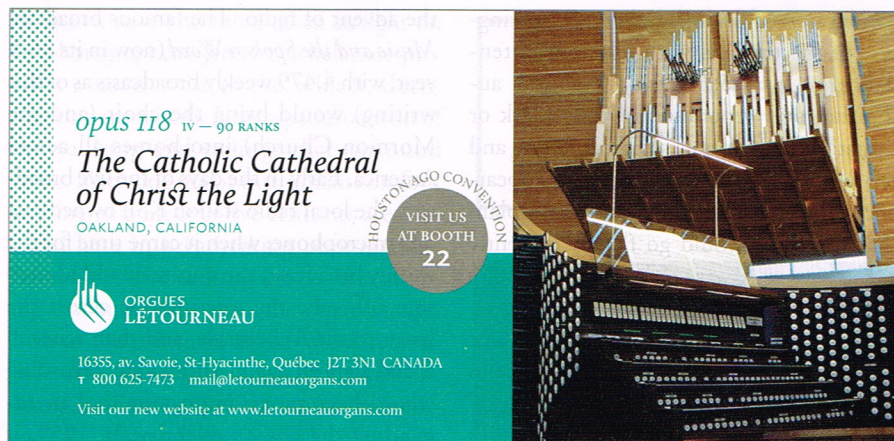


gan symphonies throughout his entire career. These are well documented in John R. Near's meticulous work in the A-R Editions publication of the complete symphonies. No mention is given in the present recording as to which versions are being used. Otherwise, the program booklet provides a fine essay by Benjamin Waterhouse on "Widor and his time" (in French and English), as well as bilingual biographies of the performers, histories of each instrument, and their stoplists (original and current).

While integral recordings featuring instruments that directly inspired Widor may be the most authentic representation of his symphonies, this excellently produced Canadian recording is compelling through superb, authoritative performances on significant North American instruments inspired by the French tonal aesthetic. In addition, the sixth CD offers the rarely performed or recorded *Suite Latine*, Op. 86 (six movements), and *Trois nouvelles pièces*, Op. 87. These works, the final opus numbers to emerge from the composer's fertile pen, retain his signature style, distilled into its purest essence. They are a fitting inclusion in this *intégrale* project. These recordings are well worth seeking out.

JAMES HILDRETH



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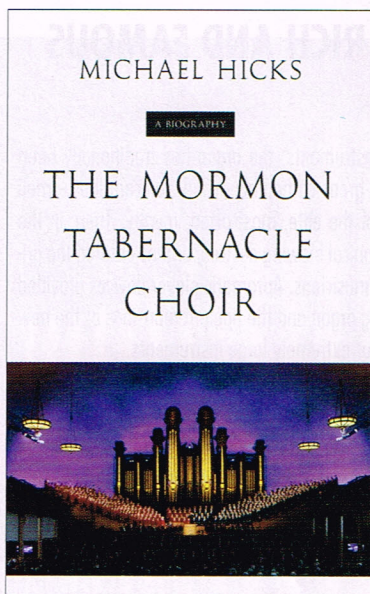


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**BOOKS**



**THE MORMON TABERNACLE CHOIR—A BIOGRAPHY**, Michael Hicks. Urbana, Chicago, Springfield, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2015. xiii, 218 pp. ISBN 9780252039089. "A first-of-its-kind history, *The Mormon Tabernacle Choir* tells the epic story of how an all-volunteer group founded by persecuted religious out-



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casts grew into a multimedia powerhouse synonymous with the mainstream and with Mormonism itself." So reads the inside cover notes of Michael Hicks's surprisingly objective account of what Ronald Reagan once dubbed "America's choir." Hicks, a professor of music at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, leaves no stone unturned in his engaging, historical recount of this unique and noble American institution.

The *Mormon Tabernacle Choir* is a story of the evolution—and growing pains—for

both a choir and church alike, as they were born and grew into maturity nearly side by side. In the choir's intentional quest to become America's premier choral ensemble, almost from its very founding, one reads of changes and disagreements in taste and style, of choral competitions and tours in attempts to build reputation, of rival conductors and of back-room, good ol' boy church politics—all peppered with much delicious drama. It is also a narrative that will seem remarkably familiar to many modern choral

conductors: of finding and recruiting singers, of frustrations with rehearsal attendance, of disagreements with church authorities over repertoire, of tone (dark or bright? vibrato or no?), of choir tenure and retirement, and even of physical appearance. Eugene Ormandy would complain that the choir would go flat. It evidently took several years to crack the nut of ladies not wearing their hats (which had a sonic effect) to broadcast sessions. And, “the most egregious breach be named? A soprano combing her hair during the ‘Hallelujah’ chorus.” Larger-than-life personalities would inhabit the podium. One was Evan Stephens, appointed conductor of the Tabernacle Choir in 1890, who organized a thousand-voice youth choir (!) as a feeder-group to the adult choir. “Stephens was already a legend in Salt Lake City, mostly for running massive singing schools for children and adolescents, who gave spectacular concerts awash in decorations and a flamboyance that even included Stephens appearing in drag.” (*Really? In the 1890s, in Utah?*) In general, the Choir would always have an awkward history with conductors, especially with their taking leave.

It could be said that the Mormon Tabernacle Choir came into the modern age with

the advent of radio. The famous broadcast *Music and the Spoken Word* (now in its 86th year, with 4,479 weekly broadcasts as of this writing) would bring the choir (and the Mormon Church) into homes all across America. Early in the days of the live broadcast, the local radio station KSL owned just one microphone; when it came time for the weekly broadcast, the station would have to sign off, take the microphone across the street to the Tabernacle, and then reinstall it and sign on again! Ultimately, recording would become an important tool in expanding the choir’s celebrity: In 1959, it won a Grammy for its hit single *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, coming in just below Bobby Darin’s *Mac the Knife*. The choir that has sung at the inauguration of four (Republican) presidents would become a familiar holiday guest on American television and beyond.

Throughout *The Mormon Tabernacle Choir*, author Michael Hicks returns to the struggle between accessibility versus dignity in the choir’s repertoire, an issue seemingly in play since the early days of the organization. By the mid-’70s, the Osmonds, and Donnie and Marie—and not the choir—were the best-known representatives of the Mormon Church. Among its many cross-

overs, the choir would record an album of Disney songs and sing back-up for John Denver and Sting. Hicks writes, “This was the choir of the new, capitalist-populist America, neither a leader nor a champion of elitist art . . . What Alfred Frankenstein had discerned in 1941—the choir falling ‘victim to the fetish of giving the public what it wants, to the detriment of more significant values.’” Even so, the choir would record the Brahms *Requiem* with the Utah Symphony in 1999, and, in 2007, sell out Denver’s Pepsi Stadium (15,000 seats), when three days later the Rolling Stones sold only 13,000 seats. And it continues to “own Christmas” through its popular holiday shows from Temple Square and countless Christmas recordings. And yet, in the last sentences of his book, Hicks laments, “But in an age of imponderable rivalry for attention, this choir reaches to grasp any tool it can find to compel you to take notice. As if great music were not enough—which, sadly for the 21st century, it no longer is.”

*The Mormon Tabernacle Choir—A Biography* reads as part history, part novel. Michael Hicks has written a real page-turner: an intriguing, forthright, and readable look, both in front of and behind the scenes, into a larger-than-life, closely-knit choral

## PIPE ORGANS OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS

ROLLIN SMITH

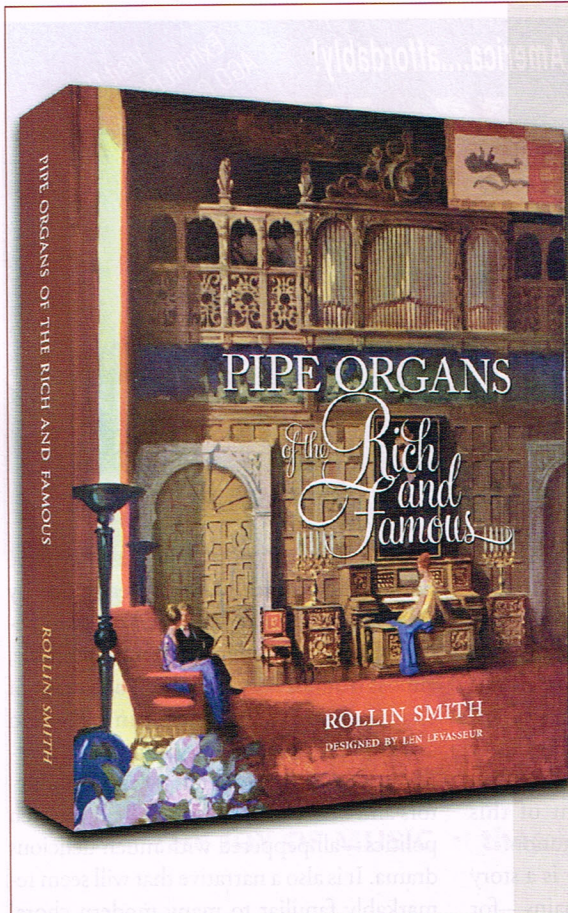
**LARGEST AND MOST COMPLEX** of musical instruments, the organ has traditionally been found in churches—from country parishes to great cathedrals—and, for centuries, small “chamber organs” were found in the homes of the elite, most often, royalty. Then, in the mid-19th century, with the application of mechanical blowing devices, organs entered the private homes of the well-to-do and professional musicians. Automatic player devices provided those who could afford them with a self-playing organ and the opulent mansions of the new American aristocracy offered unlimited space for extremely large instruments.

ROLLIN SMITH’S *PIPE ORGANS OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS* is the story of organs in more than 50 private homes—a few residents being more famous than rich. It recounts a time when the organ was not only a symbol of those who had arrived socially, but was considered the ultimate appointment of the luxurious home, indeed, the Home Orchestra of the Twentieth Century. Here you will visit with royalty, captains of industry, famous organists and composers, organbuilders, and those whose names are less familiar, but who were patrons of the King of Instruments on a lavish scale.

Profusely illustrated with 300 photographs and engravings, this large-format hard-bound book documents the work of more than 25 organbuilders in the United States, England, France, and Germany; stoplists of each instrument is included.

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ensemble—and the business that drives it—that continues to flourish and to demand much from every participant. This is a must-read for anyone interested in the choral art, in American music, in church music, and in the history of the church. Highly recommended.

THOMAS BROWN



**LOOKING UP AT ORGANS AND CEILINGS**, Jenny Setchell. Bonn: Musikverlag Dr. J. Butz, 2015. 64 pp. ISBN 9783928412179. €18. There seem to be two kinds of photographs of organ cases: those taken by tourists looking up from the

floor of a nave and those taken straight-on by photographers. Jenny Setchell here presents a novel twist to the subject, documenting cases in the larger spatial context of the vaulting and ceilings that surround them. Sixty-one major instruments on four continents built over five centuries are captured here in breathtaking photographs. Sometimes the ceilings are as breathtaking—or more so—than the organ facade, such as the paintings of the Wieskirche in Wies, the Klosterkirche in Ottobeuren, St. Mang, in Füssen, Welfenmünster in Steingaden, Unsere Liebe Frau in Bamberg, Mariä Geburt in Rottenbuch, and the Basilika of Dillingen. There are exquisitely outlined architectural details: Klosterkirche in Maulbronn, St. Goar, the Marienkirche in Mühlhausen, the Basilika Augsburg, St. Jakob in Villach, Austria, Leipzig's Thomaskirche and Nikolaikirche; and just the natural beauty of Norwich Cathedral, the Town Hall in Oxford, the Basilika of Sankt Wendel, the Marktkirche in Halle, Exeter Cathedral, Bath Abbey, Fulda Cathedral. Even the red ceiling of the Mormon Tabernacle is included. This is the ultimate organist's coffee-table book—and a bargain at the price!

ROLLIN SMITH



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