

# DEAR UNCLE MAX

Send questions to Dear Uncle Max, AGO National Headquarters, 475 Riverside Dr., Suite 1260, New York, NY 10115.

In E.F. Benson's delightful novel, *The Worshipful Lucia*, chapter ten, the description of the dedicatory organ recital refers to Falberg's famous "Storm at Sea" and to a stop called a Diocton. Is there such a composition as Falberg's "Storm at Sea"? What is a Diocton? Are the new stops given by Lucia actually on the organ in Rye?

DMG, Tex.

You just knew I was a Benson fan! *The Worshipful Lucia* has a copyright from 1935; my copy is a paperback reprint, a Signet Book from the *New American Library*, 1971. *Mapp and Lucia*, an earlier Lucia story, appeared as a TV show in 1985 and is available on video.

The scene is this: Lucia, ever the arbiter of taste for the small town of Tilling (the descriptions of buildings and places correspond to places in Rye, England—a map is handed to you if you visit!), decides to enlarge the church's organ. "She had said from the first that her whole function (and that a privilege) was to make this little contribution to the beauty of the church services." She maneuvers to have the organ recital on the day the bishop visits, and includes herself in an outdoor procession as "Tilling would wish for a little pomp and ceremony . . . an organ recital—not long—by our admirable organist to show the paces, the powers of the new instrument. Its Scope. The tuba, the vox humana, and the cor anglais; just a few new stops . . . her friends thought it would be most appropriate if, before his official recital (how she was looking forward to it!), she herself, as donor, just ran her hands, so to speak, over the keys. Mr. Georgie Pillson, who was really a wonderful performer on the pedals, would help her." She had "just finished arranging the first movement of Beethoven's 'Moonlight' Sonata . . . she hoped he would then give them Falberg's famous 'Storm at Sea.'" Later in the actual performance, during the "Storm at Sea," "the wind began to whistle on swiftly ascending chromatic

scales, thunder muttered on the pedals, and the diocton contributed some flashes of forked lightning . . . Lucia herself sat with her music face on, gazing dreamily at the vaulting of the church . . . the storm at sea died away, and a chorus presumably of sailors and passengers (vox humana) sang a soft chorale of thanksgiving." There is more, but you need to read it for yourself; I won't ruin it for you!

If there actually is such a composition as Falberg's "Storm at Sea," I have been unable to find it, or any reference to Falberg! (Anyone out there who can help?) Several people have thought they remembered a "Storm at Sea" by Sigismund Thalberg, who was ranked as one of the greatest piano virtuosos of the mid-19th century along with Liszt. All of his compositions are for piano, apart from some chamber music, an opera, some songs, and a piano concerto. Perhaps "Storm at Sea" is a subtitle, as is Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens's *Grand Fantasia in G Minor* with a subtitle of "The Storm." Guesswork. Note, however, the closeness of sound between the "F" of Falberg and the "Th" of Thalberg.

The nearest reference to a Diocton I have found is in James Wedgwood's oldish *A Comprehensive Dictionary of Organ Stops, English and Foreign, Ancient and Modern: Practical, Theoretical, Historical, Aesthetic, Etymological, Phonetic*, to give its full title. It was published in London and Boston, no date given. The reference is to a *Diaocton*, from the Greek, dia=through and octo=eight. It says:

1. The name given to the octave coupler by Holditch, who appears independently to have invented it, though long, of course, after its first employment in Italy and subsequent to its introduction at St. James, Bristol (Smith, 1819).
2. A 16' pedal stop (Washington Temple, U.S.) = Major Bass.

Again, Diocton and Diaocton sound much alike. Is this a literary device? Are the sounds' nearness used to give the author both a measure of credibility and a measure of freedom? Stop names often vary in spelling with the builder. Don't really know. (Anyone?)

St. Mary's in Rye, the church described above by Mr. Benson, had, at least as of eight years ago, an instrument built in 1901 by Norman and Beard with additions of a Clarionet in 1904, a Posaune in 1927, and, after 1937 (following the times described), a Diapason, Mixture on the Great, and Pedal Flute 8.

The specifications are:

SWELL	
Oboe	8
Horn	8
Mixture III	
Octave	4
Rohr Flute	8
Salicional	8
Vox Angelica	8
Open Diapason	8
Bourdon	16
Tremulant	
PEDAL	
Bass Flute	8
Trombone	16
Bourdon	16
Violone	16
Open Diapason	16
GREAT	
Posaune	8
Mixture III	
Fifteenth	2
Harmonic Flute	4
Principal	4
Hohl Flute	8
Open Diapason (I)	8
Open Diapason (II)	16
Double Diapason	16
CHOIR (unenclosed)	
Clarionet	8
Harmonic Flute	2
Flauto Traverso	4
Lieblich Gedeckt	8
Dulciana	8
Gamba	8
Swell to Great, Swell Octave, Great, Swell and Choir to Pedal Swell to Choir	

No tuba, no vox humana, no cor anglais, no diocton. How then did Benson know how to write about the organ so well? Perhaps it was because his father was the Archbishop of Canterbury under Queen Victoria. (Incidentally, the first Service of Lessons and Carols was given in Canterbury while his father was archbishop.) Perhaps it was because as a young man, according to his biographer, Brian Masters, he met a Mrs. Carter, "who played the organ and made noises therewith which thrilled Fred's embryonic musical sense, to the extent he imagined himself in love with Mrs. Carter, when he was really in love with the organ."

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