

THE PACIFIC COUNCIL  
FOR ORGAN CLUBS, INC.



# HOME ORGAN FESTIVAL

at

## ASILOMAR

PACIFIC GROVE  
CALIFORNIA

"The Greatest  
Organ Show  
On Earth!"



## "THE GREATEST ORGAN SHOW ON EARTH"

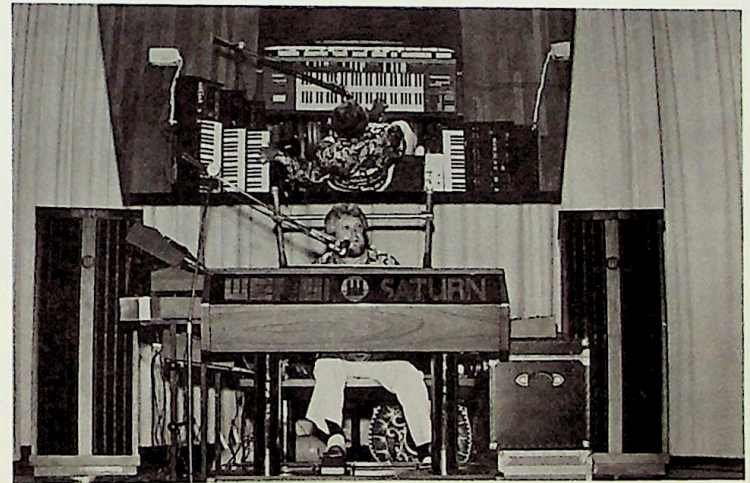
### Asilomar Conference Center

Why do more than a thousand people from 18 to 80 converge here every September--laughing, hugging, and pounding shoulders as if they were attending a class reunion?

What irresistible compulsion brings all these happy extroverts to Asilomar as surely as the famous butterflies who winter a few blocks away?

The lure is the nation's greatest theater-style organ music this side of Jesse Crawford and George Wright. As typical organ groupie Annie Olive of Southern California puts it, "If I could have only one vacation, this would have to be it."

Like the annual return of those migrating Monarchs, a few scouts arrive first. As more and more of "the Committee" flit in on a Sunday and Monday, skilled preparations for the week begin--only to be dropped instantly if someone mentions key words like "stop by," or "the party's in the Donlins' room."



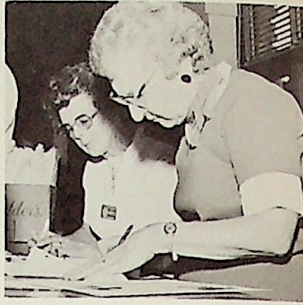
*For far-out music, this organ is aptly named.*



As soon as the munchies run out, it's back to setting up the circus.

For circus it is. By Tuesday, 1200 register for "The Greatest Organ Show On Earth," 5 concert-jammed days in one of the most beautiful natural settings in the world--for the luckiest music-lovers anywhere.

It's the annual Home Organ Festival of the Bay Area's 3000-member Pacific Council for Organ Clubs (PCOC).



*Reg Day*

### ARTIST AND AUDIENCE--WHICH IS WHICH?

Musical knowhow is what links this mixed group in a unique symbiotic relationship with its performers. No artist gets away with a shoddy performance before *this* bunch, because many of the listeners are just as good on the keyboards. Some are even world class--



*There's no more heady applause for an organist than that of an Asilomar audience. Gene Robertson basks in the glow on the Festival stage.*

like Ann Leaf and Porter Heaps, who have approximately 100 years of radio, theater, recording, and teaching fame between them.

For that reason, the organ manufacturers who provide the artists for this show choose them very carefully. As a result, the HOF stage has welcomed the na-

tion's best, playing everything from classics to jazz.

They include, to name only a few, the great classicists Richard Purvis, retired Director of Music for Grace Cathedral, and Hector Olivera, cathedral organist at 9 and now specializing in standards; such masters of theater-organ styling as Don Baker, Bill Thomson, Lynn Larsen, Carol Jones, Larry Vanucci, Rex Koury, Bud Iverson, Tom Hazelton, and Glenn Derringer; and jazz experts like Ann Tanner, Seth Rye, Danny Brown, and David Kelsey.



*An organist's talent often extends to other keyboard instruments-- Larry Vanucci, Gus Pearson, and Gordon Tucker ham it up for the lunch lineup.*

It's a little harder to describe the age, talents, and background of the audience. One woman left before the Saturday night finale one year to help her mother celebrate her 102nd birthday. Yet a promising amateur who played as an evening warm-up artist the same year was struggling with his first downy mustache at 16.

Actually, though the median age is slightly over 45, the true age of this group is somewhere around a permanent 25, if enthusiasm counts. Physical vigor has something to do with it, too. The living units, dining area, concert hall, Festival headquarters, and organ showrooms are scattered all over the hilly, forested dune terrain. To hear, or eat, you exercise.



A few of the audience don't play at all, and some will never be more than hopeful dubs. But most are middle-level organists or better, and thoroughly knowledgeable of organ technique. All of them love "the king of instruments," whether pipe or electronic. Quick to discern and applaud real talent, they're politely lukewarm to the mediocre.

It's this knowledge and responsiveness that make performing here such a unique challenge to concert organists, who find themselves vying with one another to present the most memorable shows. Yet at the same time the clubby, euphoric mood of the Festivaleers affects them, too. They cheer fellow artists from the wings, admire one another's technique and arrangements, and take diligent note of tricks they want to remember. In a sense, it's their convention, too.

But performers can also psych themselves out over this audience--even those who are the most talented and experienced. Knowing this, the HOF Committee provides a warm and sympathetic Green Room backstage, where the artists can quell their internal butterflies at a small bar presided over by Committeeman George Watson. Once they begin playing, the nervous ones usually feel a strong rapport with the audience--and give their all.



*Organ fans, many of whom are music teachers themselves, try to be early for their hero's morning workshops.*

This creates its own snag on occasion, as some artists can get carried away by such a heady relation-

ship. Early stage directors went up the wall trying to flag down grooving performers who were, in effect, heedlessly forcing all subsequent concerts to be late. The last number often wound up long past midnight, with the listeners glassy-eyed and fanny-numbed.

#### TIMING--THE KEY TO PROGRAMMING SUCCESS

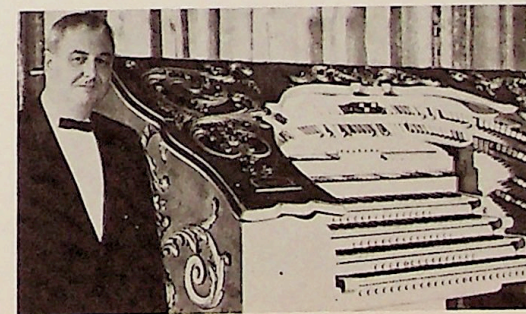
Finally, a stage manager came up with a sure stopper: the backstage traffic light. Timed for an overall 40 minutes, it remains visible at all times to the artist onstage, though out of the audience's line of sight. The organist plays most of his concert with the green light on; the amber light is his signal to wind it up; and the red light lets him know he's totally out of time--so *stop* already!

A further, last-ditch warning is a darkened stage with only the tiny organ lights left on. And when all else fails, the stage crew has a never-fail secret weapon. They pull the plug on the organ. *That* hasn't been done for some time now--but two newcomers finished without lights last year.

"Sticking to a tight schedule is absolutely necessary," says Director of Operations Ken Skoonberg, who's worked on 15 Festivals. "We now have as many as 14 or 15 exhibitors furnishing top artists, and in all fairness they must be given equal time onstage."

Ken says one answer is the 40-minute HOF concert length. At first this seems to be an odd time-span for a concert, but actually is quite practical. It was Former Director Tiny James who noted that the carbon rods in the big arc lamps spotlighting the stage lasted a little less than one hour. This was about equal to the time

*Famed Organist Tiny James shaped the present successful format of the Festival as its Director from 1969 through 1978.*





needed for introductions, applause, and 40 minutes of music. Longer concerts made it difficult to schedule all artists into the main auditorium at least once during the Festival.



*Charlie and Jeanie Banks set up light and sound equipment in Merrill Hall's balcony.*

## AMATEURS RUN A PROFESSIONAL SHOW

All the help involved in managing this "music camp for the mature" is amateur. The HOF Committee of 40 to 45 members is hand-picked by the Director, who is chosen by officials of the PCOC. Some, like Howard Otis of Sonora, have had some school or college stage experience. A few, like former Committeeman Harold Brinkman, a KRON-TV engineer, and Bob Warnock, a retired Mill Valley electronics engineer, have professional knowledge of their Festival tasks. Brinkman used to handle closed-circuit TV for an overflow hall; Warnock handles backstage lighting.

But most Committee members have had to learn from the ground up what it takes to put on a slick, snag-free \$150,000 production covering five solidly packed days, preceded by a whole year's planning.

Charlie and Jeanie Banks of Oakland are excellent examples of this amateur-but-professional knowhow. When Charlie first started managing the spotlights 20 years ago, he'd never handled anything hotter than a flashlight. But *someone* had to do it, so Charlie volunteered

at the urging of the then Assistant Director, Berkeley Rad Lab engineer Dewey Cagle.

About the same time, Jeanie Banks was drafted from her job as house-light dimmer to become the Festival's sound engineer. "The person who'd been doing it was--well, unreliable," she recalls. "Half the time when the curtain went up and the concert began, the mikes would be dead." She had nowhere to go but up.

Neither of these two amateur pros can recall any really embarrassing moments in their HOF careers. "Maybe *because* we were amateurs, we've been very, very careful not to let dumb things happen. I've always lived in mortal fear of live mikes backstage, for instance--and of open "pots" causing hum or feedback that can ruin a show," observes Jeanie.

But there was a year, back when all the equipment was rented, that Charlie says he had to depend on a "pregnant light bulb." It had a huge blister on the side--and the spare didn't work. Luckily, the bulb's time was not at hand.

So how did the Bankses manage to become so expert that they've never once loused up this professional-quality show?

"Dewey taught us," says Jeanie, simply, as if that explained all. "Dewey knew a lot about everything. He was the most knowledgeable man I ever knew. But he had



*Festival Founders Kay Chenoweth Bradley and the late Dewey Cagle, in Hoberg's ballroom. Jam-session organs are in background.*



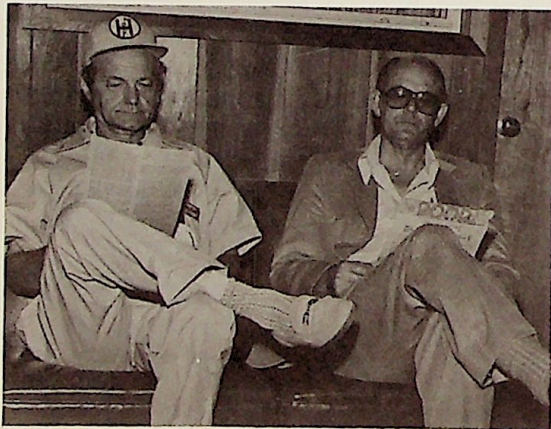
no common sense," she sighed. "He tried to tell me he was going to outlive me in spite of his chainsmoking," she added sadly. "That was just a few weeks before he died. I was so mad at him for dying...."

## FROM FRONT PORCH TO MAIN BALLROOM

The beloved Dewey Cagle was one of a tiny handful of organ buffs who founded the Festival out of sheer need to hear more good organ music. Organist Hal Schutz, now deceased, and Oakland organ buff Kay Chenoweth (now Bradley) first conceived the idea of the Pacific Council for Organ Clubs (40 of them now) and its Festival...

The doers who ran with the idea at the beginning included Art Chenoweth; Dewey and Lorraine Cagle; famed Bay Area organist Tiny James and his wife Ida; Stu Green, first editor of the Festival's daily "Poopsheet;"\* Frank Foust, first editor of the Council's monthly *Tabs & Drawbars*; and Flo Lehtinen, who den-mothered the whole bunch and later headed PCOC.

Schutz was the first to dream up a "Hammond Weekend at Hoberg's," the popular Northern California resort --but it never got off the ground. The Chenoweths finally put up a deposit on space at Hoberg's in 1958, and a year later a scant 100 people, including the Hoberg's help, attended the first Home Organ Festival.

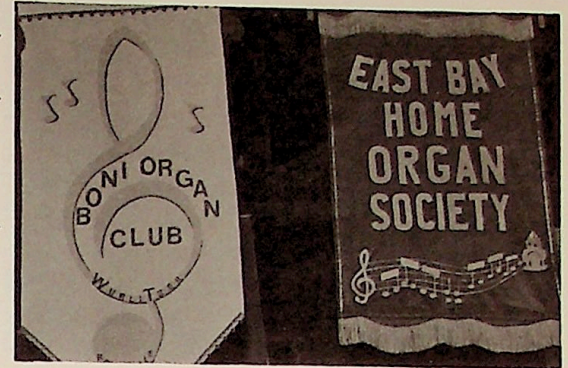


*Everybody reads the "Poopsheet," including former TABS & DRAWBARS Editor Frank Foust and HOF Director Ed Watson. Paper's gossipy style was set by long-time editors Peg and Stu Green.*

As Dewey's widow remembers that first inauspicious

\*For Parlor Organ Official Press.

*Bright club banners give a medieval tournament air to Asilomar's massive stone Administration Building.*



show, only 3 organs companies were represented. Schutz played the Hammond; Dee Fisher, then the official Disneyland organist, played the Wurlitzer; and a Lake County store owner named Winnie Curry furnished and played a Baldwin--on Hoberg's front porch.

It didn't take long for the word to spread to Bay Area organ-lovers, however. The young show took off and never looked back. Twenty-odd years ago, there were still a lot of people around who remembered with pleasure the great theater pipe organs of the Twenties. Now, through the genius of first the Hammond Organ Company and then other manufacturers, it had become possible to play those sounds right in one's own living room.

Some of the more thoughtful organ fans feared they would be the last to keep theater-organ music alive, but several things took care of that: 1) the financial health of the new organ manufacturers; 2) better and better electronic reproduction of the pipe organ sound; 3) the ease in learning to play the organ--according to some experts, about 5 times easier than learning piano; 4) the lower cost of electronics, placing them within far easier reach than pipes; and 5) the youth, talent, and enthusiasm of a whole new generation of organ concert artists --living proof that this beautiful music would live on.

For the second Festival, special showrooms were set up for the organ manufacturers, who were then asked to keep all demonstrations in those areas. Kay Chenoweth, as the first Festival Director, never lost sight of the Festival's original purpose: music, in concert form, for organ-lovers. She felt that anyone attracted to a par-





*World Premiere:  
Club member and  
warm-up artist  
Marge Volk  
plays the new  
Hammond Elegante  
for the first  
time anywhere--  
at Asilomar.*

ticular model played in concert could then spend as much time as he liked in the showroom, finding out anything else he wanted to know.

Relegating all demos to showrooms to keep the concerts "pure" was a courageous step for the young Festival to take. The manufacturers were the ones who provided the artists, and without them there was no show.

But the organ companies were quick to see the Festival as a goldmine of organ-lovers who were in the market for their first instrument or a better one. Closing the sale in the showroom was easy, once the artists had put the organs through their paces on the ballroom stage.

For it was now the main ballroom at Hoberg's, not the porch, that was jammed for concerts. The manufacturers were soon introducing their newest models before this crowd, and HOF fans became the first to hear and play many famous instruments.

Jam sessions that followed the concerts were like nothing ever heard before. If you like pop organ music, you haven't lived until you've heard 7 instruments played at the same time by the top organists in the country. For this, the organs were mounted on a high platform in

the center of the ballroom and the chairs kicked away. The dancing lasted half the night.

## A NEW REGIME AT ASILOMAR

But all good things come to an end, and when the senior Hoberg died in 1970, he bequeathed the entire resort as a haven for retarded youngsters. Tiny James, who had taken over the reins from Kay Chenoweth as Director in 1969, was at his wit's end as he combed Central and Northern California for a suitable place for the 1971 Festival.

One very beautiful location in Pacific Grove kept coming back to his mind: Asilomar, with over 100 acres of white sand dunes, pines, and wood-and-stone architecture by the masterful hand of Hearst Castle's architect, Julia Morgan. It also had a fine dining complex, excellent housing, and a 1000-seat auditorium.



*Beautiful Asilomar Beach (above) is at the northern end of the Monterey Peninsula's famed 17-Mile Drive, home of the Pebble Beach "Crosby" and other golf classics.*



There was only one drawback. Once a church convention center and now a state park, Asilomar was *dry*. But on asking more questions, Tiny learned that the rules varied from park to park.

For Asilomar, used only as an adult conference center, the law was fairly flexible. Liquor could be served in 3 ways: 1) to guests in one's room; 2) at a hosted bar, as long as none was sold; and 3) sold by a non-profit host organization holding a temporary liquor license (\$25 a day) from the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board.

True to its moderate leanings, the Festival opted for a hosted bar to keep things under control. So, at 4:30 every afternoon, and on opening and closing nights, free champagne is poured for all legal-age Festivaleers.

Vying for the honor of providing it, with music, are the manufacturers. The "Attitude Adjustment Hour" serves a total of about 140 cases for the week, or a modest 5 oz. (less than 2 drinks) per person at each half-hour party. It's not much, but everybody's attitude is just fine by dinnertime, thank you.



*As anyone can plainly see, most Festival attitudes need very little adjusting.*



*Nationally known organist Bill Irwin explains how to put pizzazz in your style with 13ths.*

## PARTYING'S OK, BUT WORKSHOPS IMPROVE YOUR STYLE

Having such tight Festival control on public drinking works out to everyone's advantage. It's much easier to catch that 8:30 a.m. workshop by the famous organist whose professional style you've been dying to emulate. Occasionally there will be a morning concert, but usually the mornings are reserved for the important fourth element of the Festival's success--the music workshops. The other elements are, of course, the concerts, the showrooms, and the Attitude Adjustment Hour (which is listed simply in the printed program as "AAH.")

Many Festivaleers are music teachers and semi-professional musicians; others just want to sharpen up their playing styles. Thus, despite the musical fun going on the showrooms till the small hours, and the innumerable spontaneous get-togethers constantly springing up in the "dorms," a surprisingly large group manages to stumble out of bed each day to catch the early breakfast, then take notes in class.

## ALL THIS AND GREAT MUSIC, TOO?

Lunch follows the workshops, then the musical fun begins all over again with post-lunch miniconcerts in the organ showrooms. These go on all day and evening.





*Attendees squeeze in shopping time for sheet music, tapes, records, cassettes, and musical gifts.*

Regular concerts start after dinner in Merrill Hall.

Besides all this are shops such as *Sheet Music* magazine's. Others offer records, tapes, and musical gifts; a women's boutique; and a photo service. Added pleasures are the beautiful beach and golf courses, the Asilomar pool, bike and horse trails.

But the central theme is music, and with all the music going on, it's not unusual to wander over the needle-scented paths, watching squirrels, bluejays, deer and rabbits (or raccoons at night), while listening to several sources of organ music at the same time.

For instance, turn to your right and gaze at a blue, blue ocean with tiny white fishing boats bobbing along. Turn to the left and admire the prow-like Monterey stone facade of Merrill Hall, where afternoon concert practice is underway. Straight ahead will be the Baldwin showroom, where Gus Pearson, one of HOF's favorite artists, is in fine "voice" as he plays a miniconcert. Just beyond is the Rodgers showroom, with perhaps the talented Maria Kumagai playing a dramatic arrangement of *Slaughter On Tenth Avenue*. At some point in your walk, you can hear them all at the same time--while enjoying the sunshine and the scent of grasses, pines, surf, woodsmoke, and perhaps roast beef for dinner. For organ-lovers, these riches are overwhelming.

## FESTIVAL BECOMES A SELLOUT

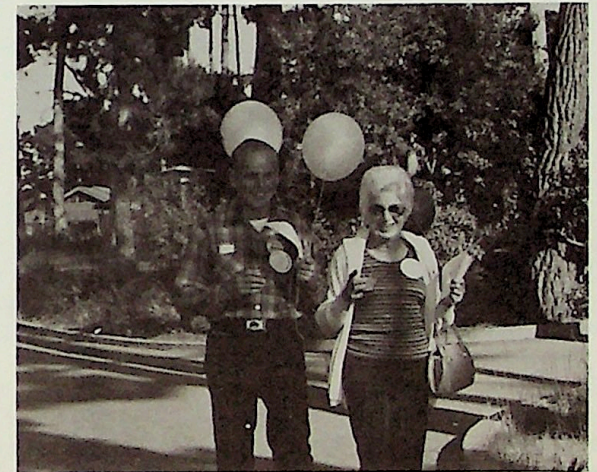
But lest you drop everything to get in on this great escape (if you're not in it already), let San Jose warehouse manager Ed Watson put on his HOF Registrar's hat and tell you what you face.

"The Festival is now so popular that without advertising, we get people from Hawaii to the East Coast. They have such a good time they all want their friends to enjoy it, too--so nearly 40% are first-timers every year. We start reservations in *March* for PCOC members, who get first choice because they sponsor the Festival, after all. When that HOF form arrives, the smart ones get their checks in the mail the same day."

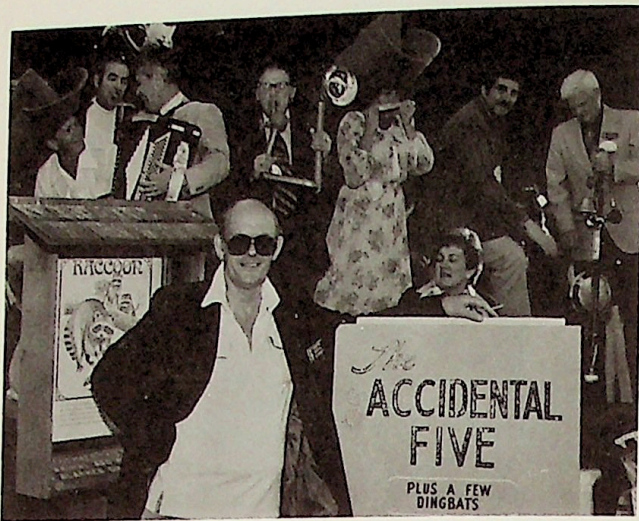
Watson gives preference to those staying the entire 5 days. Short-termers and "dailies" (who live in the area or arrange for their own housing) get what's left. "The 1981 Festival was almost entirely sold out by May, and '82 was completely sold out weeks earlier," says Watson. "The only hope for latecomers is to wait for cancellations."

Some cancellations are nightmares peculiar to this group, as every HOF Registrar soon finds out. Watson is such a soft touch to the changeable types who sign up, decide they can't go, then change their minds again, that his wife fully expects to wind up housing the overflow in the Watsons' own room.

*Warm sunshine, cold champagne, balloons and popcorn, great music in the air--what more do we need?*







This is an organ convention? Here we have sousaphone, accordion, plumbing leftovers, comb, and 2 gut-buckets. Winning in the foreground are Dir. Ed Watson and Former Dir. Jeane Noble.

Last year, he discovered he was making changes even *during* the Festival. "I must have had two dozen women complaining about the snoring of their female roommates. Funny, I didn't get a single complaint about the men."

Those who don't get in at all can console themselves with the show's younger imitators, like the Santa Cruz *Organ Holiday* and Southern California's *Home Organ Adventure*. All of these shows are Western phenomena, as is the idea of mixing "pizza and pipes," a move which has saved many of the big theater pipe organs from the wrecker's ball.

Oddly, the East has yet to discover its hungry-for-music home organists, though Salt Lake City has its Organ Loft and both Indiana and Michigan now have a few organ/pizza parlors.

### THE PRIME MOVERS

Watson, who admits he should have his head checked, is masterminding the Festival as *both* Registrar and Director. Before his tenure, these were always two separate, full-time jobs.

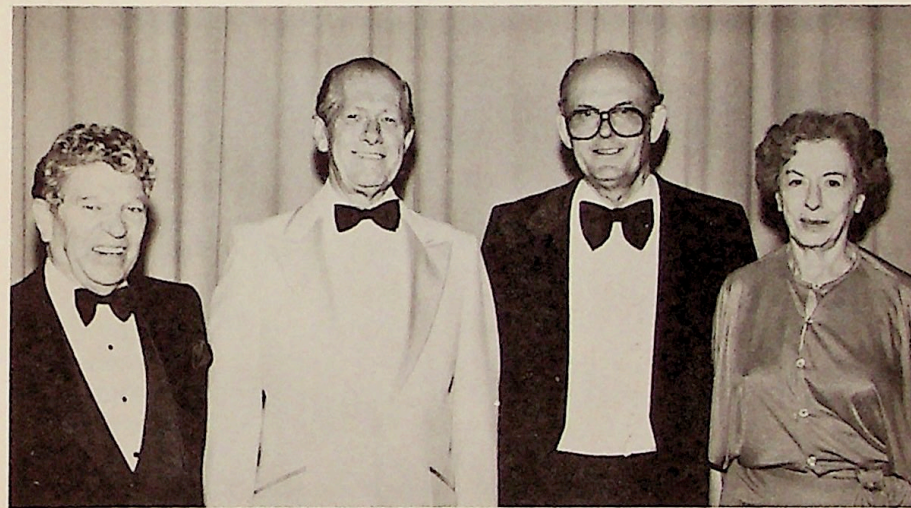
By some miracle, he's managed to keep his own job, straighten out all the housing kinks (with the aid of Frank Foust's computer), and complete 2 highly success-

ful first years as Director in 1982. Watson inherited the post from the dynamic Jeane Noble of San Rafael. Jeane had taken over for 2 innovative years after Ida James suffered a crippling stroke, effectively retiring Tiny.

Life can be fragile in this demanding, year-long job. Both Tiny James and Dewey Cagle had heart attacks while in office; Cagle's was during a Festival. For that reason, PCOC officials now have a "gang of four" running the show. Watson has been at the helm since late 1980, aided by Skoonberg, a retired insurance broker from Sacramento; Director of Personnel Gordon Tucker, a San Rafael electronics engineer and organist; and Assistant Director Joan Alexander, Alameda court reporter and organist.

"Joan is the one most likely to succeed me when I've had it up to here," smiles Watson. "She has no more sense than I do. But Ken and Gordon are old hands. They won't take the job."

The stamp of the Director is unmistakable on a project like this. Watson, a relaxed native Oregonian with Texas farmers in his background, is a large, open,



The "gang of four" in charge (l to r): Assistant Directors Ken Skoonberg and Gordon Tucker, Director Ed Watson, Assistant Director Joan Alexander.





*Kay Malstrom's little friends live under Asilomar's spacious decks as well as in the wild --and always seem to know where the party goodies are.*

honest man who is slow to anger but quick to accept new ideas if they're improvements. A music-lover who doesn't play a note, he's like the non-medical men who run hospitals--an administrator who handles the problems while encouraging his diverse crew to do their own thing.

Watson's relaxed attitude gets the best out of the hard-working organ-movers shuttling instruments from showroom to stage to workshop; the equally hard-working female crew handling the registration desk and information kiosk; and people like Les Foster--a talented artist and sign painter--and Les's wife Alta, the Committee's head usher who brooks no nonsense from the badgeless or from tape-recorder smugglers.

Willing Committee members also pour champagne until their arms drop off; change Merrill Hall overnight into a beautiful concert auditorium; man the lights and sound; listen to complaints; hand out workshop materials when they can hardly keep their eyes open; miss half the concerts because they're shuttling VIP's between airport and concert hall; scour the clubs all year for warm-up artists; or stay up half the night putting out the daily paper with its gossip, inside jokes, and vital program changes.

## IT'S NOT WORK IF IT'S FUN, RIGHT?

Overwhelmed by their first Festival experience in 1981, Al and Doris Hackley of Sunnyvale sighed, "Right in the midst of the final night's excitement, it was sad to think of facing the real world again." They're probably typical of most Festivaleers, for whom the week has been Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's rolled into one. Their new year starts on the way home.

It's also typical of the Committee, whose pay is zilch, and who really *need* vacations by this time. Early on Sunday morning, they fold away this circus as efficiently as they set it up.

The kiosk and message board are stored away; the scarlet and gold draperies are taken down in Merrill Hall; the computer, club banners, and typewriter are packed; and the rooms they hardly ever saw are vacated.

Wearily collecting the box lunches provided for the trip home, Festivaleers and Committee alike try not to wish the week were just beginning. Most just hope they can stay awake until they reach San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, Los Angeles, San Jose, Hayward, or Sacramento.

And they're already deep in plans for the next Festival.

*"Amalgamated Organ Movers" move everything else, too. On the job are Committeemen Dan Volk, Bob Gorton, and Fred Bush.*





## DATES IN FESTIVAL HISTORY

- 1958 *It's a gleam in Hal Schutz's eye; Chenoweths put up money for Festival space at Hoberg's Resort in Lake County, California.*
- 1959 *First Festival welcomes 100 attendees, features 3 organs. Kay Chenoweth is first Director.*
- 1960 *Festival moves from Hoberg's front porch to grand ballroom.*
- 1969 *Tiny James becomes second Director.*
- 1970 *Hoberg's willed to charity group; new home must be found.*
- 1971 *Tiny James brings Festival to Asilomar.*
- 1979 *Jeane Noble becomes third Director. Registration limits now being reached.*
- 1981 *Ed Watson becomes fourth Director. Festival now selling out 6 months ahead.*
- 1984 *Silver Anniversary--25 years!*

### CREDITS

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