

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.

PIPE ORGAN PIZZA PRESENTS CLARK WILSON, played on the 4/20 assembled theatre organ in Milwaukee's Pipe Organ Pizza. Purchasing information will be found in an advertisement elsewhere in this issue.

This music is honestly presented as "a cross section of the most requested numbers . . . Most are rhythmic and designed to show off the toy counter and many tonal percussions . . ." Within these parameters, it is most successful. This is Clark Wilson's first recording, designed to sell to happy pizza consumers on the spot after they have enjoyed an evening of Clark's music.

Clark Wilson has got to be the complete pizza organist. He knows how to edit and arrange movie music, pops and classics to include those parts which appeal most to his pasta-inspired audiences. It's all good fun but has little to do with theatre organ lore other than the fact that it's played on an assembled TO. Starting with a Style D (2/6) Wurlitzer, it has grown to 20 ranks, 15 of them Wurlitzer. It is now played

from the 4-manual Moller console from the State Theatre, Jersey City, N.J. It is a successful assembly of parts and a good blend of voices not originally intended to work together. Emphasis is on brass, percussions and the usual toy counter frippery which so delights the kids.

The instrument is well adapted to register the *Star Wars* music, "Rock Around the Clock," "Chattanooga Choo Choo," and, to some extent, portions of Rossini's "William Tell Overture."

The brassy *Star Wars* title music is played with verve and enthusiasm, sometimes with unfamiliar phrasing. Clark knows how to use the drums and cymbals so integral to the Williams score. He skips "Princess Leia" altogether, but has more fun with the "Space Cantina" music than we've heard on most previous recordings, adding a deeper shade of green to the faces of those unlikely creeps which populated the futuristic saloon in the film. It's played with a good sense of humor.

An attractive solo reed with high-pitched Tibia embellishment characterizes "Evergreen" in an understated arrangement which later features a lush mutation chorus. Bluesy and moody!

The organist seems to be much more at home during a rousing "Washington Post" with lots of Posthorn riffs, cymbals, drums and fast tempo. A real goodie.

The next selection, "Variations on the Mickey Mouse Theme" moves us to some pre-judgement. Seven minutes and forty-eight seconds of that undistinguished theme, would probably go by quickly munching a pickled canary tongue pizza, but just as listening music? Yet we must recall that this is a platter designed to help listeners recreate in their minds what a good time they had last night. Our reservations are dispelled by the range of the variations (which Clark credits to Lyn Larsen). After the theme is stated, we hear Jimmy Dodd's tune as a Strauss Waltz, a gallop, a current ballad (on Tibia & Vox), a bagpipe ensemble, a classical "fugue," as a Sousa march (with "Stars & Stripes" buildup) and in a hymn-like finale. Whew!

What is labelled "William Tell Overture" consists of a snatch of "Morning" (on a very fine solo reed) and the "Lone Ranger" portion of

the "Finale," both well-played. We missed the "Storm," which could be a thriller on this organ.

Side Two starts with train whistles, so we know that "ol' 99" will soon pull out, a huffin' and puffin' up to full chug, right into "Chattanooga Choo Choo," with interesting variations. It introduces several other train-associated tunes which provide entry for toy counter horns, bells, etc. The wailing whistle is heard throughout. "Toot Toot Tootsie" is the closer.

Six minutes and ten seconds seems like a lot to invest in such a limited melodic line as "Send in the Clowns" but Clark does his best to sustain interest, with lots of changes in registration and a brief switch to bolero tempo. But the languorous ballad provides a perfect "calm before the storm" — one minute and twenty-four seconds of a lively "Rock Around the Clock," with the usual pizza crowd-pleasing toy counter effects.

"How Deep is Your Love" is a lovely ballad by the three Gibbs, given a tender, loving treatment by Clark Wilson in an understated treatment.

The closer is another favorite of pizza parlor denizens, the "Theme from Rocky," which is fast becoming a cult classic. Clark makes good use of the sustained cymbal to color this upbeat film tune.

We find Clark Wilson's playing, even within the restrictions of an over-the-console sales item, most promising. The result is a much better than usual first recording by a man with much enthusiasm for pipes, and skills to match.

Recording is very good. Jacket notes are aimed mainly at the uninformed but provide valuable info about the artist and the makeup of the organ, which comes off very well. The one sour note is that Side Two of the review pressing is just enough off-center to result in a slight "wow" on sustained tones. This does not indicate that other pressings may have the same fault. Besides, faulty pressings are returnable for replacement or refund. The surface is smooth and free of "pops."

Our hope is that Clark Wilson will one day make a record solely for listeners, completely away from the pizza parlor influence. We know he can do it.

ON WITH THE SHOW! Don Croom playing the 4/23 Wurlitzer in the Fresno (California) Pizza & Pipes. Stereo record \$6.95 (cassette or 8-track tape \$7.50) postpaid from Upbeat Records, 4431 Lockwood Way, Sacramento, California 95821.

This is Don Croom's second record release and it compares favorably with his initial *Thanks for the Memory* reviewed some issues back.

The organ is a 3/23 Wurlitzer, originally in Shea's Hippodrome Theatre, Buffalo, N.Y. It was for years in the home of attorney Harold Logan, Ontario, Canada, and was moved west in 1974 for installation by Bob Rhodes in Robert and Kathryn Breuer's Fresno pizzeria, but with a new specification prepared by Tom Hazleton. It's a truly "mighty" Wurlitzer with five 16' pedal voices (including the Posthorn) as well as two 32' pedal resultants. It has six color reeds and four ranks of string celestes (but only one String tuned "on"), two Tibias and two Diapasons. It's one of the big ones and its recorded sound brings out its full authority. It also has a sweet side.

Don Croom discovered music at age seven and has been at it ever since, with major studies at Cal State University. His first pizzeria job was at the Breuer Arden plant. For this recording he added the voice of an ARP 2600 Synthesizer on some tunes.

Don is faced with the same decisions as all pizza organists who aspire to record; will the tunes the pasta chompers request most also appeal sufficiently to mere record listeners? One answer is not to worry about non-pasta fans and sell records on the scene while enthusiasm is high with proven tunes. The only trouble there is that other pasta parlor artists are recording the same "most requested" tunes. Thus they often duplicate such favorites of baked tomato pie consumers as "Malaguena," "Baby Elephant Walk," "Feelings," "Toot Toot Tootsie" and "Chatanooga Choo Choo." Sound familiar?

Other tunes played include an unfamiliar but energetic console riser, "On With the Show," "Misty," "Music Box Dancer," "Sidewalks of New York," "Blue Danube Waltz," "Maple Leaf Rag," "The Entertainer" and Sousa's "Stars



Don Croom and the 3/23 Wurlitzer.

and Stripes Forever" (yes, with the piccolo part intact but on a very anemic piccolo).

The true depth of Don Croom's organ artistry is indicated briefly in several selections, e.g., "On the Beautiful Blue Danube" and during the opening of "A Fifth of Beethoven" wherein a flawed but sensitive reading of the start of Beethoven's *5th Symphony* introduces the Bowdlerized Walter Murphy "pop" version. Again, during a very lovely reading of Debussy's "Claire de Lune," Don exhibits musical abilities far beyond the requirements of the average dough dispensary.

Yet the tail wags the dog during "Feelings." Don uses phrases from "Vesti la Giubba" for an intro and it proves far more interesting than "Feelings" during which the ARP 2600 provides a slide whistle lead. "Sidewalks of New York" and "Tootsie" are given hurdy-gurdy treatments. The "Choo Choo" gets the usual train sounds, in case anyone remembers steam locomotives. Don knows his pasta eaters.

But there's an underlying sense of musicality which pervades the selections, despite the excesses demanded by commercialism. We would like to hear a concert (or recording) played by Don Croom completely divorced from the pizza parlor atmosphere; we feel it would introduce an entirely different Don Croom.

If there is a fault in Don's musical conceptions, it could be in the paucity of registration variety. With all those fine color voices available, Don seems to prefer full combinations rather than a variety of sounds.

Of course, some organists don't go along with many color changes within a tune. For example, organ great Eddie Dunstedter often played entire choruses on a combination which pleased him.

Recording is good, although there is some rumble during loud passages. Jacket notes tell a little about Don Croom and a lot about the instrument; a detailed stoplist is given. Photos of Don and the organ add some spice, but the music speaks for itself.

We have received many favorable comments about the sketch of a closed Fox Theatre which illustrated our review of the *Roaring '20s* album in the Feb./March issue. Trouble is we neglected to credit the artist, ATOSer Ron Musselman. Sorry, Ron.

WHO? Ron Rhode playing the 3/23 Wurlitzer in the Mesa, Arizona, Organ Stop pizzeria. \$7.00 postpaid from Wm. P. Brown Corp., 5326 No. Seventh Street, Phoenix, Arizona 85014.

Ever since attending an early Ron Rhode concert at the El Segundo, California, Old Town Music Hall a few years ago, we felt we had found a winner. Ron has not disappointed us; he has grown musically with pleasing consistency ever since. There have been previous records released by Ron, each with its own merits, but this one, to our way of thinking, tops them all.

Ron is a pizza organist who thinks deeply about the music he plays for pasta chompers. Because boss Bill Brown's policy is to present music in theatre organ style, the instruments in his establishments are voiced as theatre organs and the performers are instructed to play them as such. We have an idea that Ron Rhode didn't need much pushing in that direction; although born far too late for silent movie experience, he's a "natural." With inborn good taste, he arranges the music in the most theatrical style possible, even if it must be punctuated with auto horns and sirens to please the kids in his audiences. Yes, his "Chatanooga Choo Choo" (easily the most requested tune) includes the expected huffs, puffs and train



Ron Rhode.

whistles, but when he plays "Ramona" it's pure theatre organ with just a touch of Jesse.

Ron writes his own jacket notes and he separates his music into several categories. The "pizza pleasers," played for the kids, include "Let's All Sing Like the Birdies Sing" (with an injection of Strauss' "Voices of Spring"), "Liechtensteiner Polka," the most stimulating "Repasz Band" since the Tiny James version, "Sweet Georgia Brown" and the ubiquitous "Choo Choo."

The opener, "Who?" deserves mention not only for its vigorous show-opener characteristics but also the use of snatches of "Nola" as a counter melody. The riffs are original, and the verse is given due consideration, not to mention the chromatic fillers and sorta "doo-wackadoo" brass. No dull moments here. It certainly shows up the next selection, the theme from *New York, New York*, which is pale as a comparative show tune, although it will interest those who saw the movie simply through osmosis.

We have already commented on "Ramona" and "Birdies" (with "tweets," natch) but "Peg of My Heart" has been a consistent request since 1913 when it was written. The Harmonicats record may be the all-time best seller but we'll take Ron Rhode's lush version. It sings!

"Malaguena" is another "pizza pleaser" overplay and most pizza organists have recorded it. But most have the good taste not to cheapen it, and that applies to Ron. He plays

a full concert version which would please the composer. "Am I Blue" is something else again. Not since Jim Melander's version on Concert label's *Once in a Dream* album have we heard such an impassioned treatment of this deserving "oldie." Ron includes the verse, uses some "bump and grind" and makes much of the "question and answer" technique, plus a brief change to bolero rhythm during the bridge, uses juicy key changes — well, it's an education as to what can be done with a simple tune to add interest value.

The haunting theme from *Superman* by John Williams is a bit of romanticism which might have been written by Max Steiner. It is tender and majestic at the same time, and Ron's orchestration enhances it all the more.

Stereo recording is topnotch. Ron's jacket notes are always in tune with his musical efforts. The organ sound, as recorded is superb. If you get the impression that we find this album irresistible, you are correct.

The Classic Corner

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE KING OF INSTRUMENTS, played by John Rose on the 1962 Austin organ in the Cathedral of St. Joseph, Towerhill T-1004. Available at record dealers at \$7.98 or postpaid for \$9.48 from Towerhill Records, 6000 Sunset Blvd., Hollywood, California 90028.

A few issues back we reviewed a recording of the *Star Wars* score arranged for concert organ by Robert Edward Smith and played by organist John Rose on a large church Austin. Both are back again with this intriguing musical experiment. The purpose of this album is to familiarize the uninitiated with the tonalities and pitch range of the romantic classical organ. To do this, Smith has written variations on an old and obscure Georgia folk tune entitled "Pisgah," a melody not immediately recognizable, not even for Georgians. Some of the variations resemble "Baa Baa Black Sheep" but that covers a very brief period. Mostly, the melody is lost or covered up by the fourteen variations.

Each variation is written to best illustrate an organ voice — the Prin-



John Rose. He selected the 140-rank Austin organ in the Cathedral of St. Joseph, Hartford, Conn. for this fine demo record. It is the same organ on which he recorded the *Star Wars* score.

cipal (Diapason), Flute, String and Reed (no percussions here). Side One has explanatory narration between the tonal examples so the listener does not get an impression of continuity. However on Side Two, Smith's snatches of melody and harmony, minus narrative interruptions, evolve as a cohesive whole and one can but wonder how he managed to wring so much music from relatively lacklustre material. The simple "Pisgah" blossoms into an intriguing rondo for classical organ. The music is played with easy expertise by John Rose, who seems much more at home with this music than he did during the more taxing *Star Wars* recording.

Of course its not theatre organ but it is basic organ instruction for all who seek a deeper knowledge of the instrument. Would that one of our TO experts could produce an equally effective bit of knowledge about the TO in recorded form.

Even if the buyer already has the knowledge expounded on Side One, the assembly of variations as a rondo on Side Two is worth the fee. Including the notes on the back of the jacket, there are four pages of information to bolster the audible knowledge, including the words of the narrator.

To those interested in expanding their knowledge of the "straight" organ, wondering at the great tonal range, enjoying some magnificent harmonic passages or simply listening to a well-conceived rondo, this album is recommended. □