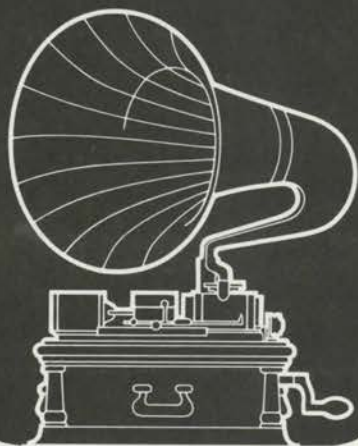


## For The Records



*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.*

**WALT STRONY: MUNDELEIN 1980, played on the 4/19 Wurlitzer organ in the auditorium of St. Mary of the Lake Seminary, in Mundelein, Illinois. \$7.00 postpaid from Walter Strony Prdns., Box 4281, Scottsdale, Arizona 85258.**

We first became aware of the seminary organ in the early 60s when it was discovered in rather poor condition by John Seng, under whose expert supervision it was refurbished and enlarged to circa 25 ranks, using parts from other organs, including some Kimball pipework. We recall hearing it played during a Chicago-based ATOS convention by Seng and Don Baker. It then had excellent reeds and strings but from the theatre organ viewpoint it lacked the lush Tibia and Vox combination which is the basic sound of the instrument. This was due to John Seng's preference for bright-sounding voices rather than the leather lipped, sexily trem'd Tibias familiar to most of us. Thus the Tibias Seng installed were "as bright as two little girls," as he put it at the time. The absence of the lush sound largely precludes its use

as a ballad organ.

When Seng departed for California, the organ fell into disuse. Many ranks of pipes disappeared, including the delicate Flute and Flute Celeste we found so intriguing. Recently, the Chicago Area T.O. Enthusiasts have made arrangements to restore and maintain the instrument, which is now a 19 ranker. The club has replaced some of the pilfered sets of pipes and has locked the chamber doors securely.

The Mundelein organ was the first theatre-style pipe organ 11-year-old Walt Strony ever heard, and it helped him pick his career. Not recorded very much, the instrument still features the brassy/stringy sound its design called for. It is great for classical selections, jazz, marches, symphonic waltzes, hoedowns and bravura show music. Walt has wisely selected his program mostly from these classifications. He departs for "Indian Love Call" but there just isn't enough big trem'd Flute and Vox to register this type of music. His presentation of the ballad is excellent but his registration misses, no fault of his.

The selections: *Superman Medley* (Williams), "Londonderry Air" (with improvisation), "Night and Day," "Indian Love Call" (Friml), "Toccata" from *Symphonie Concertante* (Joseph Jongen), "Fascinatin' Rhythm," "Valse Mirage" (Confrey), "Don't Cry For Me," "Argentina (*Evita*)," "Hoedown" (Copland).

The varied tunelist is exemplary of Walt's taste in music; they are all selections he enjoys playing and there isn't a hint of pizza parlor styling, much to his credit. All are played as concert selections and given the time required to say all Walt wants to. The "Superman" group covers the main title music and the tender "Can You Read my Mind," parts of which are obviously borrowed from Richard Strauss' "Death and Transfiguration." The improvisation is the most intriguing part of "Londonderry" while "Night and Day" is provided with a jazz setting. Walt informs us that the response speed of the organ is amazing, making jazz arrangements practical. There's a touch of Crawford in "Love Call." The "Toccata" was inspired by the exceptional Virgil Fox recording of "Symphonie Con-



Walt Strony.

certante," a piece written for organ and orchestra. Walt plays the organ part with great skill and bravado (it's a real zinger) but it couldn't be said that the orchestra part is not missed. Yet it's a fine tribute to the memory of a great classical organist. Back to Walt's energetic jazz style for "Fascinatin' Rhythm" with its slabass pedal. Then to a rarely heard concert waltz by a composer best known for his upbeat piano novelties. Zez Confrey's "Waltz Mirage" is a joy in Walt's care. "Don't Cry" gets the dramatic voicing associated with its expository use in the stage hit, *Evita*, and the program is brought to a lively close with "Hoedown," in which Aaron Copland pictures a stylized ballet for *Rodeo*. It's all first rate arranging and playing. Note especially the pedal notes which open the "Superman" opus. They sound all the world like orchestra string basses being bowed. Walt tells us that the notes were played on the 16' String and its 8' Celeste. Pedal celestes are rare on theatre organs.

Wade Bray's two-channel recording captures the Mundelein sound as it hasn't been recorded previously. The reverb heard is that of the largely wooden auditorium walls; no artificial echo was needed.

Walt Strony supplied the explanatory notes. Surfaces of the review pressing were smooth and noise-free. Some combination action noise is audible at times as weak, low-pitched thuds, not loud enough to be distracting.

Verdict: Strony's best to date, based partly on the fact that the organist chose selections well suited to the characteristics of this very special instrument.



**PIPES OF PAN(DAMONIUM)** (sic), played by Don Kinnier on the Wurlitzer organ in the Rahway Theatre, Rahway, New Jersey. HMR-1252 \$9.00 postpaid from Don Kinnier, 251 Spruce Street, Collingsdale, Penna.

Intentional lunacy is the buzz word here. Convinced that many current pipe organ releases generate laughs in the wrong places, organist Don Kinnier and HMR's Bob Balfour decided to improve on the unintentional foibles with an all out bid for humor. To fully appreciate this viewpoint, one must first absorb the

zany but appropriate jacket notes supplied by Bob Balfour, the guy who has done most to keep the Rahway and its "biggest little Wurli" intact. The notes explain the aims of the record.

Musical mayhem on records is nothing new. Spike Jones brought it to an overwhelming nadir (depending on one's viewpoint) in the '40s and '50s. And Bernie Greene's musical interludes during the long gone *Henry Morgan Show* are still remembered with fond indelicacy. But, to date, most such mayhem performed on an organ has been unintentional and often the best effort of the well-

meaning player: each record collector has his own index of runs, hits and errors. This platter will add some sinew to the latter category (again, depending on viewpoint). The cover photo of the organist being escorted to the console enmeshed in a straightjacket by two men in white coats provides a clue to the objective.

To expand the 2/7 (divided) Wurlitzer's battery of effects, Kinnier brought in a Baldwin synthesizer and a "brown noise generator" which may account for the listing of such added voices as a "Contra Septif-32" only," "Crowhorn" (tuned bird chirps) and a "Trombozz," which often sounds like a trombone full of cooked mush.

The fortunate aspect here is in the mixing. The electronic voices blend well with the pipes. For example, there's a fine-sounding clarinet melody passage in "My Romance." Yet the pipe complement lists no clarinet, so it has to be a realistic counterfeit.

Balfour is wondering how the pipe organ fans will accept the Kinnier humor-in-music, fully aware that some will holler "sacrilege." He explains, "Perhaps this album will help us remember in these troubled times what ATOS is all about — fun, pure simple fun. When we get too bent out of shape by our beloved hobby, and the fun goes out of it, we are in real deep trouble."

Not all of the tunes presented here are played for smiles, but serious or humorous, Don Kinnier turns out top performances. Let's examine them individually.

Don's spoken intro is followed by a toilet flush, then we are off on an unusual adventure.

"Anything Goes" is interspersed with toy counter thuds, sirens, etc. and the melody is slugged out on chimes against synthesizer grunts, a "tuned canary" chorus, and a variable pitch trombozz solo. Well played even ignoring the effects.

"Ragtime Medley" is played minus nonsense on a minimum of stops, mostly flutes and Glockenspiel. Includes "Easy Winners" and "Black and White Rag."

"Sonny Boy" is played dead serious, opening with a mellow Vox Humana verse. The first chorus gets some open harmony treatment on the Tibia while the "heavenly" Vox



Aided by straightjacket and butterfly net, Don's keepers escort him to the PANDAMONIUM (sic) recording session.



chorus backs a synthesized "horn" during the bridge. Last chorus features a full Tibia combination while the Vox hovers on nearby Cloud 9.

The nonsense is back for "Barney Google," with slurred pitches (synthesizer), auto horns, etc. and then Barney becomes imbued with the spirit of J.S. Bach for a trem-off snatch of well-conceived Googley counterpoint. Then a touch of Elgarian pomp, ending with a corned up '20s jazz chorus.

"Dream a Little Dream of Me" adds up to a comedy hodge-podge, the verse taking us to what might be Rudolph Valentino's desert tent for a pre-petroleum Arabic bit of "bum tiddy, bum tiddy" followed by a chorus accented by "harumphs" from a grumping baritone horn (probably the Trombozz), a sorta calliope interlude, an out of tune rag-time piano, a merry-go-round organ effect, then back to the "bum tiddy" but this time with an auto horn to indicate the arrival of petro-dollars. The ending is disgraced by a re-sounding razzberry.

Next a troubled "Wooden Soldier," undecided as to which key to march to. It's an expertly arranged tribute to indecision, with a key change every few measures, yet the treatment adds interest to the Leon Jessel chestnut which is too often simply played — rather played simply. There are those ascending references to the famous Eddie Dunstedter arrangement but otherwise it's Kinnier than one might anticipate.

Don's expertise with a ballad is demonstrated with his haunting treatment of "My Romance." No foolishness this time; he played it for his wife. He makes the small Wurl sound many times larger as the masses of delicious Vox-topped chordings seem to soar, and there's an interesting pedal line. The jacket notes state that this one is the one selection "with redeeming social value." Maybe, but it's kinda sexy just the same.

"I Can't Give You Anything But Love" is a big-band style arrangement with an exceptionally distinctive pedal part which follows the jazz bassist's plucked string pattern. The only added sound effect we noted was a final smacking loud kiss, ending in an upper plate-rattling "pop." The spirit of Spike is still with us!

The closer is more like a console riser but that's probably normal for an album dedicated to the zany. "It's Gonna Be a Great Day" sounds forth with all the enthusiasm of an introduction, rather than the last gasps as the key desk sinks into the bowels of the theatre. Either way, its well played, and we especially enjoyed the modulation used by many advanced organ students to get from there to here.

As in the case of Spike Jones, the perpetrator of such "add on" orchestration must first be a skilled musician in order to make the musical mayhem come off without sounding simply crude. Don Kinnier accomplishes his objectives with seeming ease. Filter out the comedy effects and the remainder is still interesting music.

Recording is okay, once the stylus gets past the too loudly recorded spoken intro and toilet flush. Who ever heard a flush come through louder than a Trombozz!

**SYMPHONIE CONCERTANTE.** Virgil Fox playing the Palais de Chaillot concert organ in Paris, with the Paris Opera Orchestra conducted by Georges Prêtre. Angel label S-36984. Available at record counters from circa \$5.00 to \$8.00.

This recording would normally be reviewed in The Classic Corner, but we have special reasons for reviewing it as theatre organ music: (1) much of it is program music of the type heard in high quality film scores, (2) it is perhaps the most theatrical music recorded by the late Virgil Fox, (3) it has been growing in interest value ever since the Fox record was released several years ago, to both theatre organists and to organ fans, (4) we want to pay this small tribute to Fox, who has been a friend of the theatre organ ever since, as a youth, he practiced on the Apollo Theatre instrument in his hometown, Princeton, Illinois. He was always an exponent of romantic organs rather than those promoted by "the baroque boys" (his term).

True, Fox did release one album made on the 4/37 "Dowager Empress" Wurlitzer in Wichita, a record which resulted in mixed reviews. He was much more at ease at the console of his first love, an or-



Virgil Fox.

thodox instrument, and his musicality never beamed brighter than when he was playing the instrument heard on this disc. The music, written by Belgian organist-composer Joseph Jongen in 1933, as an organ-orchestra symphony, is highly dramatic in many places; like most symphonies, it's in four movements. The Allegro and Divertimento (side 1) are largely contrapuntal interplay between organ and orchestra, lively and never dull. The Lento Misterioso (side 2) is dramatic music worthy of a contrasty film score, with the orchestra most in evidence. The mood ranges from eerie to great emotional surges of organ-augmented power which build gradually for maximum drama. But it's in the Toccata, which covers roughly half of side 2, that all hell breaks loose. The organ, which has been gentle and somewhat retiring during much of the previous movement, becomes brilliantly assertive in this thunderous finale. It's violent film music — a chase, the charge of the Light Brigade, battling saurians, triumph of the "good guys" in a space epic, Vesuvius blowing its top in 79 a.d. (or Mount St. Helens last year), a cloudburst over the Grand Canyon — and dozens of other images that the thrilling action music conjures in one's imagination. There are over 6½ minutes of expertly conceived musical violence, which is always a symphonic pattern, never just "effect" music. It is obviously inspired by composer Cesar Franck,