

## 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 (post-paid price, ordering address,) if applicable, and a black and white photo of the artist which need not be returned.*

**BALLROOM FAVOURITES, played on the Manchester Gaumont Theatre Wurlitzer by Eric Barlow. Acorn label No. CF 260 (stereo). \$8.50 airmail postpaid from Tom E.K. Herd, 8 Ashworth Court, Frenchwood, Preston, PRI 4PS, Lancashire, England. Make out checks on U.S. banks to Lancastrian Theatre Organ Trust.**

Here's some easy listening music played by a competent and pleasing British artisan. The instrument is one of two Wurli's saved by the Lancastrian Theatre Organ Trust, this being the 3/14 in Manchester's Gaumont Theatre. The recording was made before the instrument was removed to storage.

To understand the philosophy of this album one must know that dancing to organ music is well established in England. Therefore these selections are attuned to the needs of dancers, with no unrhythmic interludes linking selections. Tempo is maintained at all times, be the selections tangos, slow foxtrots, waltzes or the characteristic British "quick-step." Some variations on the norm are presented here, such as the "Doris

Waltz," "Eugene Tango," "Military Two-Step," "Lilac Waltz" and "Moonlight Saunter," titles which add charm to the music without much change in characteristics. The tunes are played simply, with rhythm dominating, and little attempt at fancy arrangements. Variety is achieved through frequent changes in instrumentation.

The tunelist consists of thirty-five titles, about equally represented by U.S.A., British and continental composers. So our continuing complaint that British organists feature too much U.S. music would not apply here. But for those who like U.S. tunes played by British organists there are: "Avalon," "Moonlight and Roses," "Dancing With Tears in My Eyes," "If You Knew Susie," "Strangers in the Night," "Me and My Shadow," etc. But it's the British and European input which sets this album apart.

Playing is clean and simple. There are no surprises. Emphasis is on keeping dancers happy, and in this area Eric Barlow succeeds admirably.

The Gaumont Wurlitzer responds well, especially with the heavily quinted registration preferred by some British and continental organists, although the solo voices of the 3/14 are used generously.

If your preferences are for conservative dance tempos, played in impeccably good taste with the melo-

dy always on top of a fine instrument, this one may be for you.

Jacket notes provide a tunelist, notes about the organist and the organ and instructions for dancers. Recording is good.

**SACRED SOUNDS, John Landon playing the 2/7 Page theatre organ in the Paramount Theatre, Anderson, Indiana. JWL-1004. \$6.00 postpaid from the Paramount Organ Society Inc., 902 East 27th Street, Anderson, Indiana 46014.**

The name of John Landon is a familiar one in these pages. He has devoted much time and research to the theatre organ field, his crowning glory, so far, being a biog of Jesse Crawford. He is also working on a definitive volume on the theatre pipe organ but we have no information as to its publication date. All this in addition to his duties as a minister and educator. John is obviously one of those gifted and talented persons who knows how to budget his time.

The organ is the 2/7 in the Anderson Paramount, a rare Page instrument discovered long ago by Rev. Landon who provided the impetus to once more make it a living, breathing organ. Back in 1964-65 the Page was restored by Lewis Hodson and Rex Hoppes. Hodson was still around to lend a hand when a second overhaul was spearheaded by



Eric Barlow at the Manchester Gaumont Wurlitzer. Note the wide end pieces and double bolsters supporting the keydesk, a British Wurlitzer variation.



Rev. John Landon. A man of many talents.

Carlton Smith and Bob Dunn in the early '70s. They continue to keep the Page in good playing condition for the weekend intermissions at the Paramount, played by John Landon and Carlton Smith. Landon's first record was released in the '60s, a group of sacred tunes played on a Reuter organ. Later he did two albums of standards played on the Page. All were well received by record collectors. Despite these successes, John insists he is not a professional. This release is his best to date. He is at home among the hymns, which he plays in theatre organ style, often in catchy, rhythmic arrangements and with full TO registration, including percussions. Nothing "Churchie sounding" here. Phrasing of music is good.

The organ sounds great. It provides the big organ sweep so dear to John's heart, and lots of registration variety. It is obviously in fine shape and the recording brings out its best qualities.

John's arrangements are true to his material. They may be light-hearted but never frivolous. If there is a fault it may be in the absence of key changes within tunes, something rarely done with hymn tunes. But here we are merely listening, not singing, and key changes could provide additional variety.

Even if one is not enchanted at thoughts of a program of hymns, no matter. John has selected 10 titles which are by no means over-recorded: "If I Could Sing a Thousand Melodies," "Overshadowed," "Beautiful Robes so White," "So This is Life," "Dwelling in Beulah Land,"

"Zion's Hill," "Shepherd Show Me How to Go," "Only a Touch of Thy Hand Dear Lord," "Fear Not I Will Pilot Thee," "Someday When the Shadows Flee."

All could pass for pop ballads. For familiar old chestnuts, he has herded a few into two medleys: (1) Hymns About Heaven, (2) Hymns About the Cross. So tunes such as "The Old Rugged Cross" and "In the Sweet Bye and Bye" are represented by single run-throughs, not prominent enough to rate the question, "What — again?!"

David Priest's jacket notes deal with the selections, the instrument and the organist, and generally add to the value of the package. The profits from this album are applied by its sponsors, the Paramount Organ Society Inc., to the maintenance and improvement of the instrument heard here, so purchasing it is, in effect, a donation toward keeping the Page alive and singing. A most worthy objective, and the product is well worth the fee.

**GEORGE WRIGHT PLAYS THE CHICAGO THEATRE ORGAN — Volume II. Century Records release No. 1061 (stereo). Order from J. Nelson Management, 900 Anderson Drive, San Rafael, Calif. 94901. \$9.95 postpaid. California residents add 6 percent sales tax.**

Those who liked the Volume I "direct to disc" Chicago Theatre album will find this release just as intriguing, although it has been mastered from a tape made simultaneously with the grooved version. The reason this volume was not released as a "direct to disc" album was explained to us; the grooved acetate was damaged and couldn't be used. No matter; perhaps there are a few audiophiles who have equipment which can differentiate, but for all practical purposes this biscuit is every bit as good from the technical viewpoint as Volume I, and it's several bucks cheaper!

The selections: "Flat Foot Floogie," "I'll Never Smile Again," "A Tisket A Tasket," "Paradise," "Cheek to Cheek," "All the Things You Are," "The Music Goes Round and Round," "You're Mine You," "Truckin'," "I'm in the Mood for



George Wright. His Chicago No. 2 is all George, even the jacket notes. (Stufoto)

Love," "All of Me," "Body and Soul."

Everything is exactly the same as it was for Volume I; only the tunes are different. From a personal viewpoint we prefer the Volume II titles over those presented in Vol. I. It's strictly a subjective matter; the Vol. II tunes hit us where we live with greater impact, probably with the same attraction they hold for George. We grew up among them when they were new and each holds a distinct 1930's memory.

The 4/29 Chicago Theatre Wur-litzer, with a mellow personality all its own, sounds wonderful and George's interpretation of the tunes is as faultless as ever. Things to look for are the harp glissando "lead ins" during "I'll Never Smile Again," the Crawford-style harmonization during "Paradise" but with a distinctly "GW" closing flourish, the typical Wright key changes during a very Fred and Gingery "Cheek to Cheek," the completeness of "All the Things You Are" (you may not find this much of it in recent sheet music versions), the scintillating Tibia and Vox registration which highlight "You're Mine You" and "I'm in the Mood for Love," not to mention thrilling key changes, the use of Dunstedter-like mutation-heavy registration during "All of Me" (plus that delicious pause and a touch of "bump and grind") and the beauty of George's adaptation of "Body and Soul." It's easily one of his most satisfying albums.

The double album includes a pho-

to of the Crawfords, who played the instrument in solo and duet from 1921 to 1926, and program notes totally by George this time, illustrating his enthusiasm for the music he plays for this well-recorded collection of nostalgic gems. The pressing is smooth and free of over-modulation problems. The album has both current and historic values, illustrating the sound of an instrument designed to accompany silent films, which could rise to solo status when played by an able artist. George Wright is one of the most able.

**THE BIRMINGHAM, Don Baker playing the 4/20 Wurlitzer organ in the Alabama Theatre, Birmingham. Concert label No. CR-0174 (stereo). \$7.50 postpaid from Don Baker, c/o The Citadel, 2400 Hackett Drive, Apt. 188, Houston, Texas 77008.**

This disc is also listed as "Don Baker, Volume 2." The material was taped while Don was in Birmingham to play a concert at the Alabama Theatre. All who have more than a nodding acquaintance with theatre organ know that veteran organist Baker earned a solid reputation in one of the toughest crucibles of all — New York City in the '20s and '30s. He played at the Rivoli, Rialto, and after a nearly two year playing stint in English theatres, the coveted Times Square Paramount solo spot, a position he held longer than any other organist who played the Paramount, nearly 14 years. So far as theatre organ stylings are concerned, Don does just about everything right. He has a big organ style best described as "bravado." On hearing his treatments of the many fine old chestnuts on this platter, one gets the impression that Don's arrangements and performance are "definitive" — sorta the last word.

His "Stars Fell on Alabama" is typical. His upbeat treatment in fox-trot tempo has some impish chromatic embellishment which simply exudes charm. His "Theme from 'The Apartment'" has become something of a Baker trademark. It is expertly phrased and attractively registered. There's more ornamentation during that Sinatra oldie, "Young at Heart" and the full meaning of the word "bravura" is illustrated during "They Call the



Don Baker. Bravura but definitive.

Wind Maria." It's a thriller. There's lots of fun reflected by "Hell's Bells" and such bouncy tunes as "Baby Face" and "I Got Rhythm." "Send in the Clowns" depends so much on the lyrics that its risky to present it as purely instrumental. Don's version will appeal mainly to those who like the tune and can sing the words along with the theme; to us, the music alone is rather lacklustre.

Not all of the selections are old timers. "You've Got a Friend" is somewhat hymn-like (reminiscent of "Bringing in the Sheaves" in spots) and "Brian's Song" recalls the famous TV biography of a doomed athlete. Only one of the selections puzzles us. It's a medley of the old minstrel tunes, "Down Yonder" and "Chicken Reel" with many "Shave and a Haircut" inserts. The entire

selection is mislabeled "Way Down Yonder in New Orleans." We can't quite figure out what Don was trying to say in this grouping, nor is there a hint among the jacket notes.

In fact, the notes (some by Don) concentrate on the vaudeville and "unit show" circuits of the '30s rather than on the music. And Don tells us how he classifies organs; rather than group them by the manufacturer's name, Don has his own system. Regardless of make, Don categorizes organs as "singing, non-singing, bombastic, pretty or just fair."

The Alabama Theatre organ? It has got to be a "singing" instrument, according to the sounds emanating from these grooves. The end result might be described as "scintillating." For this recording (and the 1978 ATOS convention) the Chapter had the 4/20 in tip-top playing shape. It's a well-balanced instrument, installed high in the sides of the auditorium in front of the proscenium. For those interested in statistics, the jacket includes a detailed stoplist.

Max Schloss's taping captured Don's well phrased, often soaring arrangements with a fidelity which compliments the music. Concert's mastering is okay and the review pressing surface is smooth and perfectly centered.

Purchasers desiring Don Baker's autograph will be accommodated. Just supply the name and suggest the desired wording.

It's a worthwhile package. □

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