

## FOR THE RECORDS (Starts on page 39)

staff organist, Jim Orcutt, on December 17 last. It's the first recording, too, of Jim Orcutt's playing we've heard, an or-



Jim Orcutt

ganist whose name is something of a legend in the Southwest. After hearing the tape we can appreciate the legend. Mr. Orcutt maintains a high level of interest throughout the entire program, which ranges from show tunes to a Hawaiian medley, from a patriotic group to a "roaring '20s" set, plus some Christmas tunes.

It should be kept in mind that these tunes were all recorded in one "take," a procedure which is a test of the mettle of any organist, especially with an audience present. Mr. Orcutt's approach is theatrical although he kicks off the tremas and "makes like church" for a few tunes, mainly the Christmas music.

His program is an ambitious one. His two show tune medleys are selections from *Sound of Music* and *My Fair Lady*. His "roaring '20s" group includes *Charleston*, *So Beats My Heart for You*, *Laugh Clown Laugh* (these two with beautifully performed "rolls" on the Tibia), *I Wanna Be Loved by You*, and *Toot Toot Tootsie*. The Christmas tunes are the expected ones, but performed with lots of imagination and variety of registration. Also heard are *Chicago* (jazzy), *You Are Too Beautiful* and *Granada*.

The organ sounds big and full. The acoustics are "big hall" but not at any loss of intimacy. The Tibia trem needs some adjustment to get it out of the stopped flute class—but that was the reason for the concert and for the sale of tapes—to start an organ fund for further refinement and, perhaps, some additions.

Jim Orcutt impresses most favorably in this first recording of the Tusla church theatre Morton. Of course, as in all "one take" recordings there are a few rough spots but these are infrequent and are

# THE PAUL FORSTER STORY

by HIS FRIEND W. S. ("Stu") GREEN

*In the first installment we learned about the showmanship of Paul H. Forster in the Central New York state area where he became "King of the Singalong" in the mid-'20s. How did he reach this prominence? In this installment we'll trace some history of his early years, then continue the story of the great years, how "Vitaphone" spurred him to ever greater efforts—the whole story, right to the present.*

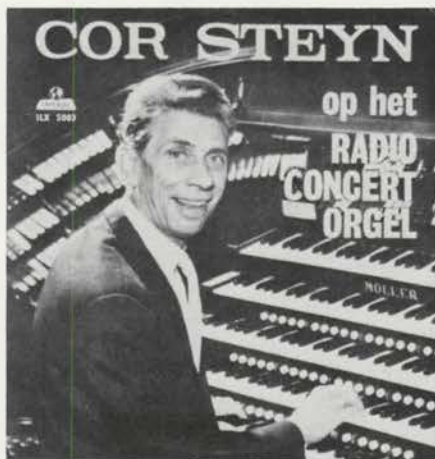
CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

## For The Record,

more than offset by Jim's over-all artistry, and especially those smooth fingered glissandos. The audience present is very quiet except to show appreciation through applause (plus an occasional cough). A copy of the program handed to attendees is included. Here's \$5.00 well invested in tape (stereo unless specified half track. No disc is available).

\* \* \* \* \*

(Cor Steyn at the Radio Concert Organ).  
Imperial ILX-5003 (mono), available by  
import from Duyvene & Remmers, N. V.,



Damrak 25, Amsterdam, Holland. Write for purchasing information.

This record marks another chapter in the long history of the 5-28 Moller which Reg Foort once moved around Great Britain in a train of lorries. During World War II it became the BBC studio organ (replacing one bombed out). It was purchased by the government-controlled Netherland Radio Corporation in 1963 and moved into temporary quarters in Holland, where this recording was made. The record marks the final chapter for Dutch organist Cor Steyn; he died shortly after it was released.

The disc was evidently produced with the export trade in mind. One entire side is devoted to medleys from the American musicals, *Porgy and Bess* and *Annie Get Your Gun*. The sound of the Moller has changed considerably since its British days. In its present installation the organ

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Paul H. Forster was born in Utica, New York, in 1892 and started taking piano lessons at 8. At 15 he was engaged as pianist at the Theatorium in Utica, a genuine 5 cent admission "nickelodeon" which showed two reels of movies and offered an illustrated song, usually sung by the manager. One year later he was lured away to the local Hippodrome where he not only played piano for movies but also conducted the small pit band for four acts of vaudeville. He first hit the "big time" when he was engaged by the Utica State theatre to play piano for vaudeville and also for movies using a large and very "straight" organ built in the local Barnes and Buhl factory. It was his first encounter with the instrument which was to dominate his life. But he was not happy with the sound of the miscast church organ and he soon discovered something better for movies—a short organ manual attached to a piano which gave forth pleasant sounds appropriate to the theatrical atmosphere. This embryo theatre organ had been added to the piano in the Utica Majestic theatre and the nameplate on it read "Marr and Colton"—another name soon to loom large on the Forster horizon.

His first meeting with a Wurlitzer was at the Avon theatre in Utica where he was engaged to play feature films on a two manual instrument. It was during this period in the early '20s that an organist named C. Sharpe Minor was rumored to be "knocking them dead" with organ novelties using illustrated song slides at the Lafayette theatre in Buffalo. And there seemed to be some fellow named Jesse Crawford doing likewise at the Chicago theatre in the "windy city."

About this time the recently founded Marr and Colton firm of Warsaw, New York (both men being refugees from the Hope-Jones Elmira factory failure) had installed a 10 rank theatre instrument in the Palace theatre in Jamestown, New York. They needed a good man to open it and that man was found pumping musical life into "flickers" at the Utica Avon. The Jamestown sojourn gave Forster an opportunity to become familiar with the uses of song slides and to gauge their possibilities, which proved to be considerable.

Forster remained at the Palace for sev-

THIS PHOTO HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE PAUL FORSTER TRADE MARK



Paul Forster at the console of the New York Piccadilly theatre 4-28 Marr & Colton which was later moved to the Hollywood Warner's theatre. The console now lies entombed beneath a 10-inch layer of concrete.

eral months learning, as he says, "to put it over." Then the Marr and Colton factory needed an organist to open a two manual installation at the Liberty theatre at Carnegie, a suburb of Pittsburgh. They sent Forster for "just two weeks". He remained at the Liberty for over a year. By now he had become solidly established

as a master of song slides and the Warsaw firm's ace demonstrator. Then the real "big time" beckoned. Here's how Forster tells it:

"In September, 1924, David Marr sent me to the Piccadilly theatre on Broadway, New York, to play the wonderful 28 rank, four manual Marr & Colton just in-

stalled there. I played novelties, recitals and for movies. It was a great experience playing along with the large theatre orchestra conducted by none other than Vincent Lopez with B. A. Rolph (later radio's *Hit Parade* conductor) on first trumpet. Those were the great days of Broad-

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## THE PAUL FORSTER STORY, continued

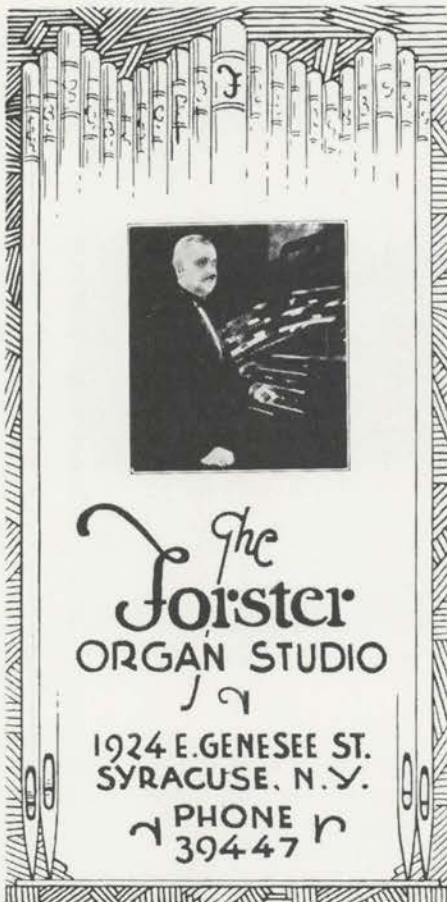
way and I am most happy to have been in on them."

But Forster's Broadway days were numbered by the arrival of two men from Syracuse in upstate New York, a pair of theatre owners named Abe Harrison and Morris Fitzer. They had just completed the installation of a ten rank, three manual Marr and Colton in their Empire theatre and they had come to the big town in search of a knockout organist to introduce the theatre organ rage which was sweeping New York City to upstate movie fans. Once they heard Forster at the Piccadilly, no one else would do. Forster liked life in the big city but the boys from Syracuse made an offer he just couldn't refuse. Reluctantly, he boarded a train for Syracuse. Perhaps it wouldn't be so bad. After all, he was a small town boy—and Syracuse wasn't far from Utica. That was his introduction to Syracuse. He would live there for most of the next 31 years.

Forster was entering the apex of his career as a theatre organist in 1927. He was nationally known and he received lucrative offers from theatres all over the USA. He finally received one from Ft. Worth, Texas, that was too juicy to let pass, so he resigned his console at the Empire, sold the family's belongings and



**FORSTER AT HOME** — The Potted palms, draped piano, variegated wall design and vase of live flowers provided color in the room (35 feet long) which housed the 2-manual, double stop rail Marr & Colton console. Pipework spoke into the far end of the room. This was the scene of years of Forster broadcasts. In the late '30s it was sold and was later broken up for parts, but here—in 1928—the little organ is in its prime.



The cover of Forster's Organ Studio Brochure

took off for Ft. Worth. His Syracuse fans were desolate. So was the management of the Empire Theatre which had depended on his drawing power to bolster a series of films ranging from so-so to poor. Actually the Empire never recovered the loss of Paul Forster. The theatre made a valiant gesture by importing no less than Sandy McPherson all the way from triumphs in Great Britain. But Forster was a most iddificult organist to follow and although Sandy played wonderfully (even pedalled with both feet), he just wasn't the type of showman that the Forster image had established; he didn't remain long at the Empire console. After that, the Empire started downhill.

Hardly had McPherson left when rumors started flying that Paul Forster and his family had returned to Syracuse. Within a few days it was announced by the management of the Eckel theatre that Forster had been engaged as featured organist at that theatre. It was explained that Paul and family just couldn't get used to Ft. Worth and suffered such homesickness for Syracuse that the increase in green stuff couldn't compensate, so back they came. Except for a 2-month engagement to open the 4-manual, 20-rank Wurlitzer at the new Loew's State in 1928, Forster remained at the Eckel until 1935. The Forsters bought a home, a stately old two story structure of red brick which had been built a good 100

years earlier by the early Syracuse aristocracy which settled on Genesee Street.

Then Paul realized the dream of a lifetime—to have his own organ. It was a Marr and Colton, naturally, a lovely, small scale unit organ with pipework fitted into the two bedrooms Mrs. Forster relinquished to the inevitable. The swell shutters opened into a long living room at the far end of which was the two manual console. The ranks were Tibia, Concert Flute, String, Diapason, Vox Humana and—yup—Kinura. It was personally voiced by David Marr. The sound was typically Marr and Colton, but on a small and quite refined scale, except for the Kinura, which was a dilly. The organ was unified to the hilt and had all traps, percussions and effects. Even though the sound film had, by that time, reared its tinny voice, Paul Forster felt secure in adding a teaching role to his career as top organist.

This is how the writer met Paul Forster. The organist had opened his school with typical Forsterian fanfare and the students flocked to him. He was riding the zenith of his popularity at the time and the future seemed secure. But if those who were attracted to the showman expected Paul Forster to carry his professional act into personal relationships, they were disappointed. The off-stage Forster proved to be a quiet man with natural wisdom and an insight into human nature,

a philosopher. And indeed, philosophy has been a lifetime pursuit with him. Even so, there was something pixie-ish about him. He had an ageless appearance. His prematurely silvered hair made him, at first sight, appear older than he was, but his cherubic face and darting eyes soon corrected the misconception. He was ready with the quip and a well developed sense of humor kept his students alert. He was a man of quick movements. His eyes flashed. His face was rarely still—the moon face with the impudent little moustache. His hands and feet were restless and that quality showed to advantage when he mounted the organ bench.

If there is one thing we recall about the mechanics of Paul Forster's technique, it is the fact that he played all pops in octaves, filling the harmony in between. It came natural to him, and the wrist motion involved was something to behold. His right wrist flashed faster than the eye could follow during tunes such as *Dancing Tamborine*. In contrast, his wife Arline, was a quiet woman albeit a charmer and one well equipped to handle the volatile musician she had married. Paul's students got to know the Forsters because his teaching was done in his organ-equipped parlor. His sons, Bob and Paul,



Peg Kimball, a brainy and talented musician, played the Empire Marr & Colton for silent films after Forster left. Now living in Boca Raton, Florida, she is remembered in the Syracuse area for "singalongs" at Loew's State 4-20 Wurlitzer during World War II.

were in and out continuously and family life went on around the student. It was a pleasant experience.

When Paul opened at the Schine-Eckel theatre a new personality came into his

life in the form of one Gus Lampe, the theatre manager. Gus saw himself as a radio personality and to provide an outlet for his talent he signed up for three half hour broadcasts each week on station WSYR to plug the Eckel theatre. Paul Forster was billed as the attraction and he did manage to play a few tunes during each broadcast (done from his residence), but the greater part of the half hours were taken up by Gus' talking. The fact that a major part of the mail re-



Another contemporary of Forster was Herbert Henderson, a British organist, at great Piccadilly console. He came to Syracuse to open the Regent's 3-12 Marr & Colton in 1927 but didn't stay long. His repertoire and style were "over the head" of the Regent's shirt sleeve clientele.

quested Gus to pipe down so Paul's pipes could be heard never phased the marathon talker in the least. His spring remained wound up for several years of "Paul and Gus". Incidentally Gus Lampe is still very much in show biz as a talent impresario for Los Angeles and Las Vegas hotels, and a very successful one.

There were other popular organists in Syracuse in those days—Carleton James, Peg Kimball, Therese LaJuett (now Johnson), Ernie Mills, Gladys Beardsley, Lew Baker, Bart Wright, Thelma McNeill (Curren)—to name a few. The four last named worked "opposite" Forster, meaning they alternated with him during the 12, or more, hour silent picture day. All four went on to become featured, or solo organists in their own rights. Not one of them tried to imitate the Forster style. Bart Wright, who replaced "opener" Herbert Henderson at the city's largest Marr and Colton at the Regent, had a big, broad "Viennese" style. Gladys Beardsley, a holdover from blood and thunder nickelodeon piano days, played the organ exactly as she had the piano, her pedalling restricted to a drone brass

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## PAUL H. FORSTER

### Feature Theatre Organist

*Announces the Opening*  
of  
MODERN ORGAN STUDIOS

at  
1924 East Genesee Street  
SYRACUSE, N. Y.

There has long been the need of a studio of this sort in Central New York, indicated by the lack of trained theatre organists to fill the numerous positions created by the astonishingly rapid growth of picture theatres, and the present featured exploitation of their high salaried organists.

The demand for schooled theatre organists, trained for the multiple duties of the theatre has far exceeded the supply.

It is to help remedy this situation, and augment the ranks of trained photoplay organ applicants, that this studio is instituted.

Arrangements can be made whereby the student may use the studio organ for practice. Plans are being made for the installation of an additional organ for practice purposes.

### *Students will be instructed in—*

ORGAN FOUNDATION WORK.  
THEATRE ORGAN INSTRUCTION.  
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TRICK EFFECTS. PEDAL STUDIES.  
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POPULAR MUSIC IN ALL ITS FORMS.  
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IMPROVISING AND TRANSPOSING.

The organs used are of the latest design, built especially for the FORSTER ORGAN STUDIO from special "movie" specifications with the most important traps and devices.

MARR AND COLTON STUDIO ORGAN installed.

Individual and class instruction.

Classes in actual screening including the cueing and synchronizing of news reels, oddities, scenics, comedies and feature pictures.

Summer Classes. Rates on request.

Your inspection invited.

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The goodies available in a Forster instruction course were just too tempting for the budding theatre organist to resist—including the author, who showed up for a lesson as often as he could scrape together the necessary \$5.00.



Therese LaJuett (now Johnson) played the style E Wurlitzer at the main-drag Temple theatre in Syracuse until it became the Paramount and the organ was plastered over. She also played opposite Ernie Mills on the Strand Theatre style 240. Therese was a frequent visitor to the Forster home in the old days and values their friendship highly. She is frequently heard playing an electronic at events in the Syracuse area.

E flat. Chic Thelma McNeil was a many-faceted musician who later went to radio where she met and married announcer-producer Jack Curren. Lew Baker had a long career as a theatre organist in Syracuse, playing well into the '30s at Loew's State, the last theatre to present organ features—with one notable exception. We'll explain that presently.

The one time we heard Paul Forster go too "far out" was during a memorial broadcast for Ernie Mills, the handsome and brilliant organist at the Strand whose bright career came to a tragic end in the crash of a small aircraft.

Ernie had been popular among his fellow organists. They used to hold what would later be referred to as "jam sessions" at Forster's home after hours. Paul liked the personable young man with the slicked-back hair and horn-rimmed glasses and he was heartbroken when Mills died of his injuries after lingering a few days to give hope that he might recover. The film playing at the Strand the week Ernie died was *Submarine* with Jack Holt and Ralph Graves. Its theme song was an innocuous little tune called *Pals* which became a sort of theme for Strand broadcasts as long as live music

was presented there. The memorial was broadcast, appropriately, from the Strand following the late show shortly after Ernie's death. Many of Ernie's organist friends were present as well as members of the Strand's all-girl orchestra. Each took his turn at the style 240 (3-12) Wur-

litzer organ or the piano to pay his last respects to the departed friend. The girls made with a sweet playing of *Pals* on strings, another played *My Buddy*. Therese LaJuett, Ernie's co-worker and deeply shaken by his death, gave an amazing simulation of Ernie's style playing his broadcast theme, *Until Tomorrow*. But Paul Forster was the natural piece-de-resistance and when he crawled up on *Oh How I Miss You Dear Old Pal of Mine* he literally "pulled out all the stops." Forster undoubtedly felt the loss strongly but his rendition of that all but forgotten tear jerker bordered on the bathos—the only time we ever heard him resort to "schmaltz."

Sound movies were well established by 1932; so was the depression. By then even the most optimistic organ enthusiast had to admit the change would be permanent. There would be no more silent movies for organists to cue, except for revivals. The depression hurried the metamorphosis by causing hard-pressed theatres to fire organists they might have kept on duty for novelties. One by one the Syracuse houses silenced their organs. The first to go was the Temple theatre. When it was remodeled as the Paramount, the little 7 ranker's chamber openings had been bricked up and the console stored backstage. Others followed. The Marr and Colton console which had figured in so many Forster "organlogues" at the Empire was removed from its elevator and shoved unceremoniously to the narrow left end of the orchestra pit, its pedals up-ended to squeeze it into the inadequate space. The big Marr and Colton in the Regent was junked when the theatre was remodeled about 1935. Forster left the Eckel in 1935. The organ was partly destroyed by fire in the late '30s and the remainder junked. Syracuse theatres were organless.

Then one day, walking by a small



In 1928 the author was just getting into the act. "Talkies" had already invaded the downtown theatres but the Regent would be silent for another year, and its 3-12 Marr & Colton sounded wonderful. Bart Wright was the Regent's solo organist.



In the 1940s Mr. Forster became active in church music once more (he had always played for Sunday services at a Syracuse church during the silent movie era). Here he is seen at the Zion Lutheran church Hammond circa 1950.

neighborhood house not far from the Forster home, we heard unmistakable organ sounds. We knew the Harvard theatre well, having "broken in" on the tiny Wurlitzer style B (4 ranks) years earlier. Our curiosity aroused by these old familiar sounds in a new organless era, we investigated. Inside were Paul Forster and David Marr. They were trying to get the miserable little instrument in good enough shape for use after the console had been inundated by several summer floods. Paul had sold the manager of the 350 seat house on the idea of organlogues to bolster his sagging business. It worked, too, for a time. Paul filled the house the first night. Forster fans flocked to the small house from all over town and kept coming.

It was at the Harvard theatre (now Wescot) in Syracuse that we heard Forster on pipes for the last time. Several other name organists "took to the suburbs" where their skills and popularity held sway briefly, but it couldn't last. If a large first-run house in mid-town couldn't afford live organ music, it was even less feasible that a 350 seater in the suburbs could do well enough for what the establishment of "talkies" had caused to become a luxury.

But fate stepped in before the axe could fall; Paul Forster suffered a fall in his home and while his broken leg was on the mend he had plenty of time for rumination on the big picture, which he faced for the first time in all its unpleasant reality. Organs in theatres were finished, so

far as making a living was concerned. Paul considers the two months spent mending as one of the most crucial in his life—and the accident a lucky one. Long before the leg had healed Paul had a new plan. He had always been interested in insurance; why not use this time of necessary inactivity to start something new? So he studied general insurance and shortly after he threw away his crutch he passed the New York State insurance examination. He opened his own agency and thereafter never had any economic worries. That doesn't mean he gave up music. He still played on radio, TV and in church as often as possible.

During the winter of 1956, while shoveling some 150 inches of snow from his Syracuse property, Paul decided that he'd had enough of Northern winters. He'd heard about the easy living in Florida and although he'd never been there he went indoors and broached the idea to wife Arline. She thought it a great idea. With sons Bob and Paul grown up and



**PAUL FORSTER TODAY.** The active organist lives in St. Petersburg with his wife—but not in retirement. He's Minister of Music at a local church. In 1966 he made a brief return to the theatre console to play for the closing show at the Keith theatre in Syracuse, New York, his first theatrical appearance there since the early 1940s.

married, there was nothing to hold them in Syracuse. The Forsters sold their belongings and moved to the St. Petersburg area with the idea of retiring. They bought a house and settled down.

Then Paul heard about a church which needed an organist to play services and train three choirs. As might be expected, Paul H. Forster is back in the saddle, up to his ears in music as organist and Minister of Music at the Church by the Sea near St. Petersburg. He just can't help making music.

*For the photos which illustrate the Paul Forster story we are indebted to Lloyd Klos, Bill Lamb and organists Luella Wickham, Therese Johnson, Peg Kimball and Paul Forster.*

## FOR THE RECORDS, cont.

sounds much less theatrical than when Reg. Foort thundered out with *Finlandia* for the RCA Victor label in the late '30s. The reeds are still excellent but the Tibias are trem'd like straight organ flutes. Thus, what we like to call "lushness" is lacking. And the registration used on pops and show tunes is often church-like.

However, the performance is tops. Cor Steyn was a hip musician with lots of inventiveness. He handles such tunes as *Moonglow* and *Jalousie* in fine style and *Caprice Viennoise* brings out the Moller's big battery of brass in review. *Uno per Tute* is 1930s swingband jazz which sounds vaguely familiar. The side closes with a generous medley from *Gypsy* played with lots of imagination and variety in registration. Although it isn't listed with the tunes, Steyn opens and closes the record with a lilting *California Here I Come*, possibly his radio theme. A history of the organ is provided on the jacket notes—if you read Dutch.

\* \* \* \* \*

## ONES WE MISSED the first time around...

**Pipe Organ Encores**, Robert Brereton at the New York Paramount 4-36 Wurlitzer, Camden CAL-591 (Mono) \$1.98; also released in stereo at \$2.98.

When this platter was first released several years ago it was given very limited distribution. As an avid record bin explorer, this reviewer was unable to locate a copy to review on the West Coast. As the New York Paramount organ sinks ever deeper into memory, each track it recorded becomes more precious. Recently the effort to locate a pressing was redoubled. The quest led to the door of the organist who was able to provide a review



Robert Brereton has just completed his third year playing an electronic in a Santa Monica, California cocktail lounge. He's a solid pipe enthusiast and is often seen at La Chapter ATOE concerts.

copy. Pressings won't be easy to locate but it's well worth the effort, the only

*(Continued on Page 46)*