

Leilting Moon River Memories

Moon River . . .

*A lazy stream of dreams,
Where vain desires forget themselves
In the loveliness of sleep.*

Moon River . . .

*Enchanted white ribbon
Twined in the hair of night,
Where nothing is but sleep.
Dream on . . . sleep on . . .
Care will not seek for thee.
Float on . . . drift on . . .
Moon River, to the sea.*

*Down the valley of a thousand yesterdays
Flow the bright waters of Moon River.
On and down forever . . . forever waiting
To carry you down to the land of forgetfulness,
To the kingdom of sleep . . . to the realms of . . .
Moon River,*

*Where vain desires forget themselves
In the loveliness of sleep.*

Moon River . . .

*Enchanted white ribbon
Twined in the hair of night,
Where nothing is but sleep.
Dream on . . . sleep on . . .
Care will not seek for thee.
Float on . . . drift on . . .
Moon River, to the sea.*

SUBMITTED TO THEATRE ORGAN
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by Jerry Stein

Long before Audrey Hepburn had *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Moon River was a favorite of many people across the country. In this case, however, it was a radio program, not a song by Henry Mancini. For nearly forty years, Moon River was broadcast nightly over WLW, "The Nation's Station," in Cincinnati. At one time, when WLW was putting out a 500,000 watt signal (that's right, 500,000 watts) the program was even heard in Europe. On April 30, 1978, the Ohio Valley Chapter presented an authentic re-creation of the show, featuring Lee Erwin and other cast members from the show. The Ohio Valley presentation was a benefit to kick off a fund drive for the renovation and restoration of Emery Theatre, home of the chapter's Wurlitzer. The show was a rousing success and was sold out a week in advance. The following, reprinted by permission, is a review of the show by Cincinnati Post critic Jerry Stein which provides a view from someone outside theatre organ circles.

The trip down Memory Lane last night at the Emery Theatre was paved with pleasure. The occasion was the American Theatre Organ

Lee Erwin at the console of the Emery Theatre Wurlitzer during "Moon River" show in April.

(Blanche Underwood Photo)



Society. Ohio Valley Chapter's, salute to the old WLW radio program *Moon River*.

On hand for the tribute were some of the show's most important ghosts who made the past come to life for two-and-a-half hours in grand style. Lee Erwin, who played the Wurlitzer theatre organ at the Albee in the '30s, returned from New York last night for a reunion with the Albee organ that is now housed at the Emery.

Erwin also was organist for WLW's *Moon River* show for 11 years. Once again, he was commanding those musical dreams from the big instrument's pipes — "Always," "I Don't Know Why I Love You Like I Do," Broadway ballads, Gershwin . . .

While Erwin wove his musical spells in which he takes full advantage of the organ's many musical moods and voices, the *Moon River* studio at WLW was re-created on stage. There was Cecil Hale seated at the actual black and chrome desk used on the show reading love poetry. Hale's big, soft baritone voice was so filled with romanticism it suggested what Cupid might have sounded like had he ever reached adulthood.

The audience of 1300-plus was especially pleased that Ruby Wright, a *Moon River* vocalist, was on the bill. Still exuding that quiet simplicity in style and tone, she offered several selections including "Poor Butterfly," which has become her song as far as Cincinnatians are concerned. She looked radiant.

Acting as host for the show was perhaps *Moon River*'s youngest veteran, genial, low-key Bill Myers. Like Hale, Myers also read poetry on the show and confessed *Moon River* gave him quite an opportunity to be a Romeo. "Who else had the chance to read love poems to his girl friend (now his wife) over a 50,000 watt station?" he asked.

The program had its lighter moments, too. Erwin played organ accompaniment for a droll Colleen Moore silent entitled *Ella Cinders Goes to Hollywood*. There was a sing-along after which Erwin, pointing to the theatre organ, told the gleeful, enthusiastic audience, "It was the first time I can remember an audience overwhelming this instrument." They were a good match, too.

Erwin opened the program with

medlies from the 1890s and another from the Broadway Theatre. The songs were filled with sound effects and musical tricks that often made charming comments on the material. Erwin doesn't just play; he interprets.

The Organ Society's program last night was the first in a series of entertainments to raise money for the renovation of the Emery Theatre, a fine old house with good acoustics and comfortable sightlines.

It was an evening of arriving and leaving. *Moon River* is gone but the Emery definitely is on the way back. □



ANN LEAF, LIVE IN CONCERT AT THE ORPHEUM'S MAJESTIC PIPE ORGAN. Quest (stereo) QOM 5002S. \$8.48 Canadian postpaid from Praise Records Ltd., 6879 Curragh Ave., Burnaby, B.C., V5J 4V6, Canada. For US buyers this record is available from Doric Records, Box 282, Monterey, Calif. 93940. Doric's price in USA is \$5.95 plus \$1.00 handling.

This is the second in a series of records featuring the restored Vancouver (B.C.) Orpheum Theatre style 240 Wurlitzer. Like the previous Reginald Foort disc, this was taped during two concerts played by Ann in the winter of 1977. The album carries 13 of the nearly 70 tunes she played for Vancouverites. The tunes selected illustrate a representative cross section of the Leaf talents and repertoire, ranging from classics to standards, from film music to novelty, then — sheer musical impishness. The latter category includes her

famous Sousa style "Blue Danube March" and her not so "Hungarian 2nd Rhapsody," which composer Franz Liszt just might recognize as arranged by Ann in fun. Of course she includes her CBS radio signature, "In Time." A dramatic classic played straight is the somewhat ghoulish "Danse Macabre" (Saint Saens) and Alfred Newman's "Street Scene" reflects the ever-changing big city mood. There's medley of tunes suggesting romance: "Love & Marriage," "Love Tales," "Lover" and "I Can't Give You Anything But Love." The standards include "That's Entertainment" (corned up with silent movie noise makers), "The Song is Ended," "I'll Get By" and an energetic "Dizzy Fingers" played with careful abandon.

Ann's biography is the story of the theatre organ from silent movies, through radio, then soap operas and now concerts, so we won't repeat. Readers have known her for years. The gal wasn't so well known to Vancouver audiences — until she played her concerts. Then the local press poured out a stream of accolades rarely accorded a visiting artist. The tunes offered here represent a cross section of the music that turned the critics on.

There is some applause following tunes, and the level is kept reasonable. Some of Ann's introductions are retained. She chats with her audience briefly in her little girl's voice, and her charm comes through. Recording is in big hall perspective which favors ensemble combinations but loses the intimacy of solo voice close-ups. The organ has been well-restored but still needs some of the special TLC in regulation and trem adjustment so necessary for recording instruments. But these are minor items which may reflect personal preference; over-all it's a fine recording. The surface of the review copy was exceptionally smooth and flaw free.

The well-conceived jacket notes provide comments on the music. Ann's performance and her career from a fresh perspective. They were written by Herb McDonald who is the prime mover in the Orpheum organ artist presentations.

There hasn't been an original installation in-theatre Ann Leaf release since she recorded the now gone Los Angeles theatre style 216