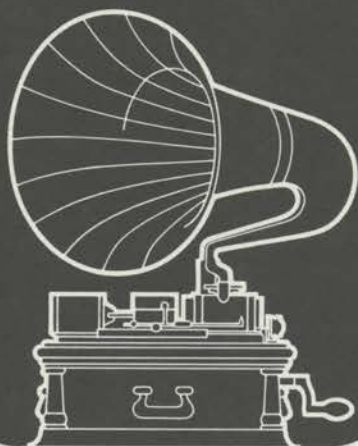


## For The Records



*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.*

**ORGAN STOP PIZZA PRESENTS RON RHODE. OSP-102 (stereo). \$6.00 postpaid, from Organ Stop Pizza, 5330 North Seventh Street, Phoenix, Arizona 85014.**

Bill Brown, father of the Arizona pizzeria-with-pipes phenomenon, has a knack for selecting talented help, whether in the organ restoration field or console performance. This is a first recording for both instrument and performer, and both come through for Bill with a degree of excellence on this biscuit which others may well use as a model.

The instrument is built around the style 260 (3/15) Wurlitzer which saw service in the Denver Fox theatre. Other complementary ranks have been added to total 23 at the opening of the Mesa Organ Stop pizzeria, with a planned total of 25 ranks. Much has been written about this instrument in recent issues of this publication, so we'll not repeat. (See the Oct./Nov., issue, page 36). However, it's of interest to note that the Mesa Organ Stop Pizza Wurlitzer is equipped with both a Posthorn and

that razor-edged relative, a Serpent. The Serpent rank is copied from the set fabricated by Harvey Heck on instructions from organbuilder Lee Haggart. The original set was fashioned from a church organ Oboe with liberal amounts of sealing wax poured into redesigned shallots to practically eliminate fundamentals. This made the Serpent even more biting and incisive than the Posthorn. This set became Bill Brown's when he purchased Heck's Tarzana (Calif.) 4/27 Wurlitzer installation for his Phoenix Organ Stop.

We felt that Ron Rhode was a "comer" when we heard him in concert a couple of years ago. This recording indicates that he has developed far more rapidly than we had envisioned. With this recording Ron demonstrates a musicianship far in advance of his years. Of course, playing opposite Lyn Larsen (while waiting for the Mesa restaurant to be built), some of that fine player's musical acumen was bound to rub off on Ron, and all to the good; Lyn's pop styling teachers were the records of Jesse Crawford and George Wright. So there are occasional familiar progressions or effects, but in the main, Ron Rhode is his own stylist.

The tunelist is a critic's dream, with none of those "Lara's Theme" type repetitions, unless leaving one's heart in San Francisco, even though Crawfordesque, is becoming a bit threadbare. Otherwise, the fare is varied. The openers on both sides are marches played in full marching band style, "Strike Up the Band" and "National Emblem March," during which the monkey wraps his tail around the flagpole with gusto. Ron isn't above a little corn as he sprinkles "Tijuana Taxi" with auto horn honks, but the ethereal beauty of his ballads, especially the mutation-spiked string registration heard during "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" and Ron's own exquisite arrangement of "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen" are special treats. There's much of Jesse Crawford in "My Hero" and a broad (!) allusion to burlesque "bump & grind" rather than the more usual Charleston in "Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate." Ron sticks rather closely to the Anderson notation during "Fiddle Fiddle" but the bright registration is his own.



Ron Rhode. His first record hit the spot. (Stufoto)

Ron knows exactly how much untrem'd classical playing he can get away with gracefully for a basically pop/standards collection — 4 minutes and 13 seconds of "Toccatto Festiva" by Richard Purvis. It's an impressive proof of Ron's way with a modern bravura selection written for straight organ presentation, and the Wurlitzer cooperates beautifully, with well-suited non-theatrical registration. It's an exciting piece of music built on a counterpoint pattern in the Widor manner (yes, including a booming pedal melody). A thriller. The closer is that good old upbeat 1906 George M. Cohan relic, "Popularity."

It's a deluxe foldout album with copious notes and photos, a solid plug for the pizzeria and a detailed stoplist. The cover boasts a striking color shot of Ron at the console. Recording is excellent, the pressing, too. In fact, everything about this album suggests excellence. It is highly recommended.

**LYN LARSEN AT THE DICKINSON THEATRE PIPE ORGAN. Stereo SPS-4835-20 \$7.00 postpaid from Dickinson Theatre Organ Society, c/o Robert E. Wilhelm, Jr., 2507 Limestone Rd., Wilmington, Delaware 19808.**

In recent years, the "Wurlitzer Only" society, that small, influential but unorganized group of "Wurlitzer pushers" has had, on a few occasions, been forced to admit that some other builders made excellent theatre organs. This happened once during the New York ATOS convention when the Robert Morton in



Lyn Larsen (Stulofoto)

Rev. Ike's theatre/church turned out to be a beauty, again during the 1975 convention when visitors were exposed to the Kimball (circa 3/25) in Dickinson High School, Wilmington, Delaware. People who had been claiming that they had never heard real theatrical qualities in a Kimball pipe organ were remarkably silent. All present would readily admit that this Kimball rivalled Wurlitzer's best, even though it wasn't necessarily imitative of that famous brand. We asked the organ's mentor, Bob Dilworth, whether any tonal changes had been made. He replied no, the sound was essentially what was heard in Philadelphia's Boyd theatre during the final concert there before the move to Dickinson.

Lyn Larsen made a Bicentennial Year celebration record on the organ which was reviewed in this column last year. While there, he suggested a second taping and this is the result. We feel this is a far superior presentation if only because it is free of the limitations placed on material adhering to the Bicentennial theme; after all, how many versions of "Battle Hymn of the Republic" can one absorb? The selection of tunes here has no set pattern, just tunes Lyn likes to play, and his choice is satisfying.

The miking is "big hall perspective" which favors ensemble sound but the fine acoustical environment of Dickinson auditorium also enhances the frequent solo voices.

By now, just about everyone is well acquainted with the Lyn Larsen treatment of music, so we are not going down the list with comments on each one. It suffices to say that this fine young organist maintains the high level of presentation he has earned since that first public con-

cert in the Orange theatre, Orange, Calif., playing a 2/6 Wicks restored with mostly Morton pipework. He was only 19.

The titles are: "From This Moment On", "Hard Hearted Hannah," "Jean," "Danny Boy," "Georgia On My Mind," "Tritsch-Tratsch Polka" (Strauss), an original, "Sounds of Wonder," "Musetta's Waltz," "The Parrot," "The Way We Were" and Kreisler's "Caprice Viennois."

The recording is packaged in a deluxe book album with informative notes about the instrument and Society by Bob and Mary Ann Dilworth, and notes on the music by Lyn. It's a most attractive package and don't forget that proceeds help maintain and improve the organ — if that is possible.

Incidentally, Lyn's previous Dickinson record, "America I Love You," is available from the same source.

**GEORGE BLACKMORE AT THE MAGNIFICENT MOLLER THEATRE ORGAN. In Quadrophonic/stereo. DO (Q) 1503. \$5.95 postpaid from Doric Records. Box 282, Monterey, Calif. 93940.**

This is British organist George Blackmore's second waxing for the Doric label and their second release of a record of the now famous Reginald Foort "traveling Moller." Currently installed in a very favorable acoustical environment in San Diego, it is a very proper instrument for the display of the music devoted to classical standards (side 2). It is essentially a concert organ with some theatrical qualities. Therefore, Khachaturian's "Gopak," Auber's "Masaniello Overture," Lang's "Tuba Tune" and Luigini's "Ballet Egyptian" are well registered during Blackmore's well-played renditions. Where mass organ sounds are called for, the Moller responds with verve. On Side 1, George has to work a little harder to come up with a variety of theatre organ combinations. Even so, registration often seems somewhat on the heavy side, considering that choice but mostly unused solo voices are available. "Canadian Capers" is hypoped with some tonal percussion sparkle. "Maria Elena" is done in rhythm-ballad style, with color added via



George Blackmore

the grand piano. Performance is low keyed. A Henry Mancini medley includes "Mr. Lucky" on rather thick registration. Similarly obese combinations give "Baby Elephant Walk" a middle-aged pachyderm amble. It isn't until he comes to "Days of Wine and Roses" that one becomes aware of truly theatre organ registration, much of it due to the fine Vox Humana. The same applies to "Moon River," an especially lovely rendition until the big mass of sound near the close. Rodrigo's "Guitar Concerto," long on the pop charts in Britain, is a slow and somber minor melody. Solo passages are played on a soft brass reed, strings and on the piano. In contrast, "Dancing in the Sun" is an upbeat "peanut vendor" latin-flavored pleasantry of the question and answer variety. It's spiced with Glock "question" plinks against a repeated Piccolo "answer" pattern. A charmer.

Plenty of variety in the selection of tunes here, although the balance is heavily in favor of the concert standards. Only about six of the titles will be familiar to most US ears, so we must assume that George selected his titles with an eye to the British and European market. Personally, we could have absorbed a little more Mancini at the expense of "Masaniello" and Luigini. In fairness to "Masaniello," it may have appeal to silent movie buffs. The changing tempos and dynamics suggest accompaniment of a flicker plot of the listener's own invention, and be sure to include a chase sequence. The music is waiting. If there's one purely vanilla selection on the list, it's the "Guitar Concerto," and one can only wonder why it was included.

George Blackmore is a much-respected international organist,

with film (*Charade*) and orchestral recording credits (with Mantovani's orchestra). He's been prominent in British music circles since his first BBC organcast in 1941. In fact, he's the only organist to have played the Foort 5/28 Moller (a Trompette en Chamade has been added) under three flags — British, Netherlands and USA. He is adept at playing all kinds of music and a previous record release by Doric of tapings made during his 1975 ATOS convention concert/live broadcast, played on the San Francisco Orpheum 4/22 Robert Morton, was his USA recording debut. It, too, was a mix of pops and concert. It has been widely accepted, so perhaps our concern with mixing a largely concert program with a smaller number of pop standards is unfounded. Still we have the feeling that both artist and instrument are most comfortable during the concert music portion.

Performance is first class throughout. Recording is excellent and our review pressing has an especially smooth surface. Profuse jacket notes document instrument, organist and music. Tim Crowson's color cover photo of optically distorted pipe-work is a stunner.

This album is recommended to those who prefer a program of mainly concert pieces played on concert registration, with some lighter selections included.

## GUEST REVIEWER

by Walter J. Beaupre

**DENNIS JAMES AT THE MOVIES: VOLUME 1, DJP-104 (stereo) \$6.75 postpaid, \$8.00 outside USA, from Dennis James Productions, The Ohio Theatre, 29 East State Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215.**

Never let it be said that organist Dennis James is chicken! It takes courage to release a premium priced LP these days featuring "Lara's Theme," "Tara's Theme," "Honeysuckle Rose" and three ragtime tunes recently recorded on a major label by Lee Erwin (one of them an Erwin arrangement). Compound these risks with what could be the sappy-est jacket notes ever stuck on the derriere of an album, and you've got yourself what might be a quick trap door to oblivion. But stay the



Dennis James. Not chicken over "Lara."

execution, o' cynical reader, at least for the 38 minutes it takes to hear *Dennis James at the Movies*.

For one thing, the D.J. recorded performance of "Sabre Dance" is well-nigh perfect. I won't even risk calling it orchestral because, frankly, no symphony orchestra has ever recorded a more thrilling rendition of the Kachaturian classic. This is inspired theatre organ playing as we dream it should be but seldom are privileged to witness.

Blockbuster No 2 on the disc is the music from GWTW. I don't care who else has recorded "Tara's Theme"; this James boy, with considerable help from those strong reeds and massive, luscious Robert Morton strings, has built an arrangement that catches fire and glows with passion. He heaps on counter melodies to fan the flames. Key changes are luminous surprises, like changing camera angles on a fine piece of sculpture.

Dennis proves handily that still another visit to "Somewhere My Love" was warranted. This time Siberia is equipped with Crawford rolls and imaginative counter melodies which keep the ballad fresh and alive. So he takes liberties with the verse (why not?) and uses reiterating orchestra bells with restrained good taste. Counter melodies grow more and more complex as the arrangement builds. "Only a Paper Moon" is rhythmic without being "funky cute." Dennis chooses an old fashioned treatment with pleasant questions and answers among Tibias and reeds. He switches to waltz tempo briefly, then eclipses with a blaze of bells.

Irving Berlin's "What'll I Do?" cuts the massive Morton down to a few well chosen ranks with Vibraphone echoes for punctuation. Nice.

"Baby Face" we are told is one of those re-creations out of Ohio history (Henry B. Murtagh): mucho razz-amatazz, busy voices, but all well controlled. The last chorus with Charleston licks is something of an anticlimax.

When Dennis James turns on a ballad from *Mame*, "If He Walked Into My Life," you'll cheer because he sounds like vintage Buddy Cole. The emotional line promises great things. Then, for some reason, Dennis abandons his feeling for Buddy Cole and returns to George Wright. Is this such a crime, you ask? Yup! We've still got the great Wright father in our midst; we sorely miss the late, great Buddy!

In my opinion the weakest cut is the bouquet to Judy and Lena (*That's Entertainment*). After a mercifully truncated junk intro Dennis plays the verse and chorus to "Boy Next Door." The jacket notes tell us it's pure Judy Garland phrasing. Your ears will tell you its Jesse Crawford. "Trolley Song" has good drive and sound effects — not enough to spoil the song, not quite. The blues approach to "You Made Me Love You" is Crawford again, a familiar agenda item so often moved and seconded by messers Wright and Larsen. Granted, it's head-y stuff with a satisfying gut-bucket climax. Just too imitative. "Honeysuckle Rose" shows "Fats" James with a nice feel for those piano-bass-type tenth chords. Honking auto horns were added, I trust, to make us ask "Why?"

It would be a kick to say — because I know Dennis admires Lee Erwin — that his three *Sting* selections are superior to the Erwin cuts of the same tunes for Angel records. But honest candor must prevail over kicks: the Erwin cuts still stand as the definitive "Solace," "Snowball Club," and "Easy Winners." I suppose it does make some sort of patriotic or ecological sense for Dennis James to adopt "Beautiful Ohio" as his signature tune. It's right there at the beginning of side one where it can be quickly forgotten.

As a carefully built total program *Dennis James at the Movies* is good listening. The "Sabre Dance" cut alone could make this a collector's item. Record surfaces were quiet and the sound of the Ohio Morton clean and lush. □