

**JUNE, 1971**

## **Robert Anderson**

**Gala opening concert of the new AEolian-Skinner organ, Zumbro Lutheran Church, Rochester, Minnesota.**

**Choral-Improvisation sur le Victimae Paschali, Tournemire; Concerto in A minor BWV 593, Vivaldi-Bach; Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr BWV 664, Fantasia and Fugue in G minor BWV 542, Bach; Ecce lignum Crucis, Heiller; Scherzo opus 2, Duruflé; Sonata on the 94th Psalm, Reubke.**

On April 18 Robert Anderson dedicated the new AEolian-Skinner mechanical action organ of the Zumbro Lutheran Church, Rochester, Minn. The organ, which Mr. Anderson himself called "a milestone of American organ building in the 20th century," is the largest mechanical-action organ built by this firm under the guidance of its new vice president and tonal director, Robert Sipe. Mr. Sipe's presence, the important guest recitalist, a program of great promise, and an overflowing audience provided auspicious circumstances for this opening concert.

Introductory remarks by Merrill Davis, organist of the church, and by Robert Anderson credited Mr. Sipe's talents with leading the congregation to this event; and Mr. Sipe deserves the credit given him. He has built an instrument of great tonal and visual beauty. Unfortunately, the church does not provide the accoustical ambience to match. The simplicity of the church interior is appealing and provides a splendid setting for the excitingly handsome organ case, but the convex wood ceiling is too low and unbroken to provide any noticeable reverberation when the pews are filled or empty. Even with its excellent gallery placement, the organ has an almost overbearing presence; but the skillfully voiced choruses of the great and rückpositiv divisions are smooth and silvery — a joy to hear. These were heard to special advantage in the contrasting concertante and ripieno sections of the Vivaldi-Bach *Concerto*. Indeed, every part of the program showed aspects of the organ to best advantage, from the opening Tournemire on the brilliant trompette en chamade, to the closing Reubke on full organ. The Bach *Trio*, the Heiller and the Duruflé, as well as the Widor encore (andante sostenuto from the *Gothic Symphony*), with their respective solo-stop requirements, all seemed totally at home on this instrument.

The program reflected a very attractive balance and variety, and in general it received a sympathetic and spirited performance. Bach suffered some from uneven rhythm, inconsistent articulation, and disturbed ensemble, but the Romantic and contemporary literature was technically more successful. Clearly, however, the organ was the *raison d'être* of this recital, and its personality won friends on every side.

— Donald Spies

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