



BOOK REVIEW

by Lloyd E. Klos

JESSE CRAWFORD, POET OF THE ORGAN, WIZARD OF THE MIGHTY WURLITZER by John W. Landon. Vestal Press, Vestal, N.Y. 13850. 372 pages. Price: \$12.50 (NY State residents add 7% sales tax.)

There are biographies of varying quality. Some serve merely as skeletons of their subjects. Others are based on average effort. But only a small minority are backed by years of painstaking research, data collection, interviews, and hours of meticulous collation which result in a superb finished product.

In the last category, we classify a most fantastic new book by ATOS member, John Landon, on the life of Jesse Crawford, the theatre organist who practically set the pace for all others in the field when the Mighty Wurlitzers were making their first great swing on the entertainment scene. Mr. Landon spent five years in research and interviews for this book, and it shows! For example, scores of pictures of every facet of Mr. Crawford's incredible career, many never seen by the public, are spotted throughout the book, accompanying the text as closely as possible.

This reviewer doubts that a more thorough book on The Poet of the Organ is possible, for author Landon has practically given us a week-by-

week (day-by-day in some sequences) accounting of the organist's life. This biography will be useful to organologists, students, and theatre organ buffs, and can easily be classed as a reference volume; albeit it is the definitive work on Crawford's career.

The ten chapters on his life are chock full of anecdotes, interesting events, humorous incidents and some sadness. One facet which graphically illustrates his rise to success, concerns the one shiny blue serge suit which Jesse wore so long while playing West Coast Theatres. But when he was the King of the theatre organ at the New York Paramount, the closet in his



sumptuous apartment contained 23 suits and 36 hats! Jesse Crawford's story is a real Horatio Alger tale come true.

The joys and sorrows of his marriages are discussed as well as his theatre, recording and tour ex-

periences. That this is not merely a story of Crawford's musical life, is proven when PhD Landon reserves an entire chapter, "The Soul of the Poet" for analyzing Jesse's personality. Associates, family and friends are all drawn into the vortex of discussion. Each chapter is documented extensively, the sources of information revealed, and a sizeable bibliography is listed after chapter ten.

There are 128 pages of appendices which include lists of recordings, transcriptions, organ rolls, compositions and arrangements known to have been made by Crawford; specifications of major theatre organs he played, lists of appearances at the N.Y. Paramount and Chicago theatres, sound films made, and a partial list of radio broadcasts.

Mr. Landon graciously acknowledges the assistance of all who helped him during the five years of preparation. There is a list of close to 100 persons and organizations whose assistance is recognized, a veritable Who's Who in the theatre organ cause. One of these is another walking encyclopedia of Jesse Crawford, Canada's Clealan Blakely, who contributed a three-page preface to the work, giving his impressions of when he'd sit through five shows at the New York Paramount in 1929 to hear the Poet. There is also a two-page foreword by organist Reginald Foort, describing his contacts with Crawford.

To every ATOS member, the reviewer strongly urges that he obtain a copy of this text for his collection. To John Landon, on behalf of all theatre organ lovers everywhere, we offer a hearty "well done!" and sincere thanks. And, if Mr. Landon puts together another book, we reserve a copy for purposes of review and reference. □

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