



Manufacturers, distributors or individuals sponsoring or merchandising theatre pipe organ records are encouraged to send pressings to the Record Reviewer, Box 3564, Granada Hills, California 91344. Be sure to include purchasing information, if applicable, and if possible a black and white photo which need not be returned.

PIPE POWER, Byron Melcher playing the 4/27 Harvey Heck studio Wurlitzer. No. CR-0099 (stereo). Available at \$4.89 postpaid from Concert Recording, Box 531, Lynwood, Calif. 90262.

It has been a long time between pipe organ records for Byron Melcher (we listed his recent plug-in contribution in the last issue). His mid-'50s "Gorilla in the Garden" (as the late Bill Huck called his studio Wurlitzer) for the Replica label is remembered as one of the best of that company's many organ records. The long wait makes one wonder why Byron has not been recorded in the interim, in view of the wide appeal of his stylings on pipes as evidenced by this release. The disc, is also the swansong (in its Tarzana, Calif. home) of the Harvey Heck 4/27 mostly Wurlitzer which started out in life as the 3/14 in the Hollywood Epyptian theatre. Over the years, Harvey, a skilled organ tech., switched and replaced ranks, added pipework and the style 285 console from the St. Louis Missouri theatre, always refining to match the instrument to the smaller area of his home-based studio.

A previous effort to record it left much to be desired, but not this time.

Concert Record's prexy Bill Johnson did the taping personally and he has captured all the subtle beauty which Harvey Heck built into the instrument in 17 years of evolution.

The next time the Heck organ is heard it will have undergone a metamorphosis. Missing will be the array of soft accompaniment voices Harvey added (he wired a Dulciana with mutations from top to bottom, a gorgeous subtle voice) and the Wurlitzer will emerge with the brilliant brassy plumage of a pizza parlor organ at the "Organ Stop" in Phoenix. Which makes this platter of its final performance as a studio organ, with years of TLC obvious, all the more a treasure.

A glance at the tune list indicates that Byron Melcher, with some exceptions likes to play old chestnuts, but not exclusively in the style of their eras.

Side one opens with a low-keyed, easy going "Call Me Irresponsible" played on a very Crawfordish combination. Oldie "Margie" is played with gusto (and a couple of clinkers) in a mostly 1920's spoof style on bright registration. "Come Touch the Sun" is probably the most beautifully played ballad on the record. Fine registration and phrasing, plus a subdued approach bring out the full beauty which Harvey Heck achieved during his years of work on the instrument.

"Thanks for the Memories" is a pleasant bit of nostalgia reminiscent of the long ago movie duet sung by Shirley Ross and that ski-nosed comic. "Rambling Rose" and "Red Roses for a Blue Lady" are both played in a gently swaying tempo with much variety in registration, all of it interesting and satisfying. Harmony is mostly traditional with an occasional touch of the modern. "Chim Chim Cheree" is given a jazz waltz treatment and "Gettin' Sentimental Over You", another memory teaser, makes exemplary use of the punctuation brass (e.g. Serpent, Posthorn) associated with the swing style of the big band era, a Melcher specialty. Byron is especially adept also in the march department and in a brief span of 1:32 minutes the whole brass band passes in review with the bells and cymbals clanging a metallic punctuation to the big brass for "Pass Me By". Byron really dipped low in the barrel to dredge up a mid-'20s tune called "Barney Google" which he plays with probably crossed fingers and a bouncy



Byron Melcher at the Harvey Heck studio style 285 Wurlitzer console. — (Stufoto)

rhythm. It's a lively reincarnation of a forgotten top pop of the day.

The final tune is the soporific theme from *Love Story*, a recent film which smacks strongly of the sentimental film romances of the '30s, a fitting closer played in full tear-jerking style by a master of that style.

The recording is good, with just enough added reverb to liven the less than theatrical acoustics of the Heck studio. The record is well packaged. The color cover photo is a closeup of another style 285 Wurlitzer console, the L.A. Metropolitan/Paramount's, which now controls the Coffman & Field Old Town Music Hall organ in El Segundo, Calif. Apparently concert Recording is ashamed of the pictures and jacket notes; only those with remarkable eyesight will be able to determine the names of the fotog and writer (me:). We'll never tell.

INTERMISSION TIME, Tiny James playing the 3/14 Wurlitzer in the Fox-Oakland Theatre. In "electronic stereo." No. DO(s)1210. Available from dealers or direct from Doric Records Sales Co. Box 605, Alamo, Calif. 94507. \$4.95 postpaid.

This recording was first issued in monaural in 1957 and persistent demands for long out-of-stock pressings moved Doric prexy Frank Killinger to reissue it in "studio stereo." This process in no way impedes, improves nor interferes with the music when compared with the 1957 original. The recording is a gem, both technically and musically. Tiny James, long a leading theatre organist in the Bay Area of

California, offers a program of well-selected standards which avoids oft-repeated ones (with the exception of "Diane"). The organ (long gone) is a style 235 Special Wurlitzer (according to Judd Walton's jacket notes), opus 1890. It has the attributes of a good recording organ, with bitey Strings, mellow Vox, sharp Posthorn, wailing Brass Sax and an especially lush Tibia.



Tiny James (shown here at the 'Pipe & Pizza' console). — (Stufoto)

Playing is tops throughout. Tiny successfully recreates the period (roughly 1930 through 1945) during which the theatre organ was used for intermission music. It had to say a lot in a spectacular manner in a very few minutes. There was no time for busy arrangements; playing was usually simple and straightforward.

Changes in registration on the disc are ample but not overdone. While the jacket claims it to be an "easy listening" album we found it to be of fascinating interest to the organ buff, with solid musical values as well as an introduction (unless one has 1957 version) to a fine theatre organ.

Selections are "McNamara's Band", "We Just Couldn't Say Goodbye", "Body and Soul", "I Believe in Miracles", "Will You Remember"?, "Ecstasy Tango", "Old Time Medley", "Wedding of the Painted Doll", "Valse Bluette", "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now", "I Guess I'll Have to Change My Plan", "Diane" and Victor Herbert Medley.

The 15 years which have passed have only enhanced the value of the music on this recording. It has been repackaged with a color photo of Tiny and the console plus additional jacket notes to bring us up to date.

One of them reveals that the Fox-Oakland organ has found a good home. It now reposes in an especially built studio in the home of John Leininger in Shingletown, Calif. A frequent visitor is Tiny James, who can't resist the siren call of an old love.

GANGBUSTERS AND LOLLIPOPS, Bill Langford at the mighty Warfield Wurlitzer. Fantasy (stereo) 8396. Available at local dealers. Autographed copies by mail from the Pizza Joynt, 19510 Hesperian Blvd., Hayward, Calif. Postpaid price not stated but we suspect \$5.50 will do it.

Ye Olde Pizza Joynt has been mentioned often in these pages. It was a pioneer in the use of pipes to sell pasta, and a profitable credit to its originator, Carsten Henningsen. The organ was recorded effectively many years ago (as a 2-manual) by Bob Gates when it was in his Bay Area studio, but this is the first released taping in its pasta parlor setting with its 3-manual console from the San Francisco Warfield Theatre. The present size of the pipe complement is not stated but it was a 3/12 last time we dropped in.

Those who have never heard Bill Langford are in for a unique treat. Long a radio and TV organist (e.g. Tennessee Ernie, Steve Allen and Rowan and Martin shows), Bill has made a new career of his pizza parlor playing and his showmanship is largely responsible for the successful combination of novelty music and gastronomic satisfaction enjoyed by the Joynt.

What the unprepared listener will find surprising on hearing this recording is the range of styles and moods it encompasses. It starts with a very literal "Chattanooga Choo Choo" with a realistic steam train takeoff thrown in for the benefit of anyone with a memory long enough to recall the iron horse. It's typical rough-hewn "pizza" music, played skillfully in chop-chop boogie woogie style with train whistle accompaniment and lots of crossing and locomotive bells. Bill informs us that the train air brake sound was produced by exhausting the air from an inflated beer keg. So, it's another slambang record? Not at all; the very next tune, "Flamingo", is given a finely phrased subtle treatment with a muted Tuba melody ac-

companied by a String/Flute mutation mix. Next an upbeat Dixielandish "Way Down Yonder" with all the improvisational frippery that style demands. The "Colonel Bogey" march is heavy with drums which are obviously played by a second musician. A chorus of ethereal Strings, plus Harp arpeggios, mark "Green Dolphin Street", which Bill describes as a "pretty lollipop" hinting he'd like to get onto the more lively stuff. This opportunity comes with a fast and bright "Cabaret", with an interpolation of a Glock/Xylophone-studded "Bye Bye Blues", to close side 1.

Uncle Billy's Wild West Show is 7:25 minutes of the wildest collection of carnival, hurdy-gurdy and side show music we've yet heard. Lots of off-key callioperly over the "Entry of the Gladiators", "Man on the Flying Trapeze", "Billboard March" and hootchie-cootchie music, played as only a barker's mentally retarded offspring might memorize them. To make sure we recognize the bass melody "elephant music" Bill throws in a few random trumpetings. Then there is the Indian attack and the U.S. cavalry charge, and a merryground which really breaks down. Great fun and nonsense.



BILL LANGFORD

This rough musical horseplay is followed by a thing of rare sensitivity; Bill gives us a shimmery "Moon River" as seen flowing by the Taj Mahal, a lovely oriental setting, finely selected registration and faultless phrasing; a rendition worthy of Dick Hull. Next moment he's off on a rhythmic "Sam the Old Accordion Man" which features the console-played accordion for some musical moments accordionist Charlie Magnante would enjoy.

Telephone bells distract from the

opening and closing of a beautifully played ballad entitled "The Old Party Line". It isn't until we realize that it's the old Lum and Abner radio theme that we fathom the reason for the phone bells which so often marked Lum and Abner's chief means of communication. It's the one time Bill's insistence on stark realism misfires. The closer is a majestic "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

There's much evidence that Bill Langford had help from uncredited instrumentalists, especially in the "skins" and effects areas, but this in no way challenges the organ's dominance nor the artistry of versatile Bill Langford. "Entertaining" is the word that describes the content of this disc.

Good miking overcomes the problems of recording an organ spread over walls and ceiling.

JONAS NORDWALL PLAYS THE PARAMOUNT WURLITZER PIPE ORGAN No. JN-102 (stereo). Available postpaid at \$5.50 from Bill Peterson, Gamba Records, 4993 S.E. 30th Ave., Apt. 98, Portland, Oregon 97202.

There are few sounds more satisfying to the theatre organ enthusiast than that of a big Wurlitzer being expertly played in the acoustical environment of a 3000-seat Rapp and Rapp theatre. That's what we have here.

Jonas Nordwall is one of that tiny band of organists equally at home on theatre pipes or the straight concert organ. Like Ray Brubacher, whose current record we reviewed in the previous issue, Jonas is able to prevent the more obvious accoutrements of each mode of playing from coloring the other in any but a plus way. Jonas is well known for concerts in both areas up and down the west coast. Teaming up with producer Bill Peterson (a stickler for perfection in all aspects of a record release) for this second record release, Jonas presents a program of current and recent pops, novelty tunes and standards well-suited to the Portland Paramount "Crawford Special" (4/20 Publix No. 1).

He starts with a rhythmic "Baby Face" in all-20's mood replete with Posthorn riffs (a Posthorn was added just for the recording session). The current "For All We Know" follows, an expertly phrased ballad, perfect for

Tibias and later ensemble reeds. "Tantalizing" is an upbeat finger-twisting novelty of "Dizzyfingers" genre with plenty of Posthorn comments. "If" is a current ballad admirably suited to theatre organ presentation, and Jonas wrings all possible romantic sentiment out of it, then administers a soothing liniment to the first chorus of "Black and Blue" which thereafter becomes pleasingly raunchy and then big and lively, even a little dirty. To close side 1 it's that penetrating pop which could become a standard — "Didn't We"? Rarely has the question been asked more hauntingly.



JONAS NORDWALL — (Bill Lamb Photo)

Side 2 opens with another current hit, "Joy to the World", a lively rhythmic pop which has nothing to do with Christmas. Again, Jonas has selected a natural for theatre organ presentation. It's big, bouncy and presented in colorful registration. Memories of Buddy Cole are rampant during "Don't Worry About Me" with the tune carried initially on a fat untrem'd Diapason chorus, then on ensemble and color reeds salted with a wealth of Flute mutations. "Down by the Riverside" gets a big combination up-tempo treatment, with some calliope and hurdy gurdy thrown in between choruses. Only trouble is, it ends too soon. Subtle is the word for the first run through of the tango "La Comparsa". Carried initially by a single Tibia melody line, it moves to color reeds before a more emphatic later chorus. It ends as it started, on soft registration, a fine example of effective understatement. "I'll Never Fall in Love Again" gets a humorous garb with audible "oohs" and "ahs" and some Kinura-spiced backing. "Give Me a Moment Please" harks back to the '30's when it was the radio theme of *Rubinoff and his Violin* and much later the broadcast theme of a well-known organist. It still has the old

charm in the able hands of Jonas Nordwall.

Miking emphasizes big auditorium acoustics which puts the listener in a mid-balcony seat. Engineering is good throughout.

— THE PLUG-IN CORNER —

THE INVISIBLE BRASS BAND, Johnny Kemm at the Lowery "Citation" with "Brass Symphonizer." CR-E112 (stereo). Available at \$4.89 postpaid from Concert Recording, Box 531, Lynwood, Calif. 90262.

It shouldn't happen to a nice guy like Johnny Kemm. Yet it's the result of a condition most organists who work for manufacturers face; the firm develops a new model (in this case it's a "Brass Symphonizer" connected to a model called "Citation") and the company wants a demonstration record which will include enough shock effect to separate the prospective customer from his upper plate; on with the extremes, no matter what happens to the music. Thus Johnny's selections are spiked with intentional pitch variations (called a "Wow-Wow"); the "Lara" melody sounds like a fly trying to buzz itself off the flypaper until the chop-chop mandolin takes over, and "Alley Cat" comes on strong with a horrendous "meow". "Night Train" is marred by a purposely wobbly melody pitch. "Ebb Tide" and "Hawaiian Wedding Song" melodies are carried on a nondescript sizzly "Reed" and "76 Trombones" boasts a "Tuba" pedal bass that might benefit from a dose of bicarbonate of soda. On the plus side the Harp, Drums and Chimes are quite realistic and there are brief passages on solid and pleasing Flute and Diapason combinations. The tunes played without grotesque voices (e.g. "March of the Toys," "One of Those Songs" and Indian Love Call") bring out the fine qualities of the basic instrument. Johnny's playing is tops throughout; it's the exploitation of the more garish effects which bug us, and they predominate. Buy this for laughs, perhaps, but not as organ music. Believe us, Johnny Kemm is a fine musician, despite some of the distortions heard on this platter.

Other tunes heard are "South Rampart Street Parade," "Hoe Down," "Wave," "Trumpeter's Lullabye," "Bugler's Holiday," and "St. Louis Blues." □