

we hear very little about mental pollution of the kind detailed above. The evil shows itself in at least eight ways:

1. Mental laziness that fosters vagueness, cuteness, and half-truths.

2. Willingness to take less than the best. This is at its worst when people get cynical enough to accept inferiority without complaint.

3. Unwillingness to express displeasure with inferiority because of timidity and an over-developed idea of good manners.

4. Ignorance of the values of self-control.

5. Obsession with bigness and money, even though efficiency and quality drop.

6. Willingness to hurt one's self rather than give up a vicious practice.

7. Indifference to the spiritual needs of others.

8. Vulgarity and exhibitionism producing "Superstars" in an entertainment world without real stars.

The title of this piece is a quotation from the Litany of "The Common Book of Prayer." I thought of it in my reactions to stories told me by friends and to books I have read. The German poet Schiller once wrote, "With stupidity the gods themselves struggle in vain." Can we whip it? I wonder.

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SPECTACULAR SOUNDS: ASHLEY MILLER AT THE ORGAN OF THE RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL. Allen GA-1090 (stereo). Available by mail from Milco Music, Box 32, Closter, New Jersey 07624. \$6.50 postpaid.

Here's a treasure which escaped us during its initial distribution. Released by a small label circa 1960, its distribution was limited. This release is a multiple plus, one because it has been remastered to include its full frequency range. Says Ashley Miller: "I'm very happy with the results of the remastering, as well as the musical content." He has considerable reason to rejoice.

First, the technical end is exceptional, especially the miking. The RCMH organ is not an easy one to record. Besides being located in a block-wide "barn," there are four chambers to pick up, plus some unenclosed percussions. It would be very easy to settle for an "average" pickup, but luckily the uncredited original recorder was adept at taping the quiet, intimate passages as well as the massive ones. Therefore the

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subtleties are retained, a point very important to the Miller arrangements and interpretations. There have been other recordings of this 4-manual, 58-rank instrument, but we believe the miking here is far better than even Ashley's Columbia label releases.

The program consists of: "Slaughter on 10th Avenue," "Blue Moon," "Masquerade," "La Vie en Rose," "Granada," "It's De-Lovely," "September Song," "Vanessa," "Reflections in the Water," and "Ritual Fire Dance" (DeFalla).

True, "Fire Dance," "Granada" and "Slaughter" have perhaps been added to the "overdone" list since this recording was made, but the freshly different Miller interpretations maintain interest throughout. Or, strike these selections and it's still a topnotch program.

The arrangements, abetted by fine shading and skilful instrumentation, often seem to soar.



Ashley Miller

A few highlights: the telling use of "emphasis" brass during "Slaughter"; the color reeds and counter melodies of "Blue Moon"; the "Chopin-esque" interpolations heard during "Masquerade," as well as the "opposing" harmonic ornamentation; the bull fight music superimposed on "Granada"; the old RCMH intermission "one-two" applied to "De-Lovely"; the reflective and nostalgic inferences which make the mostly understated "September Song" so dramatically meaningful (those Tibias never sounded sweeter); the chromatic opposites countering the melody of "Reflections," as well

as the arresting registration and level changes; the bravado and drama of "Fire Dance." If we could choose a favorite, it would be a toss-up between "Reflections" and "September Song" with "Masquerade" a close second, perhaps because of its familiarity (the melody was excerpted from Cesar Franck's "Symphony in D Minor," a favorite).

The jacket notes by well-informed Geoffrey Paterson offer much enlightenment on the music, musician and instrument. A rare stop analysis of the RCMH organ is included, and it is most revealing. In fact, the reader may do a double take on encountering some of the non-Wurlitzer TO rank names such as Bassett Horn, Cor Anglais, Spitzflute, Waldhorn etc. But then we recollect that "Roxy" wanted a Kimball organ, same as he had at the Roxy theatre, and Kimball drew up the specification. But by 1932, Kimball had lost so many artisans due to the non-demand for theatre organs, that the contract went to Wurlitzer. The miracle is that the North Tonawanda firm could inject so much of the Wurlitzer sound into an alien specification. On this recording, that sound is brought out with distinction.

REGINALD FOORT, MASTER OF THE MAGNIFICENT MOLLER! DO(Q) 1506 ("quad" stereo). \$5.98 postpaid from Doric Recording, Box 282, Monterey, Calif. 93940.

So much has been written about this instrument in recent issues, we won't have to recap. Two previous releases have been recorded by Doric, using this instrument in its current location, but this one is different — its original designer and master is back in the saddle. This is the first time Reginald Foort has recorded his brainchild since the '78s made before World War II in Britain (remember that 10" Master's Voice or Victor label blackseal with "Finlandia" covering both sides?). In fact it's Foort's first new recording on pipes of any kind, his most recent being *Say It With Music*, recorded years ago on Dick Loderhose's then 4/38 studio Wurlitzer for the Renwick label (still a formidable Foort *tour de force*) plus some sides done on the now gone Carson-Kearns 3/26

studio Wurlitzer in Hollywood for *Readers' Digest* release.

The tunelist is a mix of the familiar and offbeat. All are Foort arrangements or transcriptions, and some treatments, notably "The Stars and Stripes Forever" are more than a little "far out."

Several of the selections have been recorded by Foort previously. Compared with the pop-oriented tunelist of the Renwick release ("Tiger Rag," "Blue Tango," "Lover" etc), this is a conservative choice, more like his "Michael Cheshire" records for the Cook label in the early '50s. Foort was given a free hand by Doric's prexy, Frank Killinger, so the selections amount to a testament to more than 55 years devoted to music and the organ, a small slice from each era. For example, from Foort's continued interest in church music, there's "Trumpet Voluntary." Besides, it's a fine vehicle for the Moller's newest addition — a *Trompette en Chamade*. He goes the gamut of the European gypsy's ever-changing tempi with "Slavonic Rhapsody." The two Fritz Kreisler selections have long been Foort favorites, and come off well in Reggie's loving care — "Caprice Viennois" and "Liebesleid." The "Hot Canary" is comically portrayed as a self-assured and snobbish fowl, mostly on the Piccolo. And "The Old Sailor's Tale" is, as the jacket notes say, "a silent movie without film." It employs eleven descriptive titles and tunes to document a sea voyage which includes a raging storm. It's a nautical thriller. The program also includes two Foort originals, his broadcast theme, "Keep Smiling" and "Sitting Pretty." Both are innocuous but pretty melodies which serve to underscore the meatier fare around them, for example, the four selections which comprise the "William Tell Overture." Foort puts his all into these musical scenes which describe such contrasts as calm, storm (a brief one this time), morning and the galloping Lone Ranger "Finale." The *piece-de-resistance* is Foort's very individual styling of "The Stars and Stripes Forever." There are frequent key changes and the chromatic harmony Foort wraps around the Sousa melody in the final trio section provides coloration which alters the whole aura of the familiar tune. It's done with chromatically moving



Reginald Foort proves he still 'has it.

ninth chords and the suspense, as Foort paints himself into one harmonic cul-de-sac after another, escaping by resolution just in time to face the next, is almost exhausting. Fortunately, it's the final selection so there's time for recovery before playing it again.

How does Foort's performance compare with those on previous records? While this release contains more concert music than the Renwick record, the organist displays the same originality and fire in the two examples where like material makes comparison possible. For example, his current "Hot Canary" is played in the same bright style as his Renwick "Lady of Spain." One title is common to both releases, "Anchors Aweigh" (which is now part of "the Old Sailor's Story"). He counterpoints it with a lively "Sailors' Hornpipe," and it comes off well both times. If there are criticisms its mainly in the tunelist. We would have preferred more pops and standards in those unique Foort settings rather than such items as "Trumpet Voluntary" and the "Slavonic Rhapsody," both of which sound as though they were played by the book. After all, Foort's arrangements of light tunes are half the fun.

But generally speaking, the Doric release does much to prove that the veteran maestro still plays with the magic which once made him Britain's most popular organist-entertainer.

The 5/28 Moller is understandably putty in Foort's hands. The fact that

he knows the instrument so well makes possible the registration variety which marks his work.

Tonally, the Moller, at the time of recording, still sounded more like a romantic orthodox organ than a theatre instrument, which may explain why it's so adaptable to the purely concert pieces, and less effective in providing the registration associated with ballads. But if the Tibia sound isn't up to snuff, the Reeds and Strings are tops, as are the Diapasons. One can become sufficiently absorbed in the wizardry of the organist to ignore the TO shortcomings (we understand that the organ has since been altered to improve the TO output).

Packaging is first class. The disc is housed in a deluxe book jacket which bears three pages of notes and six photos telling the remarkable story of the one-time "traveling organ" and its creator. There is a stop analysis and additional notes about the wide variety of music offered. Recording is up to the usual high Doric standard. We managed to note a few tape splices but one must be listening for them.

This is the musical testament of one of the great theatre organists playing the instrument he loves the most. It's well worth owning.

DENNIS AND HEIDI IN ENGLAND. DJP — 105 (stereo). \$6.75 postpaid from Dennis James Productions, c/o Ohio Theatre, 29 East State Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215.

The "wedding cake couple" have turned out another topnotch biscuit. For those who dig the combination of piano and organ, this one will be considered a winner. For those purists who buy records for their organ content, be forewarned that this album is about one-third piano solos or piano-dominated duets.

We note that a solo piano (we assume) record is scheduled for Heidi later in 1977. That is good news because it will afford her an opportunity to escape from the sometimes rinky-tink piano mode which fits so well with the era of the theatre organ stylings of her husband. We have long considered Heidi James too good a pianist to be concerned with such novelty tunes as Zez Confrey's



Dennis and Heidi. They did it in Britain with much distinction.

"Kitten on the Keys." Yet, the one solo worthy of her considerable skills on this record, Moszkowski's "Etingelles" ("Sparks"), seems strangely out of place on a mainly pop/standards program. So we'll look forward to her solo piano debut where she will be free to delve into the purely piano music of, say, Gershwin, Billy Strayhorn, Dana Suesse, Lou Alter and the more exotic efforts of perhaps Scott, Griffes and even Debussy. With that formality past, we can luxuriate in the skills and charm of these exceptional artists.

The James duo has here produced an album designed mainly for the nostalgia buffs. They have developed an amazing ability to recreate the sound and mood of tunes heard on old '78s. An example is Dennis' organ solo of "Pale Moon" which is close enough to Crawford's original Victor 78 to satisfy most of the JC

cult. An even more remarkable recreation is Zamecnik's "Polly." Somewhere in some collector's set, is a pressing of "When You're With Somebody Else" played by Jack Shilkret's Rhythm-Melodists, or perhaps a shellac Victor pressing of "Fashionette." Either one would provide a very sharp clue to the sound obtained by Dennis and Heidi for their duet of "Polly," right down to the style of the organist who played Victor's studio straight organ. There was also a recording by Zez Confrey's orchestra of "Polly," but whatever the inspiration, this recreation provides an accurate "feel" of the time when the tune was new.

"America's leading concert piano/theatre organ duo" (say the jacket notes) have chosen, in this album, "not to knock the listener off his feet with sheer musical force." They have succeeded. The Len Rawle home installation is the most "USA-sounding" Wurlitzer we've yet heard from Britain, with tremos set for US tastes. It's the former Empire Leicester Square 4/20 Wurlitzer and it sounds gorgeous in its present home. Voicing and regulation are immaculate. Len personally did the taping.

Thus we have "The Continental" on piano, thinly orchestrated with organ accompaniment, a relief from the bombast often afforded this classic. Another interesting duet is "Little Rock Getaway," with echoes of the Crosby Bobcats. Heidi's piano solo of "Chelsea" is a very musical rendition of the "Fats" Waller composition. The composer's version was not nearly so refined.

The overworked "Whistler and His Dog" occupies a scant 1.55 minutes of grooves, and Dennis seems to

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be enjoying an inside joke. Yes, the dog barks are there.

One facet of the James effort is presenting the offbeat (despite the "Whistler"). Thus, the Gershwin medley includes "Looking For a Boy," Gershwin's one effort to "go Viennese" with "By Strauss" and an understandably corny "Nashville Nightingale," which proves Gershwin was thinking ahead to the "Bluegrass" present. It adds up to 6:17 minutes of compelling organ music.

To us, the most attractive selection is a medley from *Dames at Sea*, a stage musical in the Busby Berkeley manner with music in the Harry Warren style. The interesting point is that just about every tune in the 8:36, minute organ presentation sounds enough like another tune stored far back in the memory to make the medley interesting. Dennis makes the most of each derivation. Solid entertainment.

Len Rawle's miking, in fairly close perspective, underscores the intimate stylings, and a good (stereo) balance between piano and organ is maintained during the duets. The jacket bears a few notes concerning the music, also fine color photos of the interwoven pair in London. To borrow a line from the jacket notes, this album adds up to an "enjoyable blend of technical artistry and light-hearted fun."

DON THOMPSON: THE BIG SOUND DEROY-1342 (stereo). \$5.50 postpaid from Stanley C. Garniss, 35 Union St., North Easton, Mass. 02356.

The Toronto based organist Don Thompson has chosen to go the recorded-before-live-audience route on his latest release for the Dero British label, bringing highlights from four US concerts back to the UK. The featured organs lend themselves nicely to the "big sound" concept: namely the Brooklyn Paramount and the Detroit Senate Theatre Wurlitzers, the Los Angeles Wiltern Kimball and the 60-rank Skinner in St. Paul's church, San Diego. Although the album notes claim that Don Thompson has declared his independence from "the English orchestral sound," the selections are typically British with heavy emphasis on transcriptions of orchestral classics.



Don Thompson. 'Salvation Army flophouse' in the pedal line. (Stufoto)

There is also a dash of church organ virtuosity, a novelty solo, two up-tempo oldies and a sentimental ballad. This program formula — if not Don's avowed "modern virtuoso style" — has pleased Sunday afternoon UK audiences for years.

Thompson's individuality as a "modern virtuoso" and creative arranger is best demonstrated in the ballad "When Your Lover Has Gone." Playing is tasteful, restrained and cerebral. It takes repeated listening to catch all the good things Don does with the tune. Modulation is not D.T.'s strong suit, however, and there are "holes" between choruses. "Bill Bailey" and "Puttin' On The Ritz" are pleasantly bouncy but frankly, what Don does to the pedal line of "Ritz" is pure Salvation Army flophouse. "Butterflies In The Rain" like most novelty solos gets its charm from clever registrations and a lilt, rather than from slavish adherence to the original melody line.

This reviewer found "Von Himmel Hoch" the most successful offering on *The Big Sound*. If your German is no better than mine, be reminded that this is a doxology-type church tune with mind-boggling variations. Thompson plays the melody on pedals for stretches while his hands do incredible things at speeds that break the sound barrier. This record will probably be banned within fifty miles of JFK airport!

Now for the orchestral classics. The most delightful surprise for Americans will be the "Overture — Raymond." It's a minor work with a lovely theme you'll recognize as a recently recycled pop ballad. The finale is pure "William Tell" — plus

Tonto. Don makes good use of the Brooklyn Wurlitzer reeds. The pipe voices are clear with sufficient reverb to give accents a shimmer and tingle. "Crown Imperial" gets a sympathetic and spirited reading. Something — perhaps it's my culture gap — makes me wonder why he bothered in the first place.

"Finlandia" exemplifies both what is right and not-so-right about Don Thompson's "recorded live" performances. Some portions of "Finlandia" are brilliant, but there are obvious lapses from genius. That loud, wrong pedal note at the end of the first eight bars — Ouch! And cranking open the swell shades quickly in the middle of a soft, lovely passage! Tempo goes haywire as the minor theme builds. Accuracy is sacrificed to speed time and time again. Hopefully this "Finlandia" will be a promise of better things down the pike.

As one who has marched to "Pomp and Circumstance" for more years than I care to mention, I honestly think it's good music and well worth another recording. Don Thompson parades Elgar's warhorse with youthful zest and obvious affection. Let's not be picky about the mistakes in the "verse" melody line. With four different versions — one of them must be correct! Don has a tendency to vamp an extra beat here and there while he's setting up registrations, but these are minor flaws.

In my opinion the chief disaster on the disc is Don's rendition of "Ride Of The Valkyries." This hyperkinetic horse opera version on the Detroit Wurlitzer doesn't even have the decency to be funny. There ought to be a law against presenting Wagner's tragic Brunnehilde as though she and her sisters were the "Mesquiteers in drag." This one should definitely go back to Detroit for repairs.

Record surfaces were quiet throughout the review pressing, and the grooves hold the Big Sound with comfortable clarity. If you are a bit bored with those technically perfect studio performances of Tibia-Vox favorites and are willing to risk both the joys and the anguish of Don Thompson LIVE, try it. I predict this Don Thompson lp will be argued about for some time to come. I can't predict who will come out on top.

(The above review was prepared by Walter J. Beaupre) □