

The American Organist Magazine

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VOX HUMANA: Making perfect?

“Dear Big-Time Recitalist, On behalf of all of us here at St. Melvin’s, we are delighted that you will be playing the opening recital on our new Milfington and Churl organ. We are happy to tell you that we’ve booked you a room at the luxurious new Quick House Express Motel a mere 30 minutes up the freeway. Just as you’ve requested, we’ve reserved the organ for your practice all day Friday, Saturday, and Sunday after the morning services until the time of your recital.”

Months later, Big-Time arrives at St. Melvin’s. “Welcome. Come in. Just step up to the music office so we can introduce you around.”

“Thanks. Quickly though. I need to get to the organ.”

“No problem. How about a cup of coffee?”

“No thanks.”

“Oh. The staff wants to meet you too. Maybe you can just stop by our weekly staff meeting? We’d love to hear about what you think of the Milfington and Churl.”

“I haven’t played it yet. Can I just get into the church?”

“Oh sure, just give us a few minutes to let the preschool kids finish up. The teachers find that their morning nap is much more peaceful on the new carpeting in the sanctuary. We replaced the carpet when we put in the Milfington. The old wood was so noisy and the stone was so cold for the children.”

“How long will it be?”

“They should all be awake by noon. Little Samantha is sometimes a little slow to wake up. But, she’s a doll and sings in the toddler choir. But feel free to use my computer to pick up your e-mails while you wait.”

Two hours later... finally a glimpse of the Milfington and Churl. Oh dear. The Swell is manual IV, the Great is on III, the Grand Chorus is on I, and the Choir is on II. What lunatic did this? All those muscles to restrain! Well, at least there’s a day and a half. What’s that, how come I can’t set this piston?

“You can use the whole combination action. We can remotely reprogram it from the laptop! Let me see, where are the instructions? Something about a cable, and a port, and an Internet broadband connection, and a MIDI data dump...”

“Can you just tell me how to set General 1?”

“Sure, right after lunch. There’s this terrific Sushi place right off the freeway I’d love to take you to and hear about the wonderful instruments you’ve played all over the world and all those other Big Names you know.”

“Well, I’m not too hungry right now. In fact, if I can’t set any pistons or figure out where my hands go when Widor says GO, I may never eat again. So, maybe I’ll just stay here and work.”

“Well, we do have a short service in the chapel in five minutes, but it shouldn’t last more than an hour.”

“OK. Sushi is fine. Maybe the Wasabi will help calm my nerves.”

Two hours later... the church is quiet and dark. “Good news! We can’t find the combination action instructions but we’ve got a call into Jack.”

“Jack?”

“He’s the engineering student that helps Milfington with technical things. As soon as he calls back on my cell phone, I’ll run down to the console and have him tell you how to set the pistons. But he’s putting in an organ in Kazakhstan right now, so we’re not sure what the time is there.”

“Never mind. I’ll just practice.”

Five minutes later... an odd droning sound under the Swell reeds.

A uniformed fellow, wearing headphones and sunglasses and a Red Sox cap is energetically dancing down the far end of the middle aisle with a Hoover shrieking an almost B-flat. Who needs a chamade? About the same moment, another helpful stranger walks up to the console.

“Need the microphones?”

“No! Why would I?”

“Oh. We always turn them on when the organ player is here.”

I don’t want to know. The musician returns.

“Excuse me. I have Jack on the phone. He says you have to put in your PIN before the combination action will recognize your authority to change anything.”

“What’s my PIN?”

“I don’t know... Jack, what’s his PIN... un huh... OK. He says I have to give you one... I put in my PIN, then press SET-CANCEL-GT/PED-ZIMBELSTERN... Wait I can’t do that and talk on the phone, I only have two hands and feet...Wait, maybe the PIN is the same as the ATM? Is there any sight seeing you’d like to do. You know the steam engine museum is only an hour up the freeway and the foliage is lovely this time of year?”

“Look. It’s getting late. Maybe I should just go to the hotel and relax tonight and try this all over tomorrow.”

“Good idea. I’ll come back tonight and figure out the PIN, because I have the rehearsals for the weddings tomorrow...”

“Weddings?”

“Sure. It’s Saturday. We always have weddings on Saturday, but it’s OK. They’re not until noon, 2, 4, and 6. Of course the florist will be in at 9, and we’ll have to rehearse the readers for Sunday at 8, but you can have the organ before that.”

“Look. How about tomorrow night?”

“Sorry. We can’t do that. Milfington is coming in to tune. After all, an important player like you deserves an instrument in perfect shape. Just leave a note for Milfington with any problems you find. Now, what time should I pick you up for breakfast tomorrow?”

- Haig Mardirosian