

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



Ann Leaf

(Stufoto)

Wurlitzer circa 10 years ago. This example of Ann's finely honed musicianship will be of interest to new and veteran aficionados alike.

Good show, British Columbia!

GEORGE WRIGHT PLAYS THE CHICAGO THEATRE ORGAN. Direct-to-disc stereo. \$13.95 post-paid from Century Records, 6550 Sunset Blvd., Hollywood, Calif. 90028

This album is a landmark in the recording of organ music. Tape recording has been eliminated and recording is done directly on wax or acetate discs, as was standard practice until tape arrived to make recording easier if less distortion and noise free from about 1950. The difference is a very marked one in favor of total organ sound. There is a presence in the miking which defies words. It's the nearest thing to sitting in the theatre we've yet heard.

There are other factors involved in the excellence of this album: (1) George Wright's artistry, (2) the 4/29 Wurlitzer so carefully brought back to life by CATOE members and (3) a satin-smooth pressing.

It's a limited edition; only so many pressings can be made without reverting to disc copying practices which could introduce distortion. The price is an admittedly stiff one, yet the over-all quality of all aspects of this effort is bound to endear it to all who hear it.

In the jacket notes George reveals that Jesse Crawford, who opened this instrument in 1921 stated to him that he preferred it to all others. Crawford made one attempt to re-

cord it on the Marsh label in the early '20s. The records were released but early electric recording left much to be desired; thereafter, Crawford recorded only in studios. The instrument has a mellowness of ensemble associated with instruments designed for silent film accompaniment, even to the Post Horn which blends well into the ensemble. This is in contrast with later models which emphasized the more fiery voices associated with solo work after silent film accompaniments were passe. The "haunting, lyrical quality" (George's words) of the organ is quite evident in these original grooves.

The selection of tunes is perfect for such a debut. All are standards. George has recorded some of them before, although not recently. Whether recorded previously or not, all of the tunes are like new when registered on this instrument. Tunes are: "Bojangles of Harlem," "Yesterdays" (Kern), "Liza," "I Only Have Eyes For You," "Roller Coaster," "Down in the Depths" (Cole Porter), "Mickey Mouse March," "Here's That Rainy Day," "Black Moonlight," "I Left My Heart in San Francisco," "I'll See You Again," "Veradero."

By now, readers have got to be familiar with the quality of George Wright's arrangements, registration and performance, so we'll spare the eyestrain of repetition.

Besides the jacket note comments by the organist there is some GW puffery by Kathryn Manners which seems totally unnecessary and a wonderful commentary about the organ and music by veteran organ



George Wright during his Chicago Theatre concert. The record lived up to expectations. (Stufoto)

hobbyist Roy Gorish (we recall his contributions to Al Miller's "Kinura" in the mid-'50s) which adds much to the enjoyment of the music.

This is a very special album.

THERE IS ONLY ONE BILLY NALLE, played on the 4/37 Wurlitzer organ in Wichita's Century II Exhibition Hall. WTO (stereo) No. 1458. \$7.00 (\$8.50 outside the USA), postpaid from Wichita Theatre Organ Inc., c/o Central Ticket Agency, Century II Center, Wichita, Kansas 67202.

The title puts it on the line. This guy has a style all his own, just as distinctively his as were the styles of playing practiced by Jesse Crawford, Buddy Cole or Eddie Dunstedter. Although Billy has made a number of records, starting with *Swingin' Pipe Organ* (1958) played on the same instrument in its original New York Paramount Theatre home, we are confident that most will agree that this is his most innovative work to date.

There's no point in simply listing the selections; each is a work unto itself. Billy's opener is an untypical version of a typical console-riser, "From This Moment On." It's distinctive in the free style harmony employed, one of the Nalle trademarks. Billy specializes in what we call "suspense harmony," more simply stated by the resulting question — "How's he gonna get out of this musical cul-de-sac in time?" But he always manages to establish resolution before the downbeat of the next phrase. It's sometimes maddening, those harmonies left hanging for an unnerving moment. Distracting? Not at all. Such spice is what makes his music fresh, even when he's grinding out a jaded chestnut. Added to an original harmonic approach is his registration versatility. Of course the expansive facilities of the 4/37 organ help. Yet we don't recall any previous artist massing all the organ's strings for a super-Kostelanetz sound as Billy did for a too short portion of "Take the A Train." But that's show biz; leave 'em wanting more. The arrangement has much more to recommend it, including some wrenching rhythmic twists.

Billy has a way of making musical sense from meager material. His treatment of "Touch Me in the

Morning" is an example. His "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" is somber but it is loaded with captivating harmonic beauty. This one is for the musicians; others may find it dull. But it isn't if given the proper study. There's a hint of "The Lonesome Road" woven into the harmonic structure, and it's not easy to pinpoint.

If the listener likes the old Paramount News march (lifted from *La Boheme*, not *Tosca*, as once stated), the "March of Time" and similar *Gebrauchsmusik*, he'll like Billy's original, "Parade Day." It's nothing like those marches except in spirit.

Billy puts more than 7 minutes into an understated, subtle arrangement of "Where is Love?" Pure dream music, with interesting key changes on some exquisite low-keyed instrumentation and featuring some of the organ's solo reeds. That ode to the self-centered, "I've Gotta Be Me," isn't much to begin with (despite borrowings from Johann Strauss), so Billy works doubly hard to put it across, using dramatic stings and offbeat harmonic treatment. A much more attractive offering is the



Candid shot of Billy Nalle during his recent concert.

lively theme music to the long running TV series, *Mannix*, played in the same lilting style as during the show's titles. Billy reaches back to the '50s to re-create a scene from a Hollywood musical. He pictures musically the memorable dance by Gene Kelly performed on a soggy studio stage — "Singin' in the Rain." It features a brief, suggested rainstorm and is easily one of Billy's best. So is the closer, Barry Manilow's "I Write the Songs." Billy plays it in the "rum-te-tum" style so popular with

the younger set, yet manages to maintain an interesting musical level through his instrumentation and harmonic embellishments.

This is the initial record release sponsored by Wichita Theatre Organ Inc., caretakers of the 4/36+1. It is well recorded. Stereo separation is not overdone. Interesting jacket notes by Billy and Mike Coup put the finishing touches on a very attractive package.

NIGEL OGDEN, THE MIGHTY SOUND OF MUSIC, Lancastrian Theatre Organ Trust/Acorn. Available by mail at 3.30 (British Pounds) from Cyril Castle, 66 Athlone Avenue, Astley Bridge, Bolton, Lancashire, England.

During the '76 Organ Safari in England a youthful Nigel Ogden impressed us more as a witty raconteur on those interminable bus jaunts than as an organist. Then in early '78 we heard a much improved Nigel Ogden on the broadcast tapes of the "Queen" Wurlitzer dedication concert in Manchester's Free Trade

Don Baker




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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.

Hall. Once again his playing seemed to lack the authority and sparkle of his illustrious colleagues on the program. Consequently, I was totally unprepared for what is, in the writer's opinion, one of the finest theatre organ records in a blue moon.

Nigel kicks off with a hectic little show tune "This Could Be The Start of Something Big" and instantly this "dawg" becomes a thing of beauty. The bouncy full Wurlitzer opening chorus gives way to a quiet, introspective, small ensemble treatment which glows with wit and sentiment. Ever searching for new tempos, the song moves toward its climax with surprise after surprise.

Then the "Theme From Summer of '42." No one has played a ballad that well since the late Buddy Cole. Exquisite harmonies and perfect registrations. But this was no imitation. This was Nigel Ogden doing his own thing his own sweet way. All too soon Nigel was jazz waltzing his way through "What The World Needs Now" wedded to "Wives and Lovers." Some liberties with melody notes? Yes, at times. At times ever a few slips — but when you are flying that high and that well, a bit of turbulence just adds to the excitement.

Next a respectful reading of "Love's Old Sweet Song" which has to be the ultimate recording of this sentimental classic. Duke Ellington's "Flamingo" is a pleasant interlude which gives the listener a chance to relax before the next blockbuster. And Nigel has fun with the old chestnut, "Chloe," but again, his humor is not ridicule. It is as though we were laughing at ourselves for forgetting what a lovely powerful dramatic song "Chloe" really is.

Side 2 begins with one of those inevitable British marches, "Down With The Curtain." Nigel's treatment is lighthearted so that one feels like skipping along. The British approach to marches usually leaves us

cold; this one didn't. "Pink Panther" is titillatingly funky and mysterious without being too cute. Nigel suggests the beat without hitting us over the head with it. His registrations are masterpieces of understatement and the Wurlitzer Marimba has never sounded better on a recording. The church-like solemnity of "Rose of England" never becomes stuffy or over-selfconscious. Some of the patriotic English pieces are a bit much to American ears. This one, as played by Nigel, has power without pomposity. "Rush Hour" is one of those snappy novelty tunes British audiences like so well. The organist turns tinsel into silver and glass into emeralds.

"The Party's Over" reminded us again of Buddy Cole, only because Nigel manages to turn the song inward with the controlled passion which we came to expect in Buddy's best. Tibias and voxes are back, and better than ever! The album jacket warns us that Nigel has chosen "Those Were the Days" as his signature tune. We are not warned that Mr. Ogden is quite capable of turning a worn out trick into a superb new treat.

There are a few flaws. Occasionally Nigel opens the swell shades a bit too abruptly, and there are tiny pinhole lapses in transitions here and there. The fidelity and balance of the recording are technically miracles of perfection. Perhaps it is the four chamber installation of pipes, or the acoustics of Free Trade Hall, or inspired recording engineers, or the restored integrity of the "Queen" Wurlitzer, or Nigel's familiarity with his tonal resources. No matter, the end result is diamonds on velvet, a glorious sound that sparkles and shimmers. Even the tremos will please American ears.

The record envelope features an impressive overview of Free Trade Hall with an insert of Nigel at the four manual console. Commentary includes a statement by Eric Penny, head of the L.T.O.T. technical team. L.T.O.T.'s Honorable Secretary John Potter writes, "I would be surprised if, within the next few years, Nigel does not become a very much sought after organist internationally. Welcome to the top of the bill — Nigel Ogden." To that we can only add "Right on!"

WALTER BEAUPRE □

DINNY'S COLYUM

as
transcribed
by
Del Castillo



Well now, these is the days, like they say in All In The Family, when they is organ players convenshuns along with everbody else. We had the one down in Atalanta where I noo it would be so dum hot I jest skipped the hole thing, even tho I woulda liked to here that organ in the big theayter. Then Bill Worrall he had another one of what he calls his Home Organist Adventures in Pasadena California and he gets about fifteen organ dealers and they all bring in there noo organs and there best players to soup up there sails. And so they is a humdinger of a organ concert everyday and they is organ music acomin rite out of your ears from all the show rooms agoin full blast, and then they is meetins and work shops where they is lectures and discussions and so forth and so on like they say, and that goes on four-five days until everbody is all tuckered out.

Then up near Frisco they is ever year what they call the Home Organ Festival they been having one ever year for so long I lost count. They got two things agoin for them that makes me want to go. First off they is a champain party ever afternoon by the different organ dealers. And then the grub is great and three times a day everbody falls into long lines and they is told which section they got to sit in that is after they go down the line where they is three shefs aladlin out good tastin meals. And then late at nite they is jam sessions where everbody cuts loose and makes the welkin ring as they say tho I never found out what makin the welkin ring is. Must be it is somethin like a big gong.

Where they have it is at a place by the name of Asilomar wich is a Cal.