

For The Records



THE EMBASSY GRANDE PIPE ORGAN, played by four members of the Embassy group. Cascade No. PT-6664 (stereo). \$7.00 postpaid from Embassy Theatre Foundation Inc., Box 1266, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801.

We have heard and read much about the 4/15 Page organ in the Fort Wayne Embassy Theatre over the years. First there were the periodic late night concerts by Buddy Nolan which continued for years. Then, the Embassy was threatened by demolition, and this time the story has a happy ending, one which is becoming encouragingly more frequent since the incomparable San Francisco Fox was battered into a pile of rubble. This time the "good guys" won. They are members of an organization which evolved a plan to raise the \$250,000 which bought the exquisite Embassy for use as a civic auditorium. But additional operating cash is needed for such necessities as a new roof.

So, four musically talented members of the group volunteered to put on a show on a record, as a continuing plan to raise funds. Their annual report states that only 3 cents per income dollar is spent on fund raising activities, a most efficient setup. So much for background.

This disc is especially interesting because the Page organ, one of only three known to be still in use according to the jacket notes, remains exactly as the long defunct Lima, Ohio builder installed it in 1928 when the theatre opened.

There have been previous record

releases played on the Embassy Page, but this one features the best miking of the instrument to date, as comparisons will indicate. The pressing surface is smooth and pop-free. Now to the organists.

We have no idea whether they are professionals; if not their playing comes very close to it. The jacket does not list their names, so we'll do so: Bob Goldstine (who spearheaded the entire Embassy project), Robert Ort, Bill Zabel and Dyne Pfeffenberger. We can't tie their names to the tunes, but the styles illustrated offer a wide variety. There are 19 selections, some contained in a medley, and there are lots of surprises and no dull moments.

There is a nice balance between rhythm tunes and ballads. The former category would include "That's Entertainment," "Wake Up and Live," "Wilkommen," "Cabaret," "S'wonderful," "Who," "Button Up Your Overcoat," "I Love to Hear You Singing," and "You Do Something to Me." The ballads would include "Jeannine," "Home," "Memories of You," "You Couldn't Please Me More," "Feelings," "Here's, That Rainy Day," "Watch What Happens," "It Only Takes a Moment," "Ay Ay Ay" and "How Long Has This Been Going On?"



One of the organists has a penchant for upbeat old showtune stylings. Thus we have some vintage tunes such as "S'wonderful," "Who," "Button Up Your Overcoat" and "You Do Something to Me," all presented with the harmonic and rickety rhythmic adornment of their popular days. One player is very adept with portamentos, so "Home" and "Rainy Day" are loaded with them. "I Love to Hear You Singing" is played lickety-split and is

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vaguely reminiscent of the famous version. Some of the organists display skills in weaving counter melody "rides" against the main theme, such as in "Who." "How Long" features a scintillating array of massed strings, one of the record's highlights. If the reader wonders how 19 tunes can be crowded onto one platter, some tunes (e.g. "Jeannine" and "Ay Ay Ay") are one-chorus arrangements but sound complete. One tune, "S'wonderful," is marred by an ugly schmear glissando, luckily near the close.

Playing ranges from good to better. There are a few pedal bobbles and spots where harmonies do not resolve smoothly, but in the main the playing comes off well and illustrates plus entertainment value.

The organ has got to be a beauty, if this record is representative. It is in top shape as recorded and seems to have an endless variety of striking combinations. Most readers will be unfamiliar with the sound of the Page organ; this recording provides an opportunity to experience the sound of a fine instrument.

The jacket includes some info about theatre and organ. It's a worthwhile package and purchases help build up funds to safeguard theatre and instrument.

THE MANY MOODS OF THE 'MIGHTY MO', played on the Atlanta Fox 4/42 Moller theatre organ by Bob Van Camp, Dolton McAlpin, Ronald Rice, Linda Kent and Lyn Larsen. \$6.50 postpaid from Atlanta Chapter, ATOS, Box 76404, Atlanta Ga. 30328.

Here's another opportunity to hear some fine artists and know that the fee paid for the record will help "Save the Fox." The campaign by Atlanta Landmarks to keep the



Ronald Rice

wrecking ball away from the Atlanta Fox has been well documented in these pages. The campaign is in its last stages of fund-raising and the need for money is still great. Where the group in Fort Wayne had to raise hundreds of thousands, the Fox project goes into the millions because the Fox building is a much larger proposition. Yet the Atlantans are winning in their battle of civic pride against human greed.

The music is derived mainly from tapes recorded during concerts, although only one cut indicates the presence of an audience.

The "cast" for this project is similar to that for the Fort Wayne recording, with two differences, (1) the lesser known players are reinforced by "name" artists, and (2) all of the organists are revealed in the jacket notes.

Bob Van Camp, the long time master of the big Moller offers the opener, "That's Entertainment," then "Fly Me to the Moon" and later a rarely heard reading of tunes from David Rose's score for the 1943 Broadway show, *Winged Victory*,

composed while Rose was an army sergeant. The "Winged Victory March" is a thriller in Van Camp's hands.

For several years we have followed the rising career of young Dolton McAlpin. His offerings here are "Shenandoah" and "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," both low-keyed renditions played on the Moller's soft voices, with excellent phrasing and expression, but in a mode more churchly than theatrical despite the good use made of the Tibias.

Ronald Rice is an organist with a fine classical background, but here he lets his hair down to play a couple of pretty, classical nothings which fit into the TO program much better than a display of Bachian contrapuntal capability. His first offering, which he describes as "a lush, lyrical romantic piece of slush" is "Romanza" by Richard Purvis. It's subtle music, faintly reminiscent of "Out of Nowhere," registered mostly in the baritone ranges of such color reeds as the Clarinet. Mr. Rice has a leaning toward understatement which carries over to Robert Elmore's "Donkey Dance," a whimsical parallel to Grofe's "On the Trail" in places. Again Rice registers on the Reeds and Strings.

Lyn Larsen is much in evidence with three selections, the first being "Ol' Man River" wherein Lyn "lifts dat barge and totes dat bale" with the dramatic finesse so characteristic of his very popular stylings. Later on Lyn offers 1 minute and 12 seconds of "A Fine Romance." Short but good. Lyn also plays the closer, "Dixie" and "Georgia," this time with a demonstrative audience applauding and clapping in tempo, but no rebel yells. "Georgia" has a



Dolton McAlpin

little trouble getting established, due to Lyn's sophisticated harmonies, but it all ends well.

We've saved what we felt was the best surprise for last. For some time we've been hearing good things about youthful Linda Kent, who never touched a pipe organ until 1972 (she was busy competing in Yamaha contests). The version of Tchaikowsky's "Waltz of the Flowers" heard here was recorded by Miss Kent after only four hours to become familiar with the behemoth Moller. We can only echo the jacket notes — "Her performance was nothing short of phenomenal." The sweep of this beautiful waltz has rarely been brought out with such gracefulness and orchestral awareness. Again the jacket notes — "... the instrument with Linda Kent as conductor — (is) proof that the Fox organ (in) capable hands — is almost limitless in scope." Amen.

Jacket notes by John McCall and Bob Van Camp supply much insight as to the music and the musicians.

Because the cuts were made from various tapes miked during rehears-



Bob Van Camp

(Stufoto)



Linda Kent



Lyn Larsen

(Stufoto)

als or concerts, the technical aspects of James Jobson's recordings (mike placement etc) vary, yet the recordings always manage to capture the essence of the Moller. And there is some variation in volume from cut to cut, although we'd rather believe it's because some organists play louder than others. But these are minor complaints which in no way impair enjoyment of the recording (except by nitpickers). Surfaces are exceptionally smooth.

Here are five very different approaches to an instrument with many resources. The work of each is fascinating.

A PARAMOUNT PERFORMANCE with Henry Croudson playing the 4/20 Wurlitzer in the Manchester Paramount. Acorn CF-270 (Mono). \$8.50 postpaid by airmail from Tom E.K. Herd, 8 Ashworth Court, Frenchwood, Preston, PRI-4PS, Lancashire, England. Make out checks on US banks to Lancastrian Theatre Organ Trust.

The Lancastrian Theatre Organ Trust has "gone vintage" with this release. Until now their output has been played by both veteran and emerging organists on the two Wurlitzers they own, all recent mikings. This one provides a welcome change in the pattern, and will afford many USA denizens an opportunity to hear for the first time a fine theatre organist playing at the peak of his career. Meet Henry Croudson playing the Manchester Paramount theatre 4/20 Wurlitzer between 1936 and 1938. Of course, the cuts are dubs from 78 rpm records, but the quality of the original pressings must have been exceptional. The copying has been done expertly and one must listen closely to determine that the miking was done so long ago. One giveaway is the closeup perspective and complete absence of reverb of any kind, a characteristic of organ records in the "dead studio" era.

Most of the selections are showcased in medleys, thus we have groupings of familiar tunes from such remembered films as *The Great Ziegfeld* (Berlin), *Swingtime* (Kern), *On the Avenue* (Berlin), *Rosalie* (Porter), *Careless Rapture* (Novello), *Pennies From Heaven* (Johnson) and

The Vagabond King (Rudolf Friml). There is also a Hit Medley of mainly British tunes (including "Lambeth Walk," remember?) and a medley of four selections from Tchaikowsky's *Nutcracker Suite* ending with the lilting "Waltz of Flowers." Other waltzes are "Charmaine," "Diane" and "Marcheta." Another grouping is three British "Songs at Eventide" — "Evensong," "In the Shadows" and "I Love the Moon." Individual offerings include two by Duke Ellington, "Caravan" and "In My Solitude." There is also a fine reading of Louis Alter's rarely heard "Manhattan Serenade," part of which was the "Easy Aces" radio theme. Within the medleys are many old favorites such as "You" (with a vocal by Sam Costa), "The Way You Look Tonight," "Only a Rose," "Song of the Vagabonds," "Somebody," "So Do I" and "One Two Button My Shoe." There's plenty of material here with appeal to US ears.

On hearing this recording, one can't help but wonder why Henry Croudson remained cloistered in Manchester. His expertise could have taken him to London, but the greater part of his playing career was in Manchester and all of his 21 Regal Zonophone 78's were waxed there. The records would have sold well in the USA during those years, but were not imported. But for this monophonic LP compilation of Croudson's best, most of us would never have experienced the work of an artist who compares most favorably with the best the USA had to offer. It is sometimes difficult to believe the playing is circa 40 years old. Arrangements and tempos hold interest at all times. There is not as much registration variety as in current styles but that's no handicap to Croudson; he comes through by sheer technical and arranging brilliance. His playing is not reminiscent of other famous British organists then at their Zenith, but it's obvious that he had listened to Sydney Torch when he plays in free rhythm.

The jacket has an interesting cover comprised of British theatre advertisements of the period and two photos of the organist. In addition there's an 8-page leaflet with Henry Croudson biography and discography, even a floor plan of the Manchester Paramount. It's a pity that

this album couldn't have been released during Croudson's lifetime (he died in 1971 at 73). It's a well deserved tribute to a fine theatre organist.

OMNIBUS, Jonas Nordwall playing the organ in the Organ Grinder Restaurant, Portland, Oregon. Omnibus No. JN 105 (stereo). \$7.00 postpaid from Dennis Hedberg, 1303 S.W. 16th Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97201.

The Organ Grinder's mostly Wurlitzer has swollen to 41 ranks and is now played from the 4-deck console which once controlled many fewer ranks in the old "Met" Theatre in Boston. As many readers will recall, the pizzery organ started out as a 3/13 Wurlitzer in Portland's Oriental Theatre, and grew and grew to its present size through the wizardry of Dennis Hedberg in its present location, with much help from the late Bill Peterson and Jonas Nordwall.



Jonas Nordwall, Wild!

(Ngan Photo)

This group of selections deals with extremes, both in the choice of selections and the treatments, some of which are simply wild.

The first selection, described as "modern jazz-rock style," is entitled "Organ Grinder Boogie." It's simply the wildest old fashioned boogie-woogie ever grooved. Its extreme tempo conjures visions of jitter-buggers doing their 1945 thing in a speeded up film strip. The sharpest, most penetrating Post Horn we've yet heard on records provides the punctuation. We liked this tune when we first heard it 34 years ago

played by the Tommy Dorsey swing-band. All the Dorsey arrangement's goodies are there, sometimes in grotesque relief.

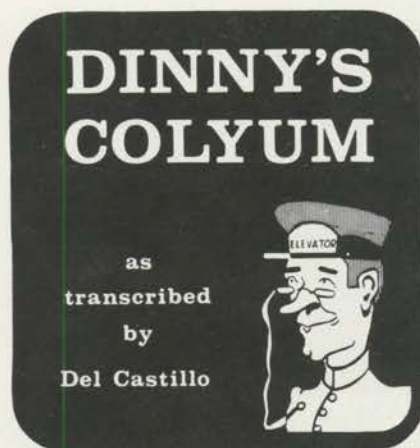
In sharp contrast there are three rather short ballads, Barbra Streisand's "Evergreen," delicately registered, and with interesting counter melodies; "Fernando" and "When I Need You," the latter registered solely on the organs three Flutes (Concert, Harmonic and Lieblich) with light percussion accompaniment. "Blue Skies" is given a light Crawford treatment. "Ruby" is mainly a bright Trumpet solo with "boom-trap" rhythmic piano accompaniment. For the Latin music buffs there are the rhythms of Ernesto Lecuona's "Gitanarias," not as well known as his "Malaguena" but just as "Espangol." Jonas has some fun doing hurdy-gurdy tricks with "12th Street Rag" and "Pineapple Rag," both of which are attacked with vigor and lots of registration changes, many involving the percussions, lots of Posthorny riffs (against that bright Glockenspiel, once more), and with absorbing melodic variations.

Again, in complete contrast is a bow to classical organ music, a composition of Flemish composer Flor Peeters. We doubt that the endlessly wandering melody line of "Aria" will sustain much interest immediately following that rocket-like "12th Street Rag."

Again, we've left the piece-de-resistance for last. It's a puzzling, absorbing, impossible-to-classify bit of fluff which covers one-third of the grooves on side 2. Named "Pinball Wizard," it might better be dubbed "The Kitchen Sink." There's a little of everything in it, all presented with great gusto. It, too, has a wandering melody line which makes little difference because the setting is the area of interest. There are thunderous claps of bass, Cymbal crashes, Tympani rolls and fanfares galore. It's a little reminiscent of the nervously active music Erich Korngold composed in the '40s for use under the titles of Errol Flynn adventure movies. Today they use about the same vigorous orchestration for *Star Wars* type movies. There's even a rock interlude. It could be classed as descriptive music, but the listener will have to decide what the picture is.

The organ sounds excellent in all combinations. It has about the nastiest Post Horn yet, and the way Jonas uses it sometimes conjures a view of tearing thin sheets of metal. The miking is good throughout. As for the review pressing, we encountered a spot half way through "Blue Skies" where very heavy bass modulation may tend to cause very light pickups to jump. While we do not advocate maintaining a monotonously constant modulation level, we encountered a very wide volume range between cuts. For example, if the volume is set at a comfortable level for "12th Street Rag," the next three tunes are almost inaudible in places, unless the volume is raised. Otherwise okay.

Dennis Hedberg's jacket notes add spice to the program. Here's variety with a capital "V" and Jonas Nordwall can chalk up another winner. □



I gotta give a salute to Mr. John Muri on acct. the ATOS made him the Organist Of The Yr. at the Convenshun this summer, and espeshully on acct. they aint so many of that generashun of organ players left. We got Rosa Rio and Don Baker in to play, and I spose maybe we should count Mr. Lowell Ayars and Mr. George Wright but I aint so sure about them they look pretty young to me. And then Mr. Tiny James who aint tiny at all who is on the Nashunal Bored and still looks pretty good. But then you start lookin through the list of organ players on the Hall Of Fame and it gets depressin to see how they aint many of them left. I started to count the ones who aint here no more and I got so discouritch I quit.

O well Time Marches On like they use to say on the newsreel and I spose we got to give the young fellers credick for pickin up and carryin on when the old guys aint got the gumpshun to keep on playin. Its a good thing we got records so as we can still hear Mr. Jesse Crawford and Henry Murtagh and Eddie Dunstedter and Dick Leibert and like that there. And of course the kids they are makin records like crazy so you can put them in with your collekshun and some of them is pretty good and some of them aint so good but you take the bad with the good as you might say and I certainly aint goin to claim that the old ones was all first class neither. If you like to lissen to organ playin it is kinda interestin to kind of pull it apart as you might say and see how they make there playin sound good. The first thing I notice is that the playin is a lot fancier now than it use to be. You take Mr. Jesse Crawford for instance and he played the tunes pretty much the way they was rote. Of course he practically invented the glissando and by golly I spelled that rite, I think, but mostly he played strate.

But now you take some of the noo batch of organ players like Mr. Jimmy Smith or Miss Shirley Scott and that is a different story. I aint sayin they aint good, they can grab a fistful of notes so fast a feller can get out of breath jest tryin to keep up with them. But I kind of like to hear a tune that makes a little sense and sometimes I cant even make out what the peace is they are playin. And then they is some of the young players and they fancy a tune up so that I aint sure jest what they are drivin at. First off they have to have a fancy intro as they say. Then when they get down to brass tax as you might say they have to show off that they can play the peace in a lot of different keys. Its like you was goin somewheres and you have to change cars every few blocks. And then they have a competishun to show off how much they can play the peddles. I got to hand it to a player like Mr. Hector Olivera and when he starts to play the Flite Of The Bumble Bee he sure makes a simpony out of it but I kind of wonder where that little bumble bee went to. He's more like those grate big insex that are bigger than you are that you look at in those horror movies.