

# Highest Notes in the Southland

By Robert Hazelleaf

**F**ROM THE MINING TOWN of Trinidad, Colo., to the 16th floor of the Villa Riviera is quite a jump—especially for a church pipe organ.

Dr. Robert W. Magin acquired it by a circuitous route that began in St. Louis. As organist in a church there, he became acquainted with the builder, a German-American whose name the organ bears on its nameplate: Hinners, Pekin, Ill.

Hinner told Dr. Magin of the fine tone quality it possessed and the condition in which it had been maintained.

Through correspondence with Trinity Episcopal Church, Trinidad, dating from 1953 to a telephone call in 1955 the transaction was completed without the new owner having seen or heard the instrument. Organs like it in playable condition are difficult to find. So difficult, in fact, that some museums exhibit them as part of the American passing scene.

**FORTUNATELY, AN EXPERT** was found to dismantle the old instrument, built sometime after 1879. He supervised the packing and shipping by rail and truck to the highest penthouse in the Southland.

When Dr. Magin was ready to begin assembling the organ in his apartment, an 8-week task, a near-calamity arose. Not a part or pipe had been marked or numbered. The new owner had to replace the thousands of parts and 405 pipes "by ear."

Through experience gained during his European studies and from authoritative books, some of them beautiful collector's items, Dr. Magin was able to assemble his prize—only to find it wouldn't fit the spot chosen for it.

Relocation to the Villa Riviera was accomplished with the advice from organ builders and the help of choir members of First Congregational Church, where Dr. Magin is minister of music.

**THE CONCERT ORGANIST** said, "We held an 'organ-building bee' with friends holding pipes and moving the various sections until we found a way to get everything where we wanted it."

Somehow, the apartment is particularly suitable as a home for the church organ. The high, steeply sloping ceiling with its massive beams (they look like timbers but are of steel and concrete) gives a cathedral effect to the room. This is enhanced by the symmetrical arrangement of golden-hued pipes in majestic columns.

The instrument is purely mechanical in action, a type of mechanism that dates from the ancient Greeks.

Its name, "tracker," is derived from the thin strips of wood, called trackers, that serve as linkage between key and pipe. Each key and stop-pull is connected through a system of levers reaching as far as 10 feet to actuate the passage of air into the pipes. The organ operates on low air pressure, even the largest 8-foot pipes take only a breath of air to sound.

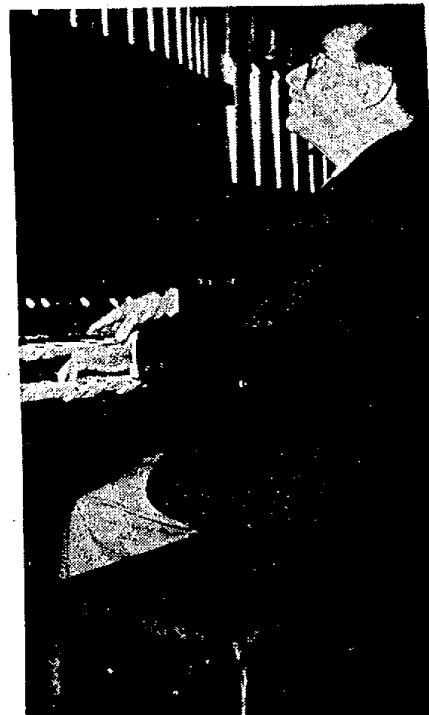
**DESPITE THIS COMPLICATED** arrangement to sound the seven sets of pipes, the action is remarkably rapid; the touch, light and responsive. When "tracker" is mentioned to an organist, he usually thinks of a sluggish, noisy and frustrating action and wishes for a modern, electrically operated instrument. The Magin installation, with its two manuals and pedal board, leaves nothing to be desired in this respect.

At a recent Organ Guild meeting, several members played the country church organ and were impressed with its perfectly preserved quality.

Even in a room considerably smaller than a church, the organ gives no hint of rushing air or other unwanted sounds. The tone is pure and sweet, yet with the power to provide room-filling full organ. Full organ, swells open and the artist "bearing down," make an instrument of great authority. At no time, however, does the volume become unpleasant.

A primary reason for his enthusiasm, Dr. Magin says, is the organ's voicing. Hinners and his associates made pipes in the old German school of organ-building. What could be better for playing music of the great German composers who wrote for this type of instrument. Though of modest size, this is the same kind of organ that is found in many of the famous European cathedrals.

**WHEN THE MEMBERS** of Trinity Episcopal Church shipped the organ to Long Beach they made certain it was complete, even to the tombstone that had served many years as a bellows weight. Dr. Magin is quick to point out that use of this stone has no facetious implications. Requirements are for a stone rather large in area, and not too thick—hence the



Dr. Robert W. Magin plays 75-year-old pipe organ brought here from Colorado.

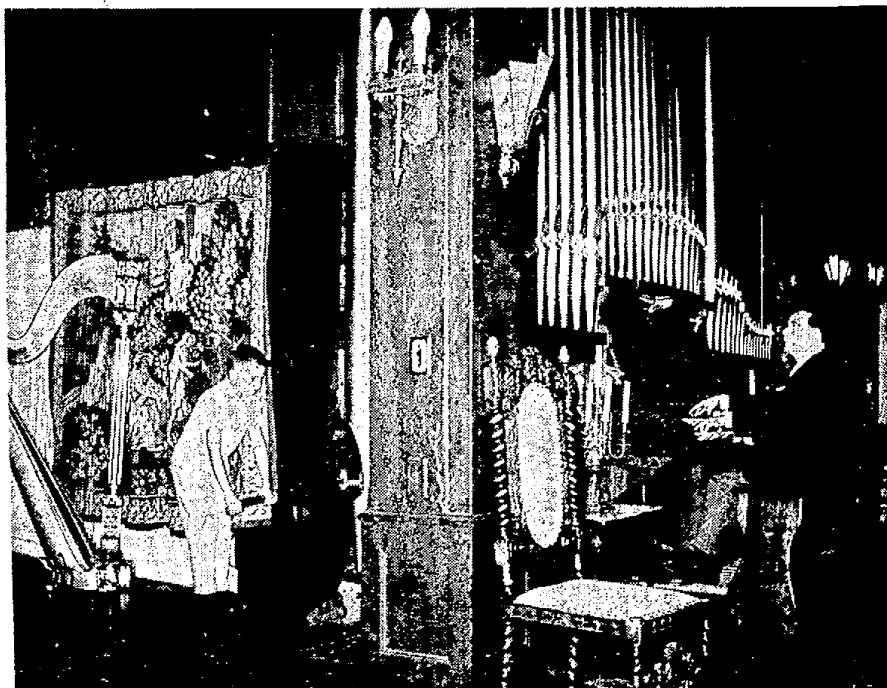
headstone, of which hundreds across the country have served this purpose.

Naturally, the hand pump was furnished. They neglected, however, to provide a choir boy for power. Though an electric blower has been used for many years, the organ had been hand-pumped for decades.

Dr. Magin was surprised to find a Long Beach resident who told him she marched down the aisle to music of the old Hinners as a bride—perhaps more years ago than she would care to tell.



Tombstone serves as bellows weight for organ, helps provide even air pressure.



Photos by the Author

Dr. Magin at console; Jimmy Wilt at hand pump once used to supply air for organ. Today, an electric blower is used to supply air, replacing the laborious pump.