

Organist Fox Gives Memorable Recital

By RAYMOND MORIN
Telegram Music Critic

In a spectacular organ recital last night at the Auditorium, Virgil Fox gave a memorable exhibition of virtuoso playing.

Just as worthy of admiration was his devotion to the instrument's gentle voices and music that's directed at the heart and poetic sensibilities.

Fox acquaints his audience (last night's was a large one) with a warm personality. When he described his Bach scores, he made one feel that the music was to be a most personal communication from the German master.

And when he told of playing Durufle's Suite, Opus 5 last October in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, you were brought closer to the music than reams of program notes could have accomplished.

But the audience had no idea how informal this recital was to be until Fox reached the last stretches of Bach's "Now Thank We All Our God."

Stops Added

He had woven Bach's original melody around and over the Chorale tune with wonderful skill. Volume began to amass. Stops were added deftly while keyboards and pedals were under fire—then nothing.

Fox arose and asked for a "doctor." One stepped forward in the person of Martin G. Becker of Waltham. In the subcellar it was discovered that a generator was in need of repair.

From a special standpoint, nothing more disastrous could have happened than in Bach's Toccata and Fugue that was four selections beyond the Chorale.

Not that the Toccata had been innocent of any wrong notes, but it was a massive accumulation of subjects—sonorous and mightily impressive.

The Fugue was rolling along quite impeccably. The subject had been spoken in the four voices—episodes had built up the structure—the brilliant recitative at the end had gone at breakneck speed—and there remained but two immense chords to be played. The very last succumbed to more generator trouble.

When it was rectified, Fox repeated and brought the work to its massive "Amen."

'One of Greatest'

He also explained to the audience that these things do happen—in fact it happened at

his home instrument in Riverside Church, New York city. He also called the Auditorium Organ "one of the greatest in the world."

Fox taught a lesson to organists who permit Bach's music to become dull for want of tonal color. He derived beautiful sounds from the "Adagio Cantabile." The "Fugue a la Gigue" wasn't only brilliant execution. It was virtually drenched in good spirit, and when the tune reached the pedals, he literally "danced a jig."

Much the same can be said—character-wise—about Edmundson's "Elfin Dance," and the Scherzo from Vierne Second Symphony.

The fireworks were set off in the Durufle Suite and Reger's Fantasy and Fugue on "How Brightly Shines the Morning Star."

Own Style

Fox has his individual style. In rampant passages he emphasizes the rhythm with sideways head and shoulder motions. And when he reaches the final stage of stentorian volume, he looks up at the right bank of pipes as if he's investigating where it's coming from.

These don't influence or alter the energy, drama, and magnificent musicality that went into such as the Durufle and Reger.

Nor did these bents in "showmanship" deter him from squeezing every ounce of beauty he could from the Suite's Sicilienne. It was crystal-like in sound.

The Toccata was an eminent "tour-de-force"—so was the Fugue from the Reger score.

In his December 1955 Auditorium recital, and again last night, Fox proved that the organ has an unchallenged membership among the aristocrats of the concert platform.

As such, he stands with Horowitz, Heifetz, and Piatigorsky.