

## MEET "THE VOICE OF MINNEAPOLIS"

By Tim Stevens



Hector Olivera at the five manual "Voice of Minneapolis" console

While AOA has been, and will continue to be dedicated to the promotion of interest in electronic home organs and keyboard instruments, from time to time it is good, I believe, to look 'from whence we evolved.' One such instrument of significant interest is "The Voice of Minneapolis:" the 1928, 10,000 pipe Kimball Organ installed in Minneapolis auditorium in AOA headquarters home of Minneapolis, Minnesota.

This organ is of particular interest because of several reasons: First, it is quite unique in that it is one organ with two very different consoles—a five manual concert (or classical) console, and a separate four manual theatre console. The concert console controls 122 ranks (or sets) of pipes; the theatre console controls 25 ranks of pipes. In addition, the theatre console features 24 special effects which facilitate the performer to get sounds like thunder, breaking glass, sleigh bells, bird calls, an airplane engine plus numerous other sounds.

The 10,000 pipe Kimball organ has been part of Minnesota's musical heritage since 1928 when it was first installed in the Minneapolis Municipal Auditorium. Hailed as one of the finest of its kind, it remains a tribute to the craftsmanship of the W. W. Kimball Company of Chicago. Originally built for an approximate cost of \$125,000.00, it has been estimated that replacing this instrument today would cost more than \$2 million.

One of only three organs of its size ever made by the Kimball Company, the "Voice of Minneapolis"—

as it was christened in 1928—is one of the largest pipe organs in the Midwest with hand-crafted pipes that vary in size from one-half inch, to more than 30 feet. Those 10,000 pipes are enclosed in seven rooms which are located behind the Auditorium's stage.

Weighing over 30 tons, the consoles are located behind enclosed partitions on either side of the stage; they simply slide forward at the touch of a button. In the organ's early days, the consoles were housed below the stage on either side, and rose dramatically through the floor, via elevators, into public view. Played together, the consoles produce a sound that is equal to that of 25 brass bands.

An extremely complex version of an early computer, the Kimball organ uses an advanced mechanical switching system to connect its keyboards to its pipes. Three hundred miles of wire carry electrical information throughout the system. The pipes themselves operate from a 60 horsepower blower on any amount of wind pressure ranging from seven and one-half inches up to 30 inches for the large bass stops.

Through the years, the organ has fallen 'out of vogue,' as it were, due much in part to changes in attitudes and general entertainment interests of the general public. As a result, this instrument has fallen into a very great state of disrepair.

In 1988, the 61-year old Minneapolis Auditorium will be razed to make way for a new convention center which will cover some seven city blocks, and seat up