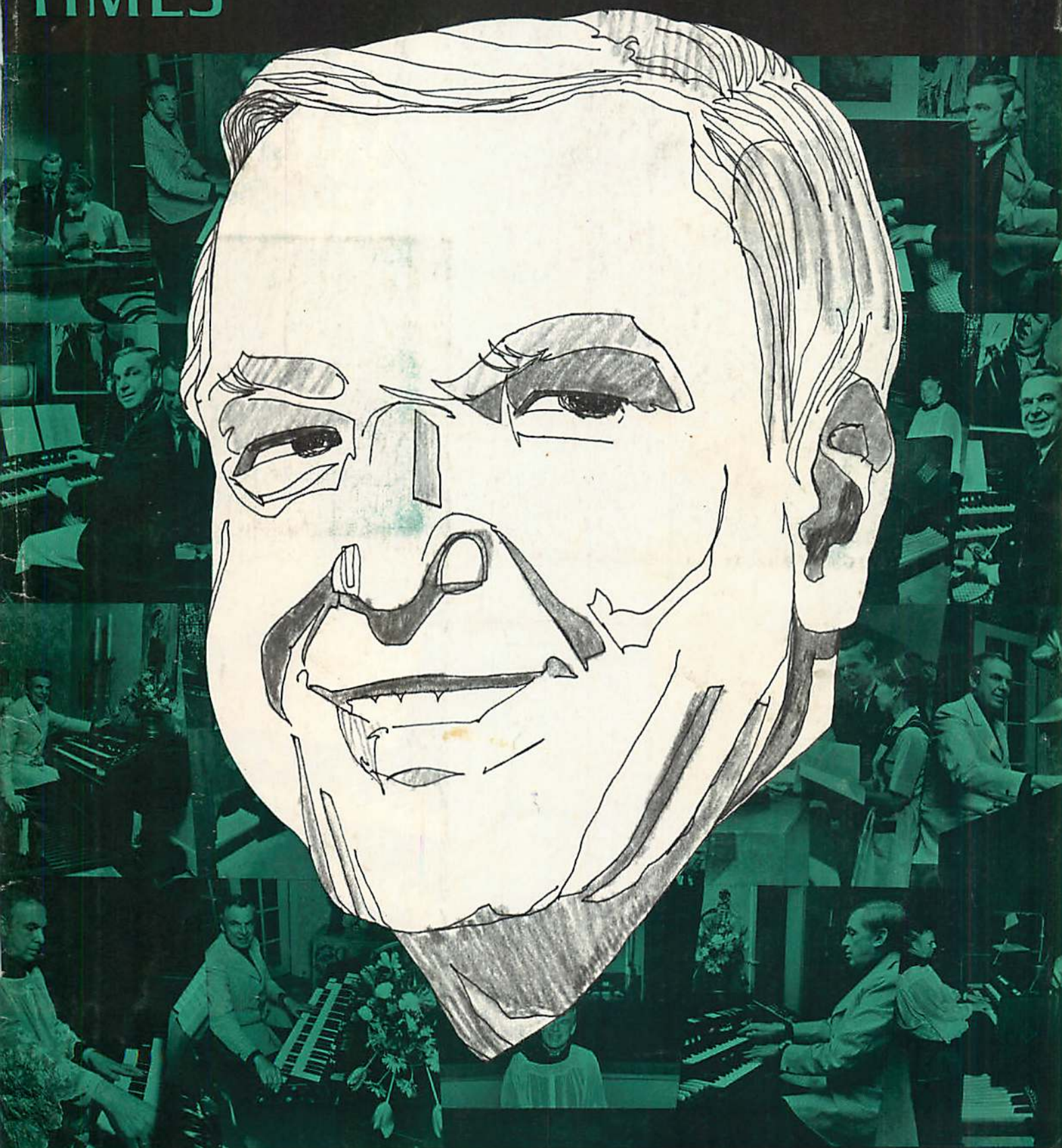


# THE HAMMOND TIMES

Volume 31 Number 2 June/July 1969



**IN THIS ISSUE- GEORGE WRIGHT, The Man & Musician.**



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## On the cover . . .

Millions of people have thrilled to the distinctive George Wright theater organ sound. But few know about the man. A Hammond Times reporter recently spent a day with the great George Wright to learn something about the personal man . . . and shares with you his thoughts and ideas.

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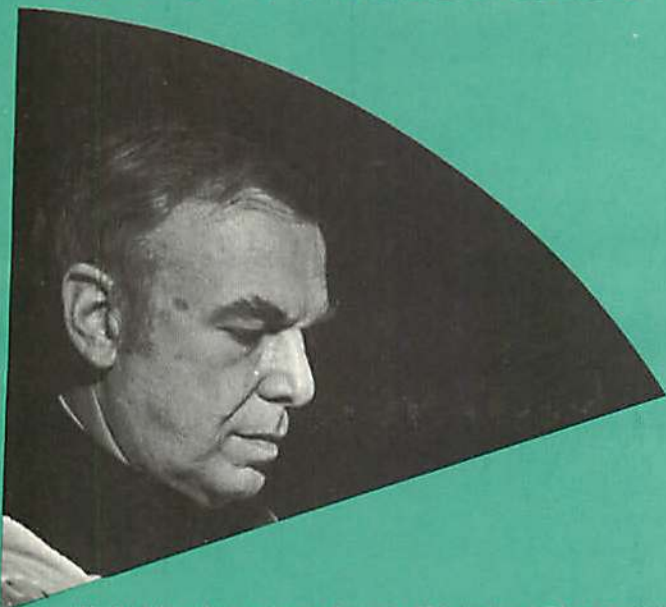
# GEORGE WRIGHT, The Man...







## and Musician.



**"Hello! So glad to hear from a Hammond Times reporter. I'll pick you up in half an hour, and we'll play it by ear."**

*I hurried out to sunny California's Hollywood Boulevard in front of my hotel at the appointed time. George Wright coolly toiled up in his little white '56 vintage Thunderbird. I jumped in and off we went.*

*And that's how my long but exciting day with George Wright began. I had been eager to meet the gifted personality who's known to millions of music lovers. A man whose brilliant keyboard talent single-handedly revived the wonderful theater style pipe organ music of the silent film days.*

*George Wright recorded many theater organ styled recordings during the '40's and '50's, and they were instant successes. Over one million records and pre-recorded tapes were sold. Since then he's made many more recordings. And they've all sold well. An organist's organist, George Wright is considered the "best there is."*

*I wasn't disappointed. Physically George Wright is tall, lean, good looking and a smart dresser. He's intelligent and speaks easily on a variety of interesting subjects.*

*But, of course, the subject most interesting to me was George Wright — the man and musician. And I want to share with you some of his thoughts as he expressed them during a typically busy day . . . getting music he'd written for St. Mary's choir duplicated; playing for an ABC-TV daytime show; practicing on St. Mary's great pipe organ; and playing the Hammond X-66 in his lovely home.*

**"I'm an all 'round musician . . . a Jack of all trades."**

I give classical recitals throughout the country, as well as popular, light classical, and jazz concerts. I've worked at movie studios accompanying orchestras. And I play organ for TV commercials, a TV program, as well as accompanying and composing music for St. Mary's choir. I play diverse music styles because I enjoy all kinds of music.

Presently, I'm the musical director for an ABC-TV daytime serial — General Hospital. I compose all the music for it. And I try to score the music the way a movie is scored. In silent pictures, the organ was used to accent the action of the actors. I don't do this. Rather, I gear myself to what a character is thinking and why he's doing what he's doing. It's very interesting work. The studio has an old Hammond B model which I play for the show. It was built in the '30's. The finish is a little beat up. But the sound is excellent.

And I enjoy my work as a classical church organist for St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Whittier, California; even though it requires many hours of preparation. Their pipe organ is one of the best in Southern California. Balcom and Vaughan of Seattle built all the mechanical parts; the pipes were imported from Holland. I don't mind at all traveling the distance I do to play such a great organ.

**"I was in show business the second I started playing the organ."**

I often went to the California Theater in Stockton, California to see the movies, and seeing movies continues to be an enjoyable pastime. At age 11 I had been taking piano lessons on and off for 8 years; and I was thoroughly amazed at the things Inez McNeil did with the 3-manual pipe organ. I suddenly wanted very much to learn how she did it. Seeing my earnestness she accepted me as a pupil. I didn't mind the difficulty I had scraping up \$1.00 for an hour lesson which always ran into 3 hours. Mrs. McNeil was very kind.

I would pinch hit for her whenever she had something else to do. And management played up the idea of a "child marvel at the organ!" At age 14 I joined the musician's union and immediately went into radio.

At this period, Jesse Crawford was my greatest influence. His playing was unique. And even before I knew what to listen for, I realized his playing was clean, and he had a beautiful sense of phrasing. When he played ballads and love songs, he paid great attention to the meaning of words.

After high school graduation, I did a brief stint in a San Francisco night club. Then I became a staff organist for a Mutual Network affiliate. At the same time, I appeared at





the big 5,000 seat Fox Theater in San Francisco 6 days a week on a featured spot. Then I moved to New York and worked for NBC radio and the recently razed Paramount Theater in Times Square. All the top entertainment names appeared at the Paramount . . . Frank Sinatra, Bob Hope, Jane Russell, Martin and Lewis, and many, many more. And since it was the big band era, so did Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Stan Kenton, Woody Herman, Count Basie and Duke Ellington.

A young singer was brought in by the management to appear with me. And I still have some old Paramount ads saying "George Wright at the organ assisted by Eddie Fisher."

**"Organ playing opportunities are limited today."**

There are lots of people studying organ. But I frankly don't know what they're going to do with it. If I had a child interested in the organ entertainment field, I'd be very honest and advise him to forget it.

While the organ field has been good to me, it is a rat race fraught with uncertainties. But if he were still interested, after being advised of all the pitfalls, I wouldn't hold him back. I'd be confident that he'd know what to expect. It takes a great talent and a strong personality to get to the top in any aspect of entertainment. And this is especially true in organ entertainment. Today the jazz organ field appears to have the greatest number of opportunities.

**"Good teaching is essential to organ playing success."**

I do not teach because I'm not a very good teacher. But I think there is a great need for more and better teachers. Now anyone can set himself up as a teacher. He can be full of bad taste musically and bad habits technically. I think standards should be established to eliminate teaching incompetency. The most important factors in a person's musical development is the teacher, and a desire to progress. A good teacher can assess a pupil's ability, and then give him or her the type of music and teaching that will help them develop.

I also believe a piano background is imperative if a person wants to seriously study keyboard music. I've seen some really gifted and talented people stopped cold. They've had tempo and good color but lacked technique. One can't sound good on a piano without technique. You can get away without it on the organ, but not too far. Learning a playing technique is hard work. It requires many long hours of practice.

**"The unique Hammond tonebars are the main difference between Hammond and other electronic organs."**

Hammonds do a lot of things other organs can't do . . . primarily because of the tonebars. The Hammond tonebars permit the organist to create his personal sound. He can create almost unlimited combinations of fundamentals and harmonics with the tonebars. As an entertainment organ, there's nothing that can ever beat the Hammond. And I love the fact that a Hammond never goes out of tune and it's portable . . . you plug it in and it's ready to go.

Tonebars, the most important feature of a Hammond organ, seem to scare off the beginning organist. Actually the tonebar difficulty ceases to exist once a beginner realizes he can experiment with them. The pitch labeling on each tonebar is very helpful. And of course there are many books on the subject designed to help even the rank beginner!

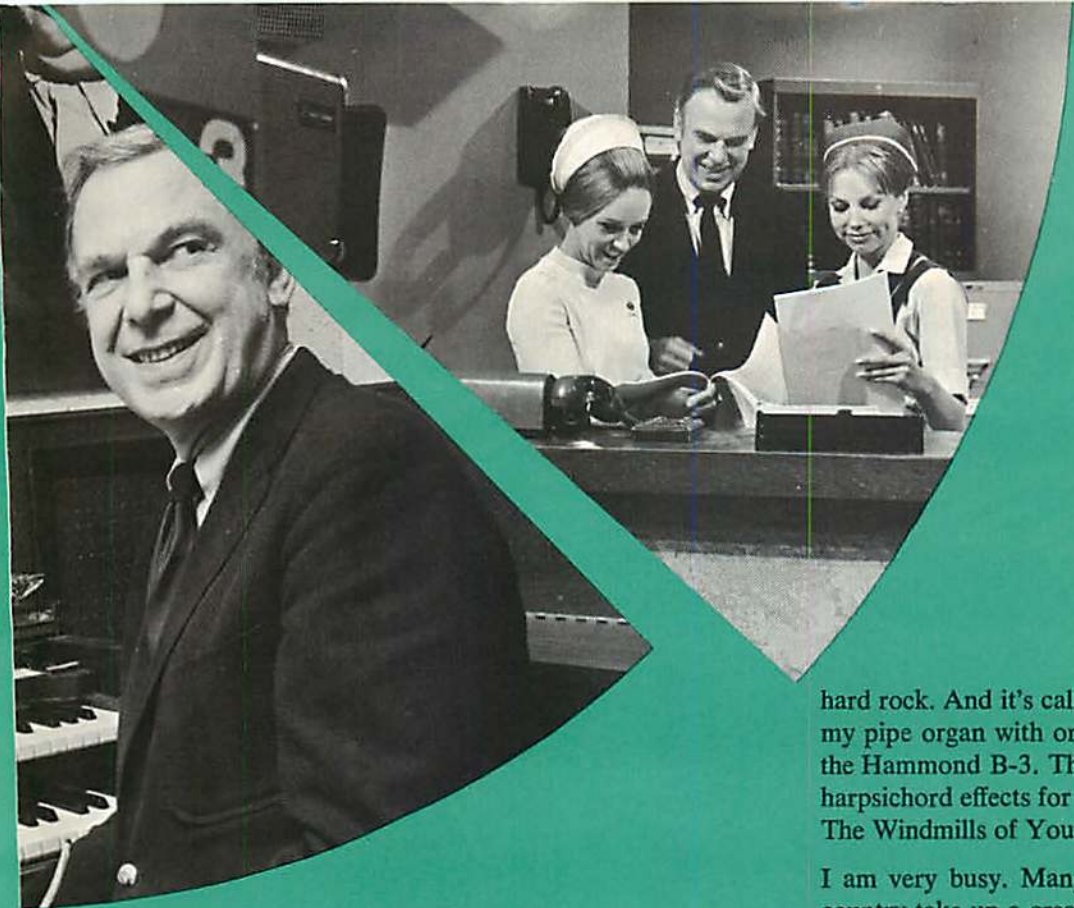
**"I have no idea what the next musical trend will be."**

Computerized sound is not terribly good. It's a novelty . . . something people will tire of easily.

The Beatles are great. I love them. I think they've contributed more to popular music than any other artist in the last 5 years. Some other favorite sounds are Tijuana Brass, Anita Kerr, and the Rolling Stones. I don't really like all the guitar influence in church music because it's not done too well. I think there should be a distinctive church sound and it should be retained. However, I do approve of classical guitars at services attended mainly by kids to help them identify with the church.

I like the jazz sound of Jimmy Smith and some of Jackie Davis. I think black jazz organists are really inventive. They have their own sound and moods . . . something the white organist doesn't have.





**"The organ of the future is the electronic organ."**

There aren't too many theater pipe organs in regular use today. The one in St. Louis' Fox Theater is used; and others are probably played by organ buffs. Some will do no more than give a few groans. They're terribly complex, full of moving and leather parts which wore out long ago.

The electronic organ has done a great deal for the home organist. It's marvelous therapy for tensions of any kind. And the electronic organ is playing an increasingly bigger part in today's music. There appears to be a definite trend toward the use of automatic rhythm with organs. This aspect of organ playing interests me.

I don't like to compare the pipe to the electronic organ because the playing technique is vastly different. And each can do things the other can't. Small electronic organs can't be expected to fill a cathedral with authentic church organ sound. And by the same token, I wouldn't want to put a church organ in a restaurant, ball park, nite club, etc. Although I've heard some Hammonds that sound great in a church with natural reverberation. Since I've had the Hammond X-66 at home, I've discovered sounds I never heard before. The number of sounds a tonewheel Hammond can make is virtually limitless. And oddly enough, the Celeste tuning of the X-66 could be very effective in a church.

**"I can't predict the future I'll have."**

My philosophy is to do a job and do it well. When it's finished, I forget it and go on to other things that have to do with music as it is today. I don't dwell in the past.

I've recorded many albums.\* And they've all been of standard tunes.

I recently recorded a new album on the Dot label that is very different from anything I've ever done. It's wild,

hard rock. And it's called *Now Is The Right Time*.† I use my pipe organ with orchestral rhythm support played on the Hammond B-3. The X-66 is used to provide bell and harpsichord effects for the Academy Award winning song, *The Windmills of Your Mind*.

I am very busy. Many live appearances throughout the country take up a great deal of my time. Every year I try to get to Rochester, New York; Houston, Texas; Portland, Oregon; Minneapolis, Minn.; Detroit, Mich.; San Francisco, Calif.; and other major cities. And besides playing for ABC-TV's *General Hospital* and St. Mary's Church, and recording, I have my own pipe organ to take care of. And I must spend several hours a week to keep it in top condition. It requires regular tuning which I do myself.

My future in music will depend on how I grow musically and how well I keep up with the pop field. One thing is certain . . . I will try hard to do my best artistically and technically.

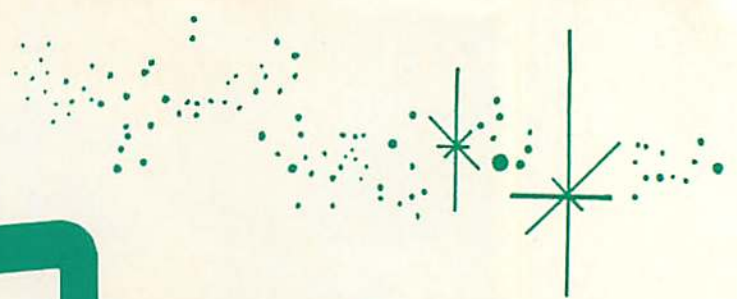
**"Thank you for coming along with me today. I hope it's been interesting for you. I've enjoyed every minute of it."**

*And that's how my long, exciting day with George Wright ended. He dropped me off at my hotel at the end of, what was for me, a memorable experience, and one that I will probably never forget.*

*I hope you've enjoyed these few moments with George Wright as much as I enjoyed being with him. He's a most unusual man—a man who lives in the future and thrives in the challenge of new and interesting trends. As a musician, few can match his talent, and many continue to enjoy the opportunity to hear his genius. □*

\* Some of his albums are: *The Wright Touch*; *George Wright Plays George Gershwin*; *A George Wright Pipe Organ Concert*; *Great Hawaiian Melodies*. † Available in July 1969.





# 6 WEEK CONCERT TOUR RACKS'EM IN.

