspapers. The committee is confident that with this fine showing of popular interest larger contributions will be forthcoming. To that end the committee will direct its effort, starting this week, to assure to Minneapolis this great addition to the life and development of the city...This installation is meant for all time and every safeguard will be thrown around the placing of the order...The organ itself will be inclosed [sic] in the huge chambers on either side of the stage, and all pipes will be concealed. Each of the two organ chambers measure 42 feet in height, 17 feet in width and 60 feet in depth, which provides ample capacity for an instrument even of the size of the one to be installed."

One of the truly unique features of the organ is the inclusion of two consoles: a five-manual concert console and a 4-manual theater console. The concert console controls 122 ranks of the total in five chamber and six divisions: enclosed great/pedal; exposed great; enclosed bombarde; enclosed swell; enclosed choir; enclosed solo. The theater console controls approximately 22 ranks of the total organ and has one rank of its own, bringing the total to 123 ranks. Every percussion device imaginable is included in the theater organ, including two distinct birds and a 9-foot Kimball concert grand piano available at 16', 8' and 4' (unfortunately, the piano was removed and sold 20 years ago). Several percussions are also available on the concert organ (chimes, xylophone, glockenspiel, etc.). There are three full-length open 32' stops, including a monumental open diapason made of virgin timber 2.1/2" thick. Wind pressures range from 7.1/2" to 30", with 10" being the most common. Each division is complete from the low flues and reeds through mixtures and mutations. The choir, swell and solo include some highly individualistic solo reeds, and

there is a stupendous collection of tubas and trumpets, including the pedal 32' bombarde whose thunderous tone can hardly be described. Most standard pedal reeds pale before this example! The construction quality and scaling/voicing concept puts to rest the common condemnation of organs of this vintage. Most mutations are present (and non-unified), including 1.1/7' and 1'. There are 10 ranks of mixtures on the exposed great (part of a complete principal chorus including 16' and 5.1/3' along with multiple - and distinctive - 8' and 4' diapasons).

There was a massive fund drive held in 1927-28, consisting largely of the sale of \$1 stock certificates in the organ. Some \$30,000 was raised (toward a goal of \$100,000) through individual donations. With this money in hand, the order was placed with W. W. Kimball in Chicago. A total of \$10,750 was paid to Kimball, and the remainder of the money was used for building alterations. Flooding in the lower Mississippi valley requiring massive public relief, and the general decline in the economy in 1929 doomed the fund drive, and Minneapolis defaulted on the contract. Some years later there was a settlement of some \$50,000.

The great organ was dedicated Monday through Wednesday, June 4-6, 1928. Lynnwood Farnam performed before crowds numbering some 9000 on Monday and Tuesday, and local theater organist Eddie Dunstedter performed on Wednesday. There are people in Minneapolis today who attended those concerts, and they relate what the newspaper reviews did not: half the people walked out on Farnam, while Dunstedter (at the theater organ) had to repeat his selections for the crowd! The programs were as follows:

Monday:

Sketch in C	Robert Schumann
Sketch in D-flat	Schumann
Largo Appassionata from Sonata in A	Beethoven
Toccata, Adagio and Fugue	J. S. Bach
Cortege et Litanie	Marcel Dupre'
Legend of the Mountain	Karg-Elert
Allegro Moderato (Concerto 4)	Handel
Divertissement	H. L. Baumgartner
Reverie on "University"	Harvey Grace
Intermezzo (Symphony 6)	Charles-Marie Widor

Tuesday:

Dorian Prelude "Dies Irae"	Bruce Simonds
Fugue in c-sharp minor	Arthur Honegger
A Gigg	William Byrd
Concerto No. 5 in F	Handel
Carillon	Eric DeLamararter
To Shepherds As They Watched	Bach
Vivace (Trio Sonata 6)	Bach
Tumult in the Praetorium	de Maleingreau
The Mirrored Moon	Karg-Elert
Carillon-Sortie	Henri Mulet

Wednesday:

Hail, Hail the Gang's All Here	Anonymous
March of the Priests	Meyerbeer
Dancing Tambourine	Polla
Pilgrim Chorus (Tannhaeuser)	Wagner

Together	Henderson
Serenade	Schubert
Rhapsodie in Blue	Gershwin
"A Little Bit of Everything"	Dunstedter

In spite of the laudatory reviews and tremendous publicity heaped upon the great organ, its use was doomed from the start because of several very significant factors:

1. The Great Depression
2. The advent of "talkies" reduced the need for theater organs
3. The local musicians' union required that 15 people be hired whenever there was music in the Municipal Auditorium. Who would hire 14 extra people when all they needed was the organist?

The organ was again used for the AGO regional in 1949 when Virgil Fox played for a fairly small crowd. It was used occasionally for religious events (the only time the union rule was waived), and by the late 1950's it had fallen into such disrepair that it was not usable when the Lutheran World Assembly meeting for August 1957 was held, with a crowd of 100,000. After some political maneuvering, the City finally spent \$13,000 on repairs, at which time several tonal changes were made:

1. A low-pitched Mixture II was added to the exposed Great
2. A high-pitched Mixture III was added to the exposed Great (this in addition to the original Mixture V)
3. The 5.1/3' was shifted to become the third Octave 4'.
4. At some unidentified time, the Resultant 64' was disconnected.

Mike Rider (Rider Organs) has donated thousands of hours to the maintenance of the organ during the past several years. He notes that because of the lack of use, the internal chest leathers are in very good shape and the organ is well suited to be re-installed. The only leather problems are in the exterior reservoirs, of which there are dozens on very high pressures. Edward Berryman (Westminster Presbyterian) has performed on the Kimball many times, has spoken about it on the radio, and is a great advocate for it. Michael Barone (Minnesota Public Radio) has recorded it and scheduled recordings for broadcast. They serve together with other volunteers on the "Kimball Organ Steering Committee" which has staged several successful events during the past year. The Committee has set for itself two broad goals: (1) restore the organ and place it in the new building; (2) ensure that it is used and properly maintained. The first goal has been partially met: the City has donated enough money to save the organ, but the Committee must raise another \$750,000. The second goal will be an on-going project to make sure the organ does not again slip into oblivion as it did during its first sixty years.

Kimball did quality work in the 1920's. The fact that the organ works as well as it does today attests to it, and a tour of the five massive chambers reveals the high quality workmanship, for there are no sagging pipes or shifted pipe racks. Enormous pipe scales and high wind pressures that

logically seem they should not work produce breathtakingly beautiful sounds in the auditorium, from gorgeous strings and flutes to thunderous choruses, from intimate color reeds to a soul-wrenching pedal division. The organ is its own best salesman: those who have never heard it come away convinced of its worth.

The final concert on the great Kimball Organ in the Minneapolis Auditorium will be held the last Tuesday of October, 1987. Beginning November 1, the organ will go into storage. What is still needed is money, in fairly large amounts. Yet, with multi-million dollar buildings and art exhibits going up all around the community, a mere \$750,000 should not be such a challenge. If a few community leaders would rally to the cause, the future could be secured for this piece of American history. That future we hope will include a City Organist who can ensure the organ is heard at all the conventions held in the new building, and an endowment fund to provide monies both for maintenance (the organ will need releathering in the future) and for public concerts.

We on the Steering Committee are not proud - we seek your help. Tax-deductible contributions are being accepted by:

The Minneapolis Organ Trust Fund
Minneapolis Convention Center Project
315 E. Grant Street
Minneapolis, MN 55404
612/348-8300

When the Twin Cities AGO chapter hosts the regional in 1989, we will unfortunately not be able to show the organ - Grant Street will be a construction site rather than an Auditorium. Hopefully a future convention will again be able to thrill the audience with the largest organ in the Midwest - the "Voice of Minneapolis."